

**REGIME SECURITY AND KYRGYZ FOREIGN POLICY**

Submitted by Kemel Toktomushev to the University of Exeter

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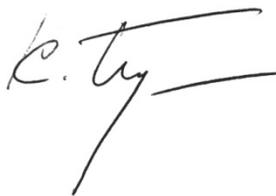
Doctor of Philosophy in Politics

In August 2014

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Toktomushev', written over a horizontal line.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a comprehensive study of Kyrgyz foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2011. It seeks to answer the following research question: how and to what extent does regime security affect Kyrgyz foreign policymaking? In so doing, this work aims to contribute to the understanding of Central Asian politics and the foreign policy sources of weak states across the post-Soviet space.

The underlying theme of this dissertation is centred on the question whether neorealist or constructivist traditions provide a more in-depth account of the erratic Kyrgyz foreign policymaking. Notwithstanding a myriad of studies on weak states, the analysis of their foreign policies is limited and mostly characterised by idiosyncratic, reductionist and great power approaches. In this respect, an interpretive and inductive framework integrative of both internal and external variables and with properly contextualised causal mechanisms may explain the international behaviour of weak states in broader and more genuine terms. Thus, the puzzle to be resolved is whether the concepts of rent-seeking and virtual politics can either substitute for or complement the New Great Game narratives in the context of weak states in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular.

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## **List of Abbreviations:**

AFS	Aero Fuels Service
APM	Aircraft Petrol Management
AUB	AsiaUniversalBank
CACO	Central Asian Cooperation Organisation
CAEU	Central Asian Economic Union
CAF	Central Asia Fuels
CAU	Central Asian Union
Centrasbat	Central Asian Battalion
CFP	Comparative Foreign Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CRDF	CSTO's Collective Rapid Deployment Forces
CRRF	CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Forces
CST	Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DLA Energy	Defence Logistics Agency-Energy
DoD	U.S. Department of Defence
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GAK	Gazpromneft Aero-Kyrgyzstan
GKChP	State Committee on the State of Emergency
GKNB	State Committee on National Security
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova
HCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IISS	International Institute of Strategic Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KAS	Kyrgyz Aviation Services
KGB	Committee for State Security of the USSR
KGS	Kyrgyz Som
KIC	Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission
MAF	Manas Aero Fuels
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFS	Manas Fuel Service
MIS	Manas International Services
MTS	Mobile TeleSystems OJSC
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the USSR
ODIHR	OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARP	NATO PfP Planning and Review Process
PEP	Politically Exposed Person
PfP	NATO Partnership for Peace programme
RATS	SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SORM	System for Operative Investigative Activities
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	UN Environment Programme

UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
US CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USD	U.S. Dollar
USHR	U.S. House of Representatives
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WFSE	World Fuel Services Europe
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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## INTRODUCTION

Born out of the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan emerged as a weak state vulnerable to internal and external insecurities. Despite the proclamations by the Kyrgyz presidents to build a prosperous, democratic and multivector-oriented republic, Kyrgyzstan became one of the poorest countries in the region, whilst its multivector foreign policy resembled international beggary in seeking support from different and often contradictory actors. The prevailing political and academic discourses attributed this erratic foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan to geopolitical constraints and the systemic weaknesses of the country. Nonetheless, these developments were not only related to the systemic weaknesses of Kyrgyzstan, but were also deeply rooted in the autocratic and rent-seeking regime that flourished in the country.

Accordingly, by presenting a comprehensive study of Kyrgyz foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2011, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: how and to what extent does regime security affect Kyrgyz foreign policymaking? In so doing, this work aims to contribute to the understanding of Central Asian politics and explain the foreign policy sources of weak states across the post-Soviet space. The underlying theme of this dissertation is centred on the question whether neorealist or constructivist traditions provide a broader and more genuine account of the erratic Kyrgyz foreign policymaking. In particular, the puzzle to be resolved is whether the concepts of rent-seeking and virtual politics can substitute or complement the New Great Game narratives.

Notwithstanding the myriad studies on weak states, the analysis of their foreign policies is limited and mostly characterised by idiosyncratic, reductionist or great power approaches. The first strand conceives foreign policy of weak states as an outcome of the idiosyncrasies, impulses and desires of a single leader. The reductionist or model-builders approach assumes that foreign policies of developing states are driven by the same decisional calculi of developed states, whilst the key difference is the scale of actions. The great power framework rests

on the principles of structural realism and thus explains international behaviour of small and weak states mostly from the perspective of systemic constraints. In a similar vein, Central Asia has been subjected to such trends of foreign policy analysis. In particular, most of the academic literature has conceived the international relations of Central Asia through the geopolitical interplay between greater players and has neglected the capacity of local states to influence foreign policy outcomes.

Orthodox approaches to the study of the foreign policies of weak states tend to overlook key variables that are quintessential for the understanding of genuine inter- and intra-state relations. Weak states pose a formidable challenge to the Westphalian view of security and international order. Security in the context of weak states does not simply refer to external orientations or military capacities, but implies a wide range of preconditions vital for the existence of the state and which have already been realised in developed countries. Weak states lack a strong physical base, effective public institutions, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state and thus are distinguished by the nature of their insecurities. The pivotal questions become: who is in power and what are their interests? Often characterised by corrupt, autocratic and family- and clan-based governance, the ruling elites struggle to escape the insecurity dilemma posed by internal and external weaknesses of the state and employ a variety of strategies to ensure security of their regime at the expense of the long-term state development. As a result, regime security often preoccupies the security agenda of the state and serves as the key rationale behind state policymaking. The perennial challenge of the ruling regimes in weak states becomes a dilemma between achieving short-term regime security or long-term state-building objectives.

Accordingly, this thesis proposes to include the concept of regime security into the analysis of foreign policy decision-making in weak states in general and in Kyrgyzstan in particular. The ruling elites in weak states tend to prioritize their own security and thus shape the foreign policies of the state in accordance with the interests of their regimes. Thus, an interpretive and inductive framework integrative

of both internal and external variables and with properly contextualised causal mechanisms may explain the international behaviour of weak states in broader and more genuine terms. Specifically, such an approach provides an opportunity to answer the posed research question by examining neorealist explanations of foreign policies of weak states vis-à-vis virtual politics and rent-seeking.

## **Research Design and Methods**

### *Causal Design*

The research design adopted for this study utilizes the techniques of high-quality investigative journalism with an academic approach to hypothesis-testing and theory-building. It adopts three principles to ensure the validity and reliability of its generalizations: case study, process-tracing and triangulation. Since the aim of this work is to assess how and to what extent regime security affects Kyrgyz foreign policymaking, a causal design with multiple themes is the optimal research solution to determine causal relations between the variables. Causal design is a type of research, which attempts to measure the impact of one specific variable on another in the form of a conditional statement, such as “If X, then Y” (USC, 2012). Partial accommodation of a multiple-theme study within a causal design contributes to general theory-building and sharpens inductive tools. Unlike cross-sectional design, which seeks to identify patterns of association, causal design with multiple case studies is oriented towards establishing causal findings. As a result, the internal validity of such an approach is strong. Ecological validity is also strong, since the research methods do not intervene with the natural setting of foreign policy decision-making (Bryman, 2004). The issues of external validity, reliability and replicability are more challenging. External validity is concerned with the generalization of research findings beyond current research settings, whereas reliability and replicability are concerned with the consistency of research methods. Since the latter criteria are more dependent on the use of research methods than on the research design, lack of transparency regarding how the analysis of data was conducted leads to questioning of the reliability of the findings, whilst the unstructured and subjective nature of qualitative research significantly decreases the chances of true replication (Bryman, 2004: 284-285). Nonetheless, difficulty of

replication, lack of transparency and weak generalization (external validity) are not problems inherent in a particular design. Rather, they are challenges of qualitative research in general, as these replication, transparency and generalization are attributed more to quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). In this respect, alternative criteria may be introduced to substitute “reliability” and “external validity” such as “dependability” and “transferability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Dependability, which parallels reliability, contributes to “trustworthiness” by necessitating an auditing approach to the merits of research, i.e. keeping all records for a peer audit (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Transferability, which parallels external validity, justifies an intensive study of small groups by emphasizing the sophisticated and detailed context of findings required for possible transferability to other cases (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

#### *Case Study and Causal Mechanisms*

This dissertation is a case study of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz foreign policy informed by intensive and detailed investigation of several foreign policy themes, including Kyrgyzstan’s military and security relations and an analysis of the supply of jet fuel to the American Air Base Manas. Despite the differences and discrepancies in case study conceptualisations, theorising and practices, a case study can be recognized in general as a research strategy, which evaluates and develops theoretical explanations by conducting a comprehensive empirical examination of a particular phenomenon as a manifestation of broader phenomena (Rogowski, 1995; Ragin, 2000, George and Bennett, 2005; Vennesson, 2008; Bennett and Checkel, 2014). The inductive nature of case study methods contributes significantly to hypothesis-testing and provides an opportunity for researchers to identify and study complex notions through the use of causal mechanisms. Although causal mechanisms are an unobservable, ontological process through which the causal agents affect and change the characteristics of other entities, hypotheses about these mechanisms can produce observable implications for testing and evaluation (George and Bennett, 2005: 137; Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 14). Conceptualised as connections between independent and dependent variables casual mechanisms operate in distinct environments and serve to unpack

correlative probability propositions (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1145-1159). When causal mechanisms are well adapted to the operational context, the outcome is a plausible social scientific explanation without flawed causal inferences (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1144).

### *Process-tracing*

With regards empirical research, scholars often resort to various within-case methods of analysis. Process-tracing is one of such methods, which is indispensable to the case study strategy (Vennesson, 2008: 224). Initially attributed to the use of data from within a case study to make assumptions about historical reasoning by Alexander George (1979), process-tracing can be identified as the use of “histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case” (George and Bennett, 2005: 6). Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel (2014) redefine this notion by dropping the term “the intervening variable” to mitigate potential confusions and limit theory-building choices. Accordingly, Bennett and Checkel (2014: 7) define process-tracing as “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case”. This definition underscores the inductive and deductive aspects of process-tracing and highlights the centrality of causal inference in the research method.

The method of process-tracing is suited to the context of case studies and is adept at capturing causal mechanisms in action (George and Bennett, 2005: 224; Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 10). However, generalising the findings of such research can be challenging, because case studies investigate a particular phenomenon, whereas process-tracing is a within-case method of analysis. Nonetheless, case study methodologists argue that the research hypothesis can be tested not against different cases, but against different evidence derived from the original case (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 15-16). Thus, process-tracing can

help refine the proposed hypothesis and clarify the workings of causal mechanisms, which, in turn, may lead to the inductive evolution of theory itself (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 16). In addition, George and Bennett (2005: 216) assert that process-tracing is useful for the development of contingent generalizations that unpack the conditions, which may produce alternative results. This aspect is especially useful for the cases with equifinality, where a combination of different variables can lead to the same outcome (George and Bennett, 2005; Bennett and Checkel, 2014). The research of Central Asian politics fits well within this framework, since the analysis of this subject requires engagement with a multitude of diverse variables. In sum, process-tracing can clarify under which conditions a hypothesis may be generalised and whether causal mechanisms are either very generalisable or exclusive to a single case, although the level of a hypothesis's generalisability for inductively-derived reasoning is nearly impossible to determine prior to the actual investigation (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 16-17).

Also, process-tracing is based meta-theoretically on scientific realism with its focus on objectivity and reasoning, which in turn is closer to positivism than to interpretism (George and Bennett, 2005: 17; Wight, 2002: 35-36). This points to a foundational challenge of reconciling process-tracing with interpretism or constructivism and gives rise to the question whether there is room for interpretive process-tracing. Indeed, it may appear difficult to combine process-tracing and a constructivist tradition, partially because constructivism on its own is a broad church encompassing diverse variants. Nevertheless, process-tracing can still strengthen both positivist and interpretivist research designs by allowing scholars to investigate the causal "what" and "how" (Lin, 1998: 166–169; Vennesson, 2008: 224; Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17-19). For example, conventional constructivists like Alexander Wendt promoted scientific realism and causal mechanisms and accepted assessment standards for the interpretations of social phenomena (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17). In these instances (as perceived by interpretive constructivists), where agency and structure are too intermingled to distinguish independent and dependent variables, it is still possible to dissect events and steps, which reveal contestation between the agent and the structure (Bennett and

Checkel, 2014: 17). Even radical constructivists have established standards of evidence and “how to” guides in order to conduct systematic and textual analysis (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17). Furthermore, George and Bennett (2005: 17) identified a case as “an instance of a class of events”. Bennett and Checkel (2014: 8) argue that such a definition acknowledges that a case is the social construction of both political players responsible for that class of events and political scholars who categorise those events. In other words, a class of events is not a given substance, but a product of scholarly interpretations. Not surprisingly, process-tracing features significantly in the works of many conventional, interpretive and radical constructivists (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17-18).

### *Triangulation*

I use the technique of triangulation due to the nature of the region, lack of academic literature and the possibility of biases. Triangulation in social sciences applies a mixing of methodologies and data types in order to validate the diverse claims related to a research question (Olsen, 2004). This technique entails the use of more than one source of data, and it can operate within and across research strategies (Bryman, 2004: 275). The main justification of the use of triangulation is that by this means the results of one research strategy are cross-checked with the outcomes of other research strategies (Bryman, 2004: 454).

There were three stages of research, beginning with a literature review to establish specific and testable propositions, followed by two phases of data collection:

1. Literature review. The academic literature in political science and International Relations on foreign policy and regime security of weak states was examined.
2. Document Analysis. The term “documents” constitutes a heterogeneous set of written, visual and audio sources of data such as private documents, mass media outputs, official state documents, etc., which have not been intentionally produced for social research (Bryman, 2004). These are the primary sources and include different genres. Although the ways of analysing these materials may vary, the key

evaluation criteria incorporate principles of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Bryman, 2004: 381).

3. Semi-structured interviewing. Semi-structured interviewing prevents the premature closure of the research focus by inquiring into alternative avenues. On one side, the presence of the interview guide with structured and themed questions ensured that all interviewees were questioned within a specific topic (which improves the replicability and reliability of the research). On the other, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews provided the possibility to incorporate unexpected nuances and depart from the initial questioning at no expense to the validity of the research. My sampling for semi-structured interviewing was purely opportunistic, but driven by a purposive approach. I also used a snowballing technique to gain further access to individuals whose experience was pertinent to my research.

#### *Fieldwork*

My fieldwork was comprised of two stages. I have spent four months in Bishkek in the autumn of 2012 and three months in the summer of 2013. I also had the advantage of being a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, since I utilised every non-academic trip to Bishkek for academic purposes in order to gather additional information. In a similar vein, I have combined my academic and non-academic trips to New York, Washington, Brussels, London and Beijing to meet new people with knowledge of Central Asian politics. As a result, I have managed to interview a variety of individuals ranging from former prime-ministers, diplomats and security officers to current high-level officials, members of parliament and representatives of international organisations.

#### *Ethics*

The explanation of the goals of the research is critical for ensuring an informed decision by the interviewees to participate in the study. The informed nature of participation also reduces the risks of deception. Thus, all interviewees were informed about the aims of the dissertation, the purpose of the interview, and where the results may be published. In particular, it was stressed that no

organization has a vested interest in the outcomes of my research. The written information sheet in the language of instruction of the interviewee was presented, and written consent for the interview was obtained in the instances where the interviewees were willing to formally sign such documents. In all other cases, the interviewees were orally informed about the research theme and its objectives. Since research that may harm both the interviewer and the interviewees is unacceptable, all possible measures were taken to prevent physical, moral and reputational harm to both interviewer and interviewee. For instance, the interlocutors who have requested protection of their identities were granted absolute anonymity. In these cases, written notes were used instead of tape-recording, whilst all obtained records of the interviews were password-protected and confidentially stored on an external portable drive. In general, to ensure best ethnics practices I was guided by the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association and by the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics.

### *Challenges and Limitations*

One of the greatest challenges of conducting research in Central Asia is the limited access to credible and objective data to use for academic analysis. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the subsequent decline of its educational institutions (or the lack of the development of thereof) and the lack of national funding to sponsor independent research negatively affected the quality and number of academic works produced within Central Asia on Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, the dwindling interest of the West in Central Asia (compared to that of the early 1990s) and thus the cut of the funding for the Central Asian research also resulted in the decrease of high quality academic works on the region.<sup>2</sup> The lack of academic literature on Central Asia is further exacerbated by the lack of objective and trustworthy non-academic information. Since information has a strategic value,

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see the notes of the seminar 'Knowledge Production and Knowledge Transfer in and on Central and Inner Asia' available at: <http://rethinking.asia/report/knowledge-production-and-knowledge-transfer-and-central-and-inner-asia>.

<sup>2</sup> This problem was also actively discussed at the seminar 'Knowledge Production and Knowledge Transfer in and on Central and Inner Asia'.

parties to a conflict<sup>3</sup> tend to promote information that aids their goals, whilst discrediting information of their adversaries (Schultz, 2004). As a result, information available for public access is often limited or skewed towards the lack of credibility and bias (Schultz, 2004). Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to gather original and trustworthy data for the rigorous analysis of intricate political phenomena in Central Asia.

Central Asia on its own is a difficult place to conduct independent research, especially if the research is related to sensitive political topics. Access to officials is limited even for locals, mainly due to the institutional culture, bureaucratic “red tape” and the psychological motives of state officials to classify most of the information. Access to information becomes even more limited if an interviewer is associated with foreign institutions, partly because of the geopolitical mind-set that prevails in the region. Shaped predominantly by the experience of Soviet “nomenklatura”, most officials still remain closed to public and academic inquiries. Although there is a new trend of openness and receptivity to the public amongst current Kyrgyz policymakers, these initiatives lack constructive substance and resemble the efforts to improve the public image of politicians. In addition, state officials often resort to façade-making. As a result, the articulation of ideal state practices by officials may hide the genuine dynamics of official decision-making. Some interviewees who are in positions of power and consent to reveal their identity tend to emphasize positive trends and good governance practices, whilst omitting negative and contentious developments.

Such an uneven access to the documents and data also affected the methodology of my research and in particular the techniques of process-tracing and triangulation. Indeed, process-tracing is a fundamental tool for the qualitative research. The causal process in our case can be identified as the causal mechanism between the independent and intervening variables and the outcome of such causal influences. Yet, it may be difficult to run a classical process-tracing research model in the context of Central Asia. This research method requires

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the struggle over power or resources. For instance, see Norman Schultz’s (2004) classification of ‘conflict information’.

establishing causal-process observations or diagnostic evidence with recurring empirical regularities in order to assess and test causal inferences (Collier, 2011: 824; Mahoney, 2012). However, collection of such evidence in Central Asia is problematic in its own right due to the aforementioned nature of conducting independent research in the region. In addition, process-tracing's standard problem of missing variables may be exacerbated by the presence of biased or false data, which in turn can lead to analytical errors.

As a result, my research design took the form of a high-quality investigative journalism approach. I have explored a variety of primary and secondary sources to reconstruct certain political decisions and actions in Kyrgyzstan such as the reorientation of the Manas air base to the Transit Centre at Manas. Then these series of events were linked together in order to understand causal relations between broader phenomena of regime security and rent-seeking and foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, as David Collier (2011: 824) advised, in some instances a detective work has been done in order to gather and evaluate diagnostic evidence.

Quite often, however, the found evidence was either circumstantial or unreliable due to the political sensitivity of the research topic. Nonetheless, the methodology also has to be adapted to the realities of political research. In the cases, where there are no solid historical clues and facts, inferential leaps are an accepted element of hypothesis construction in order to trace the existence of consistent underlying causal mechanisms (Janis, 1982; Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Thus, I have attempted to evaluate my causal inferences through the prism of a "smoking-gun" empirical test based on the factual and circumstantial evidence.

Scholars who study process-tracing usually assess causal mechanisms through the colourfully named "straw-in-the-wind", "hoop", "smoking-gun", and "doubly decisive" tests (Van Evera, 1997; Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2012; Beach and Pedersen, 2013). A "straw-in-the-wind" test metaphorically demonstrates that diagnostic evidence is too weak (Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2012). A "hoop" test

metaphorically makes the hypothesis to “jump through the hoop” in order to remain under consideration (Collier, 2011: 826). A “smoking-gun” test assumes metaphorically that a person who is caught with a smoking gun is purportedly guilty (Collier, 2011: 827). A “doubly decisive” test assumes that the evidence has been double-checked and completely verified (Collier, 2011).

Thus, a “hoop” test suggests that a piece of diagnostic evidence has to be present for a proposed hypothesis to be valid (Van Evera, 1997; Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2012). If this hypothesis passes a “hoop” test, then it somewhat weakens rival hypotheses (Collier, 2011: 825). In a similar vein, if a proposed hypothesis passes a “smoking-gun” test, then it significantly weakens rival hypotheses (Collier, 2011: 825). If a proposed hypothesis passes a “doubly decisive” test, then it completely eliminates all other hypothesis, although such a situation is highly improbable in social science (Collier, 2011: 827). However, passing a “hoop” test does not guarantee that a proposed hypothesis is valid, whilst failing a “smoking-gun” test does not mean that a proposed hypothesis is invalid (Mahoney, 2012: 571-572). Moreover, if there is a considerable doubt about the certitude of these tests, then these tests become the “straw-in-the-wind” tests, which neither confirm nor reject the hypothesis in question (Van Evera, 1997; Mahoney, 2012).

Nonetheless, in the context of the Central Asian political landscape, a “smoking-gun” test may provide sufficient criteria for the acceptance of underlying causal mechanisms, although multiple “straw-in-the-wind” evidence may also produce a convincing case. As James Mahoney (2012: 582) emphasised, “Chains of linked necessary conditions provide a good opportunity for the analyst to carry out a smoking gun test: She or he can show how an initial cause was essential to put the overall sequence in motion, culminating in the outcome.” Since this thesis attempts to assess the role of regime security in Kyrgyz foreign policymaking, the key support for this claim engages a “smoking-gun” test concerning the causal mechanism that connects regime security and the erratic foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan.

In order to accumulate a “smoking-gun” proof, it was important to mitigate the difficulties of gathering data for independent research in Central Asia. In this respect, elite interviews are an important means of collecting sufficient data for the process-tracing studies (Tansey, 2007). Apart from reconstructing a set of events, elite interviews also contribute to the triangulation technique by providing an opportunity to cross-check the accuracy of other findings (Tansey, 2007). Accordingly, in light of the aforementioned difficulties of getting access to information, I had to rely on my experience of conducting academic and non-academic interviews and on my large pool of personal contacts in order to set up formal and informal interviews with current and former state officials, representatives of the business sector and members of the international community. There is a traditional humorous anecdote that if someone begins a conversation with the Kyrgyz, he/she may find common relatives. This anecdote reflects the interconnectedness of Kyrgyz society. In a nomadic-rooted society of five million people, hypothetically one can find ways to meet anyone in the country. Accordingly, I have utilised these arrangements for academic purposes in order to meet and interview a variety of people. I started by interviewing people whom I knew personally, and I also asked my personal contacts (friends, relatives, former colleagues, classmates, neighbours, etc.) to introduce me to people whose experience was pertinent to my research. Similarly, I have asked my interviewees to recommend me to someone else whose knowledge would be relevant to my studies based on the conducted interviews.

My greatest concern was related to the question of the extent, to which I could have relied on the information provided by my interviewees. Since most of my interviews have been organised after favourable introductions, I hoped that the chances of façade-making would be minimal. Indeed, many interviewees spoke quite frankly to me about sensitive political topics, although some of them preferred to remain anonymous. Nonetheless, the veracity of some information was difficult to triangulate, although several of my interviewees shared quite peculiar and previously untold stories of Kyrgyz policymaking. As a result, even though these details could have enriched my work, I had to omit them in my research. Also,

sometimes the interviewees reconstructed or described events through the prism of their own thoughts and beliefs instead of narrating the story as they have experienced it.<sup>4</sup> Thus, I often had to clarify whether my interviewees have directly participated in a particular decision-making process or have heard from someone else about this process. In addition, most of my interviewees presented the perspective of a certain stratum of officials or represented the new regime. This situation is related to the fact that the inner circles of ousted Akayev or Bakiyev are inaccessible for interviews, since most of them are either on the run or are otherwise unreachable for academic interviews, e.g. Aidar Akayev or Maksim Bakiyev. Accordingly, although I have sought to mitigate this situation through the use of triangulation technique, it is important to underline that this research misses original views expressed by important representatives of the old regime.

Finally, in addition to the difficulty of collecting data, I was also concerned about the subjectivity of my interpretations. Certainly, there are numerous advantages of studying Central Asia as a Central Asian such as the knowledge of the local languages, easier access to information, network connections, personal observations, better understanding of political, economic and cultural context, and etc. Nonetheless, I was still worried about whether my Central Asian lenses could have distorted my understanding of complex political processes in Kyrgyzstan and thus led to an omitted-variable bias. Thus, I tried to stay as critical and open-minded as possible, whilst relying solely on facts and circumstantial evidence amidst the prevalence of conspirological and speculative knowledge in the region. My methodology was also shaped in a manner to prevent research biases, whilst the entire research has been conducted under the vigilante guidance of my supervisor. In addition, I have presented the findings of my research at various workshops and conferences to get valuable advices and feedback on how to improve my work.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It is unknown whether they have done it intentionally or unintentionally.

<sup>5</sup> To name a few: the workshop “Stepping Out of the New Great Game Narrative: Re-Joining Central Asia and International Relations” at the King’s College, 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, the workshop “Central Asia’s Hidden Offshore Ties: the Politics of Money-Laundering and Virtual State-Building”, at Columbia University’s Harriman Institute, the 3<sup>rd</sup>

## **Significance**

There are several implications of my research. First, my dissertation proposes to examine the international relations of weak states in general and of those in Central Asia in particular through an interpretive and inductive framework integrative of internal, external and transnational dynamics. Such a framework challenges orthodox and conventional approaches to the study of the foreign policies of weak states by presenting a new conceptual lens for the causal analysis of complex phenomenon in volatile and turbulent regions. Since relatively few studies have examined the impact of domestic factors on foreign policy choices of Central Asian states, this work aims to provide new conceptual insights into the analysis of Central Asian politics and to contribute to the growing literature on the challenges and opportunities of transitional states.

Second, the novelty of my work is the integration of political economy and foreign policy. The proposed framework seeks not only to bridge the gap between systemic and domestic views on Kyrgyz foreign policy, but also complements the role of the political economy in the understanding of foreign policy. Kyrgyzstan will be used as the empirical ground to demonstrate how the political economy of rent-seeking shapes foreign policy orientations of the republic. Building upon an empirical study of supplying jet fuel to the American air base Manas in Bishkek as part of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom, this work will expose the symbiosis of illicit practices in developing countries with licit and semi-licit practices in developed countries in order to explore financial connections, which are integral to the nexus of weak states and organised criminal groups. Such corrupt practices are not only a predominant feature of business relations in the post-Soviet region but in other regions as well. Thus, one of the goals of this research is to demonstrate that rather than existing exclusively in the domestic politics of weak states, corruption in the developing world involves myriad different actors, ranging from corrupt state officials and local and international middlemen to offshore shell companies and reputable financial institutions. In turn, the commercial interests of these powerful economic groups may become the main driver of the foreign

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Annual Central Asian Studies workshop at the Newcastle University, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Central Asian Studies workshop at the University of Exeter.

policies of weak states. As this work demonstrates, the local and global political economies of supplying jet fuel to the Manas Air Base overshadowed potential geopolitical points of friction between Washington and Moscow, whilst financial vehicles and offshore mechanisms ensured that the secret arrangements between senior Kyrgyz officials, shell and intermediary companies, the American Department of Defence and Russian refineries remained intact.

Third, this work contributes to the understanding of the role of regional security organisations in ensuring political stability in Kyrgyzstan, especially from the perspective of virtual politics and state performance. In general, although the complicated nature of the Central Asian security landscape gives rise to a variety of empirical puzzles to be explored, the military security of Kyrgyzstan is an underdeveloped area of research. The analysis of the effectiveness of regional security organisations has strong normative aspirations, because this work calls for a reassessment of both Kyrgyzstan's participation in multilateral military organisations and the role of international security structures in Kyrgyzstan. The violence of June 2010 between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the south of Kyrgyzstan serves as an excellent empirical demonstration of the ineffectiveness of bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, since neither the Kyrgyz government nor international actors were willing and prepared to stop the ethnic bloodshed in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter I attempts to situate the argument of this thesis within broader debates of International Relations (IR). In particular, this chapter proposes to bridge the divide between IR and its subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) by introducing an interpretivist approach integrative of internal, external and transnational dynamics to the analyses of foreign policy. The need for an inductive framework with a causal methodology is propelled by the inability of both orthodox IR and FPA to adequately explain the behaviour of international actors.

Chapter II seeks to further justify the unpacking of IR's "billiard balls" through the prism of constructivist traditions. This chapter reveals that the concept of weak states deviates from the orthodox thinking of IR, as the conceptualisation of weak states challenges the Westphalian view of security and international order. This section demonstrates that the existing approaches to the study of the foreign policy of weak states are limited and centred on idiosyncratic, great power and reductionist themes. Accordingly, Chapter II proposes to distance itself from conventional approaches to the understanding of the foreign policies of weak states and examine the international behaviour of those states by incorporating systemic constraints, internal insecurities and transnational links. In particular, Chapter II suggests exploring the neorealist explanations of foreign policies of the Central Asian states in conjunction with the concepts of virtual politics and rent-seeking. A special focus has to be given to the role of regime security amongst other variables, since the established norms, rules and governing arrangements of the ruling elites become decisive in shaping the foreign policy orientations of weak states.

Chapter III presents the case of Kyrgyzstan as a weak state distinguished by the complex nature of internal insecurities and external vulnerabilities. By examining the development of Kyrgyz foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2011, this chapter provides a retrospective analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policymaking through the prism of institutional formation, regime security and systemic pressures. In particular, this chapter seeks to explain the erratic foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan from the perspective of systemic constraints and the rent-seeking interests of the Kyrgyz ruling regimes. In addition, this section demonstrates how official and unofficial foreign policy discourses were used by the Kyrgyz leadership to justify opportunistic and mercantile deviations of Kyrgyz foreign policy, whilst the concept of multivector foreign policy appeared to be a mere act of state performance aimed at reproducing the predominant order.

Chapter IV further explores the schism between the domestic and international dimensions of state and regime security in Kyrgyzstan. This section studies the

military cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with Russia, China and the USA within the frameworks of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), and examines the roles of Kyrgyzstan's security structures and its military partners during the ethnic violence of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan. The participation of Kyrgyzstan in regional security initiatives is scrutinised as a showcase orchestrated by the Kyrgyz ruling regimes to display their bandwagoning attitudes towards more powerful players in order to accommodate the ambitions of regional hegemons and reinforce domestic regime security.

Lastly, Chapter V presents the experience of the American air base Manas as an empirical instance in order to examine the sources of Kyrgyz foreign policy and test the validity of the great power narratives vis-à-vis the rent-seeking variable. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of a complex struggle over the fuel supplies to the American air base at the Manas International Airport. In particular, this section reveals how Kyrgyz foreign policy decisions related to the Manas Air Base have rarely gone beyond the commercial preferences of the ruling elites. Whilst unveiling complex fuel arrangements between the American vendors and local subcontractors, this chapter demonstrates that the geopolitical New Great Game is a misleading concept, as the multifarious fuel cobweb had involved senior Kyrgyz officials, Russian Gazprom-owned refineries, American agency DLA-Energy and Gibraltar-registered companies.

In the conclusion, I discuss the findings of the research, its contributions and implications and propose avenues for further research.

## CHAPTER I

### *One Foreign Policy, Many Theories<sup>6</sup>*

The end of the Cold War, the events of 9/11 and the globalization of world politics posed a formidable challenge to the mainstream theories of International Relations (IR) reinvigorating the need for the re-thinking within the field. One of the implications of this “soul-searching in the academic discipline” of IR (Sorensen, 1998: 83) was the renewal of interest in foreign policy and its contribution to the understanding of world politics in general, and the behaviour of international actors in particular (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008). Traditionally, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) has been one of the most conventional approaches to the study of foreign policy decision-making. Yet, FPA was often dismissed by mainstream IR theorists due to its internal incongruities and its lack of grand theory. In turn, orthodox IR itself was subject to serious pitfalls and erroneous applications, especially when applied to the context of weak and failed states. Thus, the growing relevance of foreign policy in world politics encouraged scholars to develop the existing literature on FPA within the wider theoretical frameworks of IR (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 8).

Accordingly, since this work seeks to assess how regime security affects Kyrgyz foreign policymaking, this chapter will attempt to situate the argument of the thesis within broader debates of IR and the literature on FPA. The first section of this chapter will examine foreign policy decision-making through the prism of FPA scholarship. The second section will scrutinise whether mainstream IR theories offer a broader and more politically situated account for the analysis of foreign policy. I identify social constructivism as a tradition capable of reinvigorating the study of foreign policy: the third section will bridge the divide between FPA and IR by introducing Colin Hay’s critical approach to political analysis. Hay’s approach examines causal processes through process-tracing. Such an approach is well-

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<sup>6</sup> This title is a paraphrase of Jack Snyder’s and Stephen Walt’s similarly-named articles.

equipped to systematise constructivist research, foster interdisciplinary dialogue and provide intriguing opportunities for the generalization of findings. In sum, whilst examining the notion of “foreign policy” and its links with FPA and IR, this chapter seeks to propose an inductive approach to foreign policy. This will include internal, external and transnational variables. Such a multi-causal framework will sharpen the epistemological foundations of FPA and the meta-theoretical tools of IR to adequately and genuinely explain the foreign policy behaviour of weak states such as those in Central Asia.

### *Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)*

Traditionally, FPA has been one of the most comprehensive and fashionable approaches to the study of foreign policy. Valerie Hudson (2008: 12) defined FPA as “the subfield of IR that seeks to explain foreign policy, or, alternatively, foreign policy behaviour, with reference to the theoretical ground of human decision makers, acting singly and in groups”. FPA scholarship was developed in the 1950s with three paradigmatic works laying the foundation for this subfield: James Rosenau (1966) on comparative foreign policy; Harold and Margaret Sprout (1965) on the psychological and societal milieu of foreign policy decision-making; Richard Snyder, Henry Bruck and Burton Sapin (1954) on the decision-making process. Nevertheless, despite its aspirations to examine and explain inter-state decision-making processes, FPA failed to develop into an authoritative subfield of IR. The main criticisms of FPA stemmed from its apparent internal incongruities and the absence of any form of grand theory.

The term “foreign policy” is usually referred to the area of governmental activity that deals with the relationships between the actors (usually states) within the international community (White, 1981: 3). One of the classical definitions of “foreign policy” is given by Christopher Hill who defined it as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations” (Hill, 2003: 3).<sup>7</sup> For Walter Carlsnaes (2002: 335) foreign policy is:

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<sup>7</sup> The term “an independent actor” adds a breadth to the nature of foreign policy actors. The usage of “official” enables the inclusion of all outputs of the governmental mechanisms whilst maintaining certain parsimony amongst the plethora of international transactions (Hill, 2003: 3). The policy is

Those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed towards objectives, conditions and actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy.

In a similar vein, Hudson (2008: 12) characterised foreign policy as “the strategy or approach chosen by the national government to achieve its goals in its relations with external entities.” This is akin to Lena Jonson’s understanding of foreign policy as the patterns of official state behaviour towards one another. These actions are derived from both the deeds and the words of the official actors (2001: 96).

The classic FPA scholarship considered the particularities of human decision makers to be vital to the understanding of international relations. The pioneering work of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1954) inspired the first wave of FPA scholars to unpack “the black boxes” of IR and search for explanations at inside states themselves. As Snyder et al (1954: 53) emphasised,

We adhere to the nation-state as the fundamental level of analysis, yet we have discarded the state as a metaphysical abstraction. By emphasizing decision-making as a central focus we have provided a way of organizing the determinants of action around those officials who act for the political society.

Dissatisfied with realism’s ability to explain foreign policy choices, Snyder et al urged the scholars to move away from the systemic explanations of foreign policy outcomes and examine the role of domestic players in foreign policy formation.

In a similar vein, Harold and Margaret Sprout (1965) believed that foreign policy processes should be studied using the human psycho-milieu or the envioned units

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“sum” and “foreign” to exclude the possibility of considering every particular action as a separate foreign policy and to emphasize that the world is not yet a “homogenizing” entity, but rather a place full of “foreigners and strangers” (Hill, 2003: 3).

who are in power and have the authority to make decisions on behalf of nation-states. In particular, the Sprouts distinguished the milieu or the environment from the psycho-milieu (Sprout and Sprout, 1965: 28). The latter was identified as the psychological, political, social and situational environment as it is perceived by the decision makers (Sprout and Sprout, 1965; Hudson, 2008: 14-15). This perspective assumed that environmental factors can affect human values, choices and decisions only if they are perceived and reacted to by human individuals (Sprout and Sprout, 1965: 7). In other words, the application of the psycho-ecological terms to such concepts as “state”, “regime” or “system” is rather insensible, since the human individuals are the cornerstone of all theories on man-milieu relationships (Sprout and Sprout, 1965). As Brian White (1981: 9) summarised, “[T]here is no need to account for the objective ‘realities’ of the state’s environmental situation if the subjective perceptions of decision makers are what counts.”

In turn, Rosenau (1966) attempted to push for a middle-range theory, which would integrate information at several levels of analysis: the individual, role, governmental, societal and systemic levels (Hudson, 2008). Rosenau challenged the Sprouts reductionism, whilst accepting the relevance of the variable the Sprouts added. The key focus of the Rosenau’s pre-theorising was towards the formulation of an actor-specific theory, which would estimate “the relative potency” of different variables for a state and then assess and even predict the foreign policy behaviour of that state (Rosenau, 2006: 200). The Rosenau’s pre-theorising gradually evolved into the theory of Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) with strong direction towards scientism and behaviouralism (Hudson, 2008). The adherents of CFP suggest that foreign policy behaviour can be studied in aggregate and, thus, the dependent variable can be conceptualised via foreign policy events (Hudson, 2008: 19).

In general, these seminal pieces encouraged a generation of foreign policy analysts to develop middle-range theories and open “the black box of domestic politics and policy making in an effort to understand actors’ choices in global politics” (Garrison et al, 2003: 155). The initial period of FPA scholarship was

marked by a burst of intellectual activity, ranging from methodological innovations to the development of actor-specific theories. In sum, however, classical FPA was an intellectual product of behaviourism conceived in terms of basic rational actor individualism. It was developed as a response to realism, which it sought to challenge. This challenge was relatively successful and FPA became orthodoxy for scholars analyzing inter-state interactions. As a result, FPA retained the use of the prism of realist state-centric assumptions (White, 1981: 6; Allison, 1971). These views regarded the state or usually the government as a centrally coordinated and purposive individual, whose actions are rational, value-maximizing and calculated (Allison and Zelikow, 1999; White, 1981: 6). Foreign policy was treated as the matter of rational choice with particular goals, objectives, options, consequences and final choices (Allison, 1971).

For instance, in his seminal work, Graham Allison (1971) labelled such an approach as the rational actor model. Since different conceptualizations of foreign policy lead to distinct answers and interpretations, Allison (1971) also introduced models of organizational behaviour and governmental politics frameworks as powerful alternatives to the rational actor model (Smith, 1981; Allison and Zelikow, 1999). The organizational behaviour model examined state actions as the output of large organizations, which constitute the government and which work according to the regular patterns of institutional behaviour (Allison, 1971). This model focused on the role of organizational components and its standard operating procedures in defining the problem, outlining the options and implementing the solution (Allison, 1971). In turn, by dismissing the characterization of foreign policy as the unitary choice or the organizational output, the governmental politics model suggested that foreign policy is the outcome of bargaining games between different players in the national governments with diverse goals and objectives (Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 6).

The focus on bureaucratic politics, organisational behaviour and group decision-making was a common feature of classic FPA scholarship. The adherents of Snyder, Rosenau and Sprouts believed that the system-level analysis of foreign

policy was simply insufficient. As Michael Clarke (1981: 15) emphasised, foreign policy decision-making needs to be examined in a broader context; a range of political, institutional, organisational, environmental and personal forces may be responsible for foreign policy actions. For example, Allison (1971) combined his three approaches to determine causal factors that shaped foreign policy actions of both the USA and the USSR during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The rational actor model illuminated the larger foreign policy patterns, the organisational behaviour model revealed an organizational routine to the decision-making process, and the governmental politics model underscored the bargaining games between the political players (Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 392). Other authors examined the influence of groupthink, organisational structure and bureaucratic politics on decision-making (Hudson, 2008). Some scholars believed that foreign policy in wider terms is a series of decisions made by a conglomerate of different political actors (White, 1981). Others argued that the central explanation of state behaviour lies in the decision-making processes within the organisational context, with the basic determinants of state action being communication and information flows, the spheres of competence of the involved players and actors' motivations (Hudson, 2008: 13; Snyder et al, 2002). In essence, all these determinants presumed that foreign policy choices are made on the basis of the decision makers' perceptions, motives and competencies (Snyder et al, 2002: 144).

Nevertheless, although FPA experienced a flourishing start, its progress began to contract by the late 1980s with the theory of CFP being most affected (Hudson, 2007). The criticisms of FPA were related to its value in general, its reductionist position, US foreign policy orientation and the absence of a grand explanatory theory (Garrison et al, 2003: 156). The approach of CFP to foreign policy led to major internal incongruities, since CFP required immense data on the variety of possible independent variables with empirical testing across time and nations (Hudson, 2008: 19; Alden and Aron, 2012). As Hudson (2008: 25) asserted, "CFP methods demanded parsimony in theory; CFP theory demanded nuance and detail in method." As a result, the growing number of explanantia called into question the reliability of the methodology and the lack of parsimony within the theory (Hudson,

2008). This incongruity was further escalated by CFP's struggle to choose between the quantifiable and non-quantifiable explanatory variables. Indeed, CFP's drive to impact both academia and the practical foreign policy sphere with the same research led to the outcomes that were "unsatisfactory in a scholarly as well as a policy sense" (Hudson, 2008: 25). In addition, to certain extent FPA continued to reinforce traditional realist assumptions (White, 1981: 7). For Snyder et al (2002: 78), decision-making was "a process which results in the selection from a socially defined, limited number of problematical, alternative projects of one project intended to bring about the particular future state of affairs envisaged by the decision makers". Such a conceptualisation is similar to the "state-as-billiard-ball" analogy of rational decision-making, but with the decision makers being the units of analysis. Even the Sprouts (1965), who attempted to revise ecological concepts in the context of international politics via the psycho-milieu, operated within the vocabulary of the realist statecraft, e.g. the concepts of power, influence, political potential, action, reaction, etc.

Yet, notwithstanding the periods of decline and critical self-reflection, contemporary FPA retains its commitment to build an actor-specific and agent-oriented theory and consider both the process and the outcomes of foreign policy decision-making (Hudson, 2007: 31). Conceptually, foreign policy engages with the literature on public policy, social psychology and comparative politics and necessitates an engagement with wider social science and a number of subfields (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 4). Current FPA scholarship attempts to expand those linkages and seeks new methodologies and greater cross-level integration of explanatory variables (Hudson, 2008: 12). In addition, it was FPA – with its focus on decisions, decision makers and decision-making systems – which challenged the orthodox "state-as-billiard-ball" analysis of foreign policy (White, 1981; Snyder et al, 2002). FPA provides a different, rather behavioural insight to the study of foreign policy, since the human agents and not the states become the object of study (White, 1981: 8). As a result, FPA is still prone to multifactorial, multilevel, interdisciplinary and integrative analysis of foreign policy decision-making (Hudson, 2007). Rosenau (2006) himself appears to be more inclined towards a more holistic

approach to the understanding of world events, although the formulation of a comparative foreign policy theory remains viable for him. Consequently, as Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (2008: 7) note, it is critical to bridge the divide between FPA and IR bestowing “IR with a greater appreciation for the multi-level and multi-causal dynamics, whilst granting FPA a clearer idea of ‘grand principles’”. Within the interdisciplinary context FPA and IR enjoy a special relationship; they both attempt to understand, explain or even predict the inputs and outputs of state behaviour.

### *Foreign Policy and IR*

Indeed, foreign policy may be examined via different theoretical lenses, and FPA by itself does not provide a broad picture of foreign policy dynamics. As Hill (2003: 283) argues, “[F]oreign policy is an activity rather than an outlook: it may be harnessed to all kinds of political positions, from crusading parochialism to abstract cosmopolitanism.” Nonetheless, an activity may presuppose an outlook, and in the case of international relations this outlook can be considered state-centric. In fact, this vision is central to the discipline of IR, which regards foreign policy as “the external deployment of instrumental reason on behalf of an unproblematic internal identity situated in an anarchic realm of necessity” (Campbell, 1998: 37). Such conventional perception of foreign policy may be related to the effects of historical representation, since it was the Peace of Westphalia that directed IR scholarship towards its statist orientation (Campbell, 1998). This may explain to some degree why the subject of foreign policy has been extensively scrutinised by historians (Hill, 2003: 5). Apart from the historians, there were also many advocates of the country-studies approach who favoured the development of foreign policy expertise of an individual state, even though the theoretical and practical relevance of those findings is dubious (Hill, 2003: 6).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the main contributions to the IR scholarship on inter-state relations stems from the works of realists, liberalists and constructivists, since mainstream IR theories provide a broader and more politically situated account for the analysis of foreign policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Other theoretical developments such as public choice theory may also offer some insights into the making of foreign policy, i.e. the economic policy and alliance politics (Hill, 2003: 9).

Strengthened by the failure of the inter-war idealism to foresee the outbreak of the World War II, realism became one of the most dominant theories of IR. Realism itself is a broad theoretical church “firmly grounded in real foreign policy practice while also most committed to creating highly general theories” (Wohlforth, 2008: 38). The main emphasis of the realist school of thought is placed on power relations and the competitive nature of states. As Hans Morgenthau (1948: 5) outlined, “The main signpost of political realism is the concept of interest defined in terms of power which infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible.” With its intellectual origins in the works of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes, classical realism assumes that human nature drives the power seeking nature of states (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001). Conversely, neorealists or structural realists refute the role of the human nature in determining realpolitik and offer a more cohesive explanation of the behaviour of states. Kenneth Waltz (1979) claimed that power struggles occur because of the anarchic international system, which constrains the actions of the states. Survival becomes reason d'état, and states seek to achieve it in the world of unequal distribution of power capabilities and self-help system by balancing, bandwagoning or buckpassing.

There is also a further deviation within the structural realist camp – between defensive and offensive realists. Defensive realists believe that the effects of anarchy can be mitigated, when defence is more feasible than offense and when the states can expand its security without threatening other states, since the state incentives to expand will be reduced (Walt, 1998: 31). Thus, the states would seek to preserve the status quo balance of power. On the contrary, offensive realists propose that the states are power maximizers, and seek to expand their relative power to increase the odds of survival (Mearsheimer, 2001). Thus, hegemony becomes the ultimate goal of any state in the anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2001: 22). In contrast to defensive and offensive realism, there is also a group of scholars who believe that international structure does affect the competitive behaviour of international politics, but the main force behind this competitiveness lies in the greedy motives of the states (Glaser, 2007). This party is often termed

as motivational or neoclassical realists who believe that unit level variables such as leaders, state-society relationships or motivation of states have an impact on the state behaviour (Dunne and Schmidt, 2001).

One of the general assumptions about structural realism is that it is not a theory of foreign policy. Waltz (1996) himself disclaimed the attribution of neorealism to the foreign policy domain. Many scholars suggest that an authentic theory of foreign policy makes “determinate predictions for dependent variable (s) that measure the behaviour of individual states” (Elman, 1996: 12). In turn, the validity of neorealist predictions for dependent variable is questionable, since neorealism occasionally fails to defend its sustainability in the face of empirical challenges. Bound by specific historical conditions, realism was incapable of predicting the future of international relations. For instance, neorealism was incapable of predicting the peaceful demise of the Soviet Union and could not adequately explain the democratic peace phenomenon. However, notwithstanding such criticisms, structural realism is still well equipped for the analysis of foreign policy processes and outcomes. Different neorealist theories make different predictions, which may not be isomorphic, but they still can be employed as foreign policy theories (Elman, 1996: 32). Even if the unit-level influence obstructs the capacity of a systemic model theory to make accurate predictions, this situation does not justify the dismissal of neorealism from predicting foreign policy outcomes (Elman, 1996: 41). A similar logic is applicable to the criticisms of neorealist conceptualization and operationalization (Elman, 1996). In this respect, when the balance of applying realism to FPA is right, the upshot is a powerful tool of FPA that is committed to the real foreign policy practices and highly general theories (Wohlforth, 2008: 38). For example, realist FPA may provide an incisive and wide-ranging analysis of the US foreign policy, since the pattern of the US foreign policy behaviour fits well within the general realist framework. The American grand strategy of containment inspired by Nicholas Spykman and articulated by George Kennan is in line with the realist views of the world. The idea of counterbalancing the spread of communism rests on the enduring realist principles of balance of power, national self-interest, state survival and great power relations. The détente in the Russo-American

relations during the Cold War (especially the US foreign policy reorientation under Henry Kissinger) can be comprehensively explained by the realist emphasis on relative gains, power distribution and material state capabilities. The American post-cold war interest in the Eastern hemisphere and Central Asia can be linked to the ideas of Halford Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolf Kjellen and examined via the geopolitical lenses of neorealism. The more recent Bush doctrine can be perceived as an attempt to establish the world hegemony and deter any threats to the national security of the USA.

Nonetheless, the realist perspective often fails to provide a clear and veracious analysis of foreign policy (Wohlforth, 2008). Although the major objections to the use of neorealism as a theory of foreign policy fail to withstand scrutiny, it remains unclear as to whether realism successfully provides a universal tool for predicting and analyzing foreign policy. For instance, realism failed to predict the absence of the major war between the USA and the USSR and relatively peaceful end of the Cold War. Instead realism has mistakenly suggested that after the end of the Cold War the major powers would counterbalance against American hegemony and establish “a new multipolar balance-of-power order” (Wohlforth, 2008: 43). Wohlforth (2008) argues that such pitfalls often arise from the erroneous application of realist principles to foreign policy practices; critics assume that all realist theories are universal, whereas different realist strands are applicable in different situations. Nonetheless, even if these nuances are taken into consideration, realism cannot fully unpack the foreign policy behaviour of all nation-states. As the subsequent case study of the Manas Air Base will reveal, realism often fails to provide an accurate analysis of foreign policy events in the context of weak and autocratic states. Nevertheless, realism is exceptionally authoritative in explaining the behaviour of greater players on the international arena. For realists, the centrality of power is instrumental to the formation of successful foreign policy within an environment of anarchy and international enmity. Many realists base their notion of power on raw military capacity and presuppose rationality and therefore the predictability in foreign policymaking. Yet, the empirical evidence demonstrates

that not all international behaviour conforms to the basic realist determinants, as the next chapter on weak states will reveal.

Accordingly, liberalism may provide an alternative framework for the understanding of foreign policy. Unlike realism, liberal approaches to foreign policy are concerned more about strengthening the liberal zone of peace than promoting power politics (Doyle, 2008). The origins of the liberal tradition are usually associated with the period of Enlightenment and with the works of John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Adam Smith in particular. Adherents of liberal theory believe in cooperation, peace and interdependence and are generally more optimistic about world politics (Burchill, 2009). They strongly support democracy, juridical equality, and free market and cherish the values of order, liberty, justice and toleration (Morgan, 2007). Liberalists argue that economic interdependence, democracy and international institutions are instrumental to achieving world peace, since they decrease the chances of conflict and war (Walt, 1998: 32). Neoliberalists rather focus on the issues of political economy, environment, globalization and human rights. They have many parallels with structural realists (Lamy, 2001). Even though liberalists emphasize how individuals and their ideas, social forces and political institutions shape foreign policy outcomes, liberalism remains a complex theory (Doyle, 2008: 50). Liberalism was initially developed as a “domestic theory”; it was more concerned with the principles of representative governments, individual rights, rule of law and private property (Doyle, 2008: 59). Accordingly, in the arena of international relations liberals tend to apply the same norms that they promulgate domestically (Doyle, 2008). Liberal foreign policy seeks to protect and expand the liberal community without violating its values and core ideals (Doyle, 2008). Liberalism promotes the ideas of “democratic peace”, international cooperation and economic interdependence. As such, liberals disparage the role of military power and oppose the neorealist assumptions of state homogeneity and the determinative nature of the international system (Doyle, 2008). For instance, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* exemplifies how liberal values are strengthened and promoted via the institutional mechanisms and international organizations. Ratified in 1948 as a non-binding UN General Assembly resolution,

nowadays the declaration deems to be an obligation for all members of the international community (White, 1996: 225).

In many respects, liberalism is an “optimistic” theoretical movement. However, its “positive duty” of safeguarding democratic principles can prove to be “a dangerous guide to foreign policy, often exacerbating tensions with nonliberal states” (Doyle, 2008: 69). For example, the liberals may perceive the neoconservative turn of the US foreign policy under George W. Bush from 2000 to be the manifestation of the American understanding of its mission to spread democracy, liberty and freedom. In a similar vein, the American “God-given” mission to fight tyranny and seed democracy may be regarded as an imperial effort by Washington to stretch its power and establish world hegemony. Both interpretations, however, reveal that liberal foreign policy towards the nonliberal communities may differ drastically from policy towards its fellow liberal states. Indeed, the democratic peace thesis reinforces liberal traditions, but fails to acknowledge the often antagonistic relationship between the liberal and non-liberal states. The empirical verification of “liberal imprudence” suggests that liberal states may conduct unnecessarily aggressive and exceptionally distrustful foreign policies towards the nonliberal states (Chan, 1984; Doyle, 2008: 54). The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the military intervention in Libya in 2011 demonstrates that liberal states tend to apply realist practices to their liberal strategies. The statistical findings reveal that liberal states seem to be more war-prone; although the defensive nature of many wars has to be taken into the account (Doyle, 2008). For example, between 1816 and 1980 liberal states fought on the initiator’s side in 24 out of 56 interstate wars, whilst non-liberal states fought on the initiator’s side in 91 out of 188 interstate wars (Chan, 1984: 637).

More importantly, however, liberalism may not be a wise foreign policy guide to the world of Central Asian politics. In some instances this approach may provide useful tools for the understanding of political and economic transformations in the countries of the former Soviet Union. As Snyder (2004: 57) argues, “[L]iberalism’s claim to be a wise policy guide has plenty of hard data behind it.” For example, the

willingness of the Central Asian states to liberalise their economies according to the Western models after the collapse of the Soviet Union fits well within the neoliberal framework. Similarly, the initial course of the Central Asian leaders towards democracy and human rights can also be explained via the postulates of liberalism. Nevertheless, although some tenets of liberalism are applicable to the political landscape of Central Asia, liberalism in general is incapable of dissecting the genuine dynamics of decision-making in volatile, autocratic Central Asia. Liberalism is an academic tradition well-equipped to study the dynamics of liberal states, whereas its value in the context of non-liberal states is less imperative. For example, the weaknesses of neoliberal institutionalism are evidenced by the failures of regional integration in Central Asia. In a similar vein, the mimicking of democratic reforms and pseudo liberalisations by the corrupt Central Asian elites pose a formidable challenge to the liberalist theory. Accordingly, with its particular focus on liberal states and liberal traditions, liberalism's toolbox lacks the necessary instruments to understand the decision-making in non-liberal states.

Since both realism and liberalism appear to be incapable of sufficiently explaining the decision-making rationale in weak non-liberal states, constructivism may become a useful prism through which the claims regarding the volatile and erratic foreign policies of Central Asia can be tested. In fact, constructivist theory has the potential of both improving on realism and liberalism and bridging the divide between FPA and greater IR. Constructivism on its own is a broad church, which draws selectively from social theory, idealism, interpretative sociology, variants of Marxism, institutionalism, post-structuralism, hermeneutics and many others (Palan, 2000: 576). Whilst realists focus on the balance of power and liberalists on the power of free market, constructivists believe in the power of ideas as the driving force of international processes (Snyder, 2004: 56; Doyle, 2008: 40). Accordingly, many scholars divide the variants of constructivism into the sub-groups in order to exemplify their key differences and similarities. For instance, Ronen Palan (2000: 576) distinguishes between "hard" and "soft" versions of constructivism. Hard constructivists, such as Nicholas Onuf, Rey Koslowski and Friedrich Kratochwil, categorically believe that social structures and institutions are

solely the constructs of “man-made institutions” (Palan, 2000: 576). Soft constructivists are less radical and consist of those who are interested in the role of identity, norms and culture and believe in the power of social context (Palan, 2000: 576). Jeffrey Checkel (2008) provides slightly different categorisations – the North American and the European variants of constructivism. The North American version of constructivism, represented by Alexander Wendt, John Ruggie and Peter Katzenstein, to name a few, explores the impact of social norms and identity on foreign policy outcomes, whilst the European version of constructivism, as promulgated by Ted Hopf and Thomas Banchoff, examines the role of language in constructing social reality (Checkel, 2008: 73-74). Both variants of constructivism, however, perceive the world as socially constructed with grand politics being “what states make of it” (Checkel, 2008; Wendt, 1992).

The main source of scepticism about constructivism derives from its ambivalence over the use of mainstream social science methods which comes at the expense of its own theoretical distinctiveness, its lack of an alternative research programme and its anti-positivist epistemic approach (Hopf, 1998: 171). Further, constructivism fails to explain what structural factors spearhead changes in values and what material circumstances are needed to sustain the harmony between new values and new ideas (Snyder, 2004). Constructivists also tend to belittle or even neglect the role of power, which is deeply interconnected to the study of foreign policy (Checkel, 2008: 80).

Indeed, constructivism offers a vigorous framework for the analysis of foreign policy decision-making. It rejects the realist assumption of fact-value and “endogenizes” interests by exploring how they are constructed through a process of interaction between agents and their broader environment (Hill, 2003: 9; Checkel, 2008: 74). Checkel (2008) underscores three ways, in which constructivism may contribute to the study of foreign policy: the impact of bureaucracies, decision-making and international institutions. If Allison’s governmental politics model outlines how different political players with different interests seek to shape the national interests according to their own preferences,

constructivist analysis of foreign policy attempts to examine the process of interest formation itself, instead of accepting the state interests as a given (Checkel, 2008). For instance, the presence of the American Air Forces in Germany, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan may have different implications for Russian foreign policy if we examine them through a constructivist prism. Germany has long been perceived as an American ally, whereas Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan was regarded as a zone of Russian influence. In this respect, an increase of the American contingent at the Ramstein Air Base, for example, may trigger no interest from the Kremlin, whilst the strengthening of American military potential in Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan will certainly generate anxiety in Moscow with subsequent reactivation of Russian soft or hard power politics in the near abroad. Unlike realism, constructivism is less concerned about the amount or quality of military equipment, which can be stationed either in Germany or Ukraine. It is the social context that gives meaning to the material facts, for example whether it is a social context of friendship or enmity (Checkel, 2008: 75).

Furthermore, constructivists advance a communicative approach to the understanding of decision-making rationality. Unlike the rational and cognitive decision-making models of FPA that assume that actors are asocial and driven by instrumental or bounded rationality, the communicative approach suggests that the decision makers are social units who define their interests by means of communication and argument rather than by bargaining and pre-defined interest (Checkel, 2008: 76). Thus, language becomes a medium through which the world is interpreted and through which decision makers persuade and convince each other to choose certain foreign policy actions (Checkel, 2008: 77). For instance, constructivism effectively explains nation-building and identity formation in Central Asia at the expense of the neighbouring countries or the process of merging regime security and national security in the region. In addition, Checkel (2008) emphasises that constructivism explores the international-domestic nexus and conceptually overcomes the level-of-analysis problem. For example, constructivism illuminates the interplay of actors at different levels of analysis and may provide a

comprehensive analysis as to how domestic politics can shape international politics and vice versa. This is useful for the analysis of weak states in Central Asia.

Evidently, an intellectual tradition of constructivism and FPA, a field of study with an implied approach, has significant points of intersection. Both cognitive FPA and constructivism, especially its American school, examine how decision makers construct their realities (Checkel, 2008). In addition, some constructivists share with FPA its focus on “willful agents” or agency (Checkel, 2008: 74). However, the linkages between FPA and constructivism should not be exaggerated, since scholars of FPA have different purposes and different epistemological approaches than most of the constructivist theorists (Houghton, 2007). The works of Snyder and his colleagues were developed within the realist paradigm and as such they treated ideas as causal rather than as constitutive (Houghton, 2007: 33). FPA focuses on the construction of individual realities, whilst constructivism explores the role of social learning within a wider social structural context (Houghton, 2007: 33; Checkel, 2008: 74). In addition, as David Houghton (2007: 33) denotes, an approach cannot be automatically classified as constructivist simply because it underscores the role of ideas. Nonetheless, in general, the greatest promise of constructivism lies in its potential to collaborate constructively with other approaches in order to restore predictability of world politics and appreciate the difference (Hopf, 1998). Moreover, constructivist approaches can be extremely useful in the understanding of the foreign policy of weak states, since constructivism takes into account the social context and agent-structure interplay. As a result, constructivism offers a rich and diverse tool kit, which may provide “a robust entrée into the social dynamics of foreign policy analysis” (Checkel, 2008: 81).

### *FPA and IR*

Each theory attempts to provide its own explanation of foreign policy behaviour, exposing the weaknesses of other approaches and, thus, creating strong checks on each other (Snyder, 2004: 55). Since this intersection is unavoidable, the conjunction of greater IR narratives with specific findings of FPA may contribute

greatly to the analysis of foreign policy dynamics (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008). Waever (1996) once expressed what it deems to be a shared belief amongst the IR scholars:

It is a not overly well guarded secret that the discipline of International Relations is disappointed with its sub-discipline Foreign Policy Analysis. And the grand theorists have not been very good at integrating domestic and international explanations. While domestic factors are usually involved in empirical studies as part of the explanation, most IR-theorists have found it very difficult to see how the two sides can be linked in a coherent way.

For many years FPA was either dismissed by mainstream IR or placed within the realist and, more rarely, within pluralist theories (Houghton, 2007). For instance, when designing a plausible foreign policy model, Roy Jones (1979) emphasised that sovereign nation-states are the constituent units of the foreign policy world that seek to increase their power in order to secure their foreign policy goals. As a result of such a conceptualisation of foreign policy, FPA was either located within the realist domain or totally dismissed. Nonetheless, in general, it is rather odd that FPA has been associated with both realism and liberalism (Houghton, 2007). Houghton (2007: 26) contends that FPA resembled a body of micro-theories that failed to transform into a recognized theory and subsequently disengaged with the rest of IR. Yet, prospects remain for the integration of FPA within IR. Vendulka Kubalkova (2001) believes that IR has been split into FPA and the study of International Politics, and constructivism provides all the necessary tools for putting the field back together. In other words, constructivism may become FPA's entry point to the integration with IR. As Checkel (2008: 74) rephrased Martha Finnemore's statement, "Much of foreign policy is about defining rather than defending national interests."

Indeed, greater engagement with the discipline is important in order for FPA remain an innovative subfield of IR. FPA has always been engaged with the broader IR discussions, whether by challenging the central tenets of realism or by

introducing the methodology for a middle-range theory (Alden and Aron, 2012). There is a natural connection between the role of ideas, beliefs and identity and psychological research of FPA (Garrison et al, 2003). Moreover, current FPA scholarship has taken an ideational turn and is particularly interested in state identity and its effects on foreign policy, and whilst FPA brings individual construction, social constructivism brings collective construction (Garrison et al, 2003: 159; Houghton, 2007: 42). In addition, FPA is often criticised for lacking a theory of structure, whilst constructivism is criticised for lacking a theory of agency (Houghton, 2007: 41). Although there is no one social constructivism and there are significant ontological and epistemological divisions within constructivist domain, the absence of a unified approach does not undermine FPA's capacity to fit within this framework. On the contrary, this occurrence suggests that there may be a version of constructivism that corresponds with FPA's vision and offers the necessary intellectual underpinnings for the analysis of foreign policy (Smith, 2001: 53). Thus, social constructivism may reinvigorate the study of foreign policy placing FPA within the substantive critical debates of IR (Houghton, 2007).

In this respect, Smith, Hadfield and Dunne (2008) propose a critical approach to foreign policy, where decision makers are in power and have the authority to make decisions, although they are constrained by strong internal and external structures. This approach applies the features of critical political analysis introduced by Colin Hay (2002) to the foreign policy sphere. Hay (2002: 251) suggested that critical political analysis should be

1. Empirical but without being empiricist
2. Balanced in its conception of the relationship between structure and agency
3. Inclusive in its conception of the political, inclusive in its incorporation of extra-political factors and attentive to the interaction of the domestic and the international
4. Sensitive to the potential causal and constitutive role of ideas in social, political and economic dynamics and, above all
5. Attentive to the contingency, open-endedness and inherent unpredictability of social, political and economic systems.

The application of these principles to foreign policy offers a significant advantage over the limited perspectives of both FPA and wider IR (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 6). In a similar vein, Paul Williams (2005: 5) argues that Hay's approach provides a useful starting point for the analysis of state foreign policy. Hay's first principle implies that critical analysis should examine the actual foreign policy evidence, whilst retaining normative assumptions and commitments. The empirical evidence is an important starting point to build those assumptions and commitments, even though social scientists may be tempted to dismiss empirical political analysis (Hay, 2002). The empiricism in this case is regarded as neutral analysis without any normative interpretations (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 5). Williams (2005), for instance, provides ethical judgements about the Blair's foreign policies whilst analysing the UK foreign policies under the Labour party.

The second principle examines the relationship between agency and structure; this concept has the greatest added value for an understanding of the foreign policy behaviour of both strong and weak states. The agency-structure issue itself is one of the most central debates within the field of social science, since it questions whether the agents shape the structures or the structures shape the agents. As Hill (2003: 26) argues, this contention returns "the perennial issues of causation, freedom and determinism to the agenda of IR" and leads to "a sharper examination of the rather unsophisticated conceptual basis of some foreign policy studies". Agency or agent is an entity, which is capable of making a decision or action in any given context (Hill, 2003: 27). Structure is a set of factors and larger arrangements that constitute the multiple environments, within which agents operate, and that determine the agency's choices by exerting a constraining effect (Hill, 2003: 26). Currently, mainstream IR is being most criticised for the lack of insight into structure (Hudson, 2007: 8). In particular, FPA criticises both neorealism and constructivism for their inadequate conceptualization of agency (Hudson, 2007: 11). FPA, in turn, is being criticised for being too agent-focused. Nonetheless, more scholars tend to support the mutually complementary approach across the field of social science. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argued that the

concepts of agency and structure should be reconciled, whilst Anthony Giddens (1984) even introduced a structuration theory, which focuses on the understanding of human agency and social institutions. Social science needs to interrogate, explore and reflect on the vibrant relationship between both agency and structure (Hay, 2002: 254). One level of analysis is insufficient to explain political phenomena; a deeper examination of processes, structures and interactions between different units is needed (Hill, 2003: 27).

Accordingly, an approach which integrates both agency and structure will be relevant to foreign policy analysis, since foreign policy cannot be abstracted from the domestic context and international structures (Hill, 2003). Foreign policy is a complex, evolving and dynamic process of interaction between a great many agents within a numerous structures (Hill, 2003). Even the actual conceptualization of the term “foreign” is still contentious. In the ideal theoretical model, foreign policy is created within the internal milieu of the nation-state and implemented within its external environment (White, 1981: 4). In reality, however, the differentiation between the “domestic” and “foreign” politics becomes rather arbitrary, especially in the light of the rapid processes of globalization and the emergence of new security challenges (White, 1981: 4). As a result, the internal governmental activities are externalised, whilst the external governmental activities become subjected to the internalization. Thus, the concept of “foreign” should not be confined to the characteristics, which are found outside the state (Campbell, 1998: 37). The term “foreign” itself began to signify the “outside” parameter of the nation-states only after the term “international” was coined by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century (Campbell, 1998: 37). Consequently, it is difficult to sustain a rigid differentiation between the domestic and foreign politics, since the growing number of governmental activities typically has both dimensions (White, 1981: 4).

In this respect, Carlsnaes (2008) suggests the use of a meta-theoretical framework, which incorporates both agency and structure. Such an analytical framework may resolve the agency-structure conundrum, whilst providing a meta-theoretical foundation for a methodological reorientation towards an institutional

perspective in the foreign policy studies (Carlsnaes, 2008). Thus, Hay's approach may serve as a useful starting point for such an analysis of foreign policy. The explanatory or dependent variable of this approach may be twofold though, since for some scholars foreign policy is the product of the decision-making processes, whilst for others foreign policy is the decision-making process itself (Carlsnaes, 2008). The independent variables will be linked to various levels of analysis, which Hay's actor-structure framework proposes. In addition, the process-tracing method of analysis outlined in the introductory section of the dissertation is well-equipped to track causal relations between the variables within the complementary framework of agency-structure. Many conventional constructivists, including Wendt, agree that agency and structure are mutually constitutive, espouse the role of causal mechanisms and endorse the use of process-tracing strategies to interpret social phenomena (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17).

In turn, for interpretive constructivists, agency and structure are too entangled at all levels of analysis to differentiate whether the agency or the structure is the dependent or independent variable (Bennett and Checkel, 2014). In such instances, an interpretivist view can be still reconciled with process-tracing, because constructivist inquiries have to develop both experience-distant and experience-near approaches (Pouliot, 2007). Even radical constructivists have frameworks for conducting discourse analysis, whilst their genealogical methods resemble historical forms of the process-tracing technique (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 17). Also, a bracketing strategy that dissects events at which an agent challenges social structure or a structure thwarts agent's actions can be applied to the analysis (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 18). Causal mechanisms are abstract notions whose causal force is shaped by their operational environment (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1159). However, the contours of this environment transform over time (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1159). Thus, from an explanatory viewpoint, dividing time into relevant periods is important for the observation of causal mechanisms at work and for the understanding of processes and outcomes of interest (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1159). This method allows the scholars to reveal the contestation

between the agent and the structure and underline whether the former or the latter drives social processes.

In a similar vein, the remaining three principles of Hay's approach outline necessary prerequisites for the effective causal analysis of political processes. The third principle rejects a narrow view of politics as only inclusive of governmental variables (Hay, 2002: 251; Williams, 2005: 6). Critical foreign policy takes into account not just the interplay between the governmental bodies, but also the wider political realm: the role of individuals, activities of NGOs and influence of norms, ideas and values (Williams, 2005: 6; Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 5). Such an approach is particularly useful for the assessment of the impact of one variable on another, since it allows scholars to examine what actors, groups or individuals benefit from particular foreign policy decisions. Likewise, the fourth feature of Hay's analysis underscores the causal and constitutive role of ideas. The critical study of foreign policy requires scholars to confront important theoretical issues related to knowledge and reality and search for gaps between the leaders' words and deeds (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 2008: 5). Williams (2005: 6) denotes that such a phenomenon leads to difficult epistemological and methodological conundrums about the extent to which motivations and ideas guide foreign policy decision makers. However, when applied properly this principle contributes to the understanding of causal influences between the agent and the structure. Moreover, such an approach allows the scholars to track observable implications in order to build or test hypothesis. For instance, Williams (2005: 6-7) made an assessment of the Labour foreign policy based on the discrepancies between the statements of intent and the actual foreign policy actions.

The fifth feature of Hay's critical analysis is particularly pertinent to the understanding of foreign policies of weak states, since this principle assumes construction of foreign policies through causal mechanisms. Hay (2002: 259-260) believes that even the most inevitable and inexorable processes tend to be contingent, open-ended and contested. For instance, Stefano Guzzini (2011) argues that security should be understood through its performance – securitisation.

Securitisation is “the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat” (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 491). By conceiving security through its performance Guzzini (2011: 335) underscores that there is no universal context for the discursive processes; security is “simply part of an ongoing social construction of (social) reality”. Thus, in a similar vein, both foreign policy agents and foreign policy can be perceived as the products of social construction. In other words, foreign policy decisions are prompted not by the “objective” and given geopolitical realities, but by the “subjective” conceptions placed within a constructivist environment such as securitisation processes and security discourses (Guzzini, 2011: 331). As Williams (2005: 7) argues, there is nothing unchangeable, inevitable or natural about foreign policy directions, and accordingly “things” in foreign policy of the UK or any other country could have always been different.

In sum, an approach introduced by Hay, and then revised, by Smith, Hadfield and Dunne to foreign policy, advocates for an approach which looks at causal processes as some form of process-tracing. As Vincent Pouliot (2007) asserts, constructivist methodology should be interpretive, inductive and historical by implication due to constructivism’s postfoundationalist way of reasoning. Indeed, since constructivist strands draw more on post-positivism, whilst FPA’ methodology is mostly positivist, interpretive process-tracing becomes a useful tool to build and test theories. Causal mechanisms not only systematise constructivist research and foster an interdisciplinary dialogue, but also provide intriguing opportunities for the comparison of processes and dynamics of different security analyses (Pouliot, 2007; Guzzini, 2011: 338; Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 19).

In general, narrowing the gap between FPA and IR will be beneficial for both parties, since such a merger opens the possibility for a critical account of foreign policy “which draws on a wider notion of politics explicitly guided by progressive norms, and where decision makers are seen as having choices” (Smith, Hadfield

and Dunne, 2008: 8). Waltz's structural realism regards states as black boxes, whose preferences are determined by anarchic international system, whereas Wendt's constructivism contends that preferences are determined by ideas (Hudson, 2007: 10). Thus, the agency-structure debate between Waltz and Wendt concerns whether the state-actors shape the structures or whether the structures shape the system behaviour (Hudson, 2007: 10). However, the proponents of FPA claim that the state is the decision-maker in the first instance, since "[s]tate action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state" (Snyder et al, 2002: 59). They further claim that only human beings can generate ideas and create identities, and only human beings are the agents within the international system (Hudson, 2007: 10). Accordingly, one of the most important contributions of FPA to wider IR may be its focus on decision makers who serve as the link between the material and ideational determinants of state behaviour (Hudson, 2007: 7). There is also a practical implication that emerges from this theoretical amalgamation. Generally, the practitioners of foreign policy struggle to make use of academic IR and prefer to use FPA (Hudson, 2007: 191), partly because mainstream IR underestimated the capacity of states to conduct independent foreign policies and make an impact regardless of its size and weaknesses (Hill, 2003: 285). In turn, FPA (perhaps, more than any other sub-discipline of IR) attempts to maintain relevance for the practical foreign policy side and help decision makers with foreign policy processes and choices (Snyder et al, 2002: 175). Thus, the greater integration of FPA with wider theoretical insights of IR will be valuable not only to the academy, but also to the policymaking institutions, since they will be exposed to more rigorous theoretical frameworks.

Nonetheless, most importantly, the foreign policy approach's need to integrate both internal and external dynamics is propelled by the lack of a conceptual framework that adequately explains foreign policy behaviour of weak states. As previously outlined, conventional approaches to FPA are well equipped to analyse foreign policies of bigger international players such as the USA, Russia or China. Yet, when applied to smaller states and weaker players, these approaches are often rendered redundant, as their "universality" lacks sufficient explanatory punch. In

other words, if to rephrase Ali Dessouki and Bahgat Korany (1984: 9), the underdeveloped study of underdeveloped countries is most clearly demonstrated in the analysis of their foreign policies, which is either psycho-centric, reductionist or great power inclined. Such arguments may provide easy explanations of the international behaviour of weak states. However, they may not be genuine just like the shadows in the Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Thus, an interpretive and inductive framework with properly contextualised causal mechanisms may offer greater value for testing FPA claims regarding the relationships of weak states.

### *Conclusion*

Foreign policy is a broad, complex and constantly evolving phenomenon. A framework that can encompass all aspects of foreign policy also needs to be multifaceted and comprehensive. Traditionally, the most conventional approach to the study of foreign policy was embraced by FPA. However, FPA has been often dismissed or belittled by mainstream IR. This is mainly due to its focus on domestic politics and human decision-making. Nonetheless, the empirical challenges and recent developments within the field forced even the dominant IR theories to revise their assumptions and epistemologically and methodologically re-establish themselves. This re-thinking provided an exceptional opportunity for FPA to test its claims and seek greater integration with other IR theories. It became apparent that mainstream approaches fail to explain certain foreign policy processes and outcomes, whilst alternative approaches lack parsimony and adequate explanatory power to spearhead foreign policy debates. As such, an approach to foreign policy – integrative of internal, external and transnational dynamics – offers the greatest promise. The greater focus on multi-level and multi-causal dynamics will sharpen the epistemology of FPA as well as the meta-theoretical tools of IR. As a result, such a conceptual approach will significantly contribute to the understanding of the foreign policy phenomenon and, as Snyder (2004: 62) puts it, will set the framework “to ask hard questions of those who think that changing the world is easy”.

## CHAPTER II

### *Foreign Policy and Regime Security of Weak States*

The concept of weak states presents a serious challenge to the Westphalian understanding of the international system and orthodox IR respectively. Weak states lack effective institutions, a domestic consensus on the idea of the state and a monopoly on the instruments of violence and thus become vulnerable to internal, external and transnational threats. The nature of threats becomes instrumental to the analysis of the inter- and intra-state dynamics in weak states. However, the existing approaches to the study of foreign policy of weak states are rather limited and centred on the idiosyncratic, great power and reductionist themes. Although these frameworks provide an easy explanation of foreign policy decision-making, one level analysis is insufficient for the genuine understanding of complex political phenomena in the turbulent and vibrant developing regions, as the case of Central Asia will demonstrate. Certain concepts such as “domestic/foreign policy” or “national/regime security” are extremely perplexed in weak states and demand a greater scrutiny. Accordingly, a quest for unpacking the international behaviour of weak states should commence not on the domestic or systemic levels, but in between, incorporating external environment, internal insecurities and transnational links.

Thus, this chapter seeks to further relate the argument of this thesis to broader literature on regime security and foreign policy of weak states. In particular, this chapter introduces the notion of “regime security” and proposes to examine foreign policy of weak states in general and Central Asia in particular vis-à-vis state performance and rent-seeking. Respectively, the first section of the chapter will explore the notion of weak states and will demonstrate that IR’s classical “billiard ball” analogy is misleading in the context of weak states. The second part will examine regime security as the variable, often neglected by grand IR theorists, but which is quintessential for the understanding of foreign policy trajectories of weak states. The third section will assess the importance of regime security with respect

to other factors that may affect foreign policies of weak states. The fourth part will introduce international relations of Central Asia and the notion of the Great Game, whilst the subsequent sections will examine the neorealist explanations of foreign policies of the Central Asian states in conjunction with the concepts of state performance and rent-seeking.

### *Weak States*

The concept of “weak states” is ambiguous and wide-ranging, since the concept of “state” itself is to some extent quite elusive and syncretic. As identified in Chapter I, states are the central units of the international system and are important for the mainstream theories of IR. Yet, for orthodox IR, states are analogous to “billiard balls” in a political and territorial sense. This paradigmatic concept is presented as given in IR and exempt from extensive theoretical and empirical analysis (Halliday, 1987: 217; Buzan, 1991: 60). As Fred Halliday (1987: 217) puts it, “[In IR] the ‘state’ comprises in conceptual form what is denoted visually on a map – viz, the country as a whole and all that is within it: territory, government, people, society.” Such a conceptualisation discourages any further inquiry into the domestic structure of the state, since in theory the state already possesses political legitimacy, allegiance and authority at the domestic level (Buzan, 1991: 58-61). There is also a sociological concept of the state, which perceives it as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 1948: 78). Similarly, Theda Skocpol (1979: 29) defines the state as “a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority”. Such a Weberian conceptualisation of the term separates the state and the society and examines the state purely in the political and institutional context, i.e. equates the state with the central government (Buzan, 1991: 59).

Nonetheless, the nexus between the domestic and external structure is more valuable and promising for the effective analysis of security and foreign policy. Accordingly, Barry Buzan (1991: 59) suggests conceptualising the state broadly enough to integrate both domestic and international dynamics. This

conceptualisation approaches the state from the perspectives of physical base, institutional expression and the idea of the state (Buzan, 1991). The physical base has a concrete character and includes territory, population and all natural and man-made resources within the state's borders (Buzan, 1991: 90-91). The institutions of the state are the governmental machinery with its executive, judicial, legislative and administrative bodies along with the operating norms (Buzan, 1991: 82-83). The idea of the state is the most abstract component of the state, but which is at the core of "the state's political identity" (Buzan, 1991: 70). If we examine the states through the prism of these components, it may become apparent that metaphorically "the billiard balls" are different in size, weight and colour. There are some stronger states, and there are some weaker states. In fact, the latter represents the majority in the international system and requires specific attention. As Robert Keohane (1969: 310) puts it, "If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant." Accordingly, different scholars label those states differently. Mohammed Ayoob (1995) favours the term "Third World", which was initially associated with the Nonaligned Group of Asian and Africa states in the Cold War era. Annual state index by Foreign Policy (2005) introduces the notion of "insecure states". Eghosa Osaghae (2007) refers to the concept of "fragile states". Robert Rothstein (1976) uses the term "less developed countries", whilst Mary Kaldor (2010) and Dietrich Jung (2009) refer to "the post-colonial states".

Notwithstanding the variety of categorisations, there is a general consensus amongst the scholars regarding the essence of these entities. Weak states are those states that lack a strong physical base, an effective institutional expression, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state (Buzan, 1991; Jackson, 2010: 187). The first two notions are associated with the strengths and weaknesses of the state's institutional capacity (Thomas, 1987; Jackson, 2010). Michael Mann (1984) delineates two types of institutional power: despotic and infrastructural power. Despotic power is the ability of a state to coercively impose its rule on its citizenry, even with the exercise of force (Mann, 1984; Thomas, 1987). Infrastructural power is the ability of a state to rule by

consensus, with effective and legitimate institutions (Mann, 1984; Thomas, 1987; Jackson, 2010). Whilst the latter is more associated with the characteristic of a strong state, the former is rather the fate of a weak state (Jackson, 2010). The monopoly on the instruments of violence is another important characteristic, which distinguishes strong and weak states. In many weak states, the governments (even with strong despotic power) lack the absolute loyalty of their armed forces and are constantly under the threat of being overthrown (Jackson, 2010: 189). In some other cases, their armed forces are too fractured, poorly equipped and unfit for combat – quite often such a situation is artificially conditioned by the ruling regimes to deter possible military coup d'états (Jackson, 2010). The side effect of such a divide-and-rule policy is the emergence or the strengthening of other domestic actors such as the opposition leaders, organized crime groups, and ethnic or religious extremists who could rival the authority of the government and challenge the status quo (Jackson, 2010). As a result, the government may fail to guarantee the rule of law, maintain order and retain legitimacy without the monopoly on the instruments of violence (Jackson, 2010: 189). The idea of the state is a less tangible, but most central component of the state (Buzan, 1991). It distinguishes from the physical base of the state and its institutions by the notion of purpose and seeks to answer the existential questions of the state and define its totality (Buzan, 1991: 70). The sources of the idea of the state lie in the concept of the nation and its organising ideology (Buzan, 1991: 70-77). Unless the idea of the state is not “firmly planted in the minds” of its citizenry and in “the minds” of other states, the state has neither secure domestic foundation nor has secure international environment (Buzan, 1991: 78).

In this respect, different states may experience different types of security and insecurity in relations to those concepts. The narrowness of the state's national security may correlate positively with the weakness of the state. If the idea of the state is strong, any potential institutional failures will not pose serious menace to the state's totality (Buzan, 1991). If the idea of the state is weak, then any malfunctions of the institutional capacity may lead to serious repercussions that may threaten integrity of the state as a political unit, e.g. revolutions or civil wars

(Buzan, 1991: 82). Accordingly, in weak states national or state security is often equated to the security of the governments and ruling regimes, which creates the grounds conducive to endemic domestic violence (Buzan, 1991: 99-102). These weak states will be still viewed as states, but mostly due to their diplomatic attributes such as the boundaries on the maps or the seats in the United Nations (Buzan, 1991: 101). However, from within, these states will remain anarchic and in condition of latent or effective civil unrest (Buzan, 1991: 101).

Thus, the concept of “weak and strong states” refers to the degree of socio-political cohesion, whilst the concept of “weak and strong powers” refers rather to the traditional military-economic distinctions of states (Buzan, 1991: 97). For instance, weak powers like Austria or Singapore are strong states, because the strength of the state does not depend on traditional power (Buzan, 1991: 98). Weak states represent a broad continuum of states across the world and are characterized by political volatility, external vulnerability, institutional weakness, power centralization, delusion of national identity, structural economic problems, social divisions, lack of legitimacy, and crisis of democracy (Jackson, 2010: 188). They harbour religious, intercommunal, ethnic or other internal antagonisms along with the features of despotism, leadership greed and external attacks (Rotberg, 2003: 4). Representing international majority, these states are poor, vulnerable and insecure latecomers to the global system of states and are at their infancy of becoming modern states (Ayoob, 1995: 15). Moreover, a weak state is not a static and binary condition, but rather a continuum, since weak states can become strong and strong states can become weak (Jackson, 2010: 189). Thus, weak states may be perceived not just as a category, but also as a concept with flexible frontiers (Ayoob, 1995: 13; Muni, 1979: 121).

In fact, weak states can be further distinguished, as the degree of their weakness may vary significantly. Whilst some states remain weak without any positive progress, other weak states may slide towards failure or collapse (Rotberg, 2003). To some extent the concept of “a failed state” runs in parallel with the abovementioned conceptualisation of weak states. Yet, in the case of failed states,

the nature of threats and the level of internal incongruities are more severe. As Robert Rotberg (2003: 5) emphasises, failed states are often characterized by the protracted character of violence, which stems from the religious, ethnic or intercommunal differences and antagonism. Nonetheless, it may be erroneous to classify those enmities as the root cause of state failure, because the number of factors that may contribute to the state failure is immense. For instance, Rotberg (2003) asserts that the indicators of state failure may include loss of governmental control and authority over parts of the territory, increase of criminal violence, growth of flawed institutions, deteriorating infrastructure, lack of essential political goods, political role of warlords or other non-state actors, etc. In other words, failed states constitute “a polity that is no longer able or willing to perform the fundamental jobs of a nation-state in the modern world” (Rotberg, 2003: 6). Moreover, there is also the related notion of “a collapsed state”, which is a more extreme version of a failed state (Rotberg, 2003: 9). William Zartman (1995: 1) refers the phenomenon of state collapse to “a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new”. In this context, centralized political authority is absent or absolutely minimal, whereas the territory of the country is divided into the illegitimate warlord fiefdoms (Rotberg, 2003: 10). As a result, during this period the state as a functioning and legitimate order vanishes (Zartman, 1995: 1). Furthermore, the condition of a collapsed state is also not a static condition. For instance, whilst some states like Somalia fail and then collapse, other states like Tajikistan or Lebanon are slowly recovering from the collapsed to the failed state of being (Rotberg, 2003: 9-10).

In general, the presence of such a versatile classification of weak states demonstrates that the classical “billiard balls” analogy is misleading, if not erroneous, in many parts of the world and particularly in Central Asia. Even though the classifications of weak states often overlap with each other and to a certain extent resemble a conceptual verbiage, the concepts of weak states pose a formidable challenge to the Westphalian understanding of the international system and order. The nature of threats is one of those key features that require further

unpacking. Lacking effective institutions, domestic consensus on the idea of the state and a monopoly on the instruments of violence, weak states become vulnerable from outside and from within. Home-grown threats overshadow external threats and preoccupy security agenda of the state. As abovementioned, the border lines between regime security and national security become diluted, substantially affecting strategic decisions of the governments and daily lives of common people. Indeed, such an emphasis on power of internal dynamics in weak states directly contradicts the traditional postulates of mainstream IR. However, states are not equal, and true international system of states lies under “the façade of internationally recognized statehood” (Buzan, 1991: 103). Accordingly, the quest for the answers to the foreign policy behaviour of weak states should start perhaps not on the systemic, but on the domestic level of analysis or in between, since it is internal insecurities that may be the driving engine of the small and the weak.

#### *Regime Security in Weak States*

As aforesaid, there are numerous factors that shape the outlook of weak states. Regime security is one of those key variables, often neglected by the grand theorists, which requires a specific attention of scholars. Weak states are distinguished by the nature of their insecurities and its correlation to the ruling regimes. Thus, the role of regime security may be quintessential for the understanding of foreign policy trajectories of weak states. In fact, since this work seeks a multi-level approach integrative of both internal and external dynamics, the notion of regime security may become a point of contact for FPA and grand IR, the need for which was previously discussed in Chapter I.

The concepts of “regime” and “security” need to be unpacked for more rigorous understanding of weak states. In general, Security Studies is the broad sub-discipline of IR, mainly because the concept of security is broad and multi-faceted. The Oxford (2012) and the Merriam-Webster (2012) dictionaries provide a clear, yet narrow definition of security, which is the state of being free from danger, fear or anxiety. In IR, however, “security” is more endowed with a specific context (Ayoob, 1995). Traditionally, IR literature regarded the concept of security from the

perspective of external threats and military responses (Ayoob, 1995: 5). As Walter Lippmann (1943: 51) emphasises, "A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war." Similarly, Giacomo Luciani (1988: 151) defines national security as "the ability to withstand aggression from abroad". Ian Bellamy (1981: 102) believes that "security itself is a relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur". In other words, for most of the system-centred scholars security is outwardly directed, with the state being a referent object to be secured from external threats through military might (Ayoob, 1995; Collins, 2010: 2). Such an approach to security roots back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, when the notion of the state was formally institutionalised, and, as Ayoob (1995: 6) argues, this notion became inherent to the Western strategic thinking.

Nevertheless, the application of these principles to the analysis of weak states leads to several major conceptual problems (Ayoob, 1995; Thomas, 1987). Security in the context of weak states does not simply refer to external orientations, systemic relations, military capacities or major powers alliances (Ayoob, 1995; Thomas, 1987). Security in weak states encompasses a wide range of dimensions vital for the existence of the state and which are already dealt with in the West (Thomas, 1987). For instance, external orientation, one of the fundamental attributes of the Western security, is not as relevant for weak states as for strong ones, because most insecurities emanate from within the borders of weak states (Ayoob, 1995: 7). The outcomes of systemic security are also less promising for weak states. The proxy wars during the Cold War had an inverse effect on security of developing states by turning the Third World into a battlefield arena and substantially contributing to the growing insecurities (Ayoob, 1995: 7). Even the reliance on military power and alliance security does not bring security guarantees, as the cases of Somalia, Vietnam and Pakistan demonstrate (Ayoob, 1995: 7). Accordingly, in view of these contentions a great many scholars propose a different approach to the study of security in weak states. Thomas (1987: 1) asserts that

several key areas need to be examined to find “the Third World security” such as the search for security through nation-building or nuclear weapons, or the search for secure systems of trade, health, money and food. Acknowledging the comprehensiveness of these criteria, Ayoob (1995: 9-11) proposes to define the Third World security primarily in political terms and in relation to the substantial challenges the states and regimes face. Indeed, the limitation of Thomas’ wide-ranging criteria strictly to those with political outcomes adds parsimony to the analysis of the concept of weak states’ security without diminishing its explanatory power.

Respectively, Ayoob (1995: 9) proposes the following definition of the notion, “[S]ecurity-insecurity is defined in relation to vulnerabilities – both internal and external – that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes.” The inclusion of the internal vulnerabilities is one the most important adjustments to the definition of security that are widely contested by traditional IR. Nonetheless, internal dynamics can explain political behaviour of weak states. Numerous external and internal threats are conducive to the environment, where each societal unit, including the ruling regime, compete for survival (Jackson, 2010: 191). In turn, this fierce competition leads to a further escalation of the situation, creating a vicious and everlasting circle of “an insecurity dilemma” (Jackson, 2010: 191). The state becomes trapped in a semi-permanent condition of “emergent anarchy”, where all components of the society are engaged in self-help survival strategies, whilst the government is unable to accumulate a monopoly on the instruments of violence or establish effective institutional and physical base (Jackson, 2010: 191). In addition, the peculiar forms of threats inherent to weak states further twist the insecurity spiral. For instance, there are a number of threats, unique for weak states, which pose serious challenge to the integrity of the country. These states are under the constant threat of armed and violent intervention into the political life of the state, e.g. coup d’états, revolutions, revolts (Jackson, 2010). For example, Centre for Systemic Peace (2011) names 750 alleged, plotted, attempted and successful coup d’états in the world from 1946 to 2010, and this list excludes popular

uprisings, victories by rebel forces, social revolutions, ouster of the leaders due to their health incapacity or death, or ouster by foreign forces. The threat from warlords, religious leaders, opposition politicians, strongmen, or other individuals who may challenge the dictatorial and infrastructural power of the state contributes greatly to the insecurity dilemma of weak states. In addition, the flaws of state institutions in weak states lead to the steady erosion of the rule of law and to the eventual governmental crisis, when the ruling elites struggle to fill the formed political vacuum and claim illusory legitimacy under the mantle of statehood (Jackson, 2010: 190).

Even though most of the pressing threats to security in weak states are domestically generated, it will be imprudent to jettison in toto the role of the external or transnational threats. Since these states are internally weak, fragile and impotent to exercise coercive capacity, they become vulnerable to any external incursions, interventions or conflict spillovers (Jackson, 2010: 190). This involvement into the domestic affairs of the state may not necessarily be direct, as other interested players may support the regime change or contribute to the effective condition of anarchy and political vacuum covertly or indirectly. The examples of such cases are numerous, from the conspiracies of the medieval Europe up to the recent interventions by the USA and the UK in Libya. In addition, weak states fail to prevent smuggling of goods, human and arms trafficking, influx of misplaced people or the actual fighting, because their borders are too loose and the infrastructural power is too weak (Jackson, 2010: 190).

In a similar vein, “regime” can be endowed with a specific context. In public discourse and journalistic accounts regime is usually referred to a form of government.<sup>9</sup> Quite often this term is commonly applied to the non-democratic governments, which suppress political freedoms and exercise arbitrary rules (Shama, 2014: 14). The Oxford dictionary (2014) relates the term “regime” to the Latin word “regere” or “to rule” and thus defines the word as “a government, especially an authoritarian one”. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2014) also

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, see [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), [www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com), [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com), and etc.

classifies the term as “a form of government” or “a particular government” and as “a system of management”.

In the academia, regime is examined in broader terms.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Sally Cummings et al (2013: 446) assert that “[t]he state refers to the locus and structure of power; the regime to the rules and limitations governing power’s access and use; and government to the particular group of political actors who are exercising power at any given time”. However, Cummings et al (2013) argue that these three concepts are often conflated in the political analysis of the post-communist countries. Thus, in their work, Cummings et al (2013: 447) understand “the state” through the Weberian definition with its focus on the structure and sources of power in terms of both actors and institutions, whilst the government is analysed as the people who occupy the highest political offices in the country and administer the state. In turn, the scholars relate the concept of the regime to the rules and norms, which govern power arrangements in the country (Cummings et al, 2013).

Cummings et al (2013) even highlight “vertical regimes” and “horizontal regimes”. “Vertical regimes” are referred to the rules and norms, which define the nature and methods of power allocation amongst political actors, whilst “horizontal regimes” are referred to the acceptance of these rules by all players and thus are essentially about elites’ legitimacy (Cummings et al, 2013: 446). Accordingly, Cummings (2002: 3) denotes that “[r]egimes are typically less permanent than states but more permanent than governments”. In a similar vein, Gerardo Munck (1996: 8) argued

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<sup>10</sup> In IR literature “regime” is usually examined in much more complex terms (Rittberger, 1993). For instance, speaking about international regimes, Stephen Krasner (1982: 186) emphasizes that “Regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations. Principles are beliefs of fact, causation, and rectitude. Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice.” Similarly, John Ruggie (1975: 569) asserts that international regime is an ensemble of “mutual expectations, generally agreed-to rules, regulations and plans, in accordance with which organizational energies and financial commitments are allocated”. Keohane and Nye (1977: 19; 1987: 732) further build upon the Ruggie’s concept and affirm that this international law concept represents the “governing arrangements that affect relationships of interdependence” and “networks of rules, norms, and procedures that regularize behaviour and control its effects”. Nonetheless, the definition of international regimes in IR is yet less than straightforward, whilst the agreement amongst IR scholars on one universal definition of “international regime” is still highly unlikely (Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger, 1997).

that political regime is defined by the formal and informal procedural rules and the acceptance of those rules by all relevant actors. These rules determine who gains access to the main governmental positions, how this access is gained and how this all interplays with the publicly binding decision-making (Munck, 1996: 8). Likewise, Oisín Tansey (2009: 5) distinguished the term “regime” as a core set of rules, procedures and norms that determine elites’ access to power.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, in this work, the definition of the term “regime” will exclude the rules and norms that determine power allocations and will be only limited to a certain group of people in power – the ruling elites who have a monopoly on the instruments of violence within the country.<sup>12</sup> In weak states, these people are usually the leaders of the state and their entourages such as their relatives, clan member and cronies. Nael Shama (2014: 14) provides a somewhat similar definition of the regime, which is “governments of authoritarian states, the ruling elites of these states, and the clientage and patronage networks that are cultivated by and associated with these elites”. Such a conceptualisation goes beyond a narrow view of the regime as a particular government by incorporating other key political players who can influence state decision-making without holding official positions in the government.

Furthermore, this conceptualisation also distinguishes from the general concept of “the elites”. George Field and John Higley (quoted in Sharan, 2001: 111) define elites as “[p]eople [who are] able, through their positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes individually, regularly, and seriously” and who are “capable, if they wish, of making substantial political trouble for high officials (i.e. other elite persons who happen to be incumbents of authoritative positions)

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<sup>11</sup> Tansey (2009), however, excludes administrative structure and legal source of authority from the characterisation of the regime.

<sup>12</sup> Although this research does not engage with the broader understanding of regime, it welcomes further studies of the rules, norms and procedures that determine power distribution in the context of Central Asia. For instance, a recent research of this topic has been conducted by Cummings et al (2013). By dissecting the concepts of government, regime and state in the case of Kyrgyzstan, Cummings et al (2013) argue that the entire period from 1991 to 2010 in Kyrgyzstan can be classified as one regime of semi-authoritarianism, whilst the events of 2005 and 2010 can be defined as government changes.

without being promptly repressed”. However, in this work, the concept of regime is not inclusive of all political actors who are capable of projecting certain degree of power within the state. Instead, this work focuses on a dominant group – a controlling minority of individuals whose power and influence prevails over those of other actors within the country and who can significantly affect state policymaking. Accordingly, in this work, regime will be examined through the prism of the interests of the ruling elites.

In this respect, regime security will be classified as “the idiosyncratic set of dispositions, orientations, and strategies of a particular regime as it seeks to maintain its physical presence, establish and perpetuate legitimacy, and further its permanent and ad hoc interests” (Mohamedou, 1996: 111). The realisation of these strategies is mainly directed to achieve regime security in four areas: power consolidation, economic viability, internal and external threat diffusion and legitimacy renewal (Mohamedou, 1996; Mohamedou, 1998).

Power consolidation typically occurs when the regime takes over the state machinery, but this process may be repetitious, depending on the volatility of the threats (Mohamedou, 1996; Shama, 2014). For the regime to last, however, power consolidation needs to be perpetuated with the socio-economic demands of the people (Mohamedou, 1996: 115; Shama, 2014). Although the regimes may exist without economic viability, the ruling elites tend to associate the economic successes with their regimes to guarantee further security (Mohamedou, 1996: 116). In fact, gaining and maintaining legitimacy becomes an ultimate goal for regime security (Mohamedou, 1996; Mohamedou, 1998). In general, in weak states, the regime – id est the ruling elites – employ a range of internal and external strategies to ensure their own security at the expense of the long-term state developments (Migdal, 1988; Mohamedou, 1996: 112; Mohamedou, 1998; Jackson, 2010). Accordingly, the next sections will examine in more detail some of the strategies that the Central Asian regimes resort to in order to maintain their presence and protect their interests.

In sum, the perennial challenges of the ruling regimes in weak states lie in the dilemma between achieving short-term regime security and long-term state-building objectives (Jackson, 2010: 194). The ruling elites struggle to escape the insecurity dilemma posed by the internal and external weakness of the state, and, as a result, they twist the insecurity spiral further. It is a matter of debate whether insecurity dilemma of weak states is the standard process of state-building. Yet, the understanding of the regime and regime security in weak states is essential for the analysis and evaluation of the international behaviour of these states. As Ayooob (1995: 191) emphasizes, both domestic and international behaviour of the Third World states cannot be adequately explained without including security in the centrepiece of the analysis. The ruling elites in weak states are “obsessed” with the regime security and, respectively, most of the domestic and foreign policies they implement are conditioned by this preoccupation (Ayooob, 1995: 191). Thus, regime security may become one of the key explanations that determine international behaviour of weak states, although the number of independent variables affecting this process is numerous.

### *Foreign Policy of Weak States*

Since weak states are a separate concept, their foreign policies also need a separate focus. Accordingly, the importance of regime security needs to be assessed with respect to other factors that affect foreign policies of weak states. One may presume that there is a great scholastic diversity in the analysis of foreign policies of weak states, especially since a myriad of foreign policy behaviours inherent to weak states was identified by various scholars and policymakers. However, these approaches are still rather limited and could be situated within three main themes – the idiosyncratic, great power and reductionist frameworks, although the newer works on weak states tend to expand this analysis by examining domestic, systemic and transnational variables.

The available academic literature distinguished the horizontal and vertical methodological approaches to the study of foreign policies of weak states (Handel, 1990: 4). The horizontal approach seeks to devise a general foreign policy theory

of weak states, whilst the vertical approach seeks to examine foreign policy of a particular state during a specific period (Handel, 1990: 4). In this respect, Jeanne Hey (2003) provides a comprehensive summary of the most commonly cited strategies of small states on the international arena. According to Hey (2003: 5), these states:

- Exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs
- Address a narrow scope of foreign policy issues
- Limit their behaviour to their immediate geographic arena
- Employ diplomatic and economic foreign policy instruments, as opposed to military instruments
- Emphasize internationalist principles, international law, and other “morally minded” ideals
- Secure multinational agreements and join multinational institutions whenever possible
- Choose neutral positions
- Rely on superpowers for protection, partnerships, and resources
- Aim to cooperate and to avoid conflicts with others
- Spend a disproportionate amount of foreign policy resources on ensuring physical and political security and survival

Although Hey attributes this pattern to small states, her classification is still applicable to weak states, as their foreign policy behaviour is very similar. Nonetheless, small and weak states are different concepts. Small states are characterised by their differences in a geographical size, population number and degree of influence on international arena (Hey, 2003). The concept of weak states is related more to the socio-political cohesion, as identified by Buzan (1991). For instance, Syria can be classified as a small and weak state, whereas Israel can be identified as a small, but strong state.

Yet, notwithstanding the comprehensiveness of such summarising classifications, the contention regarding the diversity in the analysis of foreign policy of weak states still lacks strong theoretical and empirical base. Traditional approaches to the study of foreign policies of weak states are limited and mostly characterised by

psychologicistic/idiosyncratic, great power and reductionist positions (Dessouki and Korany, 1984). The first strand conceives foreign policy of weak states as an outcome of the idiosyncrasies, impulses and desires of a single leader (Dessouki and Korany, 1984: 4). This view runs in line with the behavioural and actor-specific commitments of traditional FPA that investigates foreign policies via the particularities of individuals responsible for it. Consequently, the presidents, kings or sheikhs are examined as the sole sources of foreign policy with war and peace being the outcome of their personal tastes and choices (Dessouki and Korany, 1984: 4). For instance, Zeev Maoz and Allison Astorino (1992) suggested that during the Arab-Israeli conflict in the early 1970s most of the foreign policy decisions in the engaged states were resulting from the perceptions of the key decision makers and how they assessed the nature of the events. Similarly, Yong-Pyo Hong (2000) explained security and foreign policies of South Korea of 1953-1960 via the role of its autocratic president Syngman Rhee. Hong (2000) denoted that when the degree of support and legitimacy of the Rhee regime declined, Rhee's own interests substituted national security concerns, and as a result the foreign policy priorities of South Korea of that period such as "the march north" or the orientation towards the USA served Rhee's interest (Hong, 2000).

Indeed, in general, it may be difficult to rule out the idiosyncratic variables from the explanation of foreign policies of weak states, since the regimes in weak states are often centred on charismatic or dictatorial leaders. In fact, in certain cases, such an approach appears to be enticing. For example, Thomas Leonard (1999) attributed the pursuit of independent foreign policy by Cuba to Fidel Castro, whilst Peter Mansfield (1982) identified Saddam Hussein as the principal policy-maker of the Ba'athist regime and the key source of the Iraqi foreign policy. Similarly, David Chandler (1999) investigated the decision-making rationale of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia by exploring the ideas, desires and behaviour of Pol Pot. Nonetheless, as outlined in Chapter I, decision makers-oriented FPA is often dismissed by mainstream IR due to its major internal incongruities and incapacities to deal with the systemic variables. The sole focus on one leader as the

determinant of foreign policy requires a solid and rigorous justification for omitting other variables.

On the contrary, the second framework examines the role of systemic factors in shaping foreign policies of weak states at the expense of domestic variables. The great power theme derives from mainstream IR and rests upon the principles of structural realism, thus, explaining international behaviour of weak states mostly from the position of balance of power and systemic constraints. Within this framework, not only foreign policy of weaker states depends directly on the actions of greater players, but even domestic policy of those states is perceived as the reaction to the external influences. In other words, rephrasing Paul Noble (1984: 41), the idiosyncratic approach examines what the governments “would like to do”, whereas the great power approach examines “what they are able to do”. The widest application of the great power analysis may be depicted in the literature on interstate relationships between the post-Soviet countries. Many scholars present Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia as a battleground between Russia and the USA after the demise of the USSR. The so-called New Great Game philosophy prevails not only within the academic circles, but also in the official discourses. As a result, the relations between post-Soviet states are often based on the capstones of the traditional security studies that are power relations and military might. For instance, the Russian-Georgian relations are quite often examined through the prism of the Russian consolidation of power and reassertion on its periphery (Allison, 2008a). The inability of the Ukrainian leadership to consolidate its foreign policy is explained by the swings of the Ukraine regime from one geopolitical pole to another, which may be evident in the Ukraine’s balancing between a “Slavic choice” and a “European choice” (Light, White and Löwenhardt, 2000: 82-83). Similarly, the cobweb of the Central Asian relations is more commonly scrutinised through the interplay between Washington, Moscow and Beijing.

The application of the great power narratives is not constrained uniquely to the post-Soviet periphery. For example, Mohammad-Mahmoud Mohamedou (1996:

44) denoted that foreign policy of the Arab states was often perceived as the function of the Cold War bipolarity. In a similar vein, Nadav Safran (in Mohamedou, 1996: 44-45) placed the great powers matrix in the core of the Arab states relations by arguing that the involvement of the great powers in the region exacerbated the local rivalries and prolonged the Arab-Israeli conflict. John Heilbrunn (1999) emphasised that Benin's foreign policy was formed in Paris before 1996, whilst after 1996 Benin's foreign policy became the product of the regional politics. Likewise, Nigeria was often examined through the prism of the Soviet and American engagement (Wright and Okolo, 1999: 127). Nonetheless, similar to the idiosyncratic model, one level analysis is insufficient to explain complex political phenomena, particularly in the turbulent developing regions. As aforesaid, certain concepts such as "domestic/foreign policy" or "national/regime security" are extremely perplexed in weak states and require multidimensional scrutiny.

If the great power framework perceives foreign policies of weak states through the prism of greater players, the reductionist or model-builders approach equates the foreign policy dynamics of weak states with those of strong states. As Dessouki and Korany (1984: 6) assert, the reductionist approach assumes that foreign policy of developing states is driven by the same decisional calculi as foreign policy of developed states. The main difference is measured only in the quantitative terms. Stronger states have more resources, and thus they can conduct their foreign policies on larger scale. For instance, one of the reductionist models, the Rosenau's linkage politics (1969), stressed the interdependence of national and international environments. From Rosenau's perspective (1969) foreign policy decisions are conducted in accordance to their domestic outcomes, and likewise domestic policy decisions are spearheaded with regards to their international consequences. For example, Houman Sadri (2004) relied on the postulates of Rosenau's linkage model to examine Iranian foreign relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The presence of the sub-national actors and external forces was identified by Sadri (2004: 103) as sufficiently compelling to scrutinize the decision-making processes in Iran from the stands of the linkage politics. In a similar vein, Patrick McGowan and Klaus-Peter Gottwald (1975) believed that the linkage politics is paramount in

determining external behaviour of small post-colonial African states. McGowan and Gottwald (1975) argued that foreign policy of both strong and weak states can be perceived as an adaptive form of behaviour or, in other words, as a result of the interconnectedness between the domestic structures of a state and external events. To test their hypotheses, McGowan and Gottwald (1975: 476) implied under the *ceteris paribus* assumption that “the bigger the state, the greater its influence capability; and the more modern the state, the greater its stress sensitivity”.

Yet, many scholars question the applicability of reductionist approach to weak states (Dessouki and Korany, 1984; Ayoob, 1995; Mohamedou, 1996). Such a model-builders approach predicates that both strong and weak states follow the rational decision-making model and thus fails to account for specific characteristics of weak states (Dessouki and Korany, 1984: 6). For instance, the linkage model rests on the premises of the dichotomy between internal and external environments. However, the border line between those two environments is razor-thin, if not absent, in the developing regions like the Middle East (Mohamedou, 1996: 47). As a result, model-builders approaches such as the linkage politics are rendered redundant or at least explanatory weak, when for instance applied to the Syrian-Lebanese, Saudi-Yemeni, Algerian-Mauritanian, Jordanian-Palestinian or Egyptian-Libyan affairs (Mohamedou, 1996: 47). Respectively, the reductionist approach is questioned on the same grounds as the idiosyncratic and great power frameworks for being too simplistic or even incomplete when applied to the context of weak states.

Newer literature on foreign policies of weak states tends to go beyond the abovementioned traditional approaches by expanding the analysis to domestic, systemic and transnational variables. For instance, Peter Schraeder and Nefertiti Gaye (1997: 491) argue that the interplay between domestic and international factors held a prominent role in the formation of the Senegalese foreign policy. Thus, it may be inadequate to analyse the Senegalese foreign policy solely through the prism of the superpowers relations or the personal rule of Leopold Sedar

Senghor or Abdou Diouf even during the period of Cold War (Schraeder and Gaye, 1997: 486). In this respect, Schraeder and Gaye (1997: 507) indicated that the following variables could have influenced the Senegalese specific foreign choices: the role of Islam and Wolof culture, democratic traditions, absence of the military rule, French colonial past, economic conditions, and acceptance of the socialist ideology by the Senegalese elite. Moreover, Schraeder and Gaye (1997: 485) pointed out that there are more salient variables such as traditional culture, religion or regional interests that can account for a broader and more nuanced understanding of the foreign policy dynamics of weak states.

Indeed, more scholars accept that idiosyncratic, reductionist and great power frameworks often fail to reveal the genuine picture of decision-making and at worst draw “mere caricatures” of more intertwined and complex phenomena (Schraeder and Gaye, 1997: 507; Muni, 1979; Mohamedou, 1996). Accordingly, contemporary scholarships of foreign policy decision-making in weak states attempt to move towards a multi-level and multi-causal framework of analysis. For example, Frank Mora (2003) emphasises that foreign policy choices of Paraguay from 1954 to 1998 were bound to two explanatory variables – idiosyncratic and systemic. Under Alfredo Stroessner Paraguay’s state decision-making was shaped by the autocratic governing rules, norms and procedures, whilst Paraguay’s foreign policy was devised to strengthen Stroessner’s corrupt neosultanistic regime (Mora, 2003). Under transformist Andres Rodriguez Paraguay’s foreign policies were directed to attract international support to the democratising regime of Rodriguez. Paraguay terminated its international isolationism and joined regional economic systems to boost Rodriguez’ legitimacy (Mora, 2003). The attraction of the investment capital and the demonstration of commitments to democratic reforms were critical for the strengthening of Rodriguez regime (Mora, 2003: 23). Nonetheless, lacking strong political and economic base and landlocked by two regional powers, Paraguayan foreign policy was constrained by the nature of the international system and was dependent on the regional balance of power, whether it was the Argentine-Brazil rivalry, the Uruguayan support in Mercosur or the engagement of the USA (Mora, 2003: 14).

Lena Jonson (2006) applied a similar framework to examine Tajikistan's quest for foreign policy during the first four years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Jonson (2006: 11) articulated three possible explanations that drove Tajikistan's external relations: 1) the regional system approach, which focuses on the international system in the region, the constraints it represents and the opportunities it offers to the Tajik state 2) domestic consolidation approach, which gives attention to efforts by the government to consolidate the state and secure its own hold on power 3) societal approach, which looks at the dynamics from within society and which may press the government to shift its foreign policy in one direction or another.

Through the analysis of war-torn Tajikistan Jonson provided constructivist insights on how a small state formulates its foreign policy priorities and seeks to develop its national interests under the vigilante focus of greater powers. In particular, Jonson (2006: 182) believes that the distinctions between the internal and external factors behind the foreign policy of a state cannot be clear-cut, as the domestic scene of a state is subjected to the influences from the outside and is vulnerable to the impact of international environment. Thus, Johnson (2006: 182) analysed Tajikistan's post 9/11 "open door" concept through the prism of great power engagement and Afghanistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan triangle. The introduction of domestic consolidation and societal approaches provided alternative views into the analysis of factors that shaped international behaviour of Tajikistan. Jonson (2006: 13) asserts that Tajik policymakers define and interpret national interests in terms of the interests of the ruling regime and thus "formulate foreign policy largely autonomously in relation to society in the sense that they try to reduce the other interests' possibilities to influence the choice of foreign policy". The discontent groups of people within the society and competing clan rivalries may also directly or indirectly influence the directions of foreign policy of the country and feed the insecurity of the ruling regime, which in turn may force the ruling elites to rethink its foreign policy to ensure a continued hold of power (Jonson, 2006: 13, 129). Thus, since relatively few studies examined the determinants of foreign policies of weak

Central Asian states, such a multi-causal approach sets an example for further academic inquiry into this topic.

One of the main rationales behind this approach lies in the possibility of expanding traditional Western notions of security to include into the agenda internal and non-military security matters inherent solely to weak states (Ryan, 2009). The ruling regimes in weak states “reside” in between the international system and domestic society, and their foreign policy decisions are linked to both of these notions (Ryan, 2009: 12). Thus, the foreign policy theory should be capable of scrutinising the challenges and opportunities posed by both domestic and international environments, since “neither domestic nor foreign policy can be understood without recourse to the constraints presented in the other, overlapping, sphere” (Ryan, 2009: 12). Respectively, amongst internal variables more scholars tend to emphasize the role of regime security in determining foreign policy behaviour of weak states. Particularly, this trend is depicted in the new works on the Arab states. For example, Mohamedou (1996) suggests treating regime security and state-building as key variables that affect foreign policy-making processes of Iraq. The scholar argues that it is the duality of these concepts, which accounted for major foreign policy decisions of Iraq such as the annexation of Kuwait in the early 1990s or the launch of the missiles on Saudi Arabia and Israel (Mohamedou, 1996: 324). Likewise, Curtis Ryan (2009: 7-8) asserts that the Western notions of “state” and “security” have a more complex meaning in the Middle East, which complicates the applicability of mainstream IR theories to the local context. External factors may severely limit foreign policy choices of weak states, but systemic constraints are not decisive (Ryan, 2009). The pivotal question rather becomes who is in power and what their interests are (Ryan, 2009: 8). As a result, in regards to the degree of influence on the foreign policy outcomes and alliance formations, the variable of regime security retains more explanatory power over the perspective of external threats in the Middle East (Ryan, 2009).

In sum, the traditional foreign policy studies of weak states are mostly characterised by idiosyncratic, great power and reductionist frameworks of

analysis. However, weak states lack strong physical and institutional base, effective monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state, and as a result they are trapped in the vicious circle of insecurity dilemma. Since the ruling regimes in weak states are preoccupied by their own security and short-term goals, the frontiers between the domestic and international politics blur. This phenomenon becomes the perennial impediment to the analysis, whereas the explanatory capacity of the orthodox approaches is rendered to be insufficient or even misleading in explaining the genuine dynamics of international behaviour of weak states. New literature on foreign policies of weak states seeks to mitigate this epistemological challenge and go beyond the abovementioned traditional approaches. In turn, the amalgamation of domestic and external variables may explain international behaviour of weak states in broader and more genuine terms. In particular, the inclusion of security into the analysis may contribute greatly to the understanding of foreign policies of weak states (Ayoob, 1995). The ruling regimes in weak states tend to prioritize their own security and shape their foreign policies in accordance to the home-generated threats. Thus, it becomes essential for the understanding of foreign policy dynamics of weak states to include the interests of the ruling elites who are undermined by traditional and internal security dilemmas and obsessed with domestic and regional legitimacy (Ryan, 2009).

### *The Great Game of Central Asia*

Respectively, then the ensuing question is how to examine international relations of Central Asia. Despite the shortcomings of structural realism, it will be imprudent to jettison in toto the role of the systemic factors in shaping foreign policies of five Central Asian republics. However, in a similar vein, it will be also inconsiderate to relate all foreign policies of the Central Asian states to the notions of bandwagoning and power relations. As aforementioned, one level analysis is insufficient to explain complex political phenomena in the turbulent developing regions. In turn, a diversified system-level analysis may provide a broader explanation of international politics in the region. Such an analysis may explain how the Central Asian regimes manage to play the greater actors off one another

to secure external funding and lucrative contractual terms, to curtail inconvenient external expectations and to manipulate foreign standards and norms for their own benefits (Cooley, 2012: 9). Accordingly, this work proposes to examine foreign policies of the Central Asian states via the merger of internal, external and transnational variables. In particular, the foreign policy of regime security in Kyrgyzstan will be assessed in relation to the concepts of bandwagoning, state performance and rent-seeking.

Similar to the previously mentioned studies, Central Asia has been subjected to the traditional trends of foreign policy analysis of weak states. Although recent studies tend to stress the role of the domestic variables in determining foreign policies of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, most of the literature conceives foreign policy decision-making in Central Asia through the neorealist prism of the great powers engagement. It may not be surprising that many scholars examine foreign policy orientations of these states through the neorealist perspective, since Central Asia has been an indispensable part of the Soviet monolith for 75 years, and purportedly Moscow drew the border lines of its own “backyard” or the current “near abroad”. Thus, both scholars and policymakers tend to examine the Central Asian politics through the Russian decline and reassertion in the region, linking it to the New Great Game over the spheres of influence.<sup>13</sup>

Much cited concept of the Great Game has been coined by a British intelligence officer Arthur Conolly who was casted in a well with vermin and reptiles for two

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<sup>13</sup> It was in the early 1900s, when Sir Halford Mackinder (1904) advanced his Heartland theory that stressed the importance of controlling Eastern Europe, including Central Asia, for the world dominance. However, his Heartland thesis has long dominated the academic and political discourses in the region. Nicholas Spykman (1944) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) were amongst those who introduced the concepts of geopolitics into the American foreign policy practices, as they emphasized that the balance of power in Central Asia directly affects the interests and security of the USA. As Matthew Edwards (2003: 83) denotes, such a world-wide use of the term “the New Great Game” along with an increasing focus on Central Asia has been potentially caused by the revived interest in geopolitics as the framework for the politico-security analysis. Yet, compared to the classical Great Game, the concept of the New Great Game was not limited to geopolitical dominance in a zero-sum form (Edwards, 2003). It included the competition in military, economic, cultural and religious spheres with actors at the local, state, regional, transnational and multinational levels (Edwards, 2003).

months and then beheaded by the Emir of Bukhara on charges of spying in Central Asia for the British Crown (Fromkin, 1980: 936). Although the Great Game dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term itself, however, has been popularized by Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* in 1901. The novel unfolds the life story of an orphan Kimball "Kim" O'Hara who is sucked into the political confrontation between the Russian and British Empires, known as "The Great Game", whilst travelling with a Tibetan Lama to "the River of the Arrow" (Kipling, 1901). The original Great Game was a secret war played by Tsarist Russia and Victorian Britain at the steps of Central Asia, with 2,000 miles separating two empires in the beginning of the confrontation and less than 20 miles in the Pamir region by the end of it (Hopkirk, 1990: 5). Imperial Britain perceived the active expansion of Tsarist Russia in Central Asia and Caucasus as the direct threat to its integrity, as there was a possibility of further expansion of the Russian forces to India through Afghanistan. Accordingly, the British Empire attempted to contain the growing influence of Tsarist Russia in the Central Asian region, which led to a latent confrontation between two great powers and a catastrophic defeat of Imperial Britain in Afghanistan. This classic stage of the Great Game has officially ended in 1907 with the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention (Hopkirk, 2002: 61).<sup>14</sup> Hundred years later the concept of the Great Game has been revived with new players entering the political scene of Central Asia. This revisited notion imagined a covert rivalry between Russia, China, and the USA in Central Asia and also acknowledged the emerging roles of Iran and Turkey. Such theorising was conducted from the perspective of greater powers, since the newly independent states were assumed to be too weak and fractured to make independent decisions, whilst the presence

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<sup>14</sup> The second phase of the Great Game began at the onset of the World War I, when Kaiser of Germany Wilhelm II decided to create a new Teutonic empire (Hopkirk, 2002: 61). In conjunction with Mehmed V Reshad of the Ottoman Empire, Wilhelm II declared a jihad against the Entente Powers to harness the militant Islamists against Russia and Britain in Central Asia and India (Hopkirk, 2002: 61). Particularly, Wilhelmine Germany relied on the Afghans and the Persians to invade India, as the Germans and Ottomans were spreading the rumours that Wilhelm II has been converted to Islam (Hopkirk, 2002: 61). The second phase of the Great Game, however, was ended by the defeat of the Central Powers in the World War I. The third and final phase of the Great Game is often attributed to the period after the Bolsheviks Revolution in 1917, when Vladimir Lenin proclaimed to liberate Asia from imperialist oppression (Hopkirk, 2002: 61). Lenin believed that the British Empire would have collapsed if Britain lost its jewel India (Hopkirk, 2002: 62). Thus, as Hopkirk (2002: 62) puts it, the Russians and the Britons found themselves once again playing a hide-and-seek game across the steps and mountains of Central Asia.

of strong and ambitious neighbours further constrained their choices. As Frederick Starr (1996: 80) argued, the fate of Central Asia was in question after the collapse of the Soviet Union, because the region has been “politically organized from without” since the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The hypothesis of bandwagoning posits that weaker states will align with the sources of threat, because these states are too weak to change the power distribution patterns or affect the systemic outcomes (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). Respectively, the New Great Game model envisages that weak Central Asian states with low aggregate capabilities will have no options but to bandwagon much stronger neighbours or the actors with stronger offensive potential. Indeed, the interplay between Russia, China, and the USA is currently one of the most fashionable frameworks in the analysis of the Central Asian foreign policy. The engagement of Russia in the region seems to be a natural process, taking into account the historical and cultural legacies, long transparent borders and Russia’s image as security guarantor and manager (Jonson, 2001: 120). If in the early 1990s the Russian policy in Central Asia was low-profile, yet with a zero-sum perspective, in the mid 2000s with the rising prices on oil and gas the Russia’s confidence of its great power status increased, which led to its reassertion in the Central Asian region (Jonson, 1998; Jonson, 2001; Allison, 2009a). As a result, many scholars and policymakers assumed that all matters related to Central Asia have to be discussed and agreed beforehand in Kremlin. As for the USA, Washington’s interest in the region was progressively growing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the beginning, the engagement of the USA in Central Asia was purportedly associated with the proliferation of democratic principles and with the counteraction of the Russia’s efforts to perpetuate colonial relations (Blank, 2001: 145). It was also assumed that the USA was interested in securing cheap energy supplies from Central Asia, though it remained unclear whether the Caspian oil and gas are of genuine strategic importance to Washington (Blank, 2001: 145). However, in 2001, with the global war on terror, the USA has drastically increased its military presence in Central Asia, promoting basing politics and overshadowing the democratic nurturing (Cooley, 2008: 248). China has been historically a

traditional enemy of the Central Asian peoples. Yet, in the 21 century the politics of China in the region were rather associated with the economic cooperation and trade. For China, Central Asia is important in the context of Eurasia and its possible alliance with regional powers and its cross-border relations and links with Xinjiang (Xing, 2001: 153). Nonetheless, it is still difficult to clearly outline the Chinese strategy towards Central Asia, since Beijing has specific goals and macro-conceptions but lacks a formal policy (Rumer, Trenin, and Zhao, 2007: 137).

The engagement of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia was also perceived through the geopolitical interplay. The Iranian interests in the region are primarily related to Afghanistan and Iranian security issues (Herzig, 2001: 171). Iran seeks to compete for the Central Asian influence mainly to deter its further isolation if the USA, Turkey or Israel fills the Central Asian power vacuum (Herzig, 2001: 174). Thus, Iran is interested in reviving Persian heritage and embracing Islamic governments in the region (Herzig, 2001: 174). The Turkey's probe to enter "mysterious and closed world" of new Central Asia was largely supported by the USA to contain the hegemonic ambitions of Iran and the proliferation of Shi'a Islam in the region (Snyder, 1995: xxiii). Washington assumed that secular Muslim Turkey with strong Western ties would become a model of development for its "Turkic brothers" (Snyder, 1995: xxiii). However, although the involvement of Turkey in Central Asia was steadily growing, Ankara was more interested in the developments of the Caspian region than in Central Asia itself (Winrow, 2001: 217). The Turkish officials perceived the Central Asian republics (excluding Farsi-speaking Tajikistan) as a new market for its goods and as an alternative source of hydrocarbons and raw materials (Winrow, 2001: 199). As a result, to achieve these goals Ankara was keen to promote common linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural ties (Winrow, 2001: 199).

In general, the relations of Central Asia are described as resulting from historical and cultural affinities, security concerns and economic and strategic interests of great powers in the region (Jonson and Allison, 2001: 15). Central Asia is perceived as an investment of the international system managed by "responsible

stakeholders” Russia, China and the USA (Rumer, Trenin, and Zhao, 2007: 70-71).<sup>15</sup> The capacity of the local states to conduct foreign policy independently of the external powers’ influence is either diminished or completely dismissed. As Roy Allison (2009b) emphasises, weak regionalism in Eurasia is mostly explained by the competitive nature of the great power engagement in the region, the preferences for bilateral partnership, the history of the Russian dominance or the enduring intraregional rivalries – essentially, all factors that are beyond the control of the local states. The cases of successful regional cooperation are also explained via the neorealist framework such as the hegemonic stability theory (Allison, 2009b).

Nonetheless, although the great powers analysis via the notion of the New Great Game is an attractive concept, this framework fails to reveal genuine dynamics of “the real game” in Central Asia. In fact, the framing of the region through the prism of imperial confrontation overlooks significant changes in the international politics of Central Asia (Edwards, 2003; Cooley, 2012). Comparing the period of the Great Game to the current state of affairs, it is evident that the political, economic, military and cultural situations are fundamentally different (Edwards, 2003: 90). If the Great Game was played by two imperial powers, the so-called New Great Game involves a greater number of players significantly different in typology (Edwards, 2003). For instance, besides the states, there are players at the supra-state level such as the NATO, the SCO or the OSCE and at the sub-state level such as multinational corporations, NGOs, extremist groups or criminal organizations (Edwards, 2003: 89). In addition, the aims, means, methods, costs and benefits of the New Great Game are also far different compared to those in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the number and diversity of the players (Edwards, 2003). For example, the control over Central Asia may be a matter of prestige and demonstration of Moscow’s increasing role in the international system. Chevron and Exxon Mobil may regard

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, historical and cultural commonalities are spearheaded in the relations between Turkey and all Central Asian states, except Tajikistan, between Iran and Tajikistan, or between Russia and Central Asia through their Soviet legacy (Jonson and Allison, 2001: 14). The economic interests are reflected in the energy interests of all the regional powers, Iran’s trade with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, China’s economic ties with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan or the American and Turkish investments in the Central Asian economies (Jonson and Allison, 2001: 15).

Central Asia as an oil and gas field with immense potential to generate double-digit profits, whilst Hizb ut-Tahrir may imagine Central Asia as a fertile ground for the establishment of Islamic caliphate.

The rules of the Great Game also assume that the local sovereigns and peoples are compliant with the wills of the greater powers. However, the Central Asian practices demonstrate that the local elites are not necessarily subservient to Russia, China or the USA and a fortiori to Turkey and Iran. The Central Asian states have emerged from being the passive pawns of the Central Asian chessboard to become critical actors in their own right, establishing themselves the rules of the game (Cooley, 2012). The local rules, which outline the terms of the game for the external players, are predominantly directed at ensuring the survival of the local regimes, increasing their private gains and reserving the brokering role for the home elites between local clientele and international community (Cooley, 2012). Furthermore, unlike the original Great Game, the New Great Game is not necessarily a zero-sum game at least at the state-centric level. As Heathershaw (2007) accentuates, even a scant political analysis demonstrates that the New Great Game theory is contained by the existence of a shared ground expressed in the “War on Terror” and the second- or even third-tier role of Central Asia to the USA, Russia and China. Heathershaw’s example of the “War on Terror” demonstrates that there is an intersection of interests between Russia, China and the USA, as none of the sides are interested in the escalation of the situation in Afghanistan, the subsequent spillover effect and the radicalization of the region. The existence of this strategic triangle between Moscow, Beijing and Washington has been observed not only in their competition, but also in their cooperation, enabling, and emulation (Cooley, 2012). The cooperation in the security sphere between the three poles has been especially vivid after the events of 9/11. Enabling was also an important feature of these trilateral relationships, as all parties enabled each other to pursue their own strategic aims in the region (Cooley, 2012). Emulation or mimicking has become a common trait as well: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), for instance, mirrored the form of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), or the Chinese and

Russian election monitoring institutions mirrored the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (Cooley, 2012).

Strikingly, the commitment of the scholars and policymakers to the use of the term "the New Great Game" can be attributed to the commitment of the Central Asian and Russian elites themselves to such a geopolitical mindset. John Heathershaw (2007: 248) denotes that "[i]deologies, and the political, social and cultural setting in which they 'originate', continue to have an enduring impact long after that 'origination'". The elites who came to power both in Russia and Central Asia have been raised on the dogmatic incrustations of the communist ideology. Consequently, this *nomenklatura* who became the stronghold of democracy in one night was still affected to a varying level by the ideas of class struggle and imperialism. Moreover, it will be premature to disregard the legacy and tenets of the Cold War, which lasted for more than four decades and affected more than one generation of the Soviets. Thus, the popularity of the geopolitics amongst the elites in the region may be also attributed to the institutional knowledge inherited from the Soviet past (Heathershaw, 2007).

In general, the great power analysis of the Central Asian foreign policies may not fully explain the decision-making dynamics in these states, although the rejection of systemic variables will also be imprudent and unjustified. Central Asian states lack effective institutions, physical base, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state. Whilst the Central Asian elites may play ethnic, religious or Asian cards, they are unwilling to be bound by such "natural" ties and to become dependent upon any new "big brother" (Olcott, 1996: 21-37). The ruling regimes in Central Asia tend to prioritise their own security and shape foreign policies of their countries in accordance to the home-generated threats. The neorealist explanations of foreign policies of the Central Asian states need to be examined vis-à-vis other alternative or supplementary variables. In this respect, state performance and rent-seeking may contribute significantly to the explanation of the Central Asian decision-making.

## *State Performance*

The concept of state securitisation or state performance has been only recently framed within the context of Central Asia. The notion of state performance assumes the construction of virtual statehood despite the lack of real and existential state attributes. Andrew Wilson (2005) labels this manufacturing process as the virtual politics or the reinventing act of *dramaturgiia*.<sup>16</sup> Virtual politics is about the ruling elites who invent authority and theatricalise the mythology of the state to control, contain and manipulate democracy and hide their own venality (Wilson, 2005). To protect their own interests and the interests of their entourage the ruling elites may securitize the state, whilst in reality they will be securitising their regimes. Politics becomes a set of designer projects on virtual democracy with avatars and graphical icons in cyberspace instead of the politicians and people in real life (Wilson, 2005: 39). Wilson (2005: 90) even distinguishes the extent of that *dramaturgiia*, which can shift from “information make-up” to “an entire virtual drama”.

Derek Hutcheson (2006: 468) described the Wilsonian understanding of the post-Soviet politics as “the world of virtual politics, where nothing is as it seems”. Lacking legitimacy and infrastructural power, the ruling elites in weak states resort to any means in order to sustain their power. In these states, regime legitimacy usually means legitimacy by association or by self-proclaimed righteousness (Mohamedou, 1996: 118-119). Thus, the ruling elites may securitize the state under the aegis of national interests, but de facto for the benefit of a small group of people.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the leaders of weak states with post-colonial experiences often exploit colonial practices and the divide-and-rule policies themselves to retain the power (Jackson, 2010). These performances may be reflected in the increase of financing for the law enforcement agencies, expansion of the state secret services, politically motivated law cases, illegal use of the system for operative investigative

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<sup>16</sup> “*Dramaturgiia*” is translated from Russian as the dramaturgy or the playwriting.

<sup>17</sup> For the concept of “securitization” and the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, see Buzan, B., Wæver, O. and de Wilde, J. (1998) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner; Emmers, R. (2010) ‘Securitization’, in Collins, A. (ed.) *Contemporary Security Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 136-151; or McSweeney, B. (1996) ‘Identity and security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School’, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 81-93.

activities, constraints on freedom of media or detention of the opposition leaders. The strengthening of the dictatorial capacity may also take a more repulsive manifestation such as the direct violence, high profile assassinations, mass murders, ethnic cleansing or other forms of state terror.

In these cases, democratic institutions resemble a Potemkin-type façade, which disguises the total control over the political arena and the state by the ruling elites (Hutcheson, 2006). In contrast to the Western democracies, the political technologists of the former Soviet states seek not only to affect the political outcomes within an established and real political arena, but to control and modify this political arena itself (Hutcheson, 2006). Along with the identity and ethnicity manipulations, the ruling elites employ a range of strategies to manipulate the democratic processes (Jackson, 2010: 193). Being under the external pressure to democratise, many leaders of weak states simulate the democratic changes to boost their claims for legitimacy both domestically and internationally. These claims often lack real basis, because the indicators of the democratic transition such as freedom of speech or fair elections appear to be a mere façade.

In fact, in the post-Soviet states, the ruling elites face the challenge of escaping the stigma of international pariahs, whilst nourishing their patronage networks and maximising control over the economy and society of the country in order to enrich themselves (Leonard, 2007). As a result, virtual politics emerges as a convenient solution for the ruling autocrats to strengthen their grip on power by exploiting the trappings of liberal democracy (Leonard, 2007). For instance, the creation of fake opposition parties, pressure groups and NGOs allows the autocratic leaders to establish control over the political sphere in a more subtle and effective way (Wilson, 2005; Hutcheson, 2006; Leonard, 2007). Achieving and sustaining power for the “unprincipled clientele” becomes the main goal of the political technologists in weak states of former Soviet Union (Johnson, 2006: 359).

Nonetheless, virtual politics shall not be mistakenly equated to the notion of totalitarianism (Hutcheson, 2006). As Juliet Johnson (2006: 360) colourfully

summarised, “Virtual politics operates in the twilight zone between democracy and authoritarianism, inasmuch as true autocrats would not need to employ extensive virtual politics to maintain their power.” Accordingly, the leaders of weak states still have to interact with real counterparts in order to successfully implement the project of virtual politics, since the stability of a virtual regime requires unified and powerful elites, an inert electorate, an information control culture and the lack of external pressures (Wilson, 2005: 41; Hutcheson, 2006: 468).

In this respect, Central Asia is an excellent empirical referent to observe the makings of virtual democracy. In Central Asia, the leadership is usually characterized by an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule with clan or family based decision-making, which exploits various factors such as the identity issues, nation building or power relationships to sustain its own security and legitimacy (Olcott, 1996). The Central Asian presidents who are de facto the neofeudal rulers grew up wary of democracy and the Western “war on tyranny” in the context of the unstable Central Asian political environment, chronic kleptocracy and desperate poverty (Lewis, 2008). Whilst these leaders are keen to rip the benefits of international cooperation, political pluralism and the rule of law are still far from their agendas. As a result, the ruling regimes in Central Asia mastered themselves in staging politics and performing statehood via Olympic-style shows, imaginary reforms and feigning democratic elections (Heathershaw, 2012: 628). For instance, Akayev’s simulation of democratic reforms hid the daunting situation in the country and created “a kind of virtual Kyrgyzstan”, which attracted international assistance and support (Lewis, 2008: 124). In a similar vein, the discourses of national statehood promulgated by the local elites have concealed the imbrications of Tajikistan’s official institutions with the global political and economical assemblages (Heathershaw, 2013).

Moreover, the Central Asian acts of *dramaturgiia* were not performed exclusively for the Western audience, since democratic tilts are not the only sources of external legitimacy for the ruling elites. Alliance with powerful external players also becomes an increasingly common strategy amongst the ruling regimes in weak

states (Jackson, 2010: 193). Central Asian bandwagoning with Russia or China within multilateral structures was also an act of “virtual regionalism” (Allison, 2008b). The successes of such cooperation were relatively modest. However, the tangible achievements were not the main goal of virtual politics. The primary goal of *dramaturgiia* was to reinforce domestic regime security, ensure regime legitimacy and reinvent the autocratic leaders for “the world of virtual democracy” (Allison, 2008b; Wilson, 2005: 89).

Respectively, the Central Asian *dramaturgiia* may not only supplement the neorealist picture drawn by the New Great Game narrators, but virtual politics can also provide an alternative view on decision-making in one of the most turbulent and dynamic regions in the world. The existing chasm between the discourses and the realm of practices may reveal how the discursive elements are used to construct virtual statehoods in Central Asia and how local elites manipulate these practices for their own benefit (Heathershaw, 2013).

### *Rent-Seeking*

Since the ruling regimes perform the acts of *dramaturgiia* to protect their own interests, the capture of the state by those elites cannot be neglected. In fact, rent-seeking may prove to be not a constitutive, but a causal element of state performances in Central Asia. Crystallised by the clan and family bonds, rent-seeking in Central Asia has morphed into a symbiotic substance of parasitic nature with the state and of mutualistic nature with the ruling regimes. Thus, the rent-seeking variable may be instrumental for the understanding of foreign policy of regime security in weak Central Asian states, since the actors engaged in the rent-seeking practices are biotrophic in the essence and interested in safeguarding the established rules of the game.

The conditions of weak and failed states provide unparalleled economic opportunities for the privileged groups to make fortunes by nefarious means (Rotberg, 2003; Migdal, 2001). Corruption and nepotism become the founding skeleton of the system, wherein every actor with access to illegal or semi-illegal profiting turns out

to be interested in safeguarding the existing regime, whilst those excluded from the lucrative incomes and preferential benefits tend to challenge the ruling actors, but not the rules of the game. Thus, in weak states the fear of the almighty oligarchs replaces the fear of the leviathan state (Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann, 2000). Conspired with the state officials, powerful economic groups tend to maximize the rent extraction in the captured economies (Hellman, Jones, and Kaufmann, 2000), and Central Asia with its vast natural resources is not excluded from those processes.

Rent-seeking is the process of expending resources to capture public policy decisions (Mbaku, 1998: 195). Academic literature on rent-seeking is relatively new and dates back to the works published in the 1960s by Gordon Tullock, Richard Posner and Anne Krueger (Congleton, Hillman and Konrad, 2008). Such a literature examines the quests for income redistribution via public policy at the expense of social losses and how the investments into the sources of the pre-existing income redistribute this contesting wealth instead of creating productive activity (Murphy, Shleifer and Vishny, 1993; Congleton, Hillman and Konrad, 2008). However, the phenomenon of rent-seeking itself is probably as old as human civilization. For instance, Charles Delorme, Stacey Isom and David Kamerschen (2005) emphasize that rent-seeking contributed to the weakening of the Roman Empire and its further demise in the V century. The political change from a Republic to an emperor rule aggravated the rent-seeking behaviour of the ruling elites and led to the embezzlement of tax revenues (Delorme, Isom and Kamerschen, 2005). As a result, with its weakened military and decreasing population Rome was incapable of repelling the invasion of the barbarians from the North (Delorme, Isom and Kamerschen, 2005).

The term “rent” is often benchmarked as income returns, which are higher than the minimum that an economic actor would have gained in a competitive market or under alternative conditions (Jomo and Khan, 2000: 5). Such a broadness of the definition demonstrates that rent-seeking behaviour can range from illegal activities such as illegal transfers by mafia and semi-legal activities such as monopoly rents

to legal activities such as short-term profits by innovators or political lobbying (Jomo and Khan, 2000: 5-6). In general, the rent-seeking theory rests on the premises that the opportunities for personal gain can have significant impact on public policy decision-making, whilst the quest for personal enrichment may be camouflaged by the populist rhetoric of social changes and developments (Congleton, Hillman and Konrad, 2008: 3). Accordingly, the calculation of social losses due to the unproductive use of resources and the presence of “the prizes” for the public policy decision makers becomes a central challenge to the theory of rent-seeking (Congleton, Hillman and Konrad, 2008: 3).

The rent-seeking behaviour is not endemic exclusively to the developing and non-democratic states, since there is an incentive for the individuals and special-interest groups to capture the government and influence its distributional outcomes for the purpose of enriching themselves (Mbaku, 1998: 195). This phenomenon of “state capture” is often described as “a situation in which individuals, groups or legal firms manipulate the formulation of laws, decrees, regulations and policies, to gain durable self-benefits” (Garay, Salcedo-Albaran and De Leon-Beltran, 2009: 4). State capture is usually associated with the legal actors such as national or international economic groups that pursue their economic interests mainly through the corrupted practices (Garay, Salcedo-Albaran and De Leon-Beltran, 2009). However, this concept should not be limited exclusively to those actors. In the developed and democratic countries, rent-seeking takes the form of lobbying, political campaign contributions and bribery, whereas in weak states and states in transition these activities may extend to political violence and bureaucratic corruption (Mbaku, 1998: 196-197). Indeed, bureaucratic corruption is one of the most perennial indicators of the rent-seeking behaviour. As Mbaku (1998: 199) outlines,

First, state control of the economy has placed under the direct control of civil servants a significant portion of national resources, allowing these individuals to manipulate public policy to enrich themselves at the expense of society. Second, massive state intervention in private exchange has produced politicised resource allocation systems in which

returns to factors of production are not determined by the marginal productivity of the resource but by the rent-seeking activities of the resource owner.

These preconditions explain the merger of private interests and state politics in weak states. Civil servants may be lured by the possibilities of rapid enrichment despite the illegality of such actions and potential criminal persecution. This phenomenon has become a focal feature of the political economy of weak states.

In addition, in rentier states the institutional mechanisms of resource distribution are limited by command and clientelism (Dillman, 2000: 11). Patron-client relations are those repeated set of transactions and exchanges between two agents who are distinguished by power or status and are identifiable as a superior patron and an inferior client (Jomo and Khan, 2000: 12). These arrangements take the forms of the “elaborate patronage systems, whereby state elites and various social groups are joined in complex networks of mutual exchange” (Jackson, 2010: 192). Any attempts to alter or threaten the rent-seeking patterns can lead to a substantial resistance from the engaged parties whether these are the business or political elites (Dillman, 2000: 11). Moreover, in many weak states, patrons and clients are often either the relatives or cronies of the ruling elites. For instance, John Mbaku (1998: 204) denotes that in Africa the bureaucrats are believed to be pressured by their extended families to engage in corrupt practices and share the benefits of state service with their kinfolk. In these instances, family-based ties further solidify patron-client arrangements.

In fact, the logic of the politics in clan-based and transition societies suggests that the clans as central actors will pursue their interests and will compete over limited resources within the realms of the weak state (Collins, 2002: 143). Clans are the identity networks, which consist of horizontal and vertical blood or marriage bonds and which are deeply rooted into the kin-based cultures and norms (Collins, 2002: 142). As Kathleen Collins (2002: 143) argues, clan governance should not be reduced to clientelist politics, because the blood bonds persist notwithstanding the changes in economic conditions unlike clientelist bonds (Collins, 2002: 142). The

upshot of the competition between the clans over the resources and public offices becomes the system best described as the clan hegemony (Collins, 2002: 143).

Such implications of rent-seeking may not only affect the foreign policy orientations of the country at the expense of the long-term state-building objectives, but may also have a detrimental effect to the stability of the regime in general. The notion of clan hegemony assumes that the distribution of rents may become a cause of fracture between different clans and can lead to political instability and inter-clan confrontations. As Scott Radnitz (2010b) emphasises, one of the ironies of the Central Asian politics is that autocratic regimes weaken their grip on power in the course of designing policies directed, on the contrary, to strengthen their rule. For instance, when the ruling regimes implement liberal market reforms, an important prerequisite for economic development, they are at risk of creating potential future challengers in the face of formidable capitalist class (Radnitz, 2010b). Furthermore, if these regimes fail to protect the poorer population from market shocks and economic downfalls, they create an aggrieved and discontent populace, which can be easily mobilised in exchange for material and parochial benefits (Radnitz, 2010b).

As a result, such a situation leads to the emergence of a cross-class coalition between the marginalised population and the wealthy elites (Radnitz, 2010b). Labelled by Radnitz (2010b) as “subversive clientelism”, this phenomenon is one of the strategies of the wealthy elites in nondemocratic states who have incentives to protect their interests from power holders. Subversive clientelism assumes the creation of “a social support base by making material and symbolic investments in local communities”, which in turn can be easily mobilised in order to support their investors (Radnitz, 2010b: 5).

Radnitz’ mass mobilisation theory rests on the principle that economic dispersion reduces the ruling regimes’ margin for error. Radnitz (2010a: 142-143) argues that “[b]eginning from a centralized concentration of resources, some republics purposely widened the scope of actors eligible to share some of assets of the new

state, while others ensured that resources would flow predominantly to a narrow clique that also ran the government". As a result, for instance, the post-Soviet states, which underwent liberalising economic reforms and sweeping privatization, were more open to political contestation and power struggle (Radnitz, 2010a). Liberal economic reforms helped create a layer of wealthy capitalist elites who were willing and able to either support or challenge the ruling regimes and the status quo. In turn, those states, which did not undergo liberalisation reforms and rapid privatisation, were less vulnerable to mass protests (Radnitz, 2010a). A weak and underfunded opposition in these states lacked the support of an independent business cohort and thus was incapable of unseating autocratic rulers. To support his mass mobilisation theory Radnitz (2010b) brings the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan is presented as a "positive" example, whilst Uzbekistan is presented as a "negative" example.

Nonetheless, Radnitz's account of political instability and mass mobilisation could have been enriched by further analysis of resource allocation, rent distribution and elite cooptation. In this respect, Lawrence Markowitz (2013) provides an alternative explanation of why some states like Uzbekistan serve as a negative example of mass mobilisations and popular uprisings, whilst other states like Tajikistan experience formidable anti-regime movements. In his recent study of regime change in weak states with immobile capital Markowitz (2013) attempted to advance his theory on state failures by examining how distinct rent-seeking arrangements in Central Asia either foster the cooptation of local elites to the regimes or provoke the struggle over rents and further state fragmentation.

Accordingly, Markowitz (2013) concluded that when rent-seeking opportunities are evenly distributed between provincial and local elites, these elites become dependent on the existing regime and open for cooptation. In turn, the ruling regime becomes more resilient against popular uprisings and threats of regime change (Markowitz, 2013). Uzbekistan is an exemplary case of such a rent-seeking state with cohesive territorial apparatus and coercive security institutions, which are willing to uphold the existing regime as long as the rent-seeking opportunities

are distributed evenly between various localities (Markowitz, 2013). In the instances, when the local elites lose access to patrons along with the opportunities to convert scarce resources into the rents, elites become more inclined to challenge established political arrangements in order to open up or restore the rent-seeking avenues (Markowitz, 2013). The case of Tajikistan demonstrates that such a struggle over rents in the resource-poor localities can lead to a state failure and a civil war (Markowitz, 2013).

Markowitz's conclusion runs in line with the peculiar model proposed by Petros Sekeris (2010), which explains the strategy of a rent-seeking autocrat how to stay in power, extract rent and coopt the local elites into his/her patron-client network. Sekeris (2010) asserts that the clients' or local elite's individual cooptation value is important to an autocrat, because all clients can join the political opposition and threaten the autocrat's power. Respectively, an autocrat will choose a particular strategy to mitigate the threats to his rule. Accordingly, Sekeris (2010) calculated that a weaker autocrat shares the country's rents with the strongest individuals rather than with the greater number of clientele in order to coopt the strongest societal actors, whilst saving a greater part of the rent for him or herself. In turn, a stronger autocrat will be inclined to diversify his/her beneficiaries, often on a random basis, to guarantee a low cooptation price of his/her clientele (Sekeris, 2010). Although Sekeris' model is reductionist to a certain extent and does not take into account other variables such as the loyalty or personal characteristics of the autocrats' clientele, this model can still be conducive to the understanding of the regime formation in weak states such as Kyrgyzstan.

Furthermore, rent-seeking in weak states should not be examined as a phenomenon exclusive to the domestic politics of these states. The unlawful enrichment of the autocratic rulers and their entourages cannot be accomplished without the support of local and international brokers, offshore companies and major financial institutions, which operate within the realm of licit and formal norms and practices. The fusion of the formal global economy with local informal economies poses a serious regulatory challenge to both scholars and policymakers

who seek to establish sustaining policies and greater oversight over these spheres in accordance with practices of good governance, transparency and accountability.

Central Asia is an excellent empirical ground to expose the dynamics of transnational rent-seeking and showcase how a developing region gets connected to the global economy via hidden and informal financial vehicles and offshore enterprises. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan provide numerous illuminating cases, which demonstrate how hypothetically isolated Central Asia becomes connected to the global political and economic assemblages via contemporary financial mechanisms. The cases are extremely diverse and range from telecommunications and fuel procurement to gold mining and banking. For instance, the Swedish-Finnish telecommunications company TeliaSonera was targeted in probes for aggravated bribery in Uzbekistan, with allegedly 300 million USD being paid by TeliaSonera to an associate of Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of the president of Uzbekistan, through the CEO of a competing Russian telecommunication company MTS and a Gibraltar-registered shell company in order to gain access to the national telecom market (Sindelar and Yusupov, 2013). On March 24, 2010, German carmaker Daimler agreed to pay 185 million USD to settle international bribery charges leveled by American prosecutors in at least 22 countries, including Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (*Eurasianet.org*, 2010). To win a 219 million USD oil contract in Karachaganak, Baker Hughes made payments to Kazakh officials via British tycoon Robert Kissin, using a Barclays bank account set up on behalf of a shell company registered in the Isle of Man (Leigh, 2010). In the UK, a dispute over the Tajikistan Aluminium Company (Talco) became one of the most expensive legal proceedings ever held at the London High Court, which involved the offshore companies registered in the Guernsey Islands and the British Virgin Islands.

Such cases reveal that political power is not contained solely within the Central Asian states, but flows from the transnational through to the national and the local. These cases also demonstrate that driven by the goals of personal enrichment the Central Asian elites are in full authority to establish the rules of the game for the

external players to abide. Thus, one level analysis of the Central Asian foreign policy dynamics will be simply insufficient for the genuine understanding of complex political phenomena in such a turbulent and vibrant developing region. In fact, the rent-seeking nature of doing business in Central Asia complicates the understanding of the Central Asian political processes, as the signs of state capture and global economic assemblage can be mistakenly perceived as the signs of the New Great Game. The events portrayed as the New Great Game resemble the processes related to globalization of world politics and can be applied to most energy producing areas, since not only the conditions, but even the players involved in the business activities are often the same (Edwards, 2003: 92).

In sum, rent-seeking emerges as an important variable, which can reveal the causal linkage between regime security and foreign policymaking in weak states. This notion may not only help to unpack IR's "billiard ball" state and explain the rationale behind the construction of virtual statehood and virtual democracy, but may also shed the light on the nature of political instability in weak states.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter revealed that the concept of weak states deviates from the orthodox thinking of IR, since the proposed conceptualisation of weak states challenges the Westphalian view of security and international order. Traditional approaches to the study of their foreign policies tend to oversimplify the reality or neglect key variables that are crucial for the understanding of genuine inter- and intra-state developments in weak states. However, weak states are distinguished by the nature of their insecurities, since they lack strong physical base, effective institutional expression, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state. Thus, the established governing arrangements between the local elites contribute substantially to the formation of foreign policy orientations of weak states. Regime security often preoccupies security agenda of the state and serves as the key rationale behind the state policymaking. In this respect, the case of Central Asia demonstrates that the fashionable idea of the New Great Game provides limited analysis of the political processes in the region,

focusing solely on the geopolitical interplay between greater players and neglecting the capacity of the local states to influence foreign policy outcomes. Accordingly, the neorealist explanations of foreign policies of weak states need to be examined in conjunction with other alternative or supplementary variables such as state performance and rent-seeking, since such an approach with specific focus on regime security and integrative of internal, external and transnational variables will enhance our understanding of complex political phenomena in weak states in general and in Central Asia in particular.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Development of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy*

Kyrgyzstan is a relatively new state with the record of being independent spanning only twenty three years. However, in that short stint Kyrgyzstan has already seen three different presidents, experienced two violent revolutions, survived two interethnic conflicts, hosted two military air bases, and implemented one erratic foreign policy of regime security. Notwithstanding such developments, Kyrgyzstan has not fallen into the abyss of civil war like Tajikistan, nor has it become a quasi-autarchic state like Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan. The answer to this empirical puzzle may lie in the schism between domestic and international dimensions of state and regime security in Central Asia, since states like Kyrgyzstan are distinguished by the complex nature of internal insecurities and external vulnerabilities.

Accordingly, this chapter introduces Kyrgyzstan as a weak state distinguished by the complex nature of internal insecurities and external vulnerabilities and thus proposes to examine the erratic foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan from the perspective of systemic constraints and the rent-seeking interests of the ruling regimes. In so doing, this chapter will provide a retrospective analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policymaking through the prism of institutional formation, regime security and systemic pressures. The first two parts of the chapter will study the development of Kyrgyz foreign policy from early 1990s to 2011. A specific focus will be given to Bishkek's relations with Russia, China and the USA. The third section will examine official and unofficial foreign policy discourses that prevailed in Kyrgyzstan from the position of virtual politics or the acts of state *dramaturgiia*. The last part will explore the processes, which led to systemic weakness of Kyrgyzstan and to creation of a rent-seeking foreign policy regime in the country.

### *Kyrgyz Foreign Policy at a Glance*

Initially, the period of independence was by default regarded in Kyrgyzstan as the path towards prosperity and brighter future of the country (Wood, 2005: 145-146). Foreign policy was understood to be one of the tools to achieve these goals, since the newly emerged country needed international support and cooperation to transition from the Soviet past to the democratic present. Akayev was eager to explore ties with Western democracies, whilst in a similar vein the victory of a young pro-democratic leader with liberal reformist views was warmly welcomed in the West.<sup>18</sup> The period of 1990s in general was often perceived by many Kyrgyz policymakers through the prism of romanticism and boundless optimism as the period of state-building and institutional formation (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012; Wood, 2005: 145).

Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state to adopt a Western style civil code to liberalize prices, overhaul its financial and banking systems, privatize large industrial facilities, sanction private ownership of land and uphold a relatively open, competitive political system (Gleason, 2001: 168). On May 10, 1993, the Parliament adopted the Kyrgyz som as the new currency of the country.<sup>19</sup> The introduction of the Kyrgyz som was important for foreign policymaking, because this occurrence created necessary prerequisites for the republic to develop

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<sup>18</sup> In 1990, the stalemate between First Secretary of the Communist party Absamat Masaliyev and Prime-Minister Apas Dzhumagulov led to a situation, when the Supreme Council of Soviet Kyrgyzstan had to look for an alternative compromise figure. This position was offered to famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, but he refused to run for the highest position in the country and suggested the candidacy of Akayev, a young scientist, academician and President of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science. When Akayev's candidacy was considered by the Supreme Council, Akayev himself was in Moscow and had to be persuaded to return to Bishkek and run for Kyrgyz presidency (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). As a result, on October 27, 1990, out of twelve candidates Akayev and Nasirdin Isanov received the majority of votes by the Supreme Council. In the second round of elections between these two candidates, Akayev won with the majority of votes. Later, during the putsch events of 1991 Akayev supported the self-determination right of the Soviet republics and rejected the offer of Mikhail Gorbachev to become the Vice-President of the USSR. On October 12, 1991, Akayev won the direct presidential elections with 95 percent of votes in his support, although Akayev was the only candidate running for this position.

<sup>19</sup> Akayev had to speak three times in the parliament to assure the parliamentarians of his resignation if the new currency ruined the economy of the country.

independent economic policy, although the escape from the rouble zone has also accelerated the construction of customs barriers (Wood, 2005: 147).

The early 1990s were marked by a burst of Kyrgyzstan's diplomatic activity. The Declaration of Independence of the Kyrgyz Republic invited all countries to recognise the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz Republic, and already on December 24, 1991, Turkey became the first state to establish diplomatic relations with Bishkek. Few days later Australia and the USA followed Turkey's example to hail the newly independent state. On December 27, 1991, China recognized the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). Prior to the announcement of the Kyrgyz independence, Boris Yeltsin visited Bishkek on July 20, 1991, and signed an Agreement on the Basis of Interstate Relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, although officially Russia and Kyrgyzstan established diplomatic relations on March 20, 1992 (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). In December 1991, Akayev made his first official visit abroad to Turkey as the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, where he signed an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation and later in 1997 a Treaty of Eternal Friendship (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). On December 21, 1991, Kyrgyzstan, along with seven other former Soviet republics, signed the Almaty Protocol to become a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>20</sup>

Akayev sought to establish diplomatic relations with the variety of actors interested in the region, ranging from the USA and Russia to Turkey and Iran. By the end of 1992, Kyrgyzstan established diplomatic relations with 59 countries (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). Washington established diplomatic relations with Kyrgyzstan on December 27, 1991, after the visit of U.S. State Secretary James

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<sup>20</sup> On December 8, 1991, Boris Yeltsin of Russia, Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine and Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus signed the Belavezh Accords to declare the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the creation of the CIS. In fact, by signing the Belavezh Accords Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Shushkevich created de facto the union of Slavic states (Toktomushev, 2001: 24). The presidents of the Central Asian states were tempted to create a Turkic Union of their own, but after the discussions in Ashgabat in December 1991 the Central Asian leaders decided to join the CIS instead (Toktomushev, 2001: 24).

Baker on December 17, and opened its embassy in Bishkek on February 1, 1992 (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Zakirov, 2008; Anonymous, Former Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, 16 December 2013). In the same year Kyrgyzstan opened its embassy in Washington, DC (Zakirov, 2008; Anonymous, Former Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, 16 December 2013). The key document, which initiated bilateral relations between the two countries, became the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the governments of Kyrgyzstan and the USA on August 26, 1992 (Toktomushev, 2001: 93). More than 20 agreements constituted the legal base for the Kyrgyz-American bilateral relations, amongst which were an Agreement concerning the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments and a Bilateral Investment Treaty (Zakirov, 2008: 9).

China was also amongst the first countries to recognize the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan. In May 1992 Akayev made an official visit to China, where he signed a Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Kyrgyz Republic at ambassadorial level (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1992). The two governments agreed that both countries would settle territorial disputes through the norms of international law (Carlson, 2008: 65-66). The government of Kyrgyzstan also recognised Taiwan as an integral part of the Chinese territory (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 1992). Officially, the diplomatic relations between Kyrgyzstan and China were established on January 5, 1992 (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Anonymous, Former Diplomat at the Kyrgyz Embassy to China, interview, 24 December 2013). China opened its embassy in Bishkek in May 1992, whereas Kyrgyzstan opened its embassy to China on August 31, 1993, and dedicated its opening to the anniversary of the Kyrgyz independence (Toktomushev, 2001; Anonymous, Former Diplomat at the Kyrgyz Embassy to China, interview, 24 December 2013).

In a similar vein, Akayev began to re-establish bilateral relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union. On May 15, 1992, Kyrgyzstan signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST) that aimed at integrating military structures of the CIS

member-states. On June 10, 1992, Bishkek and Moscow signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. On March 26, 1996, Akayev made an official visit to strategic partner Moscow in order to meet Yeltsin and discuss the areas of possible mutual cooperation (Toktomushev, 2001; Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). Furthermore, in July 1996 Akayev made an official visit to Tajikistan, where the two presidents signed an Agreement on the Basis of Interstate Relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, 2013). Akayev also visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and in January 1997 Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed an Agreement on Eternal Friendship confirming their commitments to the strengthening of good neighbourly relations (Legislation of the CIS countries, 1997). In April 1997 Akayev also made visits to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia to develop bilateral relations (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). In July 2000 Akayev made his second official visit to Moscow to meet Putin and discuss economic and security cooperation, whilst two months prior to this visit Akayev signed the law to turn Russian into the official language of Kyrgyzstan (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). In a similar vein, Akayev saluted the transformation of the CST into the CSTO and welcomed a Russian military air base in Kant in 2003 to support the CSTO's mission in the region.

In the mid-1990s Akayev began to explore foreign relations with the Asian countries. In March 1992 Akayev made his first official visit to India to establish diplomatic ties and to learn from India's experience of restructuring economy and a socio-political system (Joshi, 2007: 148). In April 1993 Akayev made an official visit to Japan. The two governments concluded that the agreements signed between the USSR and Japan would continue to serve as the basis for bilateral relations between Kyrgyzstan and Japan, although only one out of those seven agreements remained effective (Toktomushev, 2001: 136). In 1995, Akayev made official visits to Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, after which Akayev became seriously

interested in examining the Malaysian economic model and its applicability to Kyrgyzstan (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). As a result, in 1996, upon the request of the Kyrgyz government the Malaysian and Kyrgyz experts conducted a joint study on how to revive the Kyrgyz economy (The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to Malaysia, n.d.).<sup>21</sup> As a follow up, in January 1998, a Special Kyrgyz-Malaysian Economic Commission was created in order to implement the recommendations of the Malaysian experts, which however failed to translate into concrete actions (Toktomushev, 2001: 164-167). In July 1996 General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Jiang Zemin visited Kyrgyzstan (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). The leaders agreed to enhance their cooperation in the spheres of border management, economic cooperation and regional security. In addition, in 1996 Kyrgyzstan began to explore military cooperation with China along with Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan within the framework of the Shanghai Five later to be renamed to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Nonetheless, Western vector remained a top priority in the Akayev's list of official visits (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). In April 1992 Akayev visited Germany, and on September 12, 1992, Germany opened its embassy in Bishkek, which was authorised to act on behalf of the European Union (Toktomushev, 2001: 105). In the same year Kyrgyzstan started the dialogue with the NATO within the framework of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, whilst in 1994 Kyrgyzstan joined the NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. In May 1993 Akayev made his first visit to the USA, where he met U.S. President Bill Clinton and U.S. Vice-President Al Gore (Zakirov, 2008). In November 1994 Akayev made an official visit to Switzerland, where he signed an Agreement on Technical Cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Switzerland (Toktomushev, 2001). In 1994 Akayev also visited Belgium and France to develop bilateral relations, whilst in 1998-1999 Akayev made official visits to Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria,

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<sup>21</sup> In 2000 the Malaysian experts conducted the second stage of this study.

Denmark and Italy (Toktomushev, 2001; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Zakirov, 2008). As a result, in June 1999 a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the European Union (EU), which was signed on February 9, 1995, was finally ratified by all EU member-states (Toktomushev, 2001: 100; European Union, n.d.). The aim of this partnership was to create a framework for political dialogue between Kyrgyzstan and the EU and to support Kyrgyzstan's efforts to strengthen democracy and transition to a market-based economy (European Union, 2010). Furthermore, in 2001 Akayev agreed to host an American air base at civilian Manas International Airport as part of the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, which would become the focal point of the Kyrgyz-American relations up until 2011.

In addition, the path towards independence was also regarded in Kyrgyzstan as the novelty of becoming a member of various international organisations (Wood, 2005: 145-146). On March 2, 1992, at the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, Kyrgyzstan was accepted as a full-fledged member to the United Nations (Toktomushev, 2001; Anonymous, Former Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations, interview, 29 December 2013). In 1993, after Akayev's meeting with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) administrator James Speth, UNDP opened its office in Kyrgyzstan, which served as the UN's main contact point in the republic (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003; Anonymous, Former Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations, interview, 29 December 2013). In 1998, Kyrgyzstan also became the first post-Soviet country to join the World Trade Organization (Gleason, 2001: 173).

In that stint, Kyrgyzstan also began cooperation with specialised agencies of the UN such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),

World Food Programme (WFP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), etc.<sup>22</sup>

In 1992 Kyrgyzstan also joined the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which was transformed into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1995.<sup>23</sup> On July 8, 1992, Akayev signed the Helsinki Final Act, and on June 3, 1994, he signed the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Toktomushev, 2001; Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). In 1993 the Kyrgyz Embassy to Austria was opened in Vienna, which also co-served as the representative office of Kyrgyzstan to the OSCE (Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). On July 23, 1998, the OSCE Permanent Council established the OSCE Centre in Bishkek to work in the spheres of border security and management, good governance, regional cooperation, environmental protection, legislation and rule of law (OSCE, n.d.).

In sum, as Global Security (n.d.) reported, since independence Akayev and his emissaries travelled tirelessly across the globe in order to establish new relations and seek new partners. Apart from the abovementioned states, Akayev made visits to Iran, Pakistan, Israel, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and etc (Golan, 1995; Global Security, n.d.; Aras, 2002: 39; Dzhorobekova and Momosheva, 2003). Official visits of Akayev had a bilateral character as well. Kyrgyzstan was visited by President of Turkey Turgut Ozal, Prime-Minister of Turkey Suleyman Demirel, Vice President of the USA Al Gor, Secretary-General of the NATO Manfred Wornier, Prime-Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto, President of Iran Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Prince of Wales Charles amongst many others (Toktomushev, 2001; Zakirov, 2008). As a result, by 2005, Kyrgyzstan established diplomatic relations with more than 100 states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, n.d.).

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.un.org.kg/>.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.osce.org/bishkek/>.

In addition, Akayev was eager to promote his own foreign policy initiatives (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). In 1996, Akayev put forward an idea of celebrating an international year of mountains. Soon, in 1998, at its 54<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the year 2002 as the International Year of Mountains in order to ensure the well-being of mountain communities and to promote sustainable development of mountainous and lowland regions (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2000). Akayev's Silk Road Doctrine was also accepted as an official document of the UN on September 17, 1998, and was presented in many different countries (Toktomushev, 2001: 171; Dundich, 2010). This doctrine portrayed Kyrgyzstan as a Eurasian land-bridge, which could have linked the East and the West (Wood, 2005). Akayev also supported the creation of a Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (CANWFZ). Eventually, the creation of a CANWFZ was endorsed by all five presidents of Central Asia in Almaty in 1997, whilst the treaty's final draft text was adopted on February 8, 2005, in Tashkent (Nuclear Threat Initiative, n.d.).

However, very quickly the period of boundless romanticism of the 1990s was substituted by the period of disillusionment and frustration. By the early 2000s Akayev was no longer perceived as a democrat and a reformer in Kyrgyzstan and was widely criticized for the usurpation of power, tribalism, persecution of opposition and corruption. On February 27, 2005, the Central Election Committee of Kyrgyzstan announced the outcomes of the first round of parliamentary elections. The pro-Akayev candidates won the majority of seats in the parliament. Few days later, the Central Election Committee also approved the results of the parliamentary runoff elections, according to which Aidar Akayev and Bermet Akayeva, the son and the daughter of Askar Akayev, also acquired parliamentary mandates. The outcomes of these controversial elections triggered a wave of protests across the country with the most active social movements emerging in the south of the republic. The number of protesters ranged from 2,000 in Naryn to 50,000 in Jalalabad (Marat, 2006). By March 21, 2005, the central government lost control over most of the major cities, as the crowds led by the opposition figures

captured key administrative buildings. On March 24 from 15,000 to 20,000 people gathered at the Central Square of Bishkek (Marat, 2006). At first, the protestors were demanding cancelation of the elections' fraudulent results. However, by afternoon the crowd began to demand Akayev's resignation, and soon the frenzied masses stormed and captured the White House without any significant resistance from the police. Akayev fled with his family to Moscow, whilst the opposition established an interim government and announced the victory of the Tulip Revolution.

Coming to power in the wake of the popular uprising against authoritarian Akayev, Bakiyev positioned himself initially as the champion of democratic reforms. Indeed, as Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev (Former Director of the RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, interview, 18 August 2009) asserted, for a short term the Tulip revolution made the Kyrgyz Government's policy more open, transparent and Western-bound. The Kyrgyz President carried out his duties as a post-revolutionary reformer and was under control of the democracy-minded forces of society (Tchoroev, Former Director of the RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, interview, 18 August 2009; Juraev, 2010). The opposition was strong and the parliament and the civic organizations were very pro-active in liberalizing processes (Freedom House, 2005; Freedom House, 2006). Nonetheless, despite the promised changes Bakiyev quickly returned to the legacy of the first president. The Kyrgyz presidency began to get stronger shortly after the March events, whereas the movements for liberal reforms step-by-step gave way to a semi-authoritarian system of power (Tchoroev, Former Director of the RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, interview, 18 August 2009; Juraev, 2010; Collins, 2012: 22-23; Kalishevskiy, 2014; Stobdan, 2014). Bakiyev tried to distance himself from the other post-revolutionary governments of Ukraine and Georgia and has developed closer relations with the countries of the SCO, including its leading authoritarian members Russia and China (Tchoroev, Former Director of the RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, interview, 18 August 2009). Already on July 11, 2005, at the SCO summit in Astana, Bakiyev emphatically supported a joint SCO declaration, which called for the American withdrawal of its troops from the Central Asian soil (Cooley, 2012). Two months after, Bakiyev made his first official visit as

the President of Kyrgyzstan to Moscow. In February 2006, Bakiyev openly questioned the presence of the American air base on the Kyrgyz territory and the rental fees Kyrgyzstan was receiving (Pannier, 2006). Several months later Bakiyev began to threaten the American side with the possibility of base eviction.

There were fewer prominent diplomatic milestones during the tenure of Bakiyev than in the era of Akayev, which can be explained by the longer term of the latter and his task of building a new state. Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy under Bakiyev was even less systemic than in the first fifteen years of the country's independence. Despite the reformist and democratic rhetoric Bakiyev continued to build his politics upon Akayev's autocratic legacy. In the period from 2006 to 2009 Bakiyev has not made any official visits to the Western countries<sup>24</sup> (Tchoroev, Former Director of the RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service, interview, 18 August 2009). However, such a state of affairs has not prevented Bakiyev from exploring the avenues of cooperation with the Western states. In particular, Bakiyev extended his engagement with the USA within the framework of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. In addition, during his short spell as the President of Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev proposed several initiatives pertinent to the international relations of Central Asia such as the organisation of a special conference on Afghanistan under the auspices of the SCO and the strengthening of anti-terrorism mechanisms within the SCO and the CSTO (Jomart Ormonbekov, Former Attaché at the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Kingdom of Belgium, Mission to the EU and NATO, interview, 5 December 2012; Anonymous, Consultant, interview, 3 November 2013).

These initiatives were overshadowed by the daunting tasks of resurrecting the Kyrgyz economy and reforming the political system of the country, which Bakiyev failed to accomplish. The regime of Bakiyev quickly became associated with high level of corruption, nepotism and criminalisation of the republic. If Akayev needed fifteen years to turn towards autocratic path and seize power in the country, Bakiyev managed to usurp power within one presidential term. The popular discontent with Bakiyev's rule significantly increased in December 2009, when the

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<sup>24</sup> Bakiyev unofficially visited Germany, where he had a medical treatment.

leadership of Kyrgyzstan undertook several unpopular measures purportedly to cut the budget deficit and reform the energy sector. On January 1, 2010, the government under Daniyar Usenov doubled the gas and electricity tariffs despite the unprecedented heating and electricity cuts during one of the harshest winters in the country.<sup>25</sup> In addition, one of the most profitable energy providers “Severelektro” was sold to an unknown private owner for less than 3 million USD, even though it was previously estimated to be worth more than 130 million USD (Lee, 2010; Novosti.kg, 2010). Prior to that, “Kyrgyztelecom”, the largest state-owned telecommunications company, was also swiftly privatised (Lee, 2010). The appointment of Maksim Bakiyev, the president’s son, as the Head of the newly created Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation further ridiculed the people. Fraudulent presidential and parliamentary elections, assassinations of parliamentarians and journalists, alarming rates of unemployment, increasing exodus of the Kyrgyz work migrants to the near abroad and budget deficit – all these factors disillusioned the people and their expectations of the Tulip Revolution.

In addition, several weeks before the April events of 2010, the Russian media outlets and federal TV channels launched a campaign, condemning Bakiyev and his family ruling, although similar campaigns were also run by Radio Freedom Europe/ Radio Liberty, BBC and several independent web portals. Particularly, the Russian media disparaged the “entrepreneurialism” of Maksim Bakiyev and his connections to the transnational criminal networks and disgraced Russian oligarchs. Furthermore, on April 1, 2010, Kremlin made the export of petroleum products from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, previously exempt from taxes, subject to duties in the amount of 400 USD per ton (Regnum 2011; Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2012). The imposed fees on petroleum immediately led to a shortage of fuel in the country and to an increase in prices on other products in general. As a result, protesters, led by the opposition, occupied the squares in major cities and called for reforms in the country. Bakiyev’s government attempted

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<sup>25</sup> This move increased the rumours that Bakiyev’s family was transporting electricity to Taraz and selling it in Kazakhstan.

to suppress the discontent by limiting access to media, deploying security forces and detaining the leaders of opposition, which on the contrary led to a massive uprising against the ruling regime throughout the country. By April 6, 2010, the protesters controlled all major cities in the regions. On April 7 the protest in Bishkek against autocratic Bakiyev turned into a violent revolt leaving 87 people dead, as the White House guards clashed with the crowd. Bakiyev fled to his home village Teyit and then to Minsk on April 15, 2010.

Accordingly, when Otunbayeva came to power, she inherited a more difficult political and economic situation in the country. Unlike Bakiyev in 2005, Otunbayeva had no *carte blanche* to run reforms in Kyrgyzstan. Prior to the April events of 2010, only a few could have predicted that Otunbayeva would become the next president of Kyrgyzstan. However, the governmental change of 2010 brought strange bedfellows together in their fight against Bakiyev and his family ruling. When Bakiyev's regime was toppled, the revolutionary leaders realised that they needed to appoint a compromise figure as an interim president – someone who had no ultimate power and ambitions to challenge them afterwards and seek the presidency on a permanent or longer term basis (Kim, 2010). At that time, none of the key political figures had enough power to capture the seat in the White House without political confrontation with other players. In addition, Kyrgyzstan was on the brink of switching from presidential to parliamentary-presidential form of governance. As a result, Otunbayeva was an ideal candidate for the interim presidency. Otunbayeva has never possessed neither the financial capital nor political power derived from the clan networks to seek the presidency on more permanent basis. In addition, Otunbayeva had the potential to attract Western funds to Kyrgyzstan, as she enjoyed excellent rapport with Western leaders and had an excellent reputation in the diplomatic circles. Since Otunbayeva's presidency was the product of the inter-elite negotiations, the main objectives of her tenure were to stabilise the situation in the country and ensure a smooth and peaceful transition of power (Kim, 2010; Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013). Respectively, the developments in the Kyrgyz foreign policy under Roza Otunbayeva were less apparent than those during the rules of her

predecessors. Despite being a career diplomat, Otunbayeva had little opportunity to formulate a cohesive foreign policy of the republic. Her short tenure in office (2010-2011) further contributed to her inability to meaningfully influence Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy.

Political turmoil that followed the ousting of Bakiyev and the ethnic violence of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan predetermined the priorities of Otunbayeva's rule. Otunbayeva was more pre-occupied with the domestic matters during her presidency, as she was constitutionally responsible for stability in Kyrgyzstan. Initially, coming to power in the wake of the uprising against Bakiyev, Otunbayeva was very vocal of the American support to the Bakiyev regime. In particular, Otunbayeva criticised the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller for their unreserved support of Bakiyev.<sup>26</sup> Otunbayeva claimed that Washington attempted to secure the American air base Manas on Kyrgyz soil at the expense of human rights and democratic principles. When Otunbayeva became the Interim President of Kyrgyzstan, her criticisms went beyond the mere rhetoric to target the U.S. fuel vendors and Kyrgyz subcontractors (Higgins and Kessler, 2010; Horton, 2010). As a result, although the American vendors remained the sole suppliers of jet fuel to the air base, the purportedly Bakiyev-controlled local fuel subcontractors have been substituted by Gazprom-affiliated firms. Nonetheless, the intricate fuel arrangements of the Manas air base were not the main priority of Otunbayeva's foreign policy efforts. The ethnic violence of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan posed a formidable challenge to the integrity of the republic. Facing international reticence and indifference Otunbayeva and her government had to deal with the conflict and its repercussions on their own. Accordingly, Otunbayeva's government focused more on post-conflict humanitarian efforts, including the attraction of funds to mitigate the magnitude of the ethnic conflict.

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, see Otunbayeva's interview to *The Washington Post* on April 16, 2010, available at: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/15/AR2010041505110\\_2.html?sid=ST2010061504528](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/15/AR2010041505110_2.html?sid=ST2010061504528).

In sum, the romanticism of independence has been soon substituted by disillusionment and frustration in Kyrgyzstan. Despite his rhetoric Akayev was incapable of transforming Kyrgyzstan into the Switzerland of Central Asia, and neither of his successors has succeeded in these efforts. Respectively, whilst the decay of the institute of Kyrgyz foreign policy was aggravated during the tenure of Bakiyev, these processes have ultimately begun when Akayev was in power.

### *Russia, China and the USA*

When Kyrgyzstan appeared on a geographic map as a newly independent state, this development attracted attention of a great number of international players. The list of countries interested in a small mountainous republic ranged from Iran and Turkey to India and Australia. In turn, the Kyrgyz leadership was also searching for alternative models of development for Kyrgyzstan, as Akayev was seriously examining the Malaysian, Japanese and Swiss economic models and their applicability to Kyrgyzstan's context (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). Nonetheless, from the onset of independence there were three major vectors – Russia, China and the West – that Kyrgyzstan had to take into consideration whilst devising its national interests and foreign policy priorities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was the most natural partner for Kyrgyzstan to seek support from, especially in light of rapid impoverishment of the country. The legacy of common Soviet past and the magnitude of Cold War predetermined the initial gravitation of Kyrgyzstan towards the Russian orbit, especially taking into account that Kyrgyzstan was under the protectorate of Russia from the early 1900s. The sentiments of the common population also favoured a closer cooperation with Moscow than with the West.

Nevertheless, despite the shared historic and cultural legacy many Russian politicians perceived Kyrgyzstan as “the Russian underbelly” after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). The first

Russian government under Yegor Gaidar regarded Central Asia as an economic burden in a situation, when Russia had to concentrate on reforming its own economy (Jonson, 2001: 96-97). These pragmatic discourses reflected the genuine situation in international relations. Despite its hegemonic ambitions Russia was too weak to project power beyond its borders, especially facing internal fragmentation and collapse of the economy in addition to the loss of the Cold War. Even after 1993, when the Russian government declared its intention to recover great-power status and enhance its relations with the CIS countries, Russian policy towards Central Asia remained highly ambivalent – Kremlin was wishing for leadership without any obligations (Jonson, 2001: 97).

However, Russia remained the foremost strategic partner for Kyrgyzstan despite Kremlin's reluctance to engage in the Central Asian region nearly up until 1999. As Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) denoted, Akayev enjoyed an excellent rapport with the Russian leadership and was a good friend of the first Russian president. Economy and trade were regarded as the basis for interaction between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, although in the late 1990s trade turnover between Russia and Kyrgyzstan has decreased by 37,4 percent (Toktomushev, 2001: 49). Russia also could have offered more in terms of military assistance. Central Asia has often been perceived by the Russian elites as an unstable region of high security concerns, and Kyrgyzstan, as part of that region, was not isolated from the threats radiated from Afghanistan. When Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996, the discourse about the threat of Muslim fundamentalism and drug trafficking became more prominent in the Russian political circles (Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013). Fearing a spillover effect after the invasion of Islamic extremists in Kyrgyzstan in 1999, Vladimir Putin reactivated Russia's Central Asian policy (Jonson, 2004). Under the aegis of fighting international terrorism Moscow introduced a new basis for security and military cooperation (Jonson, 2004). Kremlin was eager to maintain the role of Russia as a security guarantor for the region, whilst at the same time addressing the growing engagement of the USA in the area (Jonson, 2004).

Although in the aftermath of September 11 events Moscow preferred to bandwagon the USA and support the American war on terrorism, by mid 2000s Russia grew wary of the increasing American presence in Central Asia. A series of popular revolutions against authoritarian leaders across the post-Soviet space sparked Kremlin's fears of colour revolutions that bring anti-Russian leaders to power (Wilson, 2009). This phenomenon explains why Kremlin supported Bakiyev and his new revolutionary government despite providing a political asylum to Akayev and his family. Russia still lacked hard and soft power at that time to change the course of events in Kyrgyzstan, whereas weak Kyrgyzstan was not a classical clientilistic state to Russia. Putin credited Bakiyev with a soft loan of 189 million USD to sustain his regime immediately after the March events of 2005, which can be regarded as an attempt to buy the new ruling elites and ensure the gravitation of Kyrgyzstan towards the Russian orbit (Tengri News, 2012). Indeed, foreign policy orientation of Bakiyev was sympathetic to Moscow during the first years of his presidency. Bishkek and Moscow improved their military and security cooperation, although economic collaboration failed to progress. In a similar vein, Kremlin opted to support the interim government of Otunbayeva in 2010 despite its animosity towards certain political leaders and open criticisms of the switch towards the presidential-parliamentary form of governance in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, however, the expectations of both Russia and Kyrgyzstan have not been fulfilled. The economic integration failed because at that time Russia's interests in Central Asia were mainly related to two-fold strategic and security concerns: to integrate the Central Asian states into the CIS hemisphere as close allies of Kremlin and to deny external powers strategic access to the Central Asia region (Jonson, 2001: 98). There were no significant joint projects, apart from the CSTO military base in Kant and the Dastan factory that produced torpedoes for export to Russia and India. Lacking oil, gas and natural resources, Kyrgyzstan was more important to Russia geopolitically than economically. In addition, the default of 1998 and financial crisis of 2008 further stalled economic cooperation. The CIS

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<sup>27</sup> For instance, it is believed that there is a personal enmity between the Russian leaders and Omurbek Tekebayev, the leader of the Ata-Meken party.

itself was perceived more as a platform for “a civilised divorce” by the leaders of the former Soviet states. As a result, despite the political rhetoric the CIS was deprived of necessary mechanisms for policy implementation and failed to develop into a genuinely collective multinational or supranational entity (Allison, 2009). In April 2011 Kyrgyzstan agreed to join the Russian-led Customs Union, but there was little progress made to become a full-fledged member of this organisation.

In fact, these dynamics were present within all multilateral organisations that have been formed with the participation of the Central Asian states or in Central Asia. For instance, in 1994 Kyrgyzstan along with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan formed the Central Asian Union (CAU), which became the Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) in 1998 after Tajikistan’s accession to it, and which was later transformed into the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) in December 2001 (Allison, 2009). In 1996 Kyrgyzstan joined the CIS Customs Union with an attempt to recover the trade scales of Soviet period. The Customs Union was formed in the mid 1990s with the goal of creating a unitary economic space for its member-states to further facilitate economic integration. Later Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan would transform the Customs Union into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). In 2004 CACO was merged into the EurAsEC (Allison, 2009). However, the Central Asian cooperation appeared to be even more problematic than the integration through the CIS institutions. The Central Asian leaders had different views of regional development and were not eager to commit themselves to supranational structures. In addition, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan sought the position of a regional hegemon and thus were unwilling to sacrifice their national interests for the objectives of regional integration.

Cooperation with China, another immediate neighbour of Kyrgyzstan, was another high priority vector for the Kyrgyz leadership to explore after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although at that time Russia was the largest trading partner of Kyrgyzstan, China was substantially increasing its economic presence in Kyrgyzstan. This occurrence was related to the deteriorating situation in the industrial sector of Kyrgyzstan, as the Kyrgyz economy was becoming more re-

export and service oriented. The membership in the WTO only contributed to the transformation of Kyrgyzstan from an industrial and agricultural republic into a transit hub for Chinese goods.

Yet, the Chinese leadership was reluctant to recklessly rush into the Central Asian region. Beijing preferred to pursue its long-term goals gradually without irritating unnecessarily Russia and the USA. In addition, the Chinese main concerns were related to the issues of border demarcation to deter the spillover of instability across the borders to the Chinese Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Lewis, 2008: 218). The problems with the Kyrgyz-Chinese borders persisted long before the Kyrgyz independence. The pacts signed by Tsarist Russia and China in the 1860s and 1880s left the Kyrgyz-Chinese frontiers ill-defined, and little progress has been made to resolve the border delimitation issue during the Soviet period (Khamidov, 2001). In 1999, the Kyrgyz government has reached an agreement with Beijing, according to which 125 thousand hectares of mountainous land in the Issyk-Kul region, Uzengu-Kuush, were ceded to China. This decision has sparked public outcry, whereas some members of the parliament were keen to initiate Akayev's impeachment for the "treacherous" agreement. Akayev was accused of secretly selling the Kyrgyz territory to China. Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Muratbek Imanaliyev has fiercely dismissed those claims arguing that the Kyrgyz government protected the national interests of the country and got nearly 70 percent of the disputed land, including the Khan-Tengri peak in Tian Shan (Khamidov, 2001). Recalling that period, Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) stated that the border negotiations with China were extremely tense, since even the Soviets were unable to resolve this issue. Initially, the Chinese side pushed for the ratio of 30 percent of the disputed lands to Kyrgyzstan and 70 percent to China, but Kyrgyz diplomats managed to overturn this ratio in their favour (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) believed that this agreement was one of the

biggest achievements of the Kyrgyz diplomacy, since even more powerful Russia had to cede Damansky Island (Zhenbao Island) to China in 1991. Nonetheless, although Uzengu-Kuush was later used by the opposition politicians to rally against Akayev, this agreement was conducive to the strengthening of the Kyrgyz-Chinese relationships, especially in the sphere of military cooperation and trade.

The general discourse of the Kyrgyz leadership towards China was more of caution and fear (Lewis, 2008: 217). China's long-term goal in Central Asia was often perceived in the political circles of Kyrgyzstan as a gradual attempt to subdue Kyrgyzstan economically and then absorb it into the Chinese empire (Rumer, Trenin and Zhao, 2007; Peyrouse, 2009; Coyer, 2014). These fears were bolstered by the nescience and incomprehension of the Chinese foreign policy goals by the Kyrgyz leadership along with the historical legacy of confrontation between China and Central Asian nomadic tribes. In reality, the economic ties between two countries were stronger than political discourses surrounding their foreign policies (Peyrouse, 2009). For instance, the Dordoi and Karasuu Bazaars are one of the largest retail markets in Central Asia that serve as the entrepot for the Chinese goods to be sold to Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Kaminski and Raballand, 2009). Dordoi alone employs at least 100,000 people, whilst the annual turnover of the market amounted to nearly 7 billion USD in 2008 (Popov, 2011a). There is no exact data on its real turnover, because such markets are run non-transparently and contribute significantly to the strengthening of shadow economy in Kyrgyzstan. These bazaars created a cohort of officials, businessmen, security officers and criminals who are interested in sustaining a status quo in the country conducive to the development of those markets.<sup>28</sup> The dependence of all those actors on the lucrative and shadow profits of the bazaars posed a serious threat to the ruling regimes, since all leaders had to take into account the consequences of their decisions to these markets. If there were no imminent threats to the sustainability of those bazaars under Akayev and Bakiyev, the future of those markets became questionable under Otunbayeva. The decision to join the Russian-led Customs Union received a strong resistance and resentment from all actors engaged in this

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, see Kapatadze (2007), Kapatadze (2008),

sphere, since the closure of the Kyrgyz borders to the cheap Chinese goods will result in the demise of the retail markets such as Dordoi and Karasuu (Popov, 2011b). After the ethnic violence in the south of the country, political instability, caused by the prospects of the bazaars closures, was the least Otunbayeva needed to ensure a smooth transition of power. Respectively, this factor may explain why the Kyrgyz government proposed its own terms for joining the Customs Union and delayed the signing of important documents such as the roadmap agreement. The inability of Kremlin to force Kyrgyzstan to join the Customs Union on Moscow terms also demonstrates the relative weakness of the bandwagoning theory and reveals that Kyrgyzstan is not a fully obedient client state of Russia.

In addition, despite the fears of being economically trapped by China, the Kyrgyz leadership was still keen to utilise the financial and investment capacity of Beijing. This incongruity can be explained by the fact that the Chinese capital could have been used by the ruling regimes for personal enrichment and to patch the state budget. According to a recent report of the parliamentary commission, Kyrgyzstan received nearly 1.8 billion USD from China in the form of loans and grants, which stands for more than half of Kyrgyzstan's external debt (Tynaeva, 2014). Most of this funding was directed to maintain Kyrgyzstan's balance of payments and to finance the budget deficit (*The Times of Central Asia*, 2014). This situation demonstrates that the Chinese leverage over Kyrgyzstan has grown significantly, whilst the Kyrgyz leaders were preoccupied with short-term goals of finding resources to sustain the budget of the republic. Ironically, amidst the fears of the Chinese expansion, Kyrgyzstan turned out to be the largest debtor to China.

As for the Western orientation, after the dissolution of the USSR the USA appeared to be one of the most promising countries to develop closer ties with, especially in the backdrop of a collapsing bipolar system and the failures of communism. The Western counterparts were offering attractive monetary support and a new model of development based on the democratic principles and the idea of free market. Facing rapid impoverishment of the country, Akayev needed a quick solution to

mitigate the repercussions of sudden independence. Respectively, in the early 1990s Akayev turned towards the West to fix the worsening economic situation in the country and to strengthen external legitimacy for his rule. Akayev's government received an influx of funding in the form of loans and grants, directed at bolstering the aspiring democratic regime in Central Asia. First Vice-Prime-Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Dzhoormart Otorbayev stated in an interview on November 24, 2012, that the Western countries strongly supported Kyrgyzstan bilaterally and multilaterally through various institutions such as the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, when the devastation reigned in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This support was expressed not only in the form of financial aid, but also included valuable advices on how to minimise the negative consequences of USSR's dissolution (Otorbayev, Vice-Prime-Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 24 November 2012).

However, Akayev failed to bring the benefits of international memberships and neoliberal reforms to the common population. Kyrgyzstan's economy underwent severe contractions, whilst the country's external debt has soared. The capitalist experiment brought technical difficulties, corruption and criminality on a hitherto unseen scale, which arose when trying to impose Western models of development on a state with little tradition of capitalism (Anderson, 1999: 65). Respectively, by 2001 Kyrgyzstan distanced itself from the USA, whilst Washington did not regard Kyrgyzstan as a region of strategic importance. Nonetheless, the cooperation between Bishkek and Washington failed to go beyond localised initiatives such as the USAID projects, the grants of the National Endowment for Democracy or the opening of the American University of Central Asia. The limited American-Kyrgyz relations were often expressed in the forms of grants and multilateral loans, whereas the early investment of the USA in Kyrgyzstan was rather the offspring of the Cold War confrontation. By supporting an aspiring democratic state in Central Asia, Washington was interested in further and complete disintegration of the Soviet Union.

However, the events of 9/11 provided a unique opportunity for both Washington and Bishkek to revisit their relationship. Akayev agreed to host an American air base Manas at the Kyrgyz civilian airport to support the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The American air base not only bolstered the legitimacy of Akayev's regime from beyond, but also guaranteed additional sources of income to the state budget and to Akayev's entourage. For Washington, Kyrgyzstan was a convenient foothold to support the American troops in Afghanistan in addition to Kyrgyzstan's geostrategic location in the heart of Central Asia and between Russia and China. As a result, the Manas air base became the most central point of cooperation between the USA and Kyrgyzstan. This correlation became especially vivid during the tenure of Bakiyev. Despite the growing domestic discontent with the autocratic rule of Bakiyev, the U.S. State Department continued to support his regime ignoring human rights violations, high level of corruption, and fraudulent presidential and parliamentary elections. Similar dynamics were present during Otunbayeva's presidency. Washington was interested in securing the air base at least until the withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan in 2014 as announced by Barack Obama. Thus, as in the cases of both Akayev and Bakiyev, the USA was willing to offer attractive financial packages for the lease of the Kyrgyz airport. Nonetheless, Washington was not keen in expanding the U.S. presence in Kyrgyzstan, which became evident during the ethnic violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan. With its narrow focus on the air base, the American leadership preferred not to intervene in Osh in June 2010. Such approach puts in question Kyrgyzstan's role in the American foreign policy, especially when the U.S. troops leave Afghanistan in 2014. In a similar vein, the termination of the airport lease and the extinction of the American interest in Kyrgyzstan will demonstrate the real commitment of the new Kyrgyz elites to the democratic principles and ideals.

In sum, the Kyrgyz leadership proclaimed to explore its international relations equally with Russia, China and the West. However, despite the rhetoric there was no thoughtful and coherent foreign policy position towards these vectors. The foreign policy orientation of Kyrgyzstan was driven by certain momentums and

political conjunctures and failed to translate into a consistent system, which would reflect Kyrgyzstan's national interests. As David Lewis (2008: 215) concluded, the Central Asian leaders lacked ideological commitments to any foreign policy poles and were rather interested in securing political and economic benefits by playing off greater players. Accordingly, the analysis of foreign policy discourses may not only reveal the environment within which the decisions are made, but also may explain the mechanics of how the Central Asian leaders play off different actors for personal benefit.

### *“Weathercock Diplomacy”<sup>29</sup> or Debating Multivectorism*

The formation of Kyrgyz foreign policy has always been accompanied by foreign policy discourses, which channelled or sought to channel political ideas. The Declaration of Independence, agreed by the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic, was the first major document, which has outlined the status of Kyrgyzstan on international arena. It stated that Kyrgyzstan became an independent, sovereign and democratic state on the basis of the inalienable right of the Kyrgyz nation for self-determination. Accordingly, on August 31, 1991, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic ceased to exist giving way to the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic. Article 13 of the Declaration emphasised that Kyrgyzstan strived to actively contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security as an equal member of the international community. As a subject of international law, the Kyrgyz Republic would also establish relations with other states, sign treaties with them, exchange diplomatic, trade and consulate missions and partake in the activities of international organisations. Article 14 of the Declaration stressed that Kyrgyzstan would adhere to the generally recognised principles of friendship and cooperation between nations, fulfil its commitments and avoid confrontations in the sphere of international relations.

Henceforth, the Declaration of Independence became the first legislative document in the sphere of foreign policy that laid the foundations of the Kyrgyz diplomacy and Foreign Service. On May 5, 1993, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan has ratified the

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<sup>29</sup> Akayev used the term “weathercock diplomacy” to characterise the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan under Bakiyev.

Constitution of the country, which officially declared Kyrgyzstan a sovereign, unitary and democratic state, governed by the secular principles and the rule of law. As previously outlined in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution reinstated the adherence of Kyrgyzstan to the norms of international law and its endeavour for universal and just peace and international cooperation. The Constitution also officially delegated the right to determine the republic's foreign policy orientation to the president.

Accordingly, being constitutionally responsible for defining the foreign policy priorities of the country, Akayev proposed the vision of Kyrgyzstan's multivector foreign policy. This concept assumed that Kyrgyzstan should have utilised the opportunity of its geopolitical location to converge the interests of Russia, China and the USA for the benefit of Kyrgyzstan and for the mutual cooperation of all concerned parties. Akayev (2004) claimed that his multivector foreign policy meant not "either" and "or", but "and" and "and". This idea was clearly expressed in Akayev's Silk Road Doctrine or the Eurasian Land-Bridge project. Outlined in 1999, the Silk Road Doctrine committed Kyrgyzstan to a multilateral foreign policy orientation, portraying the country as a microcosm of the Silk Road that linked the East and the West (Akayev, 1999; Wood, 2005). Akayev (1999) linked these ideas to his national strategy "Kyrgyzstan is our common home", which stressed multiethnic diversity and interethnic tolerance in the country and which was supposed to demonstrate the capacity of Kyrgyzstan to become the bridge between the East and the West. Respectively, in line with such thinking, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan had the following directives to fulfil (Toktomushev, 2001: 22):

- Strengthening of stability and security in the Central Asian region
- Development of collaborative and friendly relations with neighbouring states along with further deepening of integration processes
- Contribution to the strengthening of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and to the realisation of the union's economic and political potential

- Strengthening of collaborative and friendly relations with developed states of the West and the East
- Development of cooperation with the organisations of the United Nations, regional international organisations, financial and economic institutions
- Strengthening of cooperation with developing states and states in transition

When Bakiyev came to power, he sought to continue Akayev's so-called multivector foreign policy. Bakiyev's government immediately rejected Akayev's notion of Silk Road diplomacy because of its long-term association with the regime of the first president. Instead, on January 10, 2007, Bakiyev approved the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic that outlined the foreign policy priorities of the country. The adoption of this concept was justified by the expedience to accelerate ongoing transformations in Kyrgyzstan after the revolutionary events of March 24, 2005, and the general dynamics in international relations related to integrationist trends, globalisation and regionalisation of global processes. The Concept stressed that the March events of 2005 led to the creation of foreign policy that would reflect the interests and responsibilities of all parties, including the state, national and local governments, entrepreneurs and civil society. Accordingly, the new concept highlighted four main tenets for Kyrgyzstan to pursue:

- Strengthening of national security through foreign policy methods
- Creation of favourable external conditions for the implementation of national development priorities
- Strengthening of the positive international image of Kyrgyzstan
- Formation of an effective foreign policy system led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and in partnership with other interested agencies and civil society institutions

Furthermore, the Concept identified three interaction circles around which the Kyrgyz foreign policy was to be centred. The first one was the regional circle that included China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The concept encouraged the strengthening of good relations with those neighbouring states, along with Kyrgyzstan's further participation in the integration processes and regional

structures such as the SCO, the CSTO and the EurAsEC. The second circle was the continental or the Eurasian one, which included Russia, China, the USA, the EU, Germany, Japan, India and Turkey. The third circle, the global one, centred on the cooperation with the United Nations and global financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the EBRD, the Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. In sum, the Concept emphasized that Kyrgyzstan would pursue multivector, balanced and pragmatic foreign policy, based on the actual domestic resources and opportunities and the national interests of the country.

Otubayeva's tenure in power was too short to make significant conclusions regarding the continuity and changes of her foreign policies compared to those of Akayev and Bakiyev. Nonetheless, the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted at the same referendum when Otunbayeva was elected as President, outlined new structural changes in foreign policy decision-making. This constitution reduced presidential powers, whilst delegating more authority to the parliament. In addition, prior to her presidency, Otunbayeva was very vocal of weak Kyrgyz foreign policy. Otunbayeva (2009) metaphorically compared Kyrgyzstan's multivector policy to a fig leaf, which has delicately covered the spiritual nakedness of the country. Accordingly, Otunbayeva (2009) called for a systemic approach to foreign policy, implying the formulation of a clear system of axes with coherent guidelines and strong foreign policy poles. This vision was also shared by many policymakers and diplomats. As a result, after the April 2010 events, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the members of its Public Advisory Council and foreign policy experts began to draft the new Concept of Foreign Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic. Azamat Temirkulov (Member of the Public Advisory Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 3 December 2012) asserted that the new concept of foreign policy will be based on principles of national security, which are outlined in the newly adopted Concept of National Security.

Although Temirkulov stressed that the drafted foreign policy concept is a new document, Askar Beshimov (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan,

interview, 12 November 2012) has referred rather to the “reset” of the Concept of Foreign Policy of 2007.<sup>30</sup> Beshimov (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 12 November 2012) emphasized that the Concept of Foreign Policy of 2007 has to be rebooted according to the current realities, since the concept of foreign policy is a general system of views on the world, which sets the plan of actions, goals, and mechanisms to achieve these goals. As an illustrative example Beshimov mentioned that only recently the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan has issued 8 thousand work permits to 7 Chinese companies, whereas the level of investment of China to Kyrgyzstan has already reached 1 billion USD.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the Kyrgyz leadership still prefers to develop hydropower energy potential of the republic with Russia, although there are established business relations with the Chinese investors who are willing to invest in Kyrgyzstan on more favourable conditions. Respectively, Beshimov stressed that these developments have to be taken into account whilst “rebooting” the Concept of Foreign Policy.

In general, the idea of orienting towards various poles in international politics has been prevailing within the foreign policy discourses of the Kyrgyz leadership. Multivector foreign policy was perceived as a sign of a certain maturity of the state, since such foreign policy assumed orientation towards different, and often, conflicting forces in international relations (Bolshakov, 2010). The positioning of Kyrgyzstan in this multivector equation was mostly from the perspective of an equal partner. However, the literature on weak states posits that states like Kyrgyzstan tend to exhibit a low level of engagement in world politics, rely on greater powers and direct their foreign policies at ensuring political and physical security. Yet, Kyrgyz foreign policy has not resembled classical bandwagoning behaviour. Indeed, the Kyrgyz leadership was accommodating the interests of regional hegemons, but the republic was still far from representing a state, which is fully subservient to imperial centres, as suggested by the concept of the New Great Game in Central Asia. The multivector discourse itself as proposed by Akayev and

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<sup>30</sup> In fact, the concept of 2007 was developed by two groups, one of which was led by Beshimov.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, China is investing in the construction of an oil refinery in Kara-Balta, an electrical substation Datka, power lines Datka-Kemin, etc. Erlan Abdylidayev (2009) highlighted that a commodity circulation between China and Kyrgyzstan has reached 6 billion USD in 2008.

then followed by Bakiyev and Otunbayeva contradicts the neorealist notion of balance of power, since Kyrgyzstan can neither simultaneously bandwagon Russia, China and the USA nor can it balance these states on its own power terms. In other words, why did the Kyrgyz presidents promote multivector foreign policy, if Kyrgyzstan was purportedly doomed to bandwagon one of the greater powers?

The empirical evidence suggests that the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan was not always resulting from systemic changes, although systemic factors did shape Kyrgyzstan's international behaviour. As outlined in Chapter II, traditional systemic or reductionist approaches to the study of foreign policies of weak states often neglect other variables that are crucial for understanding the genuine inter- and intra-state dynamics in countries like Kyrgyzstan. Accordingly, the existence of the Kyrgyz multivector discourse leads to another explanation, which may supplement or provide alternative reasoning of Kyrgyz foreign policymaking. State securitisation or security performance is the framework that may explain the prevailing multivector discourse. As discussed previously, weak states lack strong physical base, effective institutional expression, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state. These states are distinguished by the nature of insecurities and its correlation to the security of ruling regimes. The ruling elites become preoccupied with short-term regime security goals because of internal and external weaknesses of the state. Accordingly, to protect own interests and the interests of their entourages the ruling leaders may securitize the state, whilst in reality they will be securitising their regimes.

Accordingly, the discourse of Kyrgyz multivector foreign policy can be a mere act of state *dramaturgiia*. The Kyrgyz presidents or at least Akayev and Bakiyev promoted multifaceted foreign policy to justify the fluctuations of Kyrgyzstan on international arena before their electorate and the regional players. The concept of binding the republic regionally to larger Eurasia assumed courting the protection, or at least the preferential treatment and foreign aid, of both greater powers, such as Russia, China and the USA, and secondary powers, including Turkey, Iran and

Japan (Wood, 2005). In addition, Central Asian bandwagoning with Russia in the CSTO or China in the SCO represented the form of political solidarity against the pressures and processes that could have challenged the Central Asian leaders and their entourages (Allison, 2008). These pressures were expressed in the form of democratic agendas of international agencies in the early 2000s or in the form of more conservative values such as the return to presidential governance as advised by Medvedev to Otunbayeva in 2011.

The concept of multivector foreign policy was the official, but not the only discourse, which prevailed in the Kyrgyz decision-making circles. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the narratives of conspiracy theories became prominent in Kyrgyz politics. Conspiracy theories are the discourses, which explain a significant event as secretly planned and executed by an agent or a group of agents (Heathershaw, 2012: 612). Being often the ideological artefacts of the Cold War, Central Asian conspiracy theories tended to legitimise the predominant order and reproduce elitism, patriarchy and patronage as modes of governance in the region (Heathershaw, 2012). The conspiracy theories about “deep state” and “foreign threat” were amongst the most widespread conspiriological narratives in Kyrgyzstan. “Deep state” concepts attributed the conspiriological narratives to the internal affairs of the state such as the inner-workings of the ruling clans, security services and powerful presidential families (Heathershaw, 2012).

The conspiracies of “foreign threat” suspected the role of external actors in loitering into state affairs (Heathershaw, 2012). For instance, ousted Akayev lambasted that U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Stephen Young orchestrated the Tulip Revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan. Human rights activist and former presidential candidate Toktayim Umetalieva (interview, 25 October 2012) claimed that the team of the Pakistani president has passed to Akayev an intercepted letter written by Young, which outlined the monetary flows directed for the governmental change in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Aleksandr Knyazev (2006: 66-67) accused Kurmanbek

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<sup>32</sup> However, the scheduled date was allegedly May 25, 2005 (Umetalieva, Human Rights Activist, interview, 25 October 2012). Umetaliyeva further denoted that U.S. State Department

Bakiyev, Omurbek Tekebayev and Emil Aliyev discussing a coup against Akayev with the U.S. State Department officials in 2003. In a similar vein, the April revolution of 2010 was presented by some commentators (Halpin, 2010; Greenfield, 2010; Blank, 2010) as Kremlin's revenge against Bakiyev and his family, whilst the June violence of 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan was also often regarded as an attempt of the Russian "elder brother" to hinder the pro-parliamentary political reform in Kyrgyzstan.

Nonetheless, similar to the official multivector foreign policy discourses, conspiracy theories also turned out to be mostly the acts of *dramaturgiia*. The March events of 2005 have not brought the anti-Russian leaders to power, whilst investigations of the June 2010 violence did not uncover traces of the Russian security services on the ground.<sup>33</sup> By means of the "foreign threat" conspiracies Akayev attempted to legitimise his unpopular rule and portray himself as a democratic ruler who had to flee to Moscow as a result of an unconstitutional overthrow. Similarly, the stories about the role of the Federal Security Service of Russia in inciting the ethnic clash between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh belittled the failures and incompetence of Otunbayeva's Interim Government whilst reproducing the hegemonic idea of almighty Kremlin. These developments are yet "straw-in-the-wind" evidence, which however provides an important benchmark for the investigation of the validity of the hypothesis.

These developments are also in line with the state performance explanations, since conspiracy theories are also performances, which exist in the discursive environments and which affect both official and unofficial actors (Ortmann and Heathershaw, 2012: 561; Heathershaw, 2012: 611; Sakwa, 2012). In fact, referring to Alexei Yurchak (2006), Heathershaw (2012: 611) delineated constative and performative functions of conspiracy theories, "Conspiracy theories are a form of

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representative Lynn also met with the representatives of southern criminal groupings and with supporters of Hizb Ut-Tahrir in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, see Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission (2011), International Federation for Human Rights (2010), Human Rights Watch (2010), Human Rights Watch (2011,) Matveeva, (2011), Melvin (2011), Amnesty International (2012), International Crisis Group (2012). However, the STRATFOR report stressed the presence of the Russian Federal Security Service on the ground during the April events of 2010 (Goodrich, 2010), which was not confirmed by the new government of Kyrgyzstan.

political discourse which purportedly subverts the existing order in the constative sense (making specific claims against the establishment) while, in reality, normalizing the status quo in the performative sense (deploying and reproducing the prevailing political ideas).” As a result, the narrative of conspiracy theories is not about truth or falsehood, but about felicity and infelicity, since the discursive mechanism of conspiracy theories re-inscribes the predominant order and legitimises or delegitimizes political actions (Ortmann and Heathershaw, 2012; Heathershaw, 2012).

The incongruities between formal and informal foreign policy discourses and their practices lead to the question why these incongruities exist in the first place. As the empirical evidence demonstrates, Kyrgyzstan does not present the case of a classical neorealist bandwagoning, since there are traits of both state securitisation and rent-seeking, which affect the foreign policy trajectory of Kyrgyzstan. The latter two notions are closely related to the regimes that developed and prevailed in the republic. In fact, the understanding of the formation of those autocratic and mercantile regimes is instrumental to the analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policy.

### *Kyrgyzstan Adrift*

In sum, diagnostic evidence revealed that Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2011 was non-systematic, inconsistent and reactionary. As Wood (2005: 142-143) summarised, Kyrgyz foreign policy was often viewed as “a mish-mash of guileless reactions to a series of crises” and as a practice of inviting random actors to meddle in Kyrgyzstan’s state of affairs. Such a persistent and recurring pattern of policy characteristic indicates at the presence of certain factors, which could have driven foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan under Akayev, Bakiyev and Otunbayeva, and which need to be included into the foreign policy analysis in order to better understand and explain incoherent foreign policy trajectories of weak states.

Weak Kyrgyzstan, vulnerable to systemic pressures, and a predatory rent-seeking regime became the legacy of Akayev’s fifteen-year rule, which was camouflaged

by a pseudo multivector foreign policy. The emergence of these variables began in the early 1990s, when Akayev found himself in dire need of financing to revitalise the rapidly declining Kyrgyz economy. The budget of the Kyrgyz government decreased from 38,5 percent of GDP in 1990 to 12,7 percent in 1992 (Tchantouridze, 2006: 62). The overwhelming majority of population in Kyrgyzstan was plunged into chronic poverty and struggled over physical survival (Reznikova, 2003: 94). In the period from 1987 to 1993 the personal income of the Kyrgyz citizens decreased by 58-66 percent, whereas the percentage of people living in poverty increased from 12 to 88 percent (Reznikova, 2003: 94). The industrial legacy of the Soviet Union was quickly falling into decay, since the infrastructure and logistics chains were disintegrated after the dissolution of the USSR. The collapse of the Soviet Union revealed a stark dependency of all Soviet republics to their core. However, unlike other Central Asian neighbours such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan did not possess developed gas and oil reserves to maintain economic stability and state budget. Although Kyrgyzstan was a monopolist in antimony production in the USSR and also exported uranium, gold, mercury, wool, meat, steel, tobacco, sugar and some machinery, Akayev failed to ensure stable economic infrastructure for those industries and was unable to sustain their development at Soviet level (Tchantouridze, 2006: 62).

Kyrgyzstan emerged from the USSR with a functioning economic base, high literacy rate, well-educated middle class, effective healthcare system and strong welfare state institutions, but these advantages soon diminished after the implementation of reforms advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Tchantouridze, 2006: 63; Musuraliyev, 2013; Igamberdiev and Tegizbekova, 2014). The IMF and the World Bank pushed for decentralisation and privatisation of state-run enterprises and state-held monopolies without any attempts of sequencing their advocated reforms and establishing well-functioning legal institutions (Tchantouridze, 2006: 63; Igamberdiev and Tegizbekova, 2014). As a result, in the period from 1993 to 1995 nearly 450 major industrial units have been dubiously privatised in Kyrgyzstan, and most of them then went either bankrupt or

were sold abroad, often for scrap (Begunova, 2014).<sup>34</sup> By 1995, in comparison to the early 1990s, the industrial output of the republic decreased by two-thirds (Begunova, 2014). Recommendations of the international financial institutions contributed successfully to the destruction of Soviet economic potential in Kyrgyzstan, but were unsuccessful in helping create an effective market-based economy (Lantsov and Aliyev, 2006). Following the neoliberal conceptions of economic reforms, the Kyrgyz leadership significantly cut social expenditures and imports, however, the trade balance remained negative (Lantsov and Aliyev, 2006; Igamberdiev and Tegizbekova, 2014). In 1994, Akayev's government lifted control mechanisms over fuel and food and removed controls over exports and profit margins, which, in turn, immediately led to colossal inflation and striking poverty growth in Kyrgyzstan (Tchantouridze, 2006: 63). Kyrgyzstan's limited resource endowment further constrained economic progress (Gleason, 2001: 174). Hydropower energy and gold mining appeared to be the most promising areas to centre economic development around in Kyrgyzstan. However, both sectors required significant modernization and investment and quickly became tied to major corruption scandals.

On one hand, Akayev's reforms turned Kyrgyzstan into one of the weakest states in the world incapable of projecting power beyond its borders. On the other hand, Akayev created a thin layer of oligarchs who made nefarious fortunes and managed to capture the state. These developments were the legacy of Akayev that all subsequent Kyrgyz leaders had to face, and there was little progress made by both Bakiyev and Otunbayeva to rectify the situation. Being independent for slightly more than 20 years, Kyrgyzstan managed to accrue an external debt of nearly 3 billion USD along with an undiversified economy based on the transit of Chinese goods, which further increased the vulnerability of the country (Beshimov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 12 November 2012). The Kyrgyz foreign policy became driven by the conjuncture of finding financial

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<sup>34</sup> In the period from 2001 to 2004 Akayev's government would further privatise 342 state-owned enterprises for only 12 million USD in total, including Kyrgyz mining and metallurgical combine, Kant cement and slate factory, Bishkek antibiotics factory, Issyk-Kul fish combine, TyazhElektromazh factory, Kayndy sugar factory, Ak-Suu corn processing combine, Alamedin hydropower energy stations, and others (Krasilnikova and Nochevkin, 2014).

resources to patch the holes in the budget, which in turn led to further dependence of Kyrgyzstan on other countries (Beshimov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 12 November 2012).

Not only the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan was perceived as directly dependent on the actions of greater players, but even the country's domestic policies were presumed to be a reaction to external influences. Political, economic and social realities created preconditions, which compelled Kyrgyzstan to move along the fairway of different states and take into account the policies of various geopolitical organisations (Beshimov, 2007). For instance, these arrangements were evident during Bakiyev's early years in power. Russia has never been perceived as a threat to Kyrgyz statehood. Nonetheless, the presence of a large pool of Kyrgyz migrants working in Russia, Kyrgyz dependency on Russian fuel and Kyrgyzstan's own systemic vulnerabilities justified Bakiyev's fears of Russia as a destabilising force. After the ousting of Akayev the confronting groupings and clans began a vehement strife for political power and control over the lucrative business spheres in Kyrgyzstan. The revolutionary partners realised that their goals and objectives were conflicting, whilst they were previously united only by the common vision of toppling Akayev. Bakiyev's priority was to eliminate political rivals and strengthen his vertical of power within the country. Thus, in that stint, Bakiyev needed to minimise the points of friction with Kremlin, since domestically Bakiyev's positions were still quite unstable.

In other instances, systemic weaknesses of Kyrgyzstan were manifested in more assertive and explicit forms. For example, Former Diplomat at the Kyrgyz Embassy to Russia (Anonymous, interview, 13 November 2012) claimed that there was an absolute diktat of Moscow in the Russian-Kyrgyz relations. Diagnostic evidence also supports this statement. According to the Wikileaks cable dated February 10, 2009, opposition politician Bakyt Beshimov in a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller claimed that his younger brother Askar Beshimov was dismissed from the position of Deputy Foreign Minister for CIS affairs after a direct request from the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. At a closed meeting of the

deputy foreign ministers of the CIS countries, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov was reportedly upset with Askar Beshimov's arguments against Kyrgyzstan's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Wikileaks, 2006; Anonymous, Former Diplomat at the Kyrgyz Embassy to Russia, interview, 13 November 2012). As a result, Kremlin was displeased with these comments and requested Bakiyev "to rein in" the Kyrgyz official (Anonymous, Former Diplomat at the Kyrgyz Embassy to Russia, interview, 13 November 2012).

Nonetheless, despite convincing empirical cases the tenets of structural realism do not portray the full picture of Kyrgyz politics. There is space for the Kyrgyz leadership to manoeuvre within the environment of systemic pressures and constraints (Usubaliyev, Former Representative of Kyrgyzstan to NATO, interview, 18 December 2013; Bayaman, Former Deputy Minister of Communications and Transport of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 24 December 2013). For example, Jomart Ormonbekov (Former Attaché at the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Kingdom of Belgium, Mission to the EU and NATO, interview, 5 December 2012) recalled the meeting at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels, when Kosovo declared its independence in 2008. Permanent Representative of Russia to NATO Konstantin Totsky advised all members of the CIS countries to openly oppose the secession of Kosovo, but Ormonbekov decided to disobey this directive despite the Russian pressure. Temirbek Sultanbayev (Director of the Department of Europe and the USA at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 5 December 2012) also recalled similar cases from his diplomatic experience. At the Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, the Kyrgyz side was strongly advised by their American counterparts to vote in support of the resolution on Northern Sudan. However, at that time Kyrgyzstan was expecting investments from Pakistan and Kuwait, which would have opposed this resolution. Thus, the Kyrgyz side decided to abstain despite the American warning of taking into account the Kyrgyz decision not to vote for the resolution. In a similar vein, in the early 1990s the Turkish diplomats asked Kyrgyzstan to support their position on Cyprus, but the Kyrgyz side declined to acquiesce with their request notwithstanding Turkish support of Kyrgyzstan after the independence (Sultanbayev, Director of the

Department of Europe and the USA at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 5 December 2012). Even the aforementioned dismissal of Beshimov's younger brother from office could have been attributed not to the role of Moscow, but to political activity of Bakyt Beshimov, an outspoken critic of Bakiyev's rule.

The ability of Kyrgyz diplomats to make independent foreign policy decisions despite pressures from greater players demonstrates that there are other factors, alternative to systemic theories, which may explain the trajectory of Kyrgyz foreign policy. The type of the ruling regime in Kyrgyzstan is one of those factors that unpacks Kyrgyz foreign policy milieu from a different perspective. As Chapter II describes, rent-seeking patterns prevail in Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan is not an exception. Kyrgyz officials and decision makers are joined in intricate networks of mutual exchange that are solidified by clan or family bonds. The repercussions of this phenomenon are evident in Kyrgyz foreign policymaking, which is expressed in a conjunctive form of erratic and mercantile foreign policy interests. For instance, one of the key foreign policy decisions to host an American air base on Kyrgyz soil contradicted official Kyrgyz foreign policy discourses and was rather based on the political conjuncture of Akayev and his private commercial interests (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). Felix Kulov, Former Vice-President of Kyrgyzstan and political rival of Akayev, stated in an interview on 3 July 2013 that initially the experts suggested locating the base in Kant, but Aidar Akayev, the president's son, intervened to ensure the base would be situated in Bishkek. Kulov himself proposed to open the base in the south of the republic at the Osh airport to deal directly with the issues of drug trafficking, terrorism and state security. However, Aidar Akayev was more interested in selling fuel to the Americans, and, as diagnostic evidence confirmed, Aidar Akayev managed to successfully capture fuel supplies to the American air base (Cloud, 2005; Roston, 2006; USHR, 2010; Kulov, Former Vice-President of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 3 July 2013).

Mercantilism of Kyrgyz foreign policy was the strongest common trait of Akayev's and Bakiyev's tenures. Rent-seeking interests of power groups, which perceived external actors as the wealth fund, became the driver of Kyrgyz foreign policy (Baktygulov, 2012). For instance, in the early 1990s LG Electronics, known previously as Gold Star, and Daewoo-Auto withdrew their interests for opening factories in Kyrgyzstan after Kyrgyz officials requested kickbacks and bribes (Sariyev, 2012). State institutions were incapable of formulating national interests, but were well equipped and experienced at requesting grants, loans and free gifts (Omarov, 2007). The attracted capital was either embezzled or directed to patch the budget deficit. In 1992, international institutions financed half of Kyrgyzstan's 17 percent budget deficit; in 2002, contributions of foreign donors reached the mark of 539 million USD; in 2001, the external debt soared to 1,7 billion USD, whilst by the end of 2005 the external debt reached nearly 2 billion USD (Tchantouridze, 2006: 64). However, the Kyrgyz leadership was least preoccupied with the possibility of Kyrgyzstan's foreign peonage, since the ruling elites were mostly driven by the personal enrichment calculi. These tendencies led to inconsistent pattern of Kyrgyz foreign policy behaviour. For example, on one hand, Kurmanbek Bakiyev was making official visits to Moscow, where he was expressing emphatic loyalty to Kremlin and eagerness to jointly develop Kyrgyz hydroenergy potential. On the other hand, his son Maksim was meeting the American diplomats to re-negotiate the terms of the Manas air base and Russian disgraced oligarchs Boris Berezovsky and Telman Ismailov to discuss business initiatives, including the upcoming Russian hydroenergy projects in Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013).<sup>35</sup>

The imitative and irrational nature of Kyrgyz foreign policy was often ascribed to the lack of coherent domestic policy guidelines with clearly defined national

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<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to cross-check this information, although circumstantial evidence suggests that Berezovsky and Ismailov could have visited Kyrgyzstan. For instance, in 2006, the members of the Kyrgyz Parliament declared that Berezovsky paid a private visit to Bishkek in order to meet Maksim Bakiyev, and thus the parliamentarians requested the Office of the General Prosecutor of Kyrgyzstan to react accordingly (for example, see <http://lenta.ru/news/2006/10/31/kyrgyz> or <http://www.newsru.com/world/14sep2006/oproverg.html>). Nonetheless, the General Prosecutor of Kyrgyzstan Kongantiyev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Boris Berezovsky affirmed that such a visit has not taken place.

interests (Abdurazakov, n.d.; Omarov, 2007; Baktygulov, 2012; Bayaman, Former Deputy Minister of Communications and Transport of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 24 December 2013). For instance, Valentin Bogatyrev (2012) emphasised the following pillars, on which Kyrgyz foreign policy should have rested upon, but which were missing during the tenures of Akayev and Bakiyev:

- Real assessment of the interests of foreign actors and respectively no consideration of those interests when devising Kyrgyz foreign policies towards these players
- Clear understanding of Kyrgyz national interests
- Domestic doctrine on security, strengthening and development of sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and how these factors might project on foreign policy, e.g. the relations with what actors strengthened or weakened national security
- Diversification of foreign policy orientations, e.g. the relations with what countries needed to be enhanced
- Departure from ideological understanding of foreign policy

The inability of statesmen to articulate the vision and objectives of Kyrgyz foreign policy was attributed to their lack of strategic and tactical understanding of foreign policy (Omarov, 2007). Nur Omarov (2007; n.d.) argued that the ruling regimes became the hostages of regional and clan constructions, which hindered the development of a strategic vision of the country. Nonetheless, it was the ruling regimes, which created and maintained this elaborate system of mutual exchanges. The tenets of patron-client relationships remained intact even after the changes of rulers.

As a result, the implementation of consistent foreign policy proved to be problematic on both conceptual and administrative grounds. Notwithstanding the meritocratic expectations of foreign service, many positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan were occupied based on the rent-seeking practices and clan and family attributions. Such recruitment methods only exacerbated the problems existing within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan. The participation of Kyrgyzstan in Soviet foreign policymaking was minimal, and only

few Kyrgyz nationals were employed at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Anonymous, Former Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, 16 December 2013). As a result, independent Kyrgyzstan lacked both the material and technical base and the professional cadres to run the diplomatic service (Anonymous, Former Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, 16 December 2013). Akayev had to rely on the academicians and scholars to fill this void and implement Kyrgyz foreign policy (Anonymous, Former Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, 16 December 2013). On June 12, 2001, Akayev issued a decree №197, which created the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013; Toktomushev, 2001: 18). Nonetheless, the quality of education at this institution was poor.

Although most of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan were qualified diplomats, in reality they could not devise foreign policies independently from the Office of the President. The ministers were simply high-level employees who were responsible for the execution of the presidential will or the directives of his inner circle (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013; Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012). For instance, U.S. Charge d'Affaires Lee Litzenberger reported in a confidential cable to the U.S. State Department how deferential Minister of Foreign Affairs Sarbayev was to Maksim Bakiyev during their dinner at a private restaurant on July 13, 2009, after the entry of new Manas Transit Centre agreements into force (Wikileaks, 2009e). Sarbayev stressed to the U.S. Charge d'Affaires that he was only the executor of Maksim's plan to keep the American air base. Litzenberger communicated to the U.S. State Department that Sarbayev was very nervous before and during the presence of Bakiyev's son who in turn was calm throughout and exhibited tastes to expensive scotch and Cuban cigars with his name on the label (Wikileaks, 2009e). This case explicitly demonstrates how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was serving the interests of the president's family, if the

minister himself was subservient to Maksim Bakiyev who held no official state position at that time.

This trend continued when Maksim Bakiyev was appointed the Head of the Central Agency for Development, Innovation and Investment of the Kyrgyz Republic. For instance, Maksim Bakiyev headed the Kyrgyz delegation to China in January 2010, where he held meetings with several high-profile Chinese officials. Although the Kyrgyz delegation included three ministers, the delegation was still led by the president's son. The Kyrgyz and Chinese sides discussed the construction of a rail line, which would link Kyrgyzstan, China and Uzbekistan, the investments into the Bishkek Combined Heat and Power Plant and the development of a 500-kilowatt power transmission line (Wikileaks, 2010). The Kyrgyz delegation was also interested in developing the mining and agricultural sectors jointly with the Chinese counterparts and establishing cooperation with the Shanghai Stock Exchange and the Chinese Development Bank (Wikileaks, 2010). The unusual diplomatic hierarchy of the Kyrgyz delegation demonstrated the importance of the Chinese vector for the Bakiyevs, since Maksim Bakiyev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev's son and then his likely presidential successor, personally led the negotiations over strategic and lucrative projects with China. This hierarchy also revealed the power and authority of the president's son who was making state-level decisions without consulting the Prime-Minister of Kyrgyzstan. Maksim Bakiyev also turned the participation of Minister of Foreign Affairs Kadyrbek Sarbayev in this delegation into a symbolic act by exercising the minister's powers himself such as inviting the Chinese counterparts to Kyrgyzstan and expressing satisfaction regarding the progress of the bilateral cooperation. The Chinese side felt insulted by the "nepotism of sending a dictator's son to negotiate state-to-state agreements", but still agreed to set the meetings with the Chinese deputy ministers (Wikileaks, 2010).

Unlike the high-level appointees, the mid-level and junior personnel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was shaped by different educational upbringing compared to the elder Kyrgyz diplomats, which, however, did not translate necessarily into a more liberal and better-quality outlook (Wood, 2005: 183-184). The state service within

the diplomatic branch was considered to be one of the most prestigious in the country and thus was often filled with the relatives and cronies of high-profile officials. The appointments to the embassies abroad were often conducted in accordance to similar principles, but sometimes resembled honorary exiles for powerful, but inconvenient politicians. Quite often certain positions were simply sold (Engvall, 2011). Consequently, the expertise and professionalism of the diplomatic servants was often very questionable. Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) recalled the period when he worked as the head of one of the departments at the EurAsEC:

The interests of Kyrgyzstan were championed at the EurAsEC by the permanent representatives of Kyrgyzstan, whilst I was employed there as an international official. However, what disconcerted me was the low level of preparedness of Kyrgyz officials. For instance, the Russian colleagues have approached all issues very rigorously, taking into account various possible factors and analyzing the consequences, whereas the Kyrgyz side was often prepared very superficially. Moreover, the negotiators at this level should have been permanently appointed to the organisation to understand all pitfalls and political undercurrents. However, the Kyrgyz representatives were often appointed for a short term, and in general there was a shortage of qualified staff to fill these positions.

In a similar vein, Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) further lamented that, when he was an Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov promised Akayev to fulfil the domestic needs of Kyrgyzstan in oil and gas. However, there was no prompt Kyrgyz follow-up, and this promise became prolonged and then forgotten.

In addition to the cadre problem, during the tenure of Otunbayeva there were some institutional challenges that further complicated the foreign policymaking procedures. The new Constitution of Kyrgyzstan of 2010 established the presidential-parliamentary form of governance and diffused foreign policymaking

authority between the president, the parliament, and the government. However, the mechanics of foreign policymaking remained unclear. For instance, the government of Kyrgyzstan is formed by a parliamentary majority, which is the coalition of factions. Accordingly, both the largest party in the parliament and the party with the prerogative to appoint the Minister of Foreign Affairs can propose the concept of foreign policy, but which one has the priority and needs to be chosen remains uncertain. Furthermore, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ednan Karabayev (2012) questions how the parliament should approve the cabinet of ministers in case there is a significant disjuncture between the foreign policy priorities of the parties, which comprise the parliamentary majority. The Article 88 of the new Constitution only parsimoniously affirms that foreign policy and foreign economic activity of the country should be implemented by the Kyrgyz government. This situation may lead to a conundrum when the government is either unprofessional, but loyal to the party values, or professional, but distant from the party electoral theses for which the people have voted (Karabayev, 2012).

Also, according to the new Constitution the speaker represents the parliament in Kyrgyzstan and outside its borders. However, Karabayev (2012) argues that the speaker cannot be responsible for the foreign policy of the country, because foreign policy falls within the jurisdiction of the executive branch, whereas the parliament is a legislative body. The president has the right to represent the country on international level, but the president should acquire prior consent of the Prime Minister to conduct negotiations or sign international treaties. In turn, the Prime Minister receives the permission to implement foreign policy of the country from the parliamentary majority, although the main mechanisms of foreign policy remain within the authority of the parliament, e.g. the ratification and denunciation of international treaties or the use of Kyrgyz armed forces outside the territory of the republic. As a result, such legislative nuances further dilute the already diluted Kyrgyz foreign policymaking.

In general, a corrupt system of governance is a strong indicator that regime security and rent-seeking interests dominate the agenda of the ruling elites. Apart

from being the goal of the ruling elites, the acquisition and the redistribution of rents within such political systems also serves as a technique for the autocratic leaders to co-opt the non-ruling elites into their patron-client network in order to pre-empt inter-clan rivalry and mitigate domestic political instability. In fact, the presence of such a corrupt patron-client system on its own is a “smoking-gun” proof that personal interests of the ruling elites prevail over national interests, since foreign policy directives of the country are likely to be developed through the prism of regime security in the first instance.

Kyrgyzstan’s history of independence was marked by a series of turbulent events and rapid developments, which failed to transform the republic into the flagman of democracy in the region. By the end of 2011, Kyrgyzstan represented a weak state vulnerable to systemic pressures and external influences. Furthermore, Akayev’s ineffective and corrupt governance led to the creation of a rent-seeking regime, which was further solidified by Bakiyev and remained unchallenged by Otunbayeva. The Kyrgyz foreign policymaking institutions also became ingrained in the rent-seeking schemes of the ruling elites. As a result, the meritocratic expectations of foreign service were substituted by unprofessional, mercantile and deferential values that rarely went beyond the commercial preferences of the powerful elites.

### *Conclusion*

The retrospective scrutiny of the development of Kyrgyz foreign policy demonstrates that the general conception of the multivector orientation of the republic and its real implementation has not run in parallel. Kyrgyzstan is a weak state with low economic capacity, ineffective state institutions and growing external debt. The failure of the Western economic reforms and rapid impoverishment of the republic under Akayev predetermined the place of Kyrgyzstan in the regional geopolitical system of axes. Surrounded by powerful and ambitious neighbours, Kyrgyzstan was not in the position to develop strong foreign policy orientations. As a result, Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy was often erratic and fragmentary (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic,

interview, 23 December 2013). As Leonid Bondarets (n.d.) emphasised, “Today [Kyrgyz foreign policy] was oriented towards one side, tomorrow – towards another.” Instead of bridging the East and the West, Kyrgyzstan was fluctuating between the East and the West. Multivector approach of seeking support from different and often contradictory actors resembled international beggary. The prevailing political discourses attributed bandwagoning behaviour of Kyrgyzstan to systemic constraints, which runs in line with the reductionist and great power frameworks of analysis. Dependency of Kyrgyzstan on other actors was often justified by the idea that small and weak states are more prone to external influences, since even stronger and more powerful countries cannot always implement independent foreign policy (Beshimov, 2007; Karabayev, 2012; Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012).

However, these developments were not only related to systemic weaknesses of the country, but were also rooted to the autocratic and rent-seeking regimes that flourished in the country. Accustomed to grants, loans and international financial aid, the priorities of the ruling governments have rarely gone beyond the commercial preferences of the ruling elites (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). To justify opportunistic and mercantile deviations of the Kyrgyz foreign policy, the Kyrgyz leadership used official and unofficial foreign policy discourses. The concept of multivector foreign policy appeared to be a mere act of state performance aimed at reproducing the predominant order. As a result, Kyrgyzstan continued its fluctuations between different power poles notwithstanding the proclamations by Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev to bridge the East and the West and run a multifaceted foreign policy. Despite being a career diplomat, Roza Otunbayeva also had little opportunity and power to re-formulate the country’s foreign policy. Apart from a few cases when the Kyrgyz policymakers were guided by national interests, the leadership of Kyrgyzstan has mostly exploited the space for the so-called foreign policy manoeuvring in its own mercantile and regime security interests.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Military Security and Foreign Policy*

Central Asia is one of those parts of the world that presents a variety of empirical puzzles to explore. One such conundrum is related to the nature of security institutions in the region. Why do security services in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan emphatically protect the ruling regimes from any political challenges and civil unrests? Why, on the contrary, are the security forces of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan unwilling to be bound to a particular regime? Why did the incorporation of security structures into the rent-seeking schemes in Kyrgyzstan fail to create a strong state security apparatus, like in Uzbekistan? In a similar vein, why has the fragmentation of the security services of Kyrgyzstan not led to civil war, as in Tajikistan? The multitude of questions reveals the complicated nature of the security landscape in the region. In this respect, this chapter on military security in Kyrgyzstan seeks not only to contribute to the understanding of foreign policies of weak states, but also to open the avenue for further research of political instability in weak and failed states.

Since the first two chapters situated the argument of this thesis within broader debates of IR and political science, whilst Chapter III introduced Kyrgyzstan as an empirical referent, this chapter seeks to further explore the schism between the domestic and international dimensions of state and regime security in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, Chapter IV will test the hypothesis of this thesis vis-à-vis the politics of bandwagoning and state performance. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter will provide a retrospective overview of the development of the Kyrgyz army. The subsequent three parts will explore military cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with Russia, China and the USA, within the frameworks of the CSTO, the SCO and the NATO respectively. The fifth section will scrutinise the role of Kyrgyzstan's security structures and its military partners during the ethnic violence of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan. The last section will examine the role of Kyrgyz internal security forces in maintaining the primacy of regime security. In sum, this chapter

will reveal that the regimes of Akayev and Bakiyev performed the acts of virtual politics through the participation in regional military structures in order to accommodate the ambitions of regional hegemony and to sustain their own monopoly of violence within Kyrgyzstan. The outcomes of state *dramaturgia* became evident during the tenure of Otunbayeva, when the Kyrgyz leadership found itself in a situation of international abandonment and when the new regime had to rely on the military structures it had no trust in.

### *Kyrgyz Army at a Glance*

Despite the plethora of the Kyrgyz folklore about mighty heroes and valiant warriors, modern Kyrgyzstan is the least militarized state in Central Asia (Olcott, 1996: 110). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the army of the Kyrgyz Republic has been in a permanent condition of turmoil and doom. Spending less than 1% of its GDP on defence, the leadership of Kyrgyzstan has always perceived the Kyrgyz army as a necessary attribute of statehood, but never beyond that conceptualization (Kamilov, 2005: 57). The modern Kyrgyz army and air force consists of 8,500 and 2,400 troops respectively, whilst Kyrgyz paramilitary amounts to 9,500 units (IISS, 2013: 223). The composition of the Kyrgyz army includes one Special Forces brigade, two motor rifle brigades, one mountain motor rifle brigade, one artillery brigade and one air defence brigade (IISS, 2013: 223). The air force consists of one regiment with L-39 Albatros, one aviation regiment with MiG-21 Fishbed, An-2 Colt and An-26 Curl, one regiment with Mi-24 Hind and Mi-8 Hip, and few regiments with S-125 Pechora and S-75 Dvina (IISS, 2013: 223). Paramilitary includes 5,000 border guards, 3,500 interior troops and 1,000 national guards (IISS, 2013: 223).

The core of the Kyrgyz army originates from the forces of the former Turkestan military district, which was dissolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On June 1, 1992, when the Kremlin discontinued financial support to the CIS troops, the Kyrgyz leadership announced the nationalisation of all serving personnel and military hardware located on the Kyrgyz territory (Olcott, 1996: 110). Major-General Dzhanybek Umetaliyev, the head of the newly established Defence State

Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, took under his jurisdiction the residuary forces of the Turkestan Military District. In 1993, the Defence State Committee has been transformed into the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic. Initially, nearly 15,000 soldiers were serving in the Kyrgyz army in the early 1990s (Olcott, 1996: 110). However, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the military personnel of Russian ethnicity began to repatriate to Russia (Olcott, 1996: 110). In turn, nearly 2,000 Kyrgyz officers returned to Kyrgyzstan (Olcott, 1996: 111).

From the very first days of independence, president Akayev has been promoting multivector tilt of the Kyrgyz foreign policy, claiming Kyrgyzstan had no external state enemies. Due to this political course and poor military capacity of the republic the use of military power has never been on the agenda of the Kyrgyz government as a means to achieve foreign policy goals (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013). Furthermore, during the August putsch of 1991, prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, president Akayev openly condemned the actions of the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP). On the contrary, the military elites of Soviet Kyrgyzstan sympathised to the goals of the putschists. Asankulov, the head of the Kyrgyz KGB at that time, advised Akayev and his Minister of Interior Affairs Felix Kulov of possible repercussions if they would not support GKChP, whilst military helicopters repeatedly simulated the missile attacks of the presidential palace (Klimentov, 2000). In turn, the Ministry of Interior Affairs blocked the military cantonments and KGB offices (Klimentov, 2000). Only when the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Soviet Kyrgyzstan fully expressed its support to Akayev, the defence establishment acquiesced with Akayev's pro-independence inclinations (Marcus, 2002: 125-126). Although this evidence on its own is a "straw-in-the-wind", it still acts as a promising lead to understand Akayev's decision-making rationale.

Thus, when Kyrgyzstan proclaimed its independence, Akayev was reluctant to rely on military elites (Marcus, 2002). Akayev claimed that newly established Kyrgyzstan had no external enemies to have a strong military, whilst in reality the president was more concerned with the anti-independence sentiments within the

Ministry of Defence (Marcus, 2002: 126). As a result, the allocated budget for the ministry was scarce, whilst all military equipment was the Soviet remnants (Marcus, 2002: 126). In 1997, Akayev further cut the number of military personnel to retain only a symbolic number of the National Guards (Marat, 2010: 70).

From its inception the Ministry of Defence was itself constantly at centre of various resonant corruption scandals, mostly related to the sale of valuable equipment and hardware, such as the offloading of the majority of Kyrgyz MI-24 helicopters to China (Marcus, 2002: 126). The reputation of the army was low as well. Small wages of the military personnel along with the persistent problems of hazing in the army transformed the service in the Kyrgyz armed forces from prestigious to completely unattractive. The military service became the fate of the rural youth, who could not afford to go to the university with the military classes or were unable to bribe off the defence officials. In addition to low morale in the army, the level of the combat training was also extremely poor, which was resultant mostly from the insufficient funding. The army leadership suffered from the lack of the competent and professional cadres. Promotions of the military personnel were often conducted on the basis of loyalty and clan attribution, producing a cohort of “ceremonial queens” who had diverse ranks and privileges, but no field expertise.

The repercussions of Akayev’s military reforms became apparent when the extremists of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) invaded the south of the republic in August 1999 and 2000. Several hundred guerrillas of the Namangani group wreaked havoc in the Batken region, terrorizing the locals and taking hostages, amongst which were Japanese geologists and high-ranking Kyrgyz officials. Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic (interview, 14 December 2013) stated that most likely the number of the Namangani guerrillas has not exceeded 60-70 units and was deliberately exaggerated by the Ministry of Defence to hide the doomed situation in the Kyrgyz armed forces. In total, nearly 60 people died from the Kyrgyz side during the clashes with the IMU guerrillas in 1999 and 2000. The Batken events exposed serious problems that existed in the military and security structures of Kyrgyzstan,

especially the lack of field training and necessary munitions. Most of the Kyrgyz military officers had Soviet training based on the World War II scenarios and knew how to operate an infantry platoon or a tank company on the plains or in the forests, but had no expertise of dealing with mobile groups of enemies in the mountainous areas (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013). Philipp Shishkin (2013:18) stresses the poor condition of the Kyrgyz army by quoting a Kyrgyz soldier, whose battalion had a mission to pursue the Islamic extremists, “[We] spent half a day chasing after mountain goat, and finally we bagged three of them. We ate them immediately.” Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic (interview, 14 December 2013) himself recalled that they had no means of communication on the ground and had to risk their lives for the salary of 30 USD per month. However, not only were the Ministry of Defence, the Border Guards and the Ministry of Interior Affairs unprepared to repel the extremist incursions, but Akayev and his government under Amangeldy Muraliyev also demonstrated short-sightedness and incompetence in dealing with Namangani’s guerrillas and negotiating the release of hostages. For instance, during the first Islamist incursion Akayev remained on holiday leave at his Cholpon-Ata resort residence, whilst his government had to pay 50,000 USD to the guerrillas to release four local hostages (Omuraliev and Elebayeva, 2000). To release four Japanese geologists, members of the Parliament, Tursunbai Bakir Uulu and Bayaman Erkinbayev, personally visited Hait village in Tajikistan to meet Juma Namangani and purportedly deliver him the ransom (Amin, 2012).<sup>36</sup>

The Batken crisis has led Akayev to reconsider his perceptions of the role of the army in national and regime security. As Erica Marat (2010) emphasises, after the Batken events Akayev has significantly increased the financing of state defence, enlarging the troops and revisiting “his cadre politics”. The military budget was increased from 14 million USD in 1999 to 24 million USD in 2000 and to 30 million

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<sup>36</sup> According to Western diplomats, the Japanese government secretly transferred two to six millions USD to the Kyrgyz officials to release its citizens (Rashid, 2002). Tursunbai Bakir Uulu, however, asserted that the Tajik and Kyrgyz officials have produced a fake footage of the hostage release to the Japanese government and have split between themselves a 3 million USD ransom received from the Japanese ambassador (Ozodagon, 2013).

in 2001 (Marcus, 2002: 127). The Security Council of Kyrgyzstan has also adopted the Kyrgyz military doctrine endorsed in May 2002 (Ministry of Defence, n.d.). Before that doctrine, the Ministry of Defence was guided by the National Security Strategy document, which copied the Soviet understanding of security threats and military strategy (Marat, 2010: 70). The new doctrine of 2002 aimed at reforming the Kyrgyz army and creating small mobile units based on the contractual conscriptions (Ministry of Defense, n.d.). The proposed reforms also included the creation of Border Guard Forces, Rapid Reaction Forces and Immediate Reaction Forces (Marat, 2010: 71). The doctrine sought to establish a better control of military spending and administration and outlined that external financing should be pursued via bilateral and multilateral cooperation (Marat, 2010: 71). Both the NATO and the CSTO were perceived as favoured platforms for the collaboration (Marat, 2010: 71). The new doctrine, however, had rather envisaged a document that loosely outlined the rationale of the army and military planning (Marat, 2010: 71). The doctrine had a declarative nature without determining the directions of the military development and the mechanisms of military policy realization (Kamilov, 2005: 57). The reforms have been widely criticized, whilst most military decision-making was executed on an ad hoc basis (Marat, 2010: 71).

The March revolution of 2005 and the ousting of Akayev appeared to be a promising momentum to change the prevailing dynamics within the Ministry of Defence. Bakiyev appointed Ismail Isakov as the Minister of Defence to augment the internal morale of the army (Marat, 2010: 72). Isakov was an outspoken critic of Akayev, his military reforms and the actions of the army leadership during the Batken events. Portraying himself as a champion of people's interests, Isakov has prioritized the solution of social problems in the army. For the first time in the history of Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of Defence began the construction of housing for the military personnel, and already in the period from 2005 to 2007 nearly 140 officers moved into new homes (Mikhailov, 2010). The period of conscription was also shortened from 18 to 12 months, whilst the draftees could have undergone an alternative two-year service. In addition, in 2006, Air Defence Forces have been established in the country, along with the introduction of the Kyrgyz language into

the clerical work of the Ministry. However, Bakiyev continued to reshuffle his cabinet of ministers, as president's popularity was steadily falling. Bakiyev dismissed Isakov from the ministerial position, but appointed him as the Secretary of the Security Council to prevent the authoritative general from joining the opposition. Isakov's successor Bakytbek Kalyev has switched the social focus of the military reforms to the actual combat readiness. The focus of the ministry was again on the contractual conscriptions, the creation of mobile units and the establishment of a new centre to combat terrorism and illegal armed groupings. Also, in 2008 the Kyrgyz Parliament began to develop a new draft of the military doctrine. Nonetheless, the appointment of Kalyev was rather related to a difficult political situation in the country. The increasing grievances within the society and the strengthening of the political opposition forced Bakiyev to appoint most loyal to his regime to the key governmental positions, such as Kalyev to the Ministry of Defence or Janysh Bakiyev, his younger brother, as the Head of the State Security Service. The reshuffling of the security cadres has not prevented the unification of the opposition and the popular uprising against the authoritarian rule of Bakiyev in April 2010.

Ironically, Interim President Otunbayeva occupied the building of the Ministry of Defence as her temporary residence during the April events of 2010. However, under Otunbayeva there were no significant strategic changes within the Ministry of Defence, apart from the delegation of some functions of the dissolved State Security Service to the Ministry of Defence. The ousting of Bakiyev has led to several resonant legal cases against his entourage, including a few high ranking officials in the Ministry of Defence. However, the new Ministry of Defence and Isakov, the then-acting Minister of Defence at the post-revolutionary Interim Government, became themselves the focus of different investigations. In the aftermath of the Bakiyev flight, the clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks broke out in Osh and Jalal-Abad on June 10, 2010. Four days of violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan left nearly 420 dead and thousands injured and displaced. Several national and international investigations, including the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission (KIC) led by Kimmo Kiljunen of the OSCE Parliamentary

Assembly, attempted to establish the causes and chronology of events, whilst determining responsibilities and proposing recommendations on conflict prevention, reconciliation and accountability.<sup>37</sup> The Ministry of Defence was one of the most exposed to the criticisms and public scrutiny. The army troops not only lacked sufficient equipment, but also necessary training to use non-lethal force in situations of violent civil disorder as prescribed by the State of Emergency Organic Act 2003 (KIC, 2011). It appeared that the Ministry of Defence was more preoccupied with the possible involvement of Uzbekistan in the conflict than with the prevention of mass unrest by all available means (KIC, 2011). Disturbing example of the Kyrgyz military unprofessionalism was the loss of military weapons, equipment and ammunition, including the surrender of armoured personnel carriers, some of which were later used by the mobs to break the barricades of the Uzbek mahallas. In addition, apart from the failure to intervene, some members of the army were accused of being directly involved in the attacks on Uzbek households (KIC, 2011). Accordingly, these accusations found no support amongst the ruling elites in Kyrgyzstan and were dismissed as groundless or biased.

In sum, from the onset of independence the Kyrgyz military was weak, poorly equipped and with low fighting capabilities. The army structure resembled its Soviet prototype, whilst its operative and fighting capacities were considerably low due to insufficient funding (Kamilov, 2005: 57-58). Since the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan had no financial resources to update its armament. As a result, nearly 50% of its military-technical equipment has become unusable (Kamilov, 2005: 57). The problems in the Kyrgyz military sector have been further exacerbated by the planned budget sequestration of 2012 (IISS, 2013). Kyrgyzstan with its core defence budget of 40 million USD depends mainly on foreign military donations

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<sup>37</sup> For instance, see Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission (2011) *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010*; Amnesty International (2012) *Kyrgyzstan: Dereliction of Duty*, London: Amnesty International Publications; Human Rights Watch (2010) *"Where Is the Justice?": Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and Its Aftermath*. USA: Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group (2012) *Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South*. Asia Report No 222, 29 March; International Federation for Human Rights (2010) *Kyrgyzstan: A Weak State, Political Instability: The Civil Society Caught Up In the Turmoil*. Melvin, N. (2011) *Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence*. Occasional Paper Series No. 3, New York: Open Society Foundations; National Commission of Inquiry.

and credits, but even targeted foreign aid and international security support programmes failed to improve the country's armed forces and tackle its perennial problems, such as endemic corruption, defence planning and unit cohesion (IISS, 2013: 212). In addition, in the early 1990s Akayev identified the military forces as a potential challenger to his authority, but throughout his rule Akayev's perception evolved to understand the army more as a symbolic attribute of statehood. Akayev exploited the participation of Kyrgyzstan in regional security structures as the showcase of his allegiance to certain players in order to gain favourable predispositions. However, during the Batken events of 1999 the ruling elites found themselves in a situation, where national security and integrity of the country have become incremental to their grip on power. Being incapable of repelling the extremist incursion, Akayev's government went as far as paying off the Namangani extremists with hope that the IMU Islamists would continue its march to Uzbekistan without any prolonged stays in Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless, even after the second invasion of the extremists to Batken in 2000 the Kyrgyz leadership has been confident of the absence of threats to the Kyrgyz statehood from beyond. In a similar vein, Bakiyev's engagement with regional military structures resembled an attempt to perform virtual politics in order to sustain his monopoly of violence within the state. The empirical evidence demonstrated that neither the national army nor the forces of the CSTO, the SCO or the NATO were ready to protect the integrity of the republic during the Batken events or the established governing arrangements during the March events of 2005 and the April events of 2010. In this respect, the ethnic violence of June 2010 served as the vivid example of the non-committal nature of bilateral and multilateral security arrangements.

### *Russia and the CSTO*

Military cooperation with the Central Asian states was important for Moscow to ensure its leading role in the region amidst the growing presence of other actors in the area. The empirical evidence demonstrated that in reality however neither Russia nor Russian-led military institutions were willing and capable of defending the integrity of Kyrgyzstan despite the Russian reassurance to protect the Kyrgyz republic against external extremist threats. Nonetheless, for the Kyrgyz ruling

elites, bilateral and multilateral military cooperation with Russia was an opportunity to accommodate the ambitions of the regional hegemon in order to mitigate any challenges to their rule by Moscow. Participation in the CSTO treaties and military drills appeared to be the acts of *dramaturgiia* performed by the Kyrgyz leaders to express their virtual allegiance to the Kremlin. The Kyrgyz leaders have learned to play on the Russian sentiments of great empire to foster their own legitimacy and to project the symbols of Kyrgyzstan's statehood, sovereignty and independence within and beyond.

Russia has always been perceived as the most natural and reliable guarantor of security in Central Asia. As part of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan partook in the defeat of fascism during World War II and jointly, with other fourteen socialist republics, lost the Cold War to the USA. Respectively, the general security discourses of the early 1990s in Kyrgyzstan were sympathetic to the alliance with Russia. At that time the Kyrgyz generalship believed that Russia was the only real military partner of Kyrgyzstan, whereas the North Atlantic counterparts were feeding "the fairytales" to Kyrgyz leadership to further disintegrate the remnants of the Soviet Union (Anonymous, Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 16 December 2013). As former officer of the Ministry of Defence of Kyrgyzstan Taalaibek Usubaliyev (Former Representative of Kyrgyzstan to NATO, interview, 18 December 2013) emphasised, participation of Kyrgyzstan in the Russian-led collective security system was important for national security of the republic, since the Soviet Union has no longer existed.

Indeed, in contrast to economic assistance, Moscow had more to offer to Kyrgyzstan in the field of security and military cooperation. Although the Kremlin was reluctant to send its troops for service to Central Asia, Russia remained the key supplier of weaponry and hardware to Kyrgyzstan (Marcus, 2002: 135). The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) appeared to be the most favourable platform for the military cooperation with Russia. Out of all diverse efforts in the post-Soviet space to create a collective security system, the CSTO was the only integrating structure with a precise military dimension (Rozanov and

Dovgan, 2010). The CSTO started as the Collective Security Treaty (CST) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Initially, the CST was signed on May 15, 1992, by Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Armenia with the idea that “[i]f one of the Member States undergoes aggression (armed attack menacing to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty), it will be considered by the Member States as aggression ... to all the Member States of this Treaty” (CST, 1992). Later Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus joined the treaty, which came into effect in 1994. In 1999, only six member-states signed an extension of the CST protocol, since Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan preferred to join the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development instead.

The Batken events, however, served as “smoking-gun” evidence, which underlined that the CST rather resembled a symbolic organization, whose mission was to further facilitate “a civil divorce” of the former Soviet member-states. Its collective security system proved to be ineffective, whereas Article 4, which ensured collective security against external threats, has never been exercised (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013). To initiate a military action there was a need for the approval of such action by all member-states, which could not happen quickly due to institutional problems of the CST and internal political bargaining processes (Yalovkina, 2013). As Toktogul Kakchekeyev emphasized, all member-states deliberately agreed to create a series of institutional mechanisms to limit the possibility of the interference of this regional organization into domestic affairs of each member-state, when the CST was signed (Shuvalov, 2013). Thus, at that time, the Russian-led institution was not considered seriously as a strong and effective regional security structure by the Central Asian military elites (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013).

Accordingly, reassessing the CST failures in Batken at the Minsk session of 2000, the CST member-states adopted a broader package of documents and decisions

to ensure that there were practical mechanisms of providing timely support to the member-states in crisis situations (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 10-11). The creation of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) was one of those practical steps agreed by the member-states at the Bishkek meeting in October 2000, whereas this decision was finalised at the Yerevan meeting in 2001 (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010). The CRDF consisted of 1,500 personnel, including Russian tactical and communications battalions, a Tajik assault battalion, a Kyrgyz infantry battalion and a Kazakh attack battalion, and its main purpose was to ward off external extremist aggression (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 13; Tolipov, 2009). By 2005, the CRDF consisted of 4,000 personnel and 10 battalions, ready to be mobilized by the first call of the CSTO leadership (CSTO, 2005). The incursion of the Islamists also encouraged Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to offer units for the joint command-and-staff exercise CIS Southern Shield-99 and CIS Southern Shield-2000 (Allison, 2001: 228). These exercises were one of the largest held in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as they involved combat training and interaction of armed forces, border guards, interior troops and security services (Allison, 2001: 228).

On October 7, 2002, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia transformed the CST into the CSTO. The goal of the CSTO was “to continue and increase the close and all-round allied relations in foreign policy, military and technical areas, as well as in the sphere of counteraction to the transnational challenges and menaces to the safety of states and peoples” (Charter of the CSTO, 2002). On June 23, 2005, at the Moscow session, the presidents of the CSTO member-states endorsed the Plan for Coalition Military Formation and the agreements on intergovernmental cooperation and development of collective security system (CSTO, n.d.; Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 16). The presidents also agreed to transfer the Interstate Commission of Military-Economic Cooperation into the CSTO framework (CSTO, n.d.; Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 16). In June 2007, Kyrgyzstan assumed the rotating presidency at the CSTO. On October 6, 2007, the leaders of the CSTO decided to create joint peacekeeping forces at the CSTO Dushanbe session. The member-states agreed to collectively

deploy military, police or civilian personnel to prevent or terminate military actions within or between the states in case of a third party intervention (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 61). At the same session in Dushanbe, the leaders of the CSTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the SCO, which outlined avenues of security cooperation between two organisations. Moreover, on February 4, 2009, the presidents of the CSTO member-states agreed to create Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF), the purpose of which was to repel military aggressions against the CSTO member-states and combat terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational organised crime (CSTO, n.d.). The CRRF were divided into two components – contingents of mobile armed forces and contingents of special purpose forces – and amounted to nearly 18,000 personnel in total (Rozanov and Dovgan, 2010: 62).

Nonetheless, despite the reassuring rhetoric the CST organisation continued to represent a mere artefact of the Cold War. The restructuring or rather the renaming of the organisation from the CST into the CSTO had little impact on the real provision of security to its member-states. The CSTO's pledge of collective security resembled a self-complacent mythical vow directed at bolstering legitimacy of the ruling regimes of the CSTO countries within and beyond their borders. Based on the Warsaw Pact, the CSTO was not initially equipped to deal with the threats, such as Islamic radicalism, and represented more a geopolitical organisation aimed at demonstrating Russian ambitions and power. The vantage of the large command-and-staff exercises was very questionable, since there was little utility of the dinosaurian military drills with the use of heavy artillery in the context of the newly emerging threats in Central Asia. A small number of Kyrgyz soldiers and officers engaged in the CSTO military exercises also casted doubts on the importance of Kyrgyzstan in those trainings. For instance, Kyrgyzstan has delegated 30 soldiers to the CSTO's 7000-soldier military exercise Interaction-2009. The opening of a Russian military air base in Kant in 2003 was a significant breakthrough for the Kyrgyz-CSTO relations, especially taking into account that the Kant base has become the first Russian military installation abroad since the collapse of the USSR. The initial goal of the base was to support the CRDF of the

CSTO. However, the aircrafts and hardware transferred to Kant were not fully operational to provide necessary support to the CRDF (Anonymous, Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 16 December 2013). The limited capacity of the Russian military weaponry reflected the general situation in the Russian armed forces. Equipped to engage in large-scale conventional battles, the Russian army turned out to be incapable of dealing successfully with the low-intensity conflicts that involved non-state actors, terrorist groups and partisan tactics like in Chechnya.

However, from the onset of independence Kyrgyzstan remained committed to the Russian-led military frameworks. The Kyrgyz leadership has never distanced itself from the CSTO despite its apparent lack of effectiveness and structural flaws. Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic (interview, 16 December 2013) argued that there were practical benefits for Kyrgyzstan from the CSTO memberships. The CSTO military drills and trainings were useful in enhancing knowledge, skills and expertise of the Kyrgyz officers and soldiers who had to maintain combat readiness (Anonymous, Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 16 December 2013). In addition, although there was no cash support from Russia, Moscow was willing to provide assistance in terms of hardware and qualification training to Kyrgyzstan (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013).

Nonetheless, the real commitment of the Kyrgyz leadership to the CSTO can be explained through the acts of virtual politics. The “straw-in-the-wind” clues favour the hypothesis that regime security could have impacted Kyrgyzstan’s engagement with the Moscow-led military organisations. The CSTO and its drills resembled a multistage theatrical performance from Russia to persuade the Western audience of Russian omnipotence and from the CSTO member-states like Kyrgyzstan to demonstrate their bandwagoning attitudes to Russia. The latter performance has been conducted by the Central Asian states to minimise the engagement of powerful Russia into the domestic affairs of its neighbours.

In addition, Russia was a convenient actor to play virtual politics with, since Russia with its concept of sovereign democracy was not demanding democratic transformations from Kyrgyzstan, unlike its Western counterparts. These arrangements explain why the Kyrgyz leadership used to send even a small contingent of forces to the joint military drills. The actual presence of the Kyrgyz troops at such events was more important than the quality of the delegation. Also, the engagement of Kyrgyzstan in military exercise accentuated Kyrgyzstan's statehood and sovereignty, which were important for the projection of legitimacy of the Kyrgyz ruling regimes.

Taking into account the relative weakness of Moscow in the period from the early 1990s to the late 2000s, such acts of *dramaturgiia* were conducive to both virtual patron Russia and virtual client Kyrgyzstan. Diagnostic evidence suggests that Russia was wishing for leadership in Central Asia without any obligations, whilst Bishkek was wishing for Russian obligations without Russian leadership. In addition, circumstantial evidence indicates that neither Akayev nor Bakiyev should have expected Russia to protect their regimes. For instance, the Batken events exposed institutional flaws of the CSTO and the unwillingness of Kremlin to engage directly in the military conflicts in Central Asia. However, Akayev continued military cooperation within the framework of the CSTO despite its failure to ward off Islamic extremists. In a similar vein, Bakiyev should have realised that the CSTO would not interfere in Kyrgyzstan to protect Bakiyev's regime based on the experience of Akayev. On the contrary, there were more chances that the CSTO would support the opposition leaders after the Kremlin's expression of the vote of no confidence to Bakiyev and his family ruling in late 2009.<sup>38</sup> In turn, Kyrgyzstan's call for the Russian military engagement in June 2010 was rather an act of despair and powerlessness by Otunbayeva's government to stop the violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan, which also failed to translate into concrete actions from Russia.

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<sup>38</sup> In the alleged phone conversation between Maksim and Janysh Bakiyev, secretly recorded by unknown intelligence services after the April events of 2010, two powerful relatives of the ousted president discussed the scenario of potential Russian interference to protect the Interim Government in case of counterrevolution.

Practically, military cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with Russia did not represent the classical patterns of weak states' behaviour, because the rationale of Kyrgyzstan's bandwagoning was attributed to the security of the ruling regimes. The "straw-in-the-wind" clues indicate that the Kyrgyz leadership performed virtual politics and projected the symbols of statehood to ensure the accommodation of Russian ambitions whilst protecting its own interests.

### *China and the SCO*

Since the general discourse of the Kyrgyz leadership towards China was more of a caution and fear, Kyrgyzstan preferred to develop military relations with Beijing via the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Such arrangements provided some sort of leverage to the Kyrgyz ruling elites over powerful neighbour, because the engagement of Russia ensured that China would need to deal with Moscow in case Beijing decides to expand its presence in Central Asia. In addition, the ambitions of Russia were also accommodated within this framework. Thus, Bishkek was willing to extend its politics of state performance to China akin to its military cooperation with Russia.

The SCO was initially established in 1996 as the Shanghai Five to set the framework for strategic cooperation on matters related to security on border regions between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia and China. In 2001, the leaders of these states decided to reformulate the goals of the organization and expand its scope of activities to include political, economic and military cooperation. Uzbekistan also agreed to join this club, and on June 15, 2001, the SCO was created. As a result, the Kyrgyz leadership received another reassurance, now from China, against external extremist threats, which was yet to be tested.

Nonetheless, China began to provide military assistance to Kyrgyzstan, although not as part of the SCO, but rather on ad hoc bilateral basis (Allison, 2004: 479). For instance, after the incursions of the extremists to Kyrgyzstan, China provided 600,000 USD worth of aid, such as tents and military gear to the Kyrgyz Republic

(Marcus, 2002: 135). In 2004, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) was established as the permanent entity of the SCO. The objective of the RATS was to promote further cooperation between the member-states to fight extremism, terrorism and separatism (Lukin and Mochulskyi, 2005: 20). In August 2005, Kyrgyzstan participated as an observer in Peace Mission 2005, a joint counter-terrorism military exercise between Russia and China, which involved nearly 10,000 troops and heavy firepower. In August 2007, Kyrgyzstan became involved as a full-fledged participant in Peace Mission 2007, which was conducted under the aegis of the SCO. In March 2006, Kyrgyzstan participated in a joint anti-terror exercise of the SCO in Uzbekistan, whilst in May 2007 Kyrgyzstan hosted the SCO military exercise Issyk-Kul Antiterror 2007 (De Haas, 2007: 12). There were similar war games in 2009 and 2010, which involved several thousand troops, heavy infantry and air forces of the SCO member-states, but mostly those of Russia and China. In addition, at the Moscow session of 2002, the leaders of the CSTO expressed their readiness to collaborate with the SCO, and in October 2007 the SCO and the CSTO signed an agreement on security cooperation.

Although the goal of the organisation was to strengthen “good-neighbourly” relations between the member-states and maintain stability in the region, the SCO was immediately regarded by many analysts and policymakers as a potential balancing instrument of Russia and China to counter the American engagement in Central Asia. Yet, to date, this view of the SCO has not materialized. The organisation with the budget of 4 million USD was perceived just a little more powerful than a discussion forum (Olcott, 2006; Bykov, 2011). Military cooperation within the framework of the SCO also hardly moved beyond political discourses and non-lethal military assistance. Despite its potential the military component of the SCO cooperation remained least developed. The aid was delivered mostly on bilateral basis, whilst the quantity and quality of information about external threats shared by the Russian and Chinese counterparts was of limited nature (Anonymous, Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 16 December 2013). Beijing remained reluctant to get involved directly in the security matters of Central Asia, notwithstanding its concerns with Islamic

separatists in Xingjian. In addition, it was unclear whether the SCO could guarantee a security shield against the newly emerging threats in the region.

Nonetheless, despite the lack of significant material benefits to the country from the SCO membership Kyrgyzstan remained a full-fledged member of the organisation. As in the case of Kyrgyzstan's engagement with the CSTO, "straw-in-the-wind" evidence suggests that Kyrgyzstan's membership in the SCO can be explained through the prism of virtual politics. On one hand, such attributes as symbolic engagement of Kyrgyzstan in the war games or its insignificant contributions to the SCO budget resemble the state performances conducted by the Kyrgyz leadership to display the solvency of the republic. On the other hand, these developments also demonstrate the willingness of the Kyrgyz ruling elites to showcase their bandwagoning attitudes towards greater neighbours in order to turn such deferential positions into political currency. As Allison (2008b) emphasised, virtual regionalism was not about tangible achievements, but about reinforcing domestic regime security. Respectively, the SCO was a convenient structure for the Kyrgyz leadership to protect domestic governing arrangements by accommodating the ambitions of both Russia and China within one framework. Neither Russia nor China were interested in the radicalization of Central Asia and thus were willing to cooperate, even at the expense of their own strategic interests. In addition, whilst sharing the burden of security risks in the region, both Russia and China were not demanding democratic transformations from Kyrgyzstan, which was also conducive to the Kyrgyz acts of *dramaturgiia*. Alliance with autocratic neighbours decreased some pressures from Kyrgyz autocratic presidents, since the membership in the SCO provided certain legitimacy by association.

### *The USA and the NATO*

After being quite openly pushed away by Moscow in the early 1990s, the Kyrgyz leadership perceived the Western countries as the promising avenue for potential military cooperation. The US-led NATO bloc was more experienced in addressing the new emerging threats and was better equipped to engage in low-intensity conflicts. In addition, the rapprochement with the West seemed to be beneficial for

the Kyrgyz ruling regimes in terms of the financial package and political agenda. Although the Kyrgyz leaders were reluctant to be bound to any new big brother, they were willing to play the democratic card to produce beneficial outcomes (Olcott, 1996; Lewis, 2008).

In comparison to the activities of the CSTO and the SCO, military cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with the USA was not as plentiful. Kyrgyzstan started the dialogue with the NATO in 1992 within the framework of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, later renamed to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (NATO, 2012). In 1994 Kyrgyzstan joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, aimed at developing a partnership between individual Euro-Atlantic partners and the NATO in the military sphere according to the needs of the PfP participants (NATO, 2012). In 2007 Kyrgyzstan joined the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP), the NATO mechanism to assess the conditions and capabilities of the partner forces for their improvement and transformation (NATO, 2012). Nonetheless, initially there were no significant achievements within the NATO line. The leadership of Kyrgyzstan was wary of military cooperation with the NATO and thus was reluctant to fully commit to the PfP programme (Anonymous, Lieutenant Colonel of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 16 December 2013). For instance, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the NATO Chinghiz Aitmatov had to call Bakiyev several times to explain all advantages of the PARP, including additional financing, before the president eventually signed the agreement (Ormonbekov, Former Attaché at the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Kingdom of Belgium, Mission to the EU and NATO, interview, 5 December 2012).

Such actions of the Kyrgyz leadership could be explained both through the model of virtual politics and the American interest in Central Asia. Bishkek was intentionally stalling any advancement within this framework, whilst, for instance, Kazakhstan was actively exploring military cooperation with the NATO. Kyrgyzstan's cautious position towards the NATO was often justified by Moscow's irritation of the NATO enlargement (Anonymous, Former Officer of the Ministry of Defence of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 14 December 2013). In reality,

however, this occurrence was related to the willingness of the Kyrgyz leadership to express its virtual allegiance to the Kremlin, especially since there were no tangible benefits from the NATO cooperation. PfP membership did not provide security guarantees, and thus would not address significant external challenges to the security of its participating members, unlike the NATO membership (Jonson and Allison, 2001). The functions of the PfP programme were those of education, confidence building, preventive diplomacy and political consultation without any mechanisms of responding to violent conflicts (Jonson and Allison, 2001; Allison, 2001: 231). Despite its encouragement to create joint Central Asian battalion Centrasbat, the North Atlantic bloc remained uncertain about the practical assistance to the Central Asian states against the low-intensity threats (Allison, 2001: 232). In addition, the NATO member-states were reluctant to provide lethal weaponry to Kyrgyzstan, which the Kyrgyz leadership would have welcomed. For instance, following the IMU incursions Turkey and Germany provided aid to Kyrgyzstan to mitigate the repercussions of the conflict, which was expressed in the form of nonlethal support and included weather gear and military training (Marcus, 2002: 136).

However, the events of 9/11 provided an opportunity for the Kyrgyz leadership to bring the Kyrgyz-American security relations on to a qualitatively new level. Akayev utilized the American unipolar moment to develop closer ties with Washington without damaging its relationships with Moscow and Beijing. In December 2001 Kyrgyzstan's civilian Manas International Airport opened its runways to the American aircrafts as part of the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The Manas air base would become the focal point of the Kyrgyz-American cooperation throughout the governance of Bakiyev and Otunbayeva as well. The U.S. air base brought sizeable benefits to Akayev, as his inner circle managed to capture lucrative fuel supplies. The contribution to the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan also yielded American support to autocratic Akayev. Nonetheless, despite hosting coalition forces in Kyrgyzstan, Akayev still had to perform virtual politics to sustain his unpopular regime and attract international funding. Being portrayed as a reformist and a progressive liberal in

the West, Akayev camouflaged his regime security goals through the promotion of democratic governance and market-based economy.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the SCO was perceived more as a union of non-democratic countries, whilst the CSTO was regarded as an offspring of the Cold War. Respectively, closer cooperation with the NATO via the support of the US-led war against terrorism implied association of Akayev's regime with more advanced democratic states.

In a similar vein, Bakiyev exploited the American air base for his personal enrichment and to widen the financial channels to impoverished Kyrgyzstan. However, unlike Akayev, Bakiyev was less proactive in simulating democratic changes to boost his claims for legitimacy. Instead, Bakiyev's discourses gravitated more towards Russia and the CSTO. As a result, by playing his pro-Russian card, Bakiyev managed not only to increase significantly the annual rent for the air base, but also to capture the Pentagon's lucrative fuel contracts. The U.S. Department of Defence was keen to save its key logistic hub in Central Asia to the extent that Washington turned a blind eye on opaque fuel practices at the base. The Pentagon's position was that any misappropriation of funds by the Kyrgyz leadership was not in the American jurisdiction. Interim President Roza Otunbayeva would complain later that during Bakiyev's reign American Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller downplayed human rights violations in Kyrgyzstan, avoided meetings with the opposition and coddled with Bakiyev and his son to save the air base. Despite those criticisms the Manas air base remained the narrow focus of the American security agenda in Kyrgyzstan during the tenure of Otunbayeva, which was evident during the June events of 2010.

In sum, the Kyrgyz-American military cooperation was limited to the Manas air base as part of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom. Neither Bishkek nor Washington was interested in expanding their relations within the programme initiatives of the NATO such as PfP. Although the Kyrgyz leadership mimicked democratic reforms to the Western audience, this virtual politics have been

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<sup>39</sup> However, Ashirov (Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) suggested that early Akayev was different, as he did believe in democracy and the idea of building a new state based on the democratic principles.

conducted by the ruling elites in Kyrgyzstan on a permanent basis and without any particular ties to military and security agenda.

### *Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan*

The ethnic violence of June 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan serves as an infamous empirical referent to examine the weaknesses of the concept of an external security shield. None of the security structures and military partners was willing to interfere in Kyrgyzstan to stop the bloodshed between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Otunbayeva's government found itself in a situation of remarkable international abandonment. Even the Kremlin preferred to remain non-committal despite the prevailing claims that Kyrgyzstan was the Russian dominion. In turn, this occurrence proved that Kyrgyzstan was not a classic client state to Russia. In general, the June event of 2010 exposed that after nearly twenty years of practicing virtual politics the Kyrgyz leadership gained security guarantees from its partners, which were also virtual and did not translate into real currency.

On June 10, 2010, a clash between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks near the local casino sparked mass rioting across the city of Osh. The police and local security forces were unable to disperse aggressive crowds of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, as the situation was escalating at alarmingly extraordinary speed. The rumours of the rape at the Kyrgyz dormitory by the Uzbek gangs fostered mobilisation of the rural Kyrgyz who began to advance towards Osh, whilst the Uzbeks began to barricade their mahallas. In a very short stint, the violence, arson and rape poured into the streets of Osh, as the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks crowds clashed. In few hours, the ethnic violence quickly spread across the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions. The government declared the state of emergency and issued a shoot-to-kill policy to hinder the violence. However, the situation stabilised only on June 14, with sporadic acts of violence continuing throughout the following days. As a result, this conflict left nearly 470 people dead and thousands injured and displaced. Dissecting the course of the June events, various national and international investigations revealed that structural and contextual variables created pre-conditions for the outbreak of violence and its further escalation in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Amongst

these causes were the complex relationships between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities as an echo of the early 1990s, the rise of ethno-nationalism, the political vacuum after the ousting of Bakiyev, the fragility of the state institutions and the weak rule of law, to name a few. Some investigations, including the conclusions of the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission (KIC), stressed that the Interim Government was also responsible for the bloodshed, since the post-revolutionary leaders have been either preoccupied with power and asset re-division at the expense of inter-ethnic policy or have not adequately responded to the outburst of violence in the south.

The June bloodshed posed a significant challenge not only to the governing arrangements of the ruling elites, but also to the integrity of the republic in general. Security shield, which Kyrgyz presidents have long sought from abroad, proved to be once again an elusive concept, effective mostly on paper. When the magnitude of the conflict escalated to the extreme, Otunbayeva decided to call for international intervention to stop the violence. Russia appeared to be the most natural partner to request humanitarian intervention.<sup>40</sup> Otunbayeva spoke personally to both Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin urging them to initiate a peacekeeping operation to Kyrgyzstan. At that time, not only Kyrgyzstan, but the international community as well was expecting Russian interference (Matveeva, Former Head of the Research Secretariat of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, interview, 31 May 2013). In fact, there were no legal and logistical obstacles for the initiation of the Russian peacekeeping operation (Matveeva, 2011). Moscow could have used Otunbayeva's official invitation as the legal basis for intervention to mobilise the troops from its base in neighbouring Tajikistan, where the Russian 201<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Division was stationed (Matveeva, 2011: 9-10). In addition, there was a CSTO air base in Kant, which was reinforced by the Russian airborne assault brigade. However, the Russian side decided to remain non-committal by qualifying the events in Kyrgyzstan as an internal matter of the republic (Matveeva, 2011: 9). Without clear endorsement signals from the international community, and fearing the repetition of adverse publicity and international isolationism akin to

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<sup>40</sup> Few months prior to the June conflict of 2010 Kremlin expressed support to the Interim Government, since the new regime appeared to be more convenient to Moscow.

those that followed after the Russian intervention in South Ossetia, Moscow preferred to concentrate on the post-humanitarian relief measures (Matveeva, 2011).

To the disappointment of the Interim Government, similar dynamics prevailed both within the CSTO and the SCO. The peacekeeping operation could have become an excellent opportunity for the CSTO to demonstrate its effectiveness and viability. The Russian-led international operation, consisting of international and Central Asian troops, was an appealing option to deploy in order to mitigate adverse effects within and beyond Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless, the member-states of the CSTO turned out to be reluctant to commit their troops for the military engagement in the neighbouring country. As President of Belarus Lukashenko lamented, "What sort of organization is this one, if there is bloodshed in one of our member states and an anti-constitutional coup d'état takes place, and this body keeps silent?" (Makhovsky, 2010). In this context, the engagement of the SCO was not even seriously considered, since the repercussions of the intervention were perceived to outweigh the benefits both for Russia and China (Matveeva, 2011). Predictably, the regional cooperation, including the contribution of Kazakhstan, which chaired the OSCE at that time, was also of limited nature, although Uzbekistan responded to the refugee crisis with caution, but efficiently (Matveeva, 2011).

In the absence of the Russian involvement, the rest of the international community preferred to remain reticent regarding possible humanitarian intervention. Washington, with its narrow political focus on the Manas air base, was equally unprepared and unwilling to intervene in Kyrgyzstan, notwithstanding its open support to the Interim Government's initiatives to reform the political system of the country (Melvin, 2011: 37). For instance, when Elmira Ibragimova of the Interim Government asked the U.S. Ambassador to provide at least the armoured jeeps to deliver ambulance crews, the American side refuted this request due to some legal reasons (Matveeva, Former Head of the Research Secretariat of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, interview, 31 May 2013). In reality, akin to Russia, the USA

was more concerned with the adverse publicity and misinterpretation of its actions by Russia and China. As a result, even when the Americans decided to fly humanitarian supplies to Osh, they hired the Russian transport airplanes and flew them as the Russian humanitarian aid (Matveeva, Former Head of the Research Secretariat of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, interview, 31 May 2013).

In a similar vein, the engagement of the UN and the OSCE was limited to the post-conflict humanitarian aid. Both the UN and the OSCE lacked a non-Russian-based peacekeeping strategy and ground capacities for intervention (Matveeva, 2011: 13). There were no attempts of transforming the OSCE Office in Kyrgyzstan into the operational platform for joint cooperation between the USA, EU, and Russia (Matveeva, 2011: 9). Consequently, when the violence broke out and the Kyrgyz government, along with the warring parties, appealed for international involvement, the OSCE found itself incapable of neither launching a peace operation during the conflict nor serving as a post-conflict stabilizer with its mandate, capacity and primary responsibilities for conflict prevention and management (Melvin, 2011: 35). The High Commissioner on National Minorities released a formal early warning only two days after the eruption of the violence, whilst the decision to deploy a modest police unit to the region, which was eventually rejected by the Kyrgyz party, was agreed after considerable discussions and significant “watered down” amendments (Melvin, 2011: 36). It appeared that the International Committee of the Red Cross was the only organization that was deploying its staff to the zone of conflict, whilst other international actors were, on the contrary, preoccupied by the evacuation of their personnel from southern Kyrgyzstan (Matveeva, 2011: 14). In general, the international community proved to be both unwilling and incapable of effectively responding to the outbreak of violence.

In sum, all bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, which Kyrgyzstan was committed to, appeared to be of discursive nature. Otunbayeva and her Interim Government found themselves in a situation of international abandonment. International actors and partners were both unprepared and unwilling to stop the ethnic bloodshed despite the threat of Kyrgyzstan’s failure as a state. Although the

violence itself lasted for four days, its repercussions will be imprinted for years to come. Ultimately, however, one of the lessons to learn for the new leadership of Kyrgyzstan should be whether to continue virtual politics of security cooperation or not.

### *Internal Security Services*

Unlike the army, the internal security services are instrumental in supporting the ruling elites and governing arrangements in Kyrgyzstan. The fact that the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Kyrgyzstan is much stronger than the Kyrgyz military forces itself predicated the primacy of regime security in the republic. Yet, it is difficult to isolate the strengthening of the interior security troops as the sole variable responsible for the Kyrgyz foreign policy decision-making. Internal security services are part of the basic regime survival strategy, which is not the matter of foreign policy. Nonetheless, the physical survival of the ruling regime is important for the understanding of a larger constellation that takes into account systemic constraints, rent-seeking and virtual politics as the driving force of Kyrgyzstan's international behaviour.

As discussed in the previous sections, from the early 1990s the Kyrgyz leadership was least preoccupied with external threats, even after the invasion of Islamic extremists to Batken. Nevertheless, security from internal threats was constantly on the agenda of the then-presidents. After the dissolution of the USSR the leadership of Kyrgyzstan retained all security structures established during the Soviet Union. However, these institutions were relatively weak, underfunded and poorly equipped. Akayev, in turn, preferred to engrain internal security structures into the rent-seeking processes instead of reforming them (Lewis, 2011a: 16). As a result, soon after the independence of the republic, internal security forces earned infamous reputation of being one of the most corrupt state institutions. The resonant corruption scandals involved all security divisions of the country, including the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Office of the General Prosecutor, financial police, prison service and secret service. The corrupt and rent-seeking practices varied from the siphoning of the state budget funding and the extortion of bribes from the

businessmen, to involvement with the organised criminal grouping and the protection of illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking.

Apart from those rent-seeking activities, internal security forces have often been used in Kyrgyzstan to strengthen governing regimes and suppress dissent and opposition. Both Akayev and Bakiyev exploited national security services to solidify their grip on power. Otunbayeva, in turn, had to rely on internal forces to stop the violence in the south of the country. As David Lewis (2011a: 16) asserts, Central Asian ruling elites have been routinely asserting control over society through interior and intelligence security services, highly politicised offices of the prosecutors and subordinated courts. In fact, the tradition of using internal security structures to subdue political opponents dates back to the early 1900s when the Bolsheviks came to power. The Bolsheviks recruited the peasants and working class into the new police service, whereas the tsarist gendarmerie has been dissolved. The newly established police or militia was instrumental in supporting communists and fighting counterrevolutionary forces (Ministry of Interior Defence, 2013). The militia along with other interior structures then became the foundation of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), which guarded the rule of the Communist party, especially during the era of the Stalinist political repressions.

In a similar vein, the Kyrgyz subordinate security forces have often been used by Akayev to intimidate political rivals and pressure opposition. For instance, in 2001 Kulov was sentenced to seven years imprisonment on power abuse charges after the decision to run against Akayev in the presidential elections. Likewise, Azimbek Beknazarov was arrested on charges of failing to open investigation of a murder in 1995, when Beknazarov worked for the prosecutor's office in Jalal-Abad district. These charges were brought up only in 2002, when Beknazarov began to call for the president's impeachment, after the decision of the Akayev government to cede 125 thousand hectares of the disputed land to China. After the arrest of Beknazarov, his supporters from the Aksy region began the march towards Bishkek, but were stopped by the police. After brief negotiations, the police opened fire at protesters, killing five demonstrators and wounding more than ninety. In fact,

the Aksy incident became ultimately one of those factors that led to the toppling of Akayev's regime.

Bakiyev's views on national security forces have not drastically differed from those of his predecessor. In fact, security institutions have been significantly strengthened during the tenure of Bakiyev, especially in light of police impotence during the March events of 2005. Coming to power as a champion of democratic transformations, Bakiyev soon transformed himself into one of the most autocratic presidents in the region. In a short stint, Bakiyev managed to solidify his vertical of power by appointing loyal figures to key governmental and security positions whilst outplaying direct political rivals. Bakiyev's tenure was marked by a widespread crackdown of opposition and a suppression of political freedoms along with resonant high-profile assassinations, and the State Committee on National Security (GKNB) was one of the most criticised agencies in this respect. For instance, in 2006 opposition leader and member of the parliament Omurbek Tekebayev was arrested in the airport of Warsaw with a souvenir doll filled with heroin. The airport surveillance cameras revealed that Tekebayev's luggage has been taken out of the VIP lounge to a different room prior to the departure (Wikileaks, 2006). The parliamentary investigation accused the GKNB of organising the frame-up, whilst Janysh Bakiyev, the then-deputy Chairman of the GKNB, and Busurmankul Tabaldiyev, the Chairman of the GKNB, had to resign (Freedom House, 2007). In 2010, high-ranking GKNB officer Aldayar Ismankulov was arrested in Almaty and sentenced to seventeen years in jail by the Kazakh court for the assassination of Kyrgyz opposition journalist Gennady Pavlyuk in 2009 (Shishkin, 2013). Also, in 2009 the GKNB began to illegally use the system for operative investigative activities (SORM), conducting surveillance of all communication channels (MK Aziya, 2013). At that time the GKNB was supervised by Bakiyev's eldest son Marat who worked as an advisor to the Chairman of the GKNB (Anonymous, Investigator at the State Committee on National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 17 December 2013). In addition, in 2008, two years later after the resignation from the GKNB, Bakiyev's aforementioned younger brother Janysh was appointed the Chief of the powerful presidential State Security Service. This service was responsible

for the protection of strategic units in the country such as the White House and its residents. In other words, the tenure of Bakiyev was accentuated by his reliance on the internal security structures to sustain his regime.

The early period of Otunbayeva's rule was marked by different dynamics. The revolutionary leaders preferred to rely on their own supporters, sportsmen and bodyguards rather than on the established security structures as these institutions were deemed to be pro-Bakiyev (Anonymous, Investigator at the State Committee on National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 17 December 2013). However, when the violence broke out in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the Interim Government preferred to rely on its interior troops and security forces to stop the conflict. Nonetheless, the Kyrgyz security forces were not able to respond adequately to the ethnic clashes in the south of the republic. As aforesaid, the security structures of the country were already relatively weak, underfunded and poorly equipped. Furthermore, in addition to lacking necessary training and equipment, the Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies was significantly demoralised by the April events of 2010. During the April uprising of 2010 hundreds of security officers on the ground were severely beaten by the protesters. Moldomusa Kongantiyev, the Minister of Interior Affairs at that time, was also captured and mauled by the frenzied crowds in Talas. Moreover, when Bakiyev fled Kyrgyzstan and the Interim Government led by Otunbayeva seized the power in the country, nearly 28 members of the State Security Service along with the officers of the elite SWAT unit of the GKNB (Alfa) were brought to trial for the abuse of power and murder of the civilians during the April events of 2010. On April 7, when the protesters began to storm the White House, the officers of the State Security Service opened fire at the crowd as required by their oath, which led to 87 people being killed and many more wounded. Further, in another trial Janysh Bakiyev was sentenced to life in prison in absentia for the murder of former Head of the Presidential Administration Medet Sadyrkulov. At that trial, amongst the other defendants were also the former officers of the State Security Service, the GKNB and the Ministry of Interior Affairs (Asanov, 2012).

As a result, the trial of the elite security forces under the tacit approval of the Interim Government only contributed to the rising insecurities within the security structures. The looting and lawlessness that followed the overthrow of Bakiyev only demonstrated the unwillingness of the security forces to tackle post-revolutionary general crime and thus support the new regime. Another early indicator of the looming situation within the security structures was the inability of the police to stop a localised clash between the ethnic Turks and the land squatters in the Maevka village, which resulted in looting, arson and the deaths of several people. Furthermore, in the period from April to June of 2010, the Interim Government was frenetically substituting Bakiyev's security cadres on their own, causing an internal division within the security block related to the political allegiance. Accordingly, in June 2010, Otunbayeva's government found itself in a peculiar situation of needing to rely on the security forces that it had no trust in.

Nonetheless, in sum, internal security structures were instrumental for the security of the ruling regimes during the tenures of Akayev, Bakiyev and Otunbayeva. Apart from being indispensable cogs of the rent-seeking ventures in the country,<sup>41</sup> security services were often used beyond their initial responsibilities of tackling general crime to pressure political opposition and maintain pro-ruling status quo in the country. Even in the case of Otunbayeva, once the conflict in the south had ended and the referendum on the new Constitution was conducted, the Interim Government returned to the practice of exploiting security structures to silence the revanchist forces in the country. This trend became more vivid during the tenure of Atambayev, when the General Prosecutor's Office received a tacit political approval to detain opposition members of the parliaments such as Nariman Tuleev on charges of corruption and Kamchibek Tashiyev, Talant Mamytov and Sadyr Zhaparov for the attempted coup.

Yet, the correlation between interior security forces and the foreign policy orientation of Kyrgyzstan is not as apparent as in the case of the military cooperation and the external dimensions of regime security. The maintenance and

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<sup>41</sup> For instance, see Engvall, J. (2011) *The state as investment market: An analytical framework for interpreting politics and bureaucracy in Kyrgyzstan*, Sweden: Uppsala University.

development of the internal security structures was always the prerogative of the national government, and most of the funding for these processes was channelled from the state budget. There were several attempts by international donors to enhance the security sector of the republic, but these projects were rather insignificant. The OSCE police reform project was the most comprehensive initiative undertaken in Kyrgyzstan. The ambitious OSCE project aimed at improving the operational capacity and professionalism of the Kyrgyz police, promoting community policing, enhancing forensics and criminal investigations, setting up emergency call centres, supporting Police Academy, training the policemen to deal with public disorder, and etc (OSCE, n.d.). The OSCE program began in 2003 with the initial funding of 3.6 million euro for the first stage (Lewis, 2011a: 30). However, the project, which has been promoted as a success model for the entire Central Asian region, turned out to be quite controversial (Lewis, 2011a; Lewis, 2011b).

In particular, the criticisms this initiative has raised were related to the OSCE's inability to develop self-evaluation mechanisms, the over-reliance on technical collaboration and the little attention paid to the political situation and context in the republic (Lewis, 2011a: 29). The latter aspect characterised not only the weakness of the OSCE programming in Kyrgyzstan, but also the general trends pertinent to regime security in the country, such as the intricacy of the relationships between domestic and international stakeholders. The OSCE project began against the political backdrop of Akayev expanding his powers and amending the Constitution via the referendum a year after the aforementioned events in the Aksy region (Lewis, 2011a: 29-30). As a result, the OSCE's attempt to enhance the capacity of the Kyrgyz police to manage public disorder was predetermined to be marred by the autocratic inclinations of Akayev. As Lewis (2011a: 31) denotes, the NGO sector, excluded from the participation in the police reform, was galvanised by the rumours that the OSCE's non-lethal support was enhancing the capacity of the Kyrgyz police to crackdown anti-government opposition protests.

Moreover, the public disorder management trainings became even more controversial during the tenure of Bakiyev. As the opposition began to rally against Bakiyev and take its supporters to the streets, Bakiyev was also prepared to resist the opposition initiatives. One of the vivid examples was the violent police crackdown of the anti-government protest in Bishkek in April 2007. The opposition member of the parliament Kubatbek Baibolov later lamented that the police SWAT team has brutally suppressed the meeting using the rubber bullets and the stun and riot control agent grenades (*Komsomolsya Pravda*, 'Meeting oppozicii razognali pod boi barabanov i shum granat', 2007). In turn, the OSCE's police reform programming carried on without any significant amendments amidst the widespread reports of the police abuse and deteriorating political situation in the country (Lewis, 2011a; Lewis, 2011b). As a result, the OSCE's training and equipment was used not to reform, but to modernize the suppressive mechanism of the ruling regime (Lewis, 2011a: 36). In addition, when Bakiyev came to power in the wake of the popular uprising against Akayev, the OSCE's police assistance programme was short of funding, and it was the USA that covered nearly 70 percent of the project's financial needs (Lewis, 2011a: 32). The American financing can be explained through Washington's support of the democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan after 2005, and in a similar vein through Pentagon's objective to keep the U.S. air base on the Kyrgyz soil, especially after Bakiyev's call to evict the base at the SCO summit of 2005.<sup>42</sup>

The OSCE's initiative to send a police advisory group to Kyrgyzstan after the June bloodshed of 2010 turned out to be even more disastrous (Matveeva, Former Head of the Research Secretariat of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, interview, 31 May 2013). Initially, the Kyrgyz government requested hard technical support, whilst the majority of the OSCE member-states were more inclined towards the provision of soft and more ethical advisory assistance (Anonymous, Source from a Western Government, interview, 6 June 2013). After the period of ongoing discussions within and between "Eastern Vienna" and "Western Vienna", the

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<sup>42</sup> According to various sources, the GKNB's SORM has been gifted or purchased by the Kyrgyz side in Russia in March 2009 (Loktionov, 2009). This timing coincides with the February announcement of Bakiyev in Moscow about the eviction of the American air base.

OSCE agreed to deploy a small police contingent of 52 people to the south of the republic (Anonymous, Source from a Western Government, interview, 6 June 2013). Otunbayeva was originally supportive of the OSCE mission to Kyrgyzstan. However, the lengthy and drawn-out nature of the OSCE decision-making was exploited by some politicians, such as Melis Myrzakhmatov, as the nuisance factor to rally against the Interim Government (Lewis, 2011a: 38). As a result, Otunbayeva put on hold the decision to host the OSCE's police mission in light of possible destabilisation of the situation in Osh that could have played against the Interim Government and its electorate in the upcoming elections of October 2010.

In sum, the scrutiny of the physical survival strategy of the ruling regimes contributes to the better understanding of the Central Asian realpolitik, virtual state performance and rent-seeking. Empirical evidence demonstrates that regime security was constantly on the agenda of Akayev, Bakiyev and Otunbayeva. Whilst the Kyrgyz leadership perceived the army more as a symbolic attribute of statehood, internal security services were important for supporting the ruling regimes of Kyrgyzstan. Yet, it is still an open question whether interior security structures affected the foreign policy fluctuations of Kyrgyzstan, since there were no apparent dynamics that would causally link the strengthening of internal security forces to Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy priorities.

### *Conclusion*

From the early 1990s the army was perceived more as a symbolic attribute of the statehood by the Kyrgyz leadership. Even after the incursion of the Islamic extremists the Kyrgyz ruling elites remained incredulous of the existence of external threats to the integrity of the republic. In turn, the Kyrgyz presidents exploited the army to perform the acts of virtual politics in order to convert the state *dramaturgiia* into financial and political currency and to accommodate the ambitions of regional hegemons and thus protect their regimes from any potential challenges. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the regional security structures such as the CSTO and the SCO suffered from institutional flaws and lacked political backing from the member-states to provide security guarantees to

the Kyrgyz leadership. In a similar vein, the NATO's PfP programme was not equipped to address external and internal threats to the republic.

Nonetheless, Kyrgyzstan's military state performance was not about achieving tangible benefits. The participation in regional security initiatives was the showcase conducted by the ruling regimes to display their bandwagoning attitudes towards greater players in order to reinforce domestic regime security and, as in the case of the USA, to widen financial channels to impoverished Kyrgyzstan. The task to ensure the physical survival of the Kyrgyz regimes was entrusted to interior security structures, which were engrained within the rent-seeking networks and were used to suppress dissent and opposition in the republic. In this respect, the June violence of 2010 is an excellent empirical referent to examine how all bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, which Kyrgyzstan has been virtually committed to, likewise brought virtual dividends only. Regional security organisations along with Russia, China and the USA remained reticent to Otunbayeva's call for humanitarian intervention and international peacekeeping. As a result, against the backdrop of international abandonment the Kyrgyz leadership had to rely on internal security forces, which were corroded by the corrupt practices of rent-seeking and regime security. In sum, virtual politics of state security brought more questions than answers, which the ruling regimes of Kyrgyzstan failed to cope with.

## CHAPTER V

### *Manas Air Base*

The experience of the American air base Manas in Kyrgyzstan serves as an excellent empirical referent to study the sources of Kyrgyz foreign policy. Chapter IV examined military cooperation of Kyrgyzstan with Russia, China and the USA as the outcome of virtual politics exercised by the ruling regimes in order to display their bandwagoning attitudes towards more powerful players and thus to protect themselves from the systemic pressures. In turn, this chapter will examine the validity of the great power narratives vis-à-vis the rent-seeking variable. In particular, Chapter V will empirically demonstrate that the preponderance of regime security in Kyrgyz foreign policy was related not only to the systemic weaknesses of the country, but was also deeply rooted in the rent-seeking interests of the ruling regimes.

Indeed, the developments around Manas since its establishment in 2001 shows that base politics in Central Asia extends beyond traditional international relations amongst states to connect local to global politics through offshore havens and supposedly legitimate financial mechanisms. The Manas Air Base became a source of rent for the ruling elites and the object of controversy between the government and the opposition in two successful uprisings, which toppled presidents Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

Accordingly, this chapter will expose how Akayev and Bakiyev and their entourages exploited shell companies and global financial mechanisms for their own benefits, merging the country's economy with clandestine and informal offshore worlds. A special focus will be given to the rise of new Pentagon vendors - the mysterious Red Star and Mina Corp - and to their no less mysterious owners Erkin Bekbolotov and Douglas Edelman. This section will examine what kind of relationships these companies established with local elites and particularly with powerful sons of then-presidents and how as a result the Kyrgyz foreign policy

decisions pertinent to the Manas air base have rarely gone beyond the commercial preferences of the ruling elites. In other words, this part will attempt to trace a link between the Kyrgyz leadership and the very centre of political power in Kyrgyzstan through the offshore and transnational connections of the American vendors to locally registered fuel subcontractors. This is a constellation, which demonstrates that political power is not contained solely within national units, but flows from financial and economic connections from the transnational through the national and to the local. Whilst unveiling complex fuel arrangements between the American vendors and local subcontractors, this section will demonstrate that the geopolitical New Great Game is a seductive, but misleading concept. Particularly, it will be revealed that the Russian calls for a Manas eviction were political rhetoric, as the multifarious fuel cobweb had involved senior Kyrgyz officials, Russian Gazprom-owned refineries, American DLA-Energy and Gibraltar-registered companies.

#### *Manas Air Base: From Famous to Infamous*

The Manas Air Base is an American military installation located 20 kilometers away from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The air base was opened on December 16, 2001, at the civilian Manas International Airport under the status of forces agreements as part of the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (Transit Center at Manas, n.d.).<sup>43</sup> Initially, the 786<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron of the 86<sup>th</sup> Contingency Response Group from the German Ramstein Air Base was deployed to Bishkek in order to ensure the security of coalition forces that were installing the new base (Global Security, n.d.). Thereafter, the base hosted the troops from several International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) countries; however its primary operating unit remained the American 376<sup>th</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing (Transit Center at Manas, n.d.). In the summer of 2009, the status of the Manas Air Base had been renegotiated in order to be renamed as the Transit Center at Manas International Airport, purportedly transforming the military nature of the installation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The base was unofficially named in honor of an American firefighter Peter Ganci who was killed in the 9/11 terrorist attack.

<sup>44</sup> In this work, the terms “Manas Air Base” and “Transit Center at Manas” will be used interchangeably.

The Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan represents a key logistic hub in the region and serves as a focal point in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. The ISAF command is responsible for ensuring a stable flow of supplies to one of the most hostile and remote parts of the world, where nearly 100,000 ISAF troops are stationed (U.S. House of Representatives<sup>45</sup>, 2010: 9). As a result, the Transit Center at Manas is one of the busiest American air force installations in the world (Viss, n.d.). Every American soldier who enters or leaves the Afghan battlefield must go through the Transit Center at Manas, which amounts for a transit average of 1,200-3,500 coalition troops per day (Wasson, 2010; USHR, 2010: 9). In addition, from 6 to 13 million pounds of cargo go through the Transit Center each month (Wasson, 2010; USHR, 2010: 9). The rates of fuel consumption for the Afghan war are higher than at any previous American fought war (Deloitte, 2009; USHR, 2010: 9). Nearly 30 percent of all fuel comes from the KC-135 Stratotankers stationed at the Manas Transit Center (Wasson, 2010).<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, locally the air base has a rather infamous reputation. Unlike the eponymous hero of the Kyrgyz epic Manas who united the Kyrgyz people, the American air base situated at Manas International Airport became a cause of fracture throughout Kyrgyz politics since its establishment in late 2001. On December 6, 2006, American soldier Zachary Hatfield shot dead Kyrgyz citizen Alexander Ivanov at a checkpoint at Manas Air Base. The U.S. officials stated that Ivanov, a 42-year-old truck driver, who was on his routine mission of delivering fuel to the air base, had threatened a U.S. serviceman with a knife and as a result was shot twice (Pannier, 2007). However, the statements of the U.S. spokesmen and Hatfield himself were unconvincing, whilst evidence of a knife found 20 meters away from the scene of shooting simply called for further investigation of the event (Marat, 2007; Horton, 2009; *Baza*, 2009). Although the Prosecutor General's Office of Kyrgyzstan demanded a full homicide prosecution of the U.S. soldier, the American party denied access to Hatfield and transferred him out of the country

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<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, the U.S. House of Representatives will be abbreviated as USHR.

<sup>46</sup> For example, the American forces operating out of the Manas Air Base consume up to 500,000-600,000 gallons of TS-1 jet fuel per day (USHR, 2010: 9; Cooley, 2012: 142).

referring to the intergovernmental agreement of U.S. servicemen immunity at bases outside the USA (Pannier, 2007).

The inability of the Kyrgyz government to put the American soldier on trial for the murder of the Kyrgyz citizen caused outrage in Kyrgyzstan, an event which was widely covered by both Kyrgyz and Russian media. The American compensation to Ivanov's family was the sum total of 1,000 USD compared to the reparation of 50,000 USD provided by Ivanov's local company; a difference perceived as humiliating and insulting both by the wife of Ivanov and by the majority of Kyrgyz citizens (Baza, 2009).<sup>47</sup> The Wikileaks cables dated July 2009 and purportedly issued to the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek by the Secretary of State reveal that the convening authority General Arthur Lichte dismissed the charges against 20-year-old Zachary Hatfield and closed the case under no obligation to explain his rationale. This information, which was circulated in the Kyrgyz and Russia media, reignited further the public anger about the status and necessity of American troops on Kyrgyz soil.

The base had always been under public scrutiny, and prior to this particular incident there were several complaints raised about the American installation. Some of the nuisances were related to the collision of an American stratotanker with the presidential airliner, the practice of dumping surplus jet fuel over Kyrgyz territory and the presence of armed U.S. military patrols in villages nearby the base. In addition, the location of the American base on the territory of Kyrgyzstan fostered debates amongst the local population on whether or not Kyrgyzstan will become a target for radical extremists, especially in light of possible American military actions against Iran.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> After the news coverage, the amount of the American compensation has been substantially increased, whilst the initial compensation was presented as an interim payment to the Ivanov family by the U.S. officials (Arykbayev et al, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Aleksandr Knyazev recalls at least five cases, when there was a leak of information that the Manas Air Base was a subject to an attempted terrorist attack (Bannikov, 2012). However, the controversial scholar points out that neither the American nor the Kyrgyz side is interested in making this information public (Bannikov, 2012).

Nevertheless, the greatest criticism of the Manas Air Base was attributed to the base's hyper-secretive fuel contractors with unknown beneficiaries, off-shore registrations, opaque operations and close links to those in power. The lucrative and illicit contracts and subcontracts were purportedly used by both the first president of Kyrgyzstan Akayev and the second president Bakiyev and their entourages for personal enrichment and strengthening of their regimes. This phenomenon explains why the ruling elites were rather reluctant to question the presence of the air base on the territory of the republic despite growing dissent throughout society regarding the base. As for the abovementioned complaints, the ruling governments often exploited those grievances as a pretext to renegotiate the financial agreements for their own benefits. As a result, the air base became a source of rent for the ruling elites and the object of controversy between the government and the opposition in two successful uprisings, which removed presidents Akayev and Bakiyev from power.

*Manas International Services (MIS) and Aalam Services Ltd (Aalam)*

Rent-seeking emerges when a new source of assets is captured by a ruling regime. Basing payments are one source of such rents (Cooley, 2012; McGlinchey, 2011). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 Kyrgyzstan suddenly reappeared on Washington's radar, as the Pentagon was searching for the footholds for Operation Enduring Freedom. For the USA, Kyrgyzstan emerged as a convenient location; not far from the operational zone, and with a functional airport, with a 14,000-foot runway initially designed for Soviet bombers (Daly, n.d.). For Kyrgyzstan, the events of 9/11 provided a unique opportunity to host an American air base with subsequent financial benefits, and the government of Akayev seized this moment. As Borubek Ashirov (Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012) stated, the decision to host an American air base turned out to be governmental conjuncture and an intersection of private interests, and not part of the republic's clear foreign policy position.

Some policymakers believe that this decision was driven by the willingness of the Kyrgyz government to contribute to international efforts to fight terrorism and ensure stability in the region (Muktar Djumaliev, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to the USA, interview, 15 November 2012). The government of Akayev had discussed this issue with all members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and having received a verbal approval, agreed to host an American military installation on Kyrgyz territory (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic interview, 29 October 2012). Accordingly, the Kyrgyz Parliament quickly ratified this decision, as President Akayev personally visited the Parliament to observe the voting. Washington was granted a right to build its military foothold at the civilian airport near Bishkek for the annual rent of 2 million USD, with an additional sum of four thousand USD per flight (Kudrina, 2007).

The American side found the fuel suppliers to the air base just as quickly as their Kyrgyz counterparts ratified an agreement to host the base. The Defence Logistics Agency-Energy (DLA-Energy), the U.S. Department of Defence's (DoD) agency for fuel solutions, chose a Maryland-based logistics firm, AvCard, to supply fuel to Manas (USHR, 2010). DLA-Energy awarded the vendor AvCard with two contracts and one extension without any tenders for the period from December 2001 to February 2003 for the total amount of 56,559,743.00 USD (USHR, 2010: 12). Kathryn Fantasia, the Executive Directive of the Defence Logistics Agency Energy and at that time the DLA-Energy contracting officer, stated that AvCard was selected for its promise to meet the needs of the military (Cloud, 2005). However, it is still unclear why this particular company had been chosen as the main fuel supplier to the air base and what the company's previous fuel supply history was. It may be inferred, nonetheless, that the capitalization of the company was relatively small, as it was sold on November 8, 2007 to Miami-based World Fuel Services Corporation for approximately 55 million USD, which is close to what AvCard had received for the supply of fuel to Manas from DLA-Energy (InsideView, n.d.; Bloomberg, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2007).

Rent-seeking by state actors is often formally guaranteed and legal rather than informal and illicit. The first AvCard contract to supply 15 million gallons of jet fuel to Manas was announced on November 30, 2001, prior to the official Kyrgyz government statement confirming the allowance of the air base on its territory (USHR, 2010: 12). Aidar Akayev, son of the president, who coincidentally graduated from the University of Maryland, became one of the partners of Maryland-based AvCard. His company MIS had been chosen as one of AvCard's two fuel subcontractors. The second subcontractor was Aalam owned by Adil Toigonbayev, the president's son-in-law and a citizen of Kazakhstan. These two companies were responsible for all fuel delivery to the Manas Air Base, despite AvCard not even delegating a single full-time employee to Kyrgyzstan (Cloud, 2005). MIS was initially founded by Aleksander Nastayev, a former Kyrgyz first class pilot and captain, who served as the CEO of the company for some time (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). Allegedly, shortly after the establishment MIS was raided and expropriated by Aidar Akayev (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). As for Aalam, the company was part of Toigonbayev's holding. In summer 1999 the JSC Manas International Airport, which was a reorganized version of the JSC National Airlines "Kyrgyzstan Aba Joldoru", illegally transferred the refueling complex of the Manas<sup>49</sup> airport to JSC Aalam Services Ltd (Kuzmin, 2005; Office of the General Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Republic, quoted in RFE/RL, 2005). This transfer was presented as a 30 percent contribution by Manas International Airport to the charter capital of JSC Aalam, with the entire refueling complex valued at only 510,000 USD (Kuzmin, 2005; Office of the General Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Republic, quoted in RFE/RL, 2005). The remaining 70 percent share or 1,190,000 USD, which was never transferred, became the liability of the offshore company Merleyside LLC, registered in Delaware (Kuzmin, 2005; Sotnik, 2013; Office of the General Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Republic, quoted in RFE/RL, 2005). The Prosecutor General's Office of Kyrgyzstan confirmed that both Aalam and Merleyside belonged to Adil Toigonbayev (Office of the General Prosecutor of the Kyrgyz Republic, quoted in RFE/RL, 2005; Kuzmin, 2005).

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<sup>49</sup> The refueling complex Manas will be also referred as TZK Manas in this work.

In this respect, the decision of the Kyrgyz leadership to host an American air base should be analysed through the prism of Akayev's regime and its survival. The base could have served as a source of external legitimacy for unpopular Akayev, since domestically his sources of legitimacy were lacking. By the end of 2001 Akayev was facing a crisis of legitimacy and had been widely criticized for corruption, nepotism, persecution of opposition, an usurpation of power and a crackdown on free speech. In 1998 the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic had allowed Akayev to run for presidency for the third term, and on October 29, 2000, Akayev was reelected as the President of Kyrgyzstan for the next five years. Felix Kulov, Akayev's key opponent in the presidential race, was removed from the ballot and in 2001 was sentenced to seven years imprisonment with confiscation of property on power abuse charges. There is no formidable diagnostic evidence to prove Akayev's self-legitimation motives, although the presence of the American contingent along with troops from the ISAF states on its own demonstrated that Kyrgyzstan or Akayev's regime per se was an accepted and respected member of the international community.

Nonetheless, there is a direct proof that Akayev had a vested interest in the presence of the American air base on the Kyrgyz soil. "Smoking-gun" evidence exposes that the lucrative and illicit fuel contracts and subcontracts were the real remuneration to Akayev for his services, in addition to the possible political currency. Although at first glance the official set fees appeared to be unreasonably low, the genuine agreement between Akayev and the Pentagon was rather camouflaged. The fact that the companies, directly affiliated with Akayev, were responsible for all fuel delivery to the American air base underlines the primacy of rent-seeking in Kyrgyz realpolitik and provides a sufficient criterion for acknowledging the causal relationship between the Kyrgyz foreign policy and the rent-seeking aspect of regime security. In the unlikely case of a weaker interpretation, subcontractors' affiliation with Akayev may be regarded as a coincidental or somewhat unusual occurrence, but not as an exceptionally suspicious practice. Then our "smoking-gun" evidence turns into a "straw-in-the-

wind”, which, however, still provides a certain degree of plausibility to our hypothesis.

The AvCard executives have not disclosed how much they transferred to both MIS and Aalam for the fuel, but confirmed that the company was aware of the links between the subcontractors and the family of Akayev (Cloud, 2005; USHR, 2010). Linda Kropp, the President of AvCard, claimed that she learned about those ties soon after the fuel procurement and reported it to the responsible officials at the Defence Energy Support Center (Cloud, 2005; USHR, 2010). As it turned out, DLA-Energy also knew about the beneficiaries of the Kyrgyz fuel subcontractors. Kathryn Fantasia emphasized that the contracting and procurement laws of the DoD permitted companies affiliated with foreign leaders and their entourages to bid and win the DoD tenders (Cullison, Toktogulov and Dreazen, 2010). Lieutenant colonel Joe Carpenter from the Pentagon stated that the fuel procurement had been conducted in accordance with American laws and regulations, whilst any misappropriations of funds by the Kyrgyz leadership were solely the country’s internal affairs and thus respectively at the discretion of the Kyrgyz judicial system (Roston, 2006). Accordingly, the provision of rent-seeking opportunities to the regime members of allied governments appeared to be an effect of the American government contracting procedures.

Furthermore, in late 2002 DLA-Energy invited new bidders to join the race for the lucrative fuel contracts at the Manas Air Base. The agency received five valid applications including AvCard, but DLA-Energy selected Gibraltar-registered Red Star Enterprises Ltd as the new fuel supplier to the base (USHR, 2010: 12). Although the initial contract was for one year beginning February 2003, the contract with Red Star was reconsidered five times and eventually prolonged until July 2007 without any further open tenders (USHR, 2010: 12). These procedures were justified by the “unusual and compelling urgency” to deliver fuel to one of the most hostile regions in the world (USHR, 2010: 12). Furthermore, although the supplier of fuel to the air base had changed, both MIS and Aalam remained the key and only subcontractors. Similar to AvCard’s complaint, the Representatives of

Red Star lamented the fact that the company had no choice but to work with MIS and Aalam, as Manas airport authority allowed only the abovementioned local fixed-base operators to supply fuel to the airport (USHR, 2010: 24). As a consequence, over the period from 2003 to 2005 MIS had received nearly 87 million USD and Aalam Services nearly 32 million USD from Red Star (Cloud, 2005).

Whilst rent-seeking is an effect of the preponderance of regime security in foreign policy, in the Kyrgyz case rent-seeking has accompanied regime instability and chronic state weakness. On March 24, 2005, Akayev and his family fled the country to find political asylum in Moscow as a result of the popular uprising across the country against his corrupt governance. Immediately after, the newly-appointed Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov included the Manas International Airport, MIS and Aalam into the list of 42 Kyrgyz businesses affiliated with the Akayev's regime. The privatization of the refueling complex Manas was denounced, and the facility was returned to Manas International Airport (Sorokina and Saakyan, 2011).

The denunciation of the Akayev regime after the Tulip Revolution had created numerous allegations about Akayev's offshore bank accounts and clandestine relationships with international criminal syndicates. Some allegations went beyond factual accusations to constitute the body of the conspiracy knowledge. Nonetheless, apart from the conspiracy theories and domestic inquiries, there was a serious investigation of Akayev's business ventures conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The Prosecutor General's Office of Kyrgyzstan requested assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice to trace the overseas assets of the ousted president, which Akayev could have acquired through illegal and corrupt practices (USHR, 2010: 25).

The eight-page report produced by the FBI was provided to the new leadership of Kyrgyzstan, however shortly afterwards this document was classified by the U.S. Department of Justice (USHR, 2010: 63; Shishkin, 2013: 228). Prior to the classification, *The New York Times* and *NBC News* received a copy of this report

from the government of Kyrgyzstan (USHR, 2010: 25). Aram Roston (2006) of *NBC News Investigative Unit* revealed that international investigation had examined a “vast amount of potential criminal activities” with nearly 175 enterprises associated with the ousted president. In fact, the FBI found that the criminal traces of the Akayevs led to the USA, where the president’s family had connections with an American, “known to have formed over 6,000 U.S. shell companies for organized crime factions, weapons and drug traffickers and cyber criminals” (Roston, 2006).

Moreover, the FBI report confirmed that both MIS and Aalam might have been engaged in money laundering via their accounts at Dutch bank ABN AMRO and Citibank in New York (Cloud, 2005). Both banks reported to the FBI that MIS and Aalam were “tied to transactions with arms traffickers, Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) and a myriad of suspicious U.S. shell companies associated with the Akaev Organization” (Roston, 2006). Edward Lieberman, an American lawyer hired by the Kyrgyz government to assist with the investigation, stated that in the period from December 18, 2001, to November 12, 2003, nearly 40 million USD had been wired from MIS and other related companies to Citibank accounts in New York (Centrasia, 2005). In general, the FBI Eurasian Unit advised that Akayev and his entourage might have been engaged in “siphoning off at least \$1 billion from the Kyrgyz state budget” (Roston, 2010).

However, offshore jurisdictions turned out to be the major challenge for tracking down the owners and beneficiaries of Akayev-affiliated businesses. The case of MIS and Aalam was one of numerous high-profile cases that incriminated Akayev, as his family and entourage were engaged in nearly all lucrative business spheres in the country ranging from gold mining and gambling to banking and mobile communications. Although Prosecutor General Beknazarov, American lawyer Lieberman and Head of the State Inquiry Commission Daniyar Usenov promised to locate and return the overseas assets and accounts of Akayev and his family, their attempts appeared to be populist and unviable. The State Inquiry Commission even struggled to establish domestic criminal links between major local businesses

and the family of Akayev. The initial list of 42 ventures allegedly to have belonged to Akayev was soon expanded to 73 companies, with the process of initializing these assets resembling a witch-hunt. Offshore jurisdictions were the major challenge of tracking down the owners and beneficiaries of these businesses. The State Inquiry Commission confirmed that the registration of the companies under the investigation included the Isle of Man, the Seychelles, Liberia, Panama, Liechtenstein, Cyprus and the Cayman Islands among many others (Jumagulov, 2005).

Nonetheless, these cases and particularly the MIS and Aalam affairs demonstrated that since the start of Kyrgyzstan's independence, the so-called "Switzerland of Central Asia" had not been detached from the global economy. Akayev and his entourage actively exploited the new opportunities that opened up after the breakup of the USSR. What was unthinkable during the Soviet era had become an indispensable part of regime security in Central Asia. By using offshore companies and global financial mechanisms, Akayev and his family guaranteed themselves a secure and comfortable living in exile, whereas the country had become infamously attached to hidden and informal offshore worlds.

#### *Rise of Red Star and Mina*

Rent-seeking theory rests on the assumption that the opportunities for personal enrichment can have a significant impact on public policy decisionmaking. Diagnostic evidence suggests that such a phenomenon was vividly present during the tenure of Bakiyev, whilst Bakiyev's quest for personal gains has been camouflaged by the populist rhetoric of national interests and social developments.

Bakiyev came to power in March 2005 as a result of the popular uprising against Akayev. Serving as Acting President, Bakiyev immediately began to criticise the illicit and non-transparent base arrangements between Akayev and the Pentagon. In July 2005, Bakiyev signed a declaration to remove foreign military installations from the country at the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

in Astana (Cooley, 2012: 120).<sup>50</sup> As a result, in July 2005, Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defence, had to make a personal visit to Kyrgyzstan to discuss the future of the Manas Air Base with the new leadership.

Nonetheless, sworn in officially as President of Kyrgyzstan on August 14, 2005, Bakiyev continued to denounce the fees paid by Washington to the Kyrgyz side and threatened to evict the base. In October 2005, Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. Secretary of State, made a visit to Bishkek, where she held talks over the base with Bakiyev and his cabinet. Although both Rumsfeld and Rice were reassured that the base would remain in Kyrgyzstan, they were also hinted at that the price for the presence of the air base had to drastically increase. On February 14, 2006, Bakiyev stated in an interview to Russian newspaper *Kommersant* that the American side had to pay 207 million USD per year for the use of the facility (Pannier, 2006). Washington was reluctant to accommodate a new price tag, as the requested amount was perceived to be disproportionately high (Cooley, 2012: 121).

The rounds of negotiations continued, and effectively in 2006 Bishkek and Washington came to a mutual agreement. The annual rent for the air base had been increased from 2 million USD to 17 million USD as part of the larger aid package promised by the USA, totalling up to 150 million USD per year (Cooley, 2010). Nonetheless, in its dispatch to the State Department in 2007, the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek acknowledged that the Manas Air Base would “continue to lurch from crisis to crisis”, as both the government of Kyrgyzstan and the opposition would continue to use the base “in their own domestic political arguments” (Wikileaks, 2007).

Although there were ongoing political negotiations over the base after the Tulip Revolution, the fuel supplies to the Manas Air Base were never interrupted. As mentioned above, Red Star continued to supply fuel to the base up until July 2007 receiving in total 509,217,358.00 USD (USHR, 2010: 12). From 2007 the fuel “relay

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<sup>50</sup> The same month Uzbekistan delivered a diplomatic note to the USA to vacate the Karshi-Khanabad “K2” air base from its territory within a 180-day period.

baton” was officially passed to new vendor Mina Corp, which turned out to be a re-branded version of Red Star (USHR, 2010). There were rumours that Red Star and Mina with their opaque operations, unknown beneficiaries and offshore registrations were enriching both the Akayev and Bakiyev regimes. After the April Revolution of 2010 and the subsequent ousting of Bakiyev, the American base along with its secret vendors became the core of diplomatic scandal between both countries. As a result, in April 2010, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the USHR under the chairmanship of John Tierney started an official investigation of the fuel supplies to the Manas Air Base.<sup>51</sup> In the end, the eight-month long investigation called for policy changes and greater oversight in fuel procurement (USHR, 2010).

The Subcommittee revealed the perturbing details about the fuel supply at the Manas Air Base and its vendors Red Star and Mina Corp (USHR, 2010). The Subcommittee discovered that the company Red Star belonged to Erkin Bekbolotov<sup>52</sup> and Delphine Le Dain who each owned a 50 percent stake (USHR, 2010: 20). The USHR (2010: 20), however, was cautious to advise that “it is virtually impossible to determine the companies’ beneficial ownership through public records”. The Subcommittee also concluded that the real owner of Le Dain’s shares was her husband Douglas Edelman<sup>53</sup>, as Delphine Le Dain herself had

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<sup>51</sup> In this work, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the USHR will be referred as the Subcommittee.

<sup>52</sup> The first owner of the company Erkin Bekbolotov is the Kyrgyz national<sup>52</sup>, son of Jenishbek Bekbolotov, the former Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources under Akayev (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). Erkin has graduated from the Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture named after N. Isanov majoring in finance and accounting (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). From 1994 to 1995 Bekbolotov studied at the Pace University in New York<sup>52</sup>, and after returning to Kyrgyzstan he was employed by two consulting companies for a short period of time, where Bekbolotov was responsible for the provision of educational services and market researches to the local fuel firms (USHR, 2010: 20). In late 1996 Bekbolotov joined the Kyrgyz Petroleum Company, a closed joint stock venture created by the government of Kyrgyzstan and a Canadian investor (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). Being responsible for the fuel supplies and logistics of the refinery Jalal-Abad, Bekbolotov soon rose to the position of general manager at the Kyrgyz Petroleum (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). In 1998 Bekbolotov negotiated the sale of the Jalal-Abad refinery and left the company to start his own business (USHR, 2010: 21; Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Originally from Stockton, California, Edelman has been living and doing business in Kyrgyzstan from the mid 1990s, establishing several fuel trading firms and even owning expats-favorite American Pub in Bishkek (Hettena, 2010; USHR, 2010: 21). It is believed that Edelman still holds

never actively engaged with the companies (USHR, 2010: 20). The official website of their holding states that Mina Group is “an international group of companies – Mina Corp Limited, Red Star Enterprises Limited, and Mina Petroleum FZE – with trading operations” in Asia, Europe, the USA and the Middle East (Mina Group, n.d.). Bekbolotov himself stated that Mina was founded in 2004 “as an umbrella structure for a number of operations in Iraq”, including the petroleum trade and the production of a daily English newspaper *Iraq Today*, published in Baghdad<sup>54</sup> (USHR, 2010: 23; Hettena, 2010). Although the activities of Mina resembled a CIA set-up, both Bekbolotov and Leon Panetta, a former Director of the CIA, rejected the notion that Mina was an agency project (Shishkin, 2013: 232). Nonetheless, thereafter Mina evolved into a vast corporation that even owned an Internet company in Kabul and MTV Adria in the Balkans in addition to its mining and commodities trading interests across different continents (LeVine, 2010; Hettena, 2010).<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, there is evidence that Bekbolotov and Edelman have established business relations with Akayev-affiliated companies even prior to the opening of the American air base in Kyrgyzstan. In a testimony to the USHR (2010) Bekbolotov stated that one of Edelman’s companies used to supply jet fuel to Kyrgyzstan’s national airline, which owned Manas International Airport. In 1998 Bekbolotov met Douglas Edelman, and in 1999 they teamed up to supply jet fuel to the civilian aviation at the Manas International Airport (USHR, 2010: 21). As mentioned above, in the late 1990s the airport belonged to the JSC National Airlines “Kyrgyzstan Aba Joldoru”, which was later decentralized and privatized. In the course of this privatization, TZK Manas had been illegally transferred to Aalam. In addition, Bekbolotov confirmed that both he and Edelman had helped create

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an American passport, although he has lived abroad for more than 25 years (USHR, 2010: 22). Presumably, Edelman currently resides in Kensington, London (LeVine, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Mina Media’s director Stephen MacSearraigh used to serve as the director of both Mina Corp and *Iraq Today* (Hettena, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Edelman, who is also linked to Aspen Wind Corporation, a financial consultancy firm with executive offices in Cyprus, turned out to be an executive producer of the movie about evangelist Billy Graham *Billy: The Early Years* (2008). The film was financed by the firm Solex Productions, a sister company of Mina Media (Hettena, 2010). Hettena (2010) discovered that Mina Media is registered in Nicosia, Cyprus, and is a subsidiary of Mina Corp. The company owns and runs MTV Adria, which broadcasts in Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (Hettena, 2010).

another fuel company MIS with a 40 percent ownership share in the name of Edelman's French wife (USHR, 2010: 21). The remaining 60 percent was divided between three unidentified Kyrgyz businessmen who later in 2001, according to Bekbolotov, expropriated their 40 percent share (USHR, 2010: 21). Nonetheless, Bekbolotov and Edelman continued to supply jet fuel to MIS, which, in turn, was selling this fuel to Manas Jet Services, a firm-supplier of civil aviation fuel who supplied Manas International Airport (USHR, 2010: 21). In addition, the director of operations of Red Star and Mina Corp Charles Squires, who was a Defence Attaché at the American Embassy in Bishkek before 2001, confirmed that he was personally introduced to both Adil Toigonbayev and Aidar Akayev when he was taking over the fuel supplies from AvCard at Manas (Cloud, 2005). Consequently, it is evident that the business relationships of Bekbolotov and Edelman with the companies belonging to Aidar Akayev and Adil Toigonbayev had been developed even prior to the DoD fuel procurements.

In 2001, Bekbolotov moved with his family to Toronto, where he established Red Star Enterprises (USHR, 2010: 21). Soon after, Bekbolotov and Edelman registered Red Star Enterprises Ltd in Gibraltar, the British tax haven known for its hyper-secretive jurisdiction and protection of corporate interests (Roston, 2010). In 2002 Red Star Enterprises Ltd won the DLA-Energy contract to supply fuel to Manas Air Base, and in February 2003 the company began its deliveries to the base (USHR, 2010). Concurrently, in 2003 Red Star became the sole supplier of jet fuel to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan (USHR, 2010). Bagram base commander Colonel Jonathan Ives recalled that every day approximately thirty Red Star tractor-trailers were delivering nearly 250,000 gallons of fuel to Bagram, transporting it all the way from Uzbekistan through the Salang Pass and the mountains of Mazar-i-Sharif to Kabul (Roston, 2010). Moreover, in 2007 the leadership of Red Star signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Air Forces to install a proprietary petroleum pipeline at the Bagram air base (Roston, 2010). The Subcommittee of the USHR (2010: 15) admitted that this Memorandum had institutionalized Red Star's control over fuel deliveries to the base in Afghanistan, as Red Star retained ownership of the petroleum pipeline, whilst other

bidders and fuel competitors were obliged to attain access to this pipeline. In addition, as my anonymous interlocutor mused, “Surprisingly, neither the Taliban nor the Northern Alliance has dared to attack the Red Star’s tractor-trailers or the pipeline” (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012).<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, policy changes and a greater oversight of the American fuel procurement practices could have reduced rent-seeking opportunities in the countries like Kyrgyzstan. In 2007, DLA-Energy announced a new tender to supply fuel to the Manas Air Base (USHR, 2010: 12). The name of Red Star had often been associated with Akayev and his family, and the leadership of Red Star decided to rebrand the company whilst submitting the bid for a new contract (USHR, 2010: 23). In an e-mail sent to Kari Archer of DLA-Energy, Bekbolotov stressed that Red Star and Mina are two different companies, which “share the same management team as far as fuel trading goes”; however Mina also “employs other management teams that are involved in a broader range of activities” (USHR, 2010: 23). As a result, although the incumbent bid was submitted by Red Star, the contract was awarded to Mina Corporation (USHR, 2010: 23). In fact, from the period of July 2007 to December 2011, Mina had won the tenders for fuel supply to Manas Air Base three times, and similar to the cases of AvCard and Red Star its contracts have been extended five times without open and full competition (USHR, 2010: 12). These decisions were justified by reasons of national security and were subsequently classified as secret (USHR, 2010: 13). During this stint, Mina received nearly 1 billion 292 million USD from the DoD for procurement, delivery and storage of fuel (USHR, 2010: 13).

As a result, Red Star and Mina Corp emerged as the key fuel players in the region, winning the DoD’s most lucrative petroleum contracts. Although these companies

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<sup>56</sup> Allegedly, prior to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, one of Bekbolotov’s companies was supplying fuel directly to the Taliban (Anonymous, Consultant, interview, 3 November 2013). After the invasion, Bekbolotov switched his allegiance and began working with the American side (Anonymous, Consultant, interview, 3 November 2013). According to Bekbolotov, the Americans were interested in cooperating with him, because Bekbolotov had established fuel delivery routes and his business was scalable to the American needs (Anonymous, Consultant, interview, 3 November 2013). Unfortunately, although this is an original story, there is no available information with public access to cross-check these statements,

were successful in supplying fuel to the bases in Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, the USHR was astonished by the levels of secrecy and mystery that veiled both the vendors and the DoD procurement practices and questioned why such opaque proceedings were necessary. The new government, which came to power after the ousting of Bakiyev during the April Revolution of 2010, claimed that the non-transparent and secretive nature of fuel supplies to the base was a bribe of sorts by the USA to the Bakiyev's clan (Roston, 2010). Chief of Staff of the post-2010 interim government Edil Baisalov accused Mina Corp of paying certain dividends to Maksim Bakiyev, the son of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, so that the Pentagon could have continued to use the Manas Air Base (Roston, 2010). Lawyer of Mina Dean Peroff from the law firm Amsterdam & Peroff stated that all accusations against the company were groundless, as the Subcommittee's investigation found no financial evidence linking the fuel suppliers with the Bakiyev family (Mazykina, 2011).

With access to public information only, it is unrealistic to track down the direct connection between the families of Akayev and Bakiyev and Red Star/Mina. The Gibraltar-registered companies, headquartered now in Dubai, continue to operate in a secretive manner. Denis Grigoriev (e-mail, 19 December 2012), the CEO of Mina Corp and Red Star, emphasized that "the company and its representatives have a policy not to grant interviews or comment directly on political events or situations outside of the most extraordinary circumstances". The FBI report on Akayev and his businesses have been classified in 2005, and the date of its declassification is unknown. The report of the U.S. Congress has shed some light on the issues of fuel delivery to the Manas Air Base. However, the investigation could have been more critical and thorough with a wider engagement of the Department of Justice, FBI and CIA. For instance, the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs concluded that there is no credible evidence linking financially Mina and Bakiyev. It is uncertain how the Subcommittee came to this conclusion because the investigators had not conducted a forensic audit, which would have traced every dollar spent either by AvCard, Red Star or Mina. In addition, the Subcommittee had not disclosed or referred to the classified information provided by the State Department and the DoD. As Philip Shishkin

(2013: 229) wrote, to Mina's accusers the findings of the USHR meant that the fuel corruption "was so well hidden and devious as to be beyond the reach of Washington investigators".

### *Rise of the Subcontractors*

Nevertheless, it is the relationship between the Pentagon's vendors and their local subcontractors, through which we can establish the vested interests of the Kyrgyz then-presidents in the Manas air base. Diagnostic evidence reveals that Bakiyev and his entourage continued the legacy of Akayev by recapturing the fuel supplies to the American air base through the use of subcontractors and fixed-based operators. Scott Horton (2010), in a testimony to the Subcommittee, stated that apart from the prosecutors, independently hired lawyers from a Washington-based legal firm investigated the Manas case and presented the findings to Bakiyev. Nonetheless, according to Horton's (2010) interlocutor, Bakiyev decided to drop the criminal case on fuel deliveries simply in order "to step into the shoes" of Akayev.

Since subcontractors operated locally, their ties with the ruling elites were more apparent than their links with either the DoD or the main vendors. As mentioned above, the founders of Red Star formed relationships with MIS and potentially with Aalam even prior to the events of 9/11. However, after the DoD procurements, these links were cemented, since Red Star became the base's only vendor, whilst MIS and Aalam became exclusive subcontractors. After the Tulip Revolution of 2005, the leadership of the country changed, as had changed the leadership of both MIS and Aalam. The Kazakh owners of Aalam immediately fled the country, whilst the company's machinery, equipment and two storage facilities were nationalized (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). The refueling complex was also returned to Manas airport (RFE/RL, 2005).

As for MIS, the company came fully under the control of Babanov who was already supplying fuel to MIS from 2003 (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012; USHR, 2010: 24). Prior to MIS, Babanov was building his gas

station empire in Kyrgyzstan under the patronage of Aidar Akayev (Jeenbekov, 2012). The total control of MIS, however, opened the door for Babanov to the jet fuel business, from which Babanov was previously excluded (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). Babanov split up MIS into Aircraft Petrol Management (APM) and Aero Fuels Service (AFS) and continued to supply fuel to the base (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). Bekbolotov confessed that after the ousting of Akayev, Red Star financed the creation of Kyrgyz Aviation Services (KAS), a proxy company, which leased the Aalam's former storage facilities (USHR, 2010: 26). However, Bekbolotov lamented the fact that the plan to control the entire fuel delivery process was soon interrupted, when Babanov established exclusive rights to access the Manas airport and its storage facilities (USHR, 2010: 26). As a result, Red Star was again subcontracting the fuel delivery to APM, a restructured version of MIS (USHR, 2010: 26).

Nonetheless, despite the involvement of the president's family in fuel deliveries, the American vendors continued to supply fuel to the air base via Bakiyev-affiliated subcontractors. The incident with Hatfield and Ivanov, the driver of Babanov's company, allowed Mina's KAS to regain the subcontracting niche, phasing out Babanov's stakes (USHR, 2010: 26). In May 2008, Mina created a new firm Manas Aero Fuels (MAF) with Gazprom subsidiaries.<sup>57</sup> In addition, in that stint Mina founded two more firms: Central Asia Fuels (CAF) and Manas Fuel Service (MFS) (USHR, 2010: 28). Mina did not even attempt to disguise its relationships with MAF. Red Star, Mina and MAF shared the same office space at the Hyatt hotel in Bishkek, whilst Nurbek Tashibekov, the general director of MAF, had a Red Star-affiliated email account (Tynan, 2010d). Nikolai Ushakov, Edelman's former employee at the American Pub, registered seven websites on behalf of Mina, among which were manasaerofuels.net, cafuels.net, manasfuels.net and kaerofuels.com (Tynan, 2010d). In 2008 MAF managed to fully outbid Babanov's

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<sup>57</sup> The role of Gazprom will be discussed below.

APM and gain absolute access to the storage facilities of the airport Manas (USHR, 2010: 28).

Although Mina representatives claimed that MAF, CAF and MFS were created to guarantee the company full control over fuel delivery, these new firms were believed to be Maksim Bakiyev's shares in the lucrative fuel chain (Sorokina and Saakyan, 2011; Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). When Bakiyev came to power, his son Maksim soon became allegedly the richest person in Kyrgyzstan, taking over all Akayev's assets from gold mining and hydro-energy to banking and mobile communications. He was accused of sharing business interests with disgraced Russian oligarchs and transnational criminals. The management of his assets and finances was conducted by MGN Group, an investment firm with offices in Moscow, New York and London (Smythe, 2012; Shishkin, 2013: 121). The company was led by American citizen Eugene Gourevitch who was accused of defrauding Telecom Italia and money laundering for international mafia (Smythe, 2012; Kucera, 2013). The public reputation of Maksim's companies was ostensibly sustained by a PR firm Flexi Communications led by former London-based BBC producer Vugar Khalilov (Ferghana News, 2010). Maksim's personal banker was his friend Mikhail Nadel, whose AsiaUniversalBank with two former US senators on its board, became the largest systemic bank in the country during Bakiyev's tenure (Shishkin, 2013). Maksim became so influential in the country that no serious political appointments were conducted without his approval (Anonymous, Security Adviser, interview, 14 January 2013). According to a confidential cable by the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, British and Canadian businessmen complained to the Duke of York Prince Andrew that "only those willing to participate in local corrupt practices are able to make any money", because nothing gets done in Kyrgyzstan without "a cut" to Maksim (Wikileaks, 2008).

Accordingly, there is circumstantial evidence that Maksim Bakiyev had "a cut" in the air fuel business as well. Unlike in the Aidar Akayev's case, it is more difficult to establish a direct connection between Maksim and MAF, CAF or MFS. Baisalov

wrote to Shishkin (2013: 229) ahead of his visit to Kyrgyzstan to study fuel supplies, “What do you guys want: some videotape where Maxim is seen taking cash from Mina? There is no such thing.” However, the USHR (2010: 37) confirmed that its investigation did establish that Maksim was informally engaged with the JSC Manas International Airport, the airport’s governing authority, which served as a gateway to lucrative fuel procurements.

In particular, after the Tulip Revolution one of the first orders by Kurmanbek Bakiyev was to appoint Egemberdi Myrzabekov as the new president of the Manas airport, whilst Bakytbek Sydykov, the son of Bakiyev’s Chief of Staff, was appointed as Myrzabekov’s deputy (Pobedimov, 2005). In turn, after these appointments DLA-Energy received a few letters from Myrzabekov who clearly outlined the criteria for the American vendors to meet in order to supply fuel to the Manas airport (USHR, 2010). Taking into account these requirements, DLA-Energy announced on March 15, 2007, that all fuel solicitors had to possess a letter of authorization from the Kyrgyz airport authorities and a commitment letter from the fixed-based operators (USHR, 2010: 39). As a result, AvCard and AeroControl were unable to obtain permission from Myrzabekov, whilst International Oil Trading Company’s letter of permission was believed to be not genuine (USHR, 2010: 39). Mina again won the DLA-Energy solicitation, as the company secured all authorizations, suitable fuel storages and exclusive relationships with all local fuel subcontractors (USHR, 2010: 39-40). In turn, MAF became a key subcontractor for fuel storage (USHR, 2010: 27).

Furthermore, in April 2009, Maksim’s confidant Eugene Gourevitch was introduced to the Board of Directors of Manas International Airport, whilst Sydykov was promoted to the position of the president of the Manas airport (Lenta.ru, 2011; Kucera, 2013). In few months Gourevitch orchestrated the sale of the airport’s refueling complex<sup>58</sup> to MAF for approximately 7 million USD, whilst Mina financed MAF to purchase this facility (USHR, 2010: 28; Lenta.ru, 2011). After the April events of 2010, Gourevitch would be sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment in

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<sup>58</sup> This is the refueling complex, which was illegally transferred to Aalam Services during Akayev and then nationalized.

absentia with confiscation of property on corruption charges (Akipress, 2011; Lenta.ru, 2011). The Prosecutor General's Office would state that the facility itself used to bring 4-5 million USD per year in rent fees, yet was still sold cheaply to MAF (Tynan, 2009). Although MAF was in good standing at that time, such operations in favour of MAF raised serious questions about whether Mina cut a deal with Bakiyev's younger son or bribed airport authorities (Shishkin, 2013: 229).

Such a chain of events confirms the involvement of the Kyrgyz government in the American fuel procurement practices and affirms the interests of the Bakiyev family in the American fuel deliveries. Unlike in Akayev's case, the engagement of Bakiyev and his entourage in this business is more clandestine. Nonetheless, there are diagnostic clues, which accentuate that nearly all key decisions pertinent to the presence of the American base in Kyrgyzstan should have been processed through the prism of the rent-seeking interests of the ruling regime. The recurring empirical pattern of fuel capture by Akayev and Bakiyev families only contributes to the hypothesis that mercantile interests of the ruling elites prevailed over the long-term state-building objectives.

#### *Open Secrets and Closed Rules: The Political Economy of Base Closure*

The fusion of private interests and state politics is a central feature of political economy of weak states. Civil servants lured by the opportunities of rapid enrichment often manipulate public policy in order to enrich themselves and their entourage (Mbaku, 1998). Accordingly, foreign policy becomes a handy tool for the ruling regime to maintain legitimacy and further its rent-seeking interests. The case of the Manas air base is an excellent empirical referent to examine how rent-seeking interests may affect high-level state decision-making.

As circumstantial evidence affirmed, the Manas air base was a source of lucrative rent for Bakiyev and his entourage. Nonetheless, on February 3, 2009, Bakiyev announced his decision to close the American air base at Manas International Airport. A few weeks later members of the Kyrgyz Parliament unanimously voted for the eviction of the base, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered a

diplomatic note to the American side to leave the base in 180 days. This decision had been conducted in light of the Kremlin's promise to provide a 2 billion USD soft loan to Kyrgyzstan along with a 150 million USD grant. Although Bakiyev confirmed the irrevocability of his decision, on June 23, 2009, Bishkek and Washington signed a new deal, according to which the rental fees for the use of the airport would increase from 17 million USD to 60 million USD (Cooley, 2012). The installation, renamed to the Transit Center at Manas, ceased to be a military base and became a logistics and transportation hub. In the first instance, these developments may be perceived as the New Great Game struggle between Washington and Moscow over strategic influence in Central Asia. Nonetheless, through the prism of the process-tracing methodology it becomes evident that the political economy of rent-seeking was integral to Bakiyev's political manoeuvres.

Despite Bakiyev's early rhetoric to evict the ISAF troops from the Kyrgyz soil, the announcement to close the American air base still came unexpectedly, especially after the rounds of high-level negotiations. In a similar vein, only few could have predicted the changes in basing agreement between Bishkek and Moscow after the Kremlin's pledge to provide a 2 billion USD loan to Bakiyev's government. Such a politics reinvigorated the popular tale of the New Great Game on the grand chessboard of Central Asia. Bakiyev explained his decisions regarding the air base through the prism of false expectations and high-level deception. In particular, immediately after the April revolution, at the Minsk press conference in 2010, Bakiyev asserted that he felt cheated by the Russian leadership in February 2009. The ousted president revealed that he had a lengthy conversation with both Medvedev and Putin prior to the announcement of his decision to terminate the U.S. access to the Manas air base (Centrasia, 2010). According to Bakiyev, the Russian leadership was irritated by the presence of the American forces in Kyrgyzstan and was willing to offset the costs of evicting the base.

However, when Bakiyev agreed to this deal and publicly announced his decision, the very next day the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan expressed their willingness to host an American air base (Centrasia, 2010). In turn,

when the Kyrgyz government delivered a formal notification to the USA of its intent to evict the base, Hillary Clinton sent a cable to the American agencies to examine the receptivity of the governments of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman to the shift of ISAF operations to their facilities (Wikileaks, 2009a). The U.S. State Department also advised to deliberate whether to pursue the Azerbaijan facilities as an alternative option (Wikileaks, 2009a). Respectively, Bakiyev lamented, “It turned out that only Kyrgyzstan was against [the presence of the American troops in Central Asia], whilst everyone was for it. This was a slap in the face from the Russian leadership” (Centrasia, 2010). Thus, Bakiyev referred to these developments as the justification for his decision to keep the American air base in Kyrgyzstan.

Nonetheless, an array of “straw-in-the-wind” clues suggested that Maksim Bakiyev managed to capture fuel supplies to the Manas Air Base, as did Aidar Akayev and Adil Toigonbayev at one time. Therefore, taking into account the vested interests of Bakiyev’s entourage in the lucrative fuel business, it remains contentious whether Bakiyev was guided by the Russian “deceit” to keep the air base in the country. In turn, such a political move by Bakiyev substantially endangered security of his regime. Although the proximate causes of the April 2010 events were directly related to the grievances accumulated within the country during the reign of Bakiyev, Kremlin contributed to the overthrow of Bakiyev by heating up the anger generated within Kyrgyzstan via the federal TV channels and imposing taxes on the export of the Russian petroleum products to Kyrgyzstan.

The Kremlin always reacted sensitively to any developments in the region related to the engagement of other players. After the events of 9/11 Vladimir Putin openly supported George W. Bush and the US-led war on terror, as Russia preferred to bandwagon the USA. Nonetheless, with the growing world prices on oil and gas, the rhetoric of senior Russian officials changed, as the political discourse in Russia was again focused on the geopolitical rivalry between Moscow and Washington. In

2003 Russia opened a military base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan.<sup>59</sup> The new air base, located 30 km away from the American air base, became the first military installations of Russia beyond its borders since its independence. The Russian leadership began to call for the eviction of all American military installations from its nearby territories and from Kyrgyzstan in particular, although the latter was installed under the approval of Moscow (Ashirov, Former Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 29 October 2012).

Accordingly, Bakiyev's U-turn enraged Vladimir Putin personally, as Putin refused to meet the official Kyrgyz delegation led by Prime-Minister Daniyar Usenov in Moscow in 2010 (Mikhailov, 2010; Rasov, 2010; Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013). Kremlin was further ridiculed by Bakiyev's misuse of the first instalment of the preferential loan in the amount of 300 million USD (Mikhailov, 2010; Rasov, 2010; Abdygulov, Head of the Economy and Strategic Development Department of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 13 September 2012). Maksim Bakiyev preferred to gamble with this money on the Russian stock exchange through his financial companies (Abdygulov, Head of the Economy and Strategic Development Department of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 13 September 2012).<sup>60</sup> In addition, Maksim was setting up a scheme to appropriate the remaining 1.7 million USD designated to the construction of the hydro-energy stations in the republic (Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013).<sup>61</sup>

In a similar vein, it remains contentious whether the Kremlin's initial goal was to overthrow Bakiyev's regime and evict the American base, although U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul confessed that in 2009 both Washington and Moscow offered bribes to Bakiyev to keep the base or shut it down respectively (Kucera, 2012). The Wikileaks (2009c) cables reveal that Russian

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<sup>59</sup> During the Soviet times, the Kant air base was a military aviation school, where pilots from the communist satellite countries, among which were even two presidents Hosni Mubarak and Hafez al-Assad, were undergoing aviation trainings (Mironov, n.d.).

<sup>60</sup> With access to public information, it is yet too difficult to cross-check this statement. Nonetheless, taking into account that Abdygulov worked with Maksim Bakiyev at his Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation and nowadays Abdygulov chairs the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan, I assume that Abdygulov could have indeed possessed insider knowledge. Nonetheless, this information should be still analysed with a certain degree of skepticism.

<sup>61</sup> In a similar vein, this information is also difficult to triangulate.

Ambassador Valentin Vlasov enjoyed an excellent rapport with the Kyrgyz political beau monde. For instance, at the opening of Maksim Bakiyev's new resort on June 20, 2009, the Russian Ambassador moved "like a trusted friend" through the nervous crowd of Kyrgyz political and business elite, which waited for "boss" Maksim to arrive and start the ceremony (Wikileaks, 2009c). U.S. Charge d'Affaires Lee Litzenberger reported that during this event a Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament ran up to the Russian Ambassador at some point to inform him that the American air base would stay in Kyrgyzstan because it was "all about the money" (Wikileaks, 2009c). To which Vlasov unsurprisingly replied, "I know it's about the money, but I want to see all the details of the money" (Wikileaks, 2009c). This "straw-in-the-wind" evidence demonstrates that Bakiyev's ruling regime shaped Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy according to its rent-seeking interests and preferences.

In general, such privy discussions demonstrate that rent-seeking schemes constituted an important part of political processes in Kyrgyzstan and were instrumental in the Manas basing politics. Moreover, there is "smoking-gun" evidence, which may explain why Bakiyev and his entourage decided to play the greater players off against one another. Behind-the-scene fuel arrangements reveal that the Russian call for the Manas eviction was rather a political discourse, since intricate fuel delivery chain had involved senior Kyrgyz officials, Russian Gazprom-owned refineries, American DLA-Energy and Gibraltar-registered companies.

From the very inception, the fuel procured to the Manas Air Base was delivered predominantly from Russian refineries with the tacit approval of Kremlin. During Akayev's tenure MIS and Aalam were procuring TS-1 jet fuel for the American air base from different locations, including Pavlodar and Atyrau, Kazakhstan, and the refineries of Turkmenistan (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). However, the main deliveries were from the Omsk refinery (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). The Omsk refinery is the largest petroleum refinery in the world with the annual production capacity of approximately 21 million tons of crude oil and is a subsidiary of

Gazpromneft, which, in turn, is a subsidiary of Gazprom (Gazpromneft, n.d.). The established fuel delivery schemes became jeopardized when Putin signed a decree No. 230 dated February 20, 2004, about the "Amendments to the list of equipment, materials and technologies that can be used to produce missile weapons and which are subjected to export control" (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, 2004). Referring to this decree, the Federal Agency for Technical and Export Control of the Russian Federation banned all exports of jet fuel for military purposes (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012).<sup>62</sup>

Regardless, the Manas air base has not experienced any fuel shortages. The U.S. Congress revealed that Red Star and Mina invented a scheme, which allowed companies to evade the ban and continue supplying jet fuel to the base. According to the USHR (2010), these American fuel vendors used their proxy companies to obtain false Kyrgyz certifications, which stated that the Russian fuel would be used by Kyrgyz civil aviation. However, this fuel was then re-procured to Red Star and Mina. All my interlocutors confirmed that it would be naïve to assume that the Kremlin was unaware of this illicit scheme. As Turdukulov (Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012) stated, all top Gazprom officials, including Miller, understood where their fuel was really going, but in the end Gazprom was the recipient that was receiving most of the American money. Indeed, it was apparent and easily calculable that imported jet fuel was not used for Kyrgyz domestic purposes. The monthly needs of the Manas air base were several times higher than the annual needs of the "half-dead" Kyrgyz civil aviation (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). During some months the Manas Air Base was consuming more fuel than Moscow airport Sheremetyevo (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012).

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<sup>62</sup> Both Bekbolotov and the DoD officials claimed that they have not seen this Decree, and they doubted whether it has existed per se. Yet, the document is freely available on the Russian internet for the download.

In light of these developments, the letter from the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Igor Chudinov to the Chief Executive of Gazprom Alexey Miller becomes especially controversial.<sup>63</sup> This letter, which was presented by Bekbolotov to the USHR, reveals that Chudinov requested Miller's assistance in the provision of jet fuel to Kyrgyz aviation. In particular, the head of Gazprom was asked to ensure Mina-founded CAF would continue to receive 40,000 tons of jet fuel per month. Bekbolotov did not disclose how they managed to persuade a second person in the country to engage in such a sensitive issue and, moreover, falsely verify that Russian jet fuel would be used by Kyrgyz aviation. Nonetheless, this letter serves as a "smoking-gun" proof that the ruling regime exploited official communication channels in order to protect its personal interests. Otherwise, it remains unclear why the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan officially requested Gazprom to support a private firm.

Moreover, Bakiyev's entourage also used unofficial "back-door" channels to promote its rent-seeking interests. Horton (2010: 5) revealed that Mina's director of operations Squires enjoyed an exceptional rapport with Kyrgyz senior officials including Maksim Bakiyev whom he personally saw together at the Hyatt hotel in Bishkek. In addition, my anonymous interlocutor (interview, 14 January 2013) confirmed that the appointment of Chudinov as Prime Minister was directly orchestrated by Maksim, because Chudinov was a cadre of Maksim. In turn, the Subcommittee of the USHR (2010) also exposed that Erkin Bekbolotov, owner of Mina Group, personally served as a middleman between Maksim Bakiyev and the DoD during the negotiations over the base. Erkin, who was a contemporary of Maksim, admitted before the USHR that they were, indeed, "social acquaintances" and knew one another since they were teenagers (USHR, 2010: 32; Shishkin, 2013: 230).<sup>64</sup> Although Bekbolotov claimed that "personally" he did not do any business with Maksim, Bekbolotov confirmed that he has approached Maksim to save the base (USHR, 2010: 32). After a meeting with Maksim, Bekbolotov contacted DLA-Energy to outline a proposed solution to the Manas conundrum

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<sup>63</sup> The original letter is published in the report *Mystery at Manas* of the USHR (2010).

<sup>64</sup> The fathers of Maksim and Erkin come from the same Jalal-Abad region and both served on high-level positions in the governments of Akayev.

brokered with the son of the president, and until June 23, 2009, Bekbolotov continued to serve as a “back-door channels” intermediary (USHR, 2010: 30). In turn, the Wikileaks (2009e) reveal that Maksim Bakiyev praised himself for masterminding the new transit agreement via his “American friends in Washington”.

If Bekbolotov’s rationale behind those negotiations was to save a source of his lucrative business, it is yet unknown what guided Maksim. Due to the lack of available public information and inaccessibility of Maksim Bakiyev for interview, we may only assume the genuine motives of Maksim in saving the base. Nonetheless, aforementioned diagnostic evidence indicated that Maksim Bakiyev had vested interests in the fuel deliveries to the Manas Air Base. After the April events of 2010, the Prosecutor General’s Office issued a statement that there was an ongoing investigation of the companies that belonged to Maksim, amongst which were CAF, MFS, KAS, Aircraft Petrol Ltd and Aviation Fuel Service (Tynan, 2010a). If those allegations are genuine, then the engagement of governmental officials and the rationale of Maksim in saving the base become apparent.

In fact, the protectionism of the jet fuel business by high-standing officials was not exercised regarding CAF only. Prior to 2005, there was a draft law to impose a 2000 KGS<sup>65</sup>-per-ton tax on all imported jet fuel; however, after 2005 the taxes on imported jet fuel were lifted by the Kyrgyz Parliament and the president (Tynan, 2010a). Moreover, Red Star and Mina were exempt from paying any taxes on Kyrgyz soil by an intergovernmental agreement (Tynan, 2010a). Accordingly, it is highly unlikely that the tax haven for American fuel vendors was spearheaded by incentives to ease the tax burden of businessmen in the republic with a budget deficit. The rent-seeking nature of the Bakiyev regime presents rather a more realistic picture, with tax havens used for some secretive purposes.

Furthermore, the Manas case not only demonstrates how the ruling elites capture the government and influence its distributional outcomes, but it also exposes how

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<sup>65</sup> 2000 KGS are approximately 45 USD.

political economy of rent-seeking emerges as a phenomenon not bound to the borders of weak states. “Smoking-gun” evidence showcased that complex fuel scheme engaged a variety of players. As Tolkunbek Abdygulov, (Head of the Economy and Strategic Development Department of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 13 September 2012) advised, this fuel chain was all about making money. The law of finance is to make money using other people’s money, and in our case there was a stable buyer – the U.S. Air Force, and there was a stable seller – the refineries in Russia (Abdygulov, interview, 13 September 2012). What was needed was to find a way how to join this chain between the seller and the buyer and make money (Abdygulov, interview, 13 September 2012). Maksim Bakiyev did not even have to invent anything, he simply outlined the new rules of the game, and everyone started playing to them accordingly, because all parties were interested in the Russian fuel to be delivered to the American air base (Abdygulov, interview, 13 September 2012).

What was important for Gazprom and other Russian companies is that they have never been directly engaged with the American vendors or Kyrgyz subcontractors in these transactions (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). There were 2-3 intermediary companies, which bought fuel from Russia and then resold it in Kyrgyzstan; there was never a direct contact between the initial sellers and Mina (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). For instance, in Russia there are few documents available online for public access about legal dispute No. A40-85035/2005 between LLC NefteTrade and the Inspectorate of the Federal Tax Service of the Russian Federation at the Arbitrary Court of Moscow.<sup>66</sup> According to this case, NefteTrade had purchased fuel from JSC RussNeft’s Syzran refinery and then sold it on to a third party LLC Albars. In turn, Albars sold this fuel to Red Star’s KAS. KAS would then sell this fuel to Red Star/Mina. Interestingly, the information about Albars (n.d.) available on its website displays that this Bishkek-registered company was created on August 29, 2002, to export Russian oil to the countries belonging to the Customs Union. The company’s main fuel suppliers are Russneft, Rosneft, Gazprom Oil and Lukoil

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<sup>66</sup> For instance, there are some documents available on the legal portal Pravo.Ru.

(Albars, n.d.). Albars (n.d.) also has two foreign bank accounts at BNP Paribas and Bank Hapoalim in Switzerland, with the former also being a place where Red Star and Mina used to have accounts (USHR, 2010).

As Bekbolotov confessed to the USHR (2010: 46), this scheme was a political cover for the Kremlin, because if the information about Gazprom and Mina became public, the Kremlin would have failed to deal with it politically and thus would have closed the fuel channel. There was also a pragmatic political explanation why the Kremlin permitted the sale of fuel to the base. Fuel was a hook for the Kremlin to have at least some control over the American base (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). If Russia decided to close this particular fuel channel, the base would have found another source of fuel supply and would have become totally inaccessible to the Russians (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013). This situation was foreseen because Red Star and Mina were advised to examine alternative fuel routes, and were making contacts in Turkmenistan and Arab countries (Anonymous, Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, interview, 23 December 2013).

In general, it is evident that the Kyrgyz fuel scheme was a multifarious mechanism that involved senior officials, shell and intermediary firms, the American DoD and Russian refineries. The cobweb of links between the companies was as complex as the logistics routes chosen for the delivery of jet fuel. Whilst ensuring that both Russian and American needs were satisfied, the regimes of Akayev and Bakiyev managed to turn the air base into the source of rent. The intricate linkages between the Kyrgyz ruling elites and international actors demonstrated that a small Central Asian republic was not a mere pawn of great powers, but a fully-fledged figure in the “tournament of shadows” for fuel, influence and power. In fact, much of the ostensible great power politics was mere acts of state *dramaturgiia* and a cover for the Kyrgyz ruling regimes to hide their goals of personal enrichment. The lucrative business opportunities brought together strange bedfellows, blurring the contours of the Central Asian geopolitical map and anachronizing traditional Cold War

thinking. Global financial mechanisms and offshore vehicles have become indispensable to modern Kyrgyzstan, whilst the country itself has fully immersed itself into the global informal economy.

### *Rivalry from Within*

In one of its cables to the U.S. State Department, the American Embassy in Bishkek suggested that the Manas Air Base would continue “to lurch from crisis to crisis”, as both the Kyrgyz government and the opposition would use the base for their own domestic political purposes (Wikileaks, 2007). Although the American diplomatic cable suggested that the base would be exploited more rhetorically and as part of the political arguments, the Manas Air Base became the object of controversy between different elite groupings within the country, whilst the access to its fuel supplies contributed to political instability and to some extent to popular uprisings in Kyrgyzstan. As Eric McGlinchey (2011) asserted, the unwillingness of Akayev and Bakiyev to redistribute the wealth accumulated from the fuel contracts to the American air base was one of the factors in the downfall of their regimes.

Indeed, in a country, where approximately 800 families own most of the profitable businesses, access to lucrative fuel contracts may become a cause of fracture between the elites and can lead to substantial power shifts within the republic.<sup>67</sup> As Markowitz (2013) theorised, provincial and local elites become more dependent on the existing regime and open for cooptation, when rent-seeking opportunities are evenly distributed between them. However, when those elites lose their rent-seeking avenues, they become more inclined to challenge political status quo in order to restore the opportunities to convert scarce resources into lucrative rents (Markowitz, 2013). In this respect, the rivalries over the sources of rent in Kyrgyzstan were noticeable not only between different clans, but also within each clan. For instance, initially during the tenure of Akayev Akayev’s son-in-law Adil Toigonbayev was controlling major assets in the country (Anonymous, Security Adviser, interview, 14 January 2013). However, after some time Akayev’s son Aidar began to drive out his close relative from the most lucrative businesses, and

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<sup>67</sup> For instance, Beshimov (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, interview, 12 November 2012) advised that approximately 500-600 people control all major assets in Kyrgyzstan.

as a result they had to split their spheres of interest (Cloud, 2005; Anonymous, Security Adviser, interview, 14 January 2013). The fuel supplies to Manas were splintered between Akayev's son and son-in-law, which emphasises that none of the sides was interested in yielding control of this particular business.

In the case of Bakiyev, the intra-clan rivalry was unfolding between the sons and the brothers of the president. During the first year after the March revolution of 2005 Bakiyev's brothers had significant influence over the president, but after 2006 Maksim became in control of his father to usurp the power in the country (Anonymous, Security Adviser, interview, 14 January 2013; Anonymous, Political Adviser, interview, 6 May 2013; Wikileaks, 2008). Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Bakiyev, stated that he met Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2006 to inform him that other families were also interested in the Manas jet fuel cake (Kramer, 2010). However, Bakiyev continued to threaten Washington to evict the base with the purpose of channelling the DoD's fuel contracts to the companies controlled by his family (Kramer, 2010). Dzhekshenkulov claimed that this confrontation with Bakiyev has partly led to the Dzhekshenkulov's dismissal from the office (Kramer, 2010).

The emergence of a strong elitist class in Kyrgyzstan can be attributed to the early liberalisation reforms of Akayev (Radnitz, 2010b; Radnitz, 2010b). Those reforms helped create a thin layer of wealthy elites who had a large social support base and were capable of challenging the ruling regimes (Radnitz, 2010b). The rivalry between Babanov and Mina-affiliated intermediary companies is an indicative example of such a struggle between different power groups within Kyrgyzstan over access to the Manas fuel deliveries. When Aidar Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan, Babanov took over his jet fuel business, and from 2005 to 2007 Babanov became the sole supplier of fuel to the American air base (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). However, by 2008 the governing authorities of the airport began to favour the rivals of Babanov, and in a short stint Babanov's companies were outbid by MAF, CAF and MFS (USHR, 2010). Allegedly, Maksim Bakiyev decided to get the full control over the jet fuel supplies

to Manas and used these companies and the airport authority to drive out Babanov from this business (Sorokina and Saakyan, 2011). Approximately the same period Babanov sold his gas station empire to Gazprom for 100 million USD and joined the opposition that demanded the resignation of Bakiyev (Bukasheva, 2010).<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the competition between Babanov's companies and Mina-affiliated entities was also evident in their attempts to capture the VOSST fuel storage. Valeriy Khon's company VOSST owned a large fuel storage facility located in a close proximity to the Manas Air Base. Khon confirmed that Squires from Mina approached him in 2003, 2006 and 2008 seeking to buy or rent the facility (Tynan, 2010b). According to Khon, after the third refusal the people of Maksim began to pressure Khon to sell the storage (Tynan, 2010b). Khon advised that he was pressured in a similar vein by Babanov and his affiliates (Tynan, 2010b). Squires of Mina acknowledged before the Subcommittee that Babanov turned out to be "a bitter and unpleasant rival" to Mina and Red Star (USHR, 2010: 40). Nonetheless, in a testimony to the USHR (2010) Khon asserted that Babanov was pressuring Khon to lease the storage facility not to Babanov, but to Red Star, and in 2008 Khon agreed to sell the storage facility to LLC Atek Oil, which belonged to Sagadylda uuly Janybek, the niece of Babanov. However, Khon claimed that 5 million USD promised for the storage has never been transferred to him. After an eight-month long lawsuit Atek Oil agreed to return the facility to Khon, but on onerous terms (Babakulov, 2011). Khon asserted that the people of Maksim Bakiyev forced him to sign this settlement agreement in December 2009 (Babakulov, 2011). In 2009 Babanov was also appointed the Vice Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, which to some extent can be perceived as the compensation to him for the base, since by joining the opposition Babanov significantly increased the weight of the anti-Bakiyev block.

In general, these examples demonstrate that there was a constant struggle between the local elites over access to the Manas fuel pipe. Although the fuel

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<sup>68</sup> In turn, in 2008, Babanov's close business partner Musa Bazhaev, the Russian oligarch of Chechen origin, lost his factories Koshoy and Kaiyndy-Kant in Kyrgyzstan purportedly to Maksim Bakiyev (Bukasheva, 2010).

supplies to the Manas Air Base were always controlled by the close relatives of the then-presidents, the remaining elitist groupings were keen to redistribute scarce resources even at the expense of political stability in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, this struggle often shifted the power balance within the country.

### *Life after the April Revolution of 2010*

The overthrow of Bakiyev exposed numerous problems related to the DoD procurement at the Manas airport, since the political economy of fuel supplies to the air base was part of the political conflict that led to the uprising against Bakiyev and then indirectly to the ethnic violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan. The new government openly criticised Washington for supporting Bakiyev's corrupt regime by providing lucrative fuel contracts to Bakiyev-affiliated companies at the expense of political freedoms and human rights. The diplomatic scandal was escalated further, when Mina was awarded a new contract in 2010 by DLA-Energy notwithstanding the open objections of the Kyrgyz government. On December 2, 2010, Interim President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbayeva met with U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton in Bishkek, where both parties agreed to work on establishing a new Kyrgyz state venture that would supply fuel to the Transit Center at Manas.<sup>69</sup>

Nonetheless, whilst DLA-Energy was preparing a new fuel solicitation for 2012 and whilst Kyrgyzstan was negotiating the creation of a joint venture with Gazpromneft, Mina continued to supply fuel to the Transit Center (Pellerin, 2010). In addition, to fix its reputation Mina hired reputable international and local law firms such as Amsterdam & Peroff<sup>70</sup> and Kalikova & Associates<sup>71</sup> and top-notch PR and lobbying firms such as Bush-Cheney affiliated Hamilton Place Strategies<sup>72</sup> and BGR Gabara<sup>73</sup>. In the summer of 2011 Mina announced that it would provide 2.5 million USD to the American University of Central Asia to create a New Generation Academy, a preparatory school for 70 students from the regions (American

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<sup>69</sup> To read the U.S. Embassy transcript go to [http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/tr\\_12\\_03\\_10.html](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov/tr_12_03_10.html).

<sup>70</sup> See Mazykina, J. (2011).

<sup>71</sup> See <http://k-a.kg/eng/inga-mecke-attorney-amsterdam-peroff-llp>.

<sup>72</sup> See Tynan (2010e).

<sup>73</sup> See [http://www.bgrdc.com/bgr\\_gabara.html](http://www.bgrdc.com/bgr_gabara.html).

University of Central Asia, 2011). Despite Mina's public relations efforts it was apparent that the U.S. vendor was losing its business niche in Kyrgyzstan, since the new government was determined to oust Mina from fuel contracting to Manas. In the summer of 2010, Bekbolotov met with son of Otunbayeva Atai Sadybakasov in Istanbul (Kucera, 2010). After this meeting Otunbayeva posted a new entry in her video blog that the leadership of Mina was trying to establish contacts with her to renegotiate the terms, but Otunbayeva omitted that her son deliberately flew to Istanbul to meet Bekbolotov (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012). Turdukulov (Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012) speculates that probably Mina and Sadybakasov failed to come to a common agreement, and Mina decided to discredit Otunbayeva. By leaking the information about this meeting, the leadership of Mina was trying to demonstrate that the new government was also playing by the same rules of rent-seeking and self-profiting (Turdukulov, Chairman, Foundation of Progress, interview, 12 November 2012).

In fact, the immediate post-Bakiyev fuel supply structure demonstrates that there was still a plethora of opaque operations and intermediary companies. In 2010 Mina agreed to subcontract a fraction of its fuel requirements to the Kyrgyz state-owned TZK Manas (Centrasia, 2011; Tynan, 2011b). Centrasia (2011) revealed that in 2010 Mina Corp was buying fuel from TZK Manas for 1030 USD per ton and was selling it to the U.S. government for 1263 USD, making a profit of 233 USD per ton. In turn, TZK Manas was buying fuel from a new player, mysterious Mega Oil, for 850-890 USD, making a profit of nearly 140-180 USD per ton (Centrasia, 2011). Mega Oil was buying fuel from the Gazprom-owned refineries in Russia for approximately 780 USD and earning 69-110 USD per ton (Centrasia, 2011).

The appearance of these new intermediary companies immediately led to the allegations of old practices within the new government. TZK Manas has long been associated with Babanov, the favourite of Otunbayeva (Yalovkina, 2012). Mega Oil was an intermediary company created by the leadership of a Bishkek subsidiary of Gazpromneft, Gazpromneft Azia, led by former Minister of Finance under Akayev

Bolot Abildayev (Centrasia, 2011). Centrasia (2011) discovered that from its inception in 2007 Mega Oil has been several times re-registered, but all owners of the company were Gazprom-affiliates. For instance, amongst the founders of the company were the son, the wife and the daughter-in-law of Abildayev, whilst the legal address of the company matched one of the office addresses of the Gazpromneft Azia (Centrasia, 2011). Indeed, it is difficult to find a direct link between Otunbayeva, Babanov and Mega Oil. Nevertheless, Kyrgyz journalist Elena Avdeeva (2011) emphasised that in 2010 the director of TZK Manas was Marat Malatayev who knew Otunbayeva well from their shared diplomatic work history and who knew well Babanov. Purportedly, Malatayev orchestrated the purchase of Babanov's gas station by Gazpromneft Azia, where Malatayev has served as the Deputy Director (Avdeeva, 2011). This information is, however, difficult to triangulate and thus it needs to be taken into account with a certain degree of scepticism.

In turn, a Eurasianet source advised that TZK Manas was using Mega Oil, because at that time TZK Manas did not possess a license to export the Russian jet fuel to Kyrgyzstan (Tynan, 2011a). My anonymous interlocutor (Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012) also stated that jet fuel is a very scarce product with extremely high demand in the world. Fuel vendors often have to negotiate the amounts of fuel they purchase one year ahead, because every petroleum refinery has its own storage limits (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). As a result, if fuel vendors fail to purchase the volumes of fuel indicated in their "wish lists" to the refineries, they often get fined for failing to comply with the obligations (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). These practices are particularly widespread at the Russian refineries. Since no one in fuel business expected the April revolution of 2010, the fuel vendors found themselves in a situation when they could have procured fuel to Mina, but they had no signed memorandums with the Russian refineries (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012). Thus, to some degree the introduction of Mega Oil was a way to continue fuel supplies to the

base, using the institutional capacities of Gazpromneft Azia (Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012; Tynan, 2011a).

Nonetheless, in February 2011, Gazpromneft Aero, the subsidiary of the Russian giant Gazpromneft, and TZK Manas signed an agreement on creating a joint venture Gazpromneft Aero-Kyrgyzstan (GAK), with a shared ratio of 51 percent to 49 percent (K-News, 2012). On September 26, 2011, the DoD awarded GAK with the first contract to supply 20 to 50 percent of all required fuel to the Transit Center at Manas, with the possibility of increasing GAK's shares up to 90 percent if GAK can fully meet those requirements (U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, 2011). On October 26, 2011, the DoD announced that London-based World Fuel Services Europe (WFSE) was chosen as the second Manas fuel vendor with the requirement to supply a minimum of 10 percent of fuel needs of the base (Tynan, 2011b). World Fuel Services Europe is a branch of World Fuel Services, a Fortune 500 company, that purchased the first air base vendor AvCard (Tynan, 2011b). This news was perceived locally as a promising sign. Indeed, these were exciting times when the Americans, Russians and Kyrgyz sat together at the table to discuss the fuel arrangements to the Manas Air Base.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter sought to examine a complex struggle over the fuel supplies to the American air base at the Manas International Airport. Whilst unveiling intricate linkages between different actors over access to the Manas Air Base, this section demonstrated that the American air base has become a source of rent for the ruling elites in Kyrgyzstan. Both Akayev and Bakiyev and their entourages exploited the DoD's lucrative fuel contracts for the personal enrichment and for the strengthening of their regimes. The capture of fuel supplies to the Manas Air Base has been accomplished through the use of subcontractors and fixed-based operators. In the case of Akayev these companies were MIS and Aalam, and in the case of Bakiyev these companies were purportedly KAS, APM, AFS, CAF and MAF.

Although the fuel deliveries to the Manas Air Base were always controlled by the inner circles of the ruling presidents, the remaining elitist groupings were eager to alter these arrangements. As a result, lucrative fuel contracts became a cause of fracture between the Kyrgyz elites and led to substantial power shifts and political instability in the republic, which eventually turned into two successful uprisings against Akayev and Bakiyev. In addition, the empirical evidence demonstrated that even after the ousting of two presidents the new elites continued to play by the old rules. The case of Mega Oil displayed that there was still a progress to make in fuel procurement to make it a more transparent process.

Moreover, Manas business arrangements revealed that the geopolitically motivated concept of the New Great Game lacked empirical evidence in Kyrgyzstan. Common business interests overshadowed potential geopolitical points of friction, whilst financial vehicles and offshore mechanisms ensured that these secret arrangements remained intact. The regimes of Akayev and Bakiyev managed to play off Washington and Moscow for their own rent-seeking interests, as the complex fuel schemes involved not only Kyrgyz senior officials and shell and intermediary companies, but also the American DoD and the Russian refineries. Much of the great power politics turned out to be the state performances directed to hide the real rent-seeking rationales. As a result, Kyrgyz politics emerged as part of a complex constellation with transnational connections and global outreach.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis presented a comprehensive analysis of the Kyrgyz foreign policy from the early 1990s to 2011. The main research question was the following: how and to what extent does regime security affect Kyrgyz foreign policymaking? Accordingly, this work revealed that regime security was quintessential in shaping foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan. Such a situation was predetermined by the systemic weaknesses of the republic and personal interests of the ruling regimes. In particular, the Kyrgyz ruling elites managed to play off greater players for their own rent-seeking interests and performed the acts of virtual politics in order to accommodate the ambitions of regional hegemony and to sustain their own monopoly of violence within Kyrgyzstan.

### *Regime Security and Foreign Policy*

Weak states like Kyrgyzstan pose a formidable challenge to the Westphalian view of security and international order. Security in such a context implies a wide range of preconditions vital for the existence of weak state and which have already been realised in developed countries. Weak states lack a strong physical base, effective public institutions, a monopoly on the instruments of violence and a consensus on the idea of the state and thus are distinguished by the nature of their insecurities (Buzan, 1991). The ruling elites in such states fail to escape the insecurity dilemma posed by both internal and external weaknesses of the state, and as a result the perennial challenge of those elites becomes the dilemma of achieving short-term regime security at the expense of the long-term state-building objectives (Migdal, 1988; Ayoob, 1995; Mohamedou, 1998; Jackson, 2010).

In this respect, the regime security variable may add an analytical breadth to the foreign policy analysis of weak states. Accordingly, this work attempted to demonstrate that regime security drove foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan. In turn, the preponderance of regime security in Kyrgyz foreign policy was explained by the systemic weaknesses of the country and the rent-seeking motives of the ruling elites. In this research, “regime” was defined as a certain group of people in power,

the ruling elites, who have a monopoly on the instruments of violence within the country. Such a conceptualisation focuses on a powerful minority of individuals, i.e. presidents and their entourages, who can significantly affect state policymaking and whose influence and might prevails over those of other players in the country.

Traditionally, Central Asia has been studied through the interplay of greater players and particularly through the Russian decline and reassertion in the region. Such a conceptualisation is in line with the neorealist concept of the New Great Game, which imagines a covert rivalry between Russia, China and the USA over access to Central Asia. This model envisages that weak Central Asian states have no alternatives but to bandwagon the actors with stronger offensive potential. Indeed, the retrospective analysis of the Kyrgyz foreign policy demonstrated that the failures of economic reforms and rapid impoverishment of the republic under Akayev predetermined the weakest place of Kyrgyzstan in the regional geopolitical system of axes.

As a result, the pattern of Kyrgyz foreign policy behaviour was often erratic and fragmentary. Instead of bridging the East and the West, Kyrgyzstan was rather fluctuating between the East and the West. Driven by certain momentums and political conjunctures the foreign policy orientation of Kyrgyzstan failed to translate into a consistent system that would reflect Kyrgyzstan's national interests. The prevailing political discourses attributed bandwagoning behaviour of Kyrgyzstan to systemic constraints and were often justified by the idea that small and weak states are more prone to external influences.

Indeed, the systemic weaknesses of Kyrgyzstan partially explain why the ruling regimes were preoccupied with the accommodation of the ambitions of regional hegemons, whilst their multivector foreign policy resembled opportunism and state-level beggary. Kyrgyzstan's weak infrastructural power, undiversified economy and a limited resource endowment transformed the republic into one of the poorest and weakest states in the world incapable of projecting power beyond its borders. As a result, the Kyrgyz leadership had to take into account the policies and priorities of

stronger partners, regional organisations and international institutions quite often in order to attract necessary funds to finance deficit budget.

Nonetheless, the preponderance of regime security in Kyrgyz foreign policy was related not only to the systemic weaknesses of the country, but was also deeply rooted in the rent-seeking interests of the ruling regime. Characterised by corrupt, autocratic and family-based governance, the Kyrgyz ruling elites, in reality, lacked ideological commitments to any foreign policy poles and were rather interested in securing personal political and economic benefits by playing off greater players (Lewis, 2008). As diagnostic evidence revealed, rent-seeking schemes constituted an important part of political processes in the country and were instrumental in shaping foreign policy orientations of Kyrgyzstan.

Since regime security was driven by the systemic constraints and the rent-seeking interests of the ruling elites, virtual politics emerged as a convenient strategy for the ruling regimes to both further their rent-seeking interests and to reinforce their security from the external pressures. In this respect, the Kyrgyz leadership excelled at theatricalising democratic reforms for the Western audience and at reinventing regionalism for the less democratic Eastern and Central Asian counterparts. The reflection of such a virtual politics was the erratic foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan. In fact, what some scholars (Abdurazakov, n.d.; Omarov, 2007; Otunbayeva, 2009; Baktygulov, 2012) framed as the non-existing Kyrgyz foreign policy can be interpreted as the virtual foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan, the goal of which was to guarantee domestic security and rent-seeking opportunities to the ruling regimes.

This work revealed numerous cases of such a phenomenon. For instance, these tendencies were evident in the relationships of Kyrgyzstan with Russia, China and the USA within regional military structures. Diagnostic evidence exposed that both the CSTO and the SCO suffered from institutional flaws and lacked political backing from their member-states to provide security guarantees to the Kyrgyz leadership. In a similar vein, the NATO's PfP programme was not equipped to address internal and external threats to the republic. Nonetheless, Kyrgyzstan's

military state performance was not about achieving tangible benefits. Akayev and Bakiyev exploited the army to perform the acts of virtual politics in order to convert the state *dramaturgiia* into political and financial currency and to accommodate the ambitions of regional hegemons. Participation in regional security initiatives was the showcase conducted by the Kyrgyz ruling regimes to display their bandwagoning attitudes towards greater players to reinforce domestic regime security. However, virtual politics of military cooperation brought quite often virtual dividends only. Regional security structures were as disinclined to fight the IMU islamists in the Batken region in 1999 and 2000, as they were unwilling to protect falling regimes of Akayev and Bakiyev in 2005 and 2010 respectively. Nevertheless, it was the government of Otunbayeva, which experienced the real non-committal nature of bilateral and multilateral security arrangements. Regional security organisations along with Russia, China and the USA remained reticent to Otunbayeva's call for humanitarian intervention and international peacekeeping, when the ethnic violence broke in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. As a result, against the backdrop of international abandonment the Kyrgyz leadership had to rely on internal security forces, which were corroded by the corrupt practices of rent-seeking and regime security, and on the Kyrgyz army, which was weak, poorly equipped and with low fighting capabilities.

In a similar vein, the Kyrgyz ruling elites orchestrated the acts of state *dramaturgiia* to capture the state and create opportunities for personal gain. Crystallised by the clan and family bonds, rent-seeking in Kyrgyzstan has morphed into a symbiotic substance of parasitic nature to the state apparatus. Corruption and nepotism became the founding skeleton of the Kyrgyz political system, wherein every actor with access to illegal or semi-illegal profiting was interested in safeguarding the existing regime. Those excluded from the lucrative incomes and preferential benefits tended to challenge the ruling actors, but not the rules of the game. The experience of the American air base Manas in Kyrgyzstan serves as an excellent empirical referent to prove that Kyrgyz foreign policy decisions have rarely gone beyond the commercial preferences of the ruling elites. As this work showcased, both Akayev and Bakiyev and their entourages exploited the US Department of

Defence's lucrative fuel contracts for the personal enrichment and for the strengthening of their regimes. In addition, the circumstantial evidence revealed that even after the ousting of two autocratic presidents the new elites continued to play by the old rules of rent-seeking. More importantly, clandestine business arrangements of the Manas Air Base challenged the geopolitically motivated concept of the New Great Game. The regimes of Akayev and Bakiyev managed to play off Washington and Moscow for their own rent-seeking interests, whilst much of the great power politics turned out to be mere state performances directed to hide the real rent-seeking rationales. Common business interests overshadowed potential geopolitical points of friction, as the complex behind-the-scene fuel arrangements involved not only senior Kyrgyz officials and shell and intermediary companies, but also the American Department of Defence and the Russian refineries.

In turn, official and unofficial foreign policy discourses were used by the Kyrgyz leadership to justify opportunistic and mercantile deviations of the international behaviour of Kyrgyzstan. For instance, the concept of Kyrgyz multivector foreign policy assumed courting the protection of greater players and represented the form of political solidarity against the pressures and processes that could have challenged the Kyrgyz ruling regimes. Likewise, informal foreign policy discourses such as conspiracy theories reproduced the predominant state of affairs and legitimised patron-client relations as an established mode of governance. Thus, Kyrgyzstan continued its fluctuations between different power poles notwithstanding the proclamations by Akayev and Bakiyev to run a multivector foreign policy and to bridge the East and the West. Despite being a career diplomat, Roza Otunbayeva also had little opportunity and power to re-formulate foreign policy of the country.

In sum, regime security played an instrumental role in shaping foreign policy choices of Kyrgyzstan. Although the majority of scholars and policymakers perceived Kyrgyz foreign policy of regime security as the reaction to external influences, systemic factors were not the only constitutive element that shaped

external relations of the republic. Rent-seeking was amongst the primary factors that influenced Kyrgyz decisionmaking. Akayev's ineffective and corrupt governance led to the emergence of a rent-seeking regime, which was driven by the goal of maintaining its physical presence and safeguarding established rules of the game. These arrangements were further solidified by Bakiyev and remained unchallenged by Otunbayeva. As a result, the Kyrgyz foreign policymaking institutions became ingrained into the rent-seeking schemes of the ruling regimes, whilst the meritocratic expectations of foreign service were substituted by unprofessional, mercantile and deferential values that rarely went beyond the commercial preferences of the powerful elites. In other words, the inconsistent Kyrgyz foreign policy was the outcome of virtual politics exercised by the ruling regimes in order to protect themselves from the systemic pressures and to maintain their rent-seeking practices.

*Generalisation of Findings: Multilevel Framework of Analysis and Process-Tracing*

This dissertation examined international relations of Kyrgyzstan through an interpretive approach integrative of internal, external and transnational variables. Such an approach seeks to bridge the divide between FPA and IR and enhance their capacity to explain the input and output of state behaviour through a multi-level and multi-causal framework of analysis. This framework challenges conventional approaches to the study of weak states and presents a new perspective for the causal analysis of complex political phenomenon. Indeed, an interpretivist approach with causal process-tracing methodology provides intriguing opportunities for hypothesis-building and hypothesis-testing.

Accordingly, this work encouraged to start the quest for unpacking international behaviour of weak states not on domestic or systemic levels, but in between, incorporating external environment, internal insecurities and transnational links. This approach is based on Hay's (2002) principles of critical political analysis. Smith, Hadfield and Dunne (2008) proposed to apply the features of Hay's analysis to the foreign policy sphere. This framework challenges the postulates of structural realism and actor-specific commitments of traditional FPA by incorporating both the

agency and the structure as potential independent variables and outlining necessary prerequisites for the effective causal analysis of political processes. The application of these principles to foreign policy of weak states offers a significant advantage over the limited perspectives of both FPA and wider IR, since there is a lack of conceptual frameworks that adequately explain foreign policy behaviour of weak states. Orthodox approaches to FPA are well-equipped to analyse foreign policies of stronger players such as the USA or Russia. Yet, when applied to smaller and weaker states such as Kyrgyzstan the universality of these approaches lacks sufficient explanatory punch. As a result, the studies of underdeveloped states remain underdeveloped and mostly centred around conventional idiosyncratic, reductionist and neorealist dogmas.

In this respect, the framework used for this study can help understand and explain international behaviour of other weak states, in Central Asia and beyond, in broader and more genuine terms. In particular, an interpretive and inductive approach integrative of both internal and external variables may allow the scholars to examine the sources of foreign policies in the context, where a combination of different variables can lead to the same outcome. For instance, as previously discussed, through the analysis of war-torn Tajikistan Jonson (2006) provided constructivist insights on how a small and weak state formulates its foreign policy priorities under the vigilante focus of greater powers. Jonson (2006) demonstrated that the distinction between the internal and external variables, which shape foreign policy of weak states, is razor-thin. Thus, it is important to take into account both domestic and systemic context in order to understand how small Central Asian states develop and promote their national interests.

Nonetheless, such an approach should not be limited to the Central Asian region exclusively. For example, Yasar Sari (2008) examined foreign policy decisionmaking of post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia through the interplay of domestic and systemic variables and regime security in particular. Sari (2008) sought to verify whether internal variables such as the type of threats, role of leadership and its orientation, strength of the newly independent states, and

external level of interference shape foreign policy choices of weak post-Soviet states. Thus, Sari (2008) denoted that the general foreign policy trends of those states towards their former imperial centre were characterised by balancing, bandwagoning and omnibalancing. However, when both internal and external security matters were on stake, the leadership of Yerevan, Baku and Tbilisi gave higher priority to those issues, which were of vital importance to their own security. Accordingly, Sari (2008: 392) concluded that foreign policies of these Caucasian states were the product of the perceived threats to the ruling regimes than of the geopolitical estimations, although the ruling regimes have not separated domestic and foreign policies process, as they regarded foreign policy as “a tool for interaction between power struggles in domestic politics and position in the international system”. In a similar vein, Bassel Salloukh (2000) advocated for a move away from structural realism when examining the Arab alliance decisionmaking. Salloukh (2000) argued that foreign policies of Syria under Bashar al-Assad and Jordan under King Hussein were driven by the state-society variable, as the ruling regimes in these states were preoccupied with their own survival. In the case of Syria, the Ba'th party ensured regime control and obedience of the active societal group through strong internal corporatist institutions and specialized bureaus of the Regional Command, which in turn allowed Assad to engage more with the external threats and geopolitical balancing (Salloukh, 2000). In Jordan, the Hashemite regime was more engaged with the internal matters and its own security, whilst the domestic and external spheres overlapped to the extent of the merger (Salloukh, 2000). In other words, such an approach has the potential to contribute to the understanding of structural factors that shape international behaviour of weak states across the globe in general and in Central Asia in particular.

Furthermore, the causal research design adopted for this work utilised the case study, process-tracing and triangulation research methods to ensure the validity and reliability of its generalisations. The inductive nature of the case study method provides an opportunity for the scholars to test the hypothesis via the use of causal mechanisms, which produce observable implications for the evaluation.

Although external validity of case studies is relatively weak, transferability of findings is the challenge of qualitative research in general and not the problem inherent exclusively to a specific research design. Thus, case studies can still succeed at developing valid generalisations, especially in the context of the cases with equifinality. Moreover, interpretive process-tracing can be conducive for testing the hypothesis both against different evidence within and against different cases across the research topic, since process-tracing is superior at capturing causal mechanisms in action for comparison and possible transferability to other cases.

There is a caveat, however, which needs to be taken into account by scholars who want to study complex political phenomena in the volatile and turbulent regions such as Central Asia through an interpretivist approach with causal process-tracing methodology. Due to an uneven access to the information it may be difficult to run a classical process-tracing research model. Scholars have to acknowledge the possibility of inferential leaps, missing variables and biased or false data, and thus they have to always cross-check or triangulate information. Moreover, scholars have to be aware that it may be problematic to locate undeniable evidence or evidence beyond reasonable doubt and run a “double decisive” process-tracing test in the context of a sensitive political research, especially if the researchers have access to public information only and are constrained by limited resources.

Accordingly, to establish a causal relationship between the dependent, independent and intervening variables in such a research, scholars have to build a convincing case to test a hypothesis based on the available data. In this work I have attempted to evaluate my causal inferences through the prism of a “smoking-gun” test. There were a number of “smoking-gun” clues, which helped me evaluate my hypothesis, although some of the evidence has fallen into the circumstantial “straw-in-the-wind” category. Nevertheless, multiple “straw-in-the-wind” clues also provide an important benchmark for the investigation of causal mechanisms and offer a certain degree of plausibility to the hypothesis. Thus, based on a preponderance of evidence I concluded that the inconsistent Kyrgyz foreign policy

was the effect of virtual politics exercised by the ruling regimes in order to protect themselves from the external interferences and to maintain their rent-seeking practices. Although the presence of undeniable proof would have enriched the argument beyond reasonable doubt, such evidence is yet unrealistic to obtain in the context of the Central Asian political landscape.

In sum, an interpretivist approach integrative of internal, external and transnational variables can be conducive to the analysis of foreign policies of weak states on the post-Soviet space and well beyond. The inductive nature of the interpretivist methodology provides excellent possibilities to build and test the theories and compare the process and outcomes of the research within and across the case studies. Indeed, such a framework equips aspiring scholars with practical tools to study complex political phenomena in the volatile and turbulent regions.

#### *The Political Economy of Rent-Seeking and Political Instability*

In addition to the main findings, this research had an indirect discovery related to the political stability of weak states. The case study of Kyrgyzstan demonstrated that the Kyrgyz ruling elites failed miserably at a task of ensuring domestic regime security despite employing a variety of strategies to maintain physical presence and spearhead their personal interests. Accordingly, there is an ensuing question, which requires a further and more detailed academic inquiry: why does the foreign policy of regime security lead, on the contrary, to regime insecurity? In this respect, the political economy approach adds a fresh explanatory value to the understanding of post-Soviet political developments.

Diagnostic evidence revealed that the political economy of rent-seeking has not only shaped foreign policy orientations of Kyrgyzstan, but also had a detrimental effect on the political stability of the country. The distribution of rents became a cause of fracture between different clans and thus contributed to political instability in the republic. Radnitz (2010a; 2010b) attempted to explain this phenomenon through the political economy of authoritarianism. By examining the presence of mass protests in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia and their absence in

Azerbaijan, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Radnitz (2010a) related the wave of the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet states to the distribution of resources. In particular, Radnitz (2010a) believes that those post-Soviet states, which underwent liberalising economic reforms, were more prone to power struggle and political contestation, whilst the states, which did not undergo economic reforms and privatisation, were less vulnerable to mass protests.

Radnitz linked this nexus of political economy and political influence in the region to the emergence of a wealthy layer of capitalist elites who were capable of challenging the status quo and unseating the autocratic rulers. For instance, Radnitz (2010a) argued that a thorough redistribution of resources in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine in the early 1990s created important preconditions for the revolutions, whilst command-type economic systems in Azerbaijan and Belarus minimised the number of regime defectors and starved the opposition of resources and financial channels. Indeed, Akayev's economic reforms created a layer of oligarchs who amassed a fortune and established a large support base to protect and advance their own interests. These developments became the legacy of Akayev, which Bakiyev and Otunbayeva had to face.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that apart from the presence of the wealthy elites the mechanism of rent distribution and elite cooptation was also instrumental to political stability/instability in Kyrgyzstan. As McGlinchey (2011) asserted, the unwillingness of Akayev and Bakiyev to redistribute the rents led to their downfall. The case of the Manas Air Base demonstrated that that there was a constant struggle between the local elites over access to the Manas fuel pipe. Although the fuel deliveries to the Manas Air Base were always controlled by the inner circles of the ruling presidents, the excluded elitist groupings were keen to alter the fuel status quo. As a result, lucrative fuel contracts became a cause of fracture between the Kyrgyz elites and led to political instability in the republic, which eventually turned into two successful uprisings against the then-presidents.

Such a process may be related to the prevalence of distinct rent-seeking arrangements in Central Asia. In particular, Markowitz (2013) concluded that the ruling regimes become more resilient against popular uprisings, when rent-seeking opportunities are evenly distributed between provincial and local elites. On the contrary, in the resource-poor localities, elites, which are deprived of rent-seeking opportunities, are more inclined to challenge the ruling regimes in order to open up or restore the rent-seeking avenues (Markowitz, 2013). In this respect, Kyrgyzstan turns out to be an excellent empirical referent to examine the processes of power contestation through the lenses of the political economy of rent-seeking.

In general, the correlation between the distribution of rents and political stability is an intriguing area to conduct further academic research. The analysis of this correlation can inform our understanding of state failures, regime changes, communal violence, protracted social conflicts and other challenges of weak states attempting to shift from the authoritarian to democratic form of governance. Thus, the answer to the question “Why does the foreign policy of regime security lead to the regime insecurity?” serves as an excellent starting point for independent academic research with strong normative implications.

#### *Global Anti-Corruption Regime as a Normative Aspiration*

This research has strong normative aspirations, since the author dreams of Kyrgyzstan to eventually become the Switzerland of Central Asia, as was promised by Akayev. Accordingly, the findings of this work may point at a variety of issues from a normative perspective such as the prevailing patron-client relations in Kyrgyzstan, inconsistent foreign policy orientations, weak rule of law or unprofessional security structures. Nonetheless, one of the aims of this work was to underscore the need for the re-development of current thinking about state weakness, organised crime and corruption within the discourse of global governance.

Although the notion of corruption is probably as old as human civilization, the wave of global anti-corruption norms and strategies began only in the early 1990s as an

effect of accelerated globalization processes.<sup>74</sup> In a famous speech, then-president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn placed “the cancer of corruption” on the agenda of development organizations and international institutions. The fight against corruption was launched under the aegis of good governance and the promotion of accountability and transparency. International actors such as the IMF and the World Bank began to identify corruption as one of the main obstacles to economic growth in the developing world. The initiatives these organizations proclaimed reinvigorated interest in the topic of corruption in the academy as well, leading scholars to study the impact and effectiveness of anti-corruption measures. Nonetheless, Alexander Cooley and Jason Sharman (2013) point out that popular conceptualization reproduces the idea that corruption is contained only within states and in the practices of their officials. In those instances when corruption is examined in a transnational context, it is usually presented as an indispensable part of criminal networks that link illicit activities with officials of weak states and illicit non-state actors, including organized crime factions, terrorists, weapons traffickers, drug smugglers and money launderers (Andreas, 2011; Cooley and Sharman, 2013).

However, by focusing on illicit globalization, scholars and policymakers often omit the role of licit actors and financial mechanisms in the developed world that facilitate the expansion of illicit and corrupt practices in developing states. Building upon an empirical study of supplying jet fuel to the American air base Manas, this work revealed that illicit practices in Kyrgyzstan were linked to licit and semi-licit practices in developed countries. For instance, the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission of 2005 confirmed that many businesses purportedly owned by the family of Akayev had offshore jurisdictions at the Isle of Man, the Seychelles, Liechtenstein, Cyprus and the Cayman Islands amongst many others. In turn, the fuel subcontracting firms owned by the son and the son-in-law of Akayev used their bank accounts at ABN AMRO and Citibank in New York purportedly for money laundering. In a similar vein, the watchdog Global Witness (2012) conducted its own investigation in Kyrgyzstan, but in this case related to its largest bank AsiaUniversalBank (AUB).

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<sup>74</sup> For instance, see the OECD’s Anti-Bribery Convention (1997), the Council of Europe’s Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (1999), or the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003).

AUB was nationalized after the April events of 2010 and was accused of involvement in large-scale money laundering by the new government, whilst an independent EBRD-funded audit supported this view. Global Witness (2012) found significant evidence of money laundering through AUB, as dozens of onshore and offshore companies moved millions of dollars through the bank with no clear business activity. Nearly 1.2 billion USD passed through the AUB accounts of three UK companies, which then dissolved without filing any account information (Global Witness, 2012: 66). The largest transfers went through the UK's Standard Chartered, Austrian Raiffeisen Bank and Citibank in New York (Global Witness, 2012). In the most flagrant example, a UK company, which moved 700 million USD through its AUB account without any business activity in the UK, was owned by a Russian who died two years before the company was actually registered (Global Witness, 2012).

Such findings reveal not only the stark inadequacy of how some of the world's major economies monitor the registration of companies and contribute to global money-laundering, but also expose the symbiosis of illicit practices in developing countries with licit and semi-licit practices in developed countries. Indeed, Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular provides excellent opportunities for the most privileged to amass fortunes at the expense of ordinary people. At the same time, the unlawful enrichment of Central Asian rulers and their entourages could not have been accomplished without the support of local and international brokers, offshore companies and major financial institutions, which operate within the realm of licit and formal norms and practices. The global assemblages of different players only conform to the proposed dynamics of transnational corruption, which takes place with the complicity of reputable international institutions or even with their direct engagement.

Thus, corruption in the developing states and in Central Asia per se should be examined within a transnational context. The fusion of the formal global economy with local informal economies poses a serious regulatory challenge to both scholars and policymakers who seek to establish sustaining policies and greater

oversight over these spheres in accordance with practices of good governance, transparency and accountability. In this respect, changing the conversation about corruption is the first step towards effective global anti-corruption regime, which can eventually lead to the strengthening of legal norms and to the appearance of effective programs such as the recovery of stolen public assets. Rather than speaking about problems of merely local, national and regional provenance, we need to recognize that we are dealing here with global challenges requiring global solutions.

### *Epilogue*

With the arrival of Almazbek Atambayev to the White House, it appears that Kyrgyz foreign policy is no longer inconsistent and fragmentary. Portraying himself as an anti-corruption champion, Atambayev promised to fight corruption and turn Kyrgyzstan into a prosperous and developed state. The new President of Kyrgyzstan has been quite explicit in his foreign policy preferences. Kyrgyzstan is at the verge of joining the Russian-led Customs Union. The Americans shifted the air transit to Romania and finally left the Manas Air Base. Gazprom has purchased Kyrgyzstan's largest gas company for a symbolic 1 USD. RusHydro has been selected to construct and develop hydroelectric power plants in the Kyrgyz region of Naryn. Rosneft expressed interest in purchasing the stakes of the Manas airport, whilst Moscow offered a military aid package to Bishkek in the amount of 1 billion USD. It is yet unknown whether these advances signal the formation of a strong Kyrgyz foreign policy vector or whether Kyrgyzstan is becoming a client state of Russia. However, the findings of my research suggest that the Kyrgyz elites tend to prioritise their own security and thus shape the foreign policies of the country in accordance to their own priorities. Consequently, these recent developments may turn out to be again the mere acts of virtual politics in order for the new ruling regime to ensure its survival and further its rent-seeking interests.

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Anonymous, Fuel Logistics Expert, interview, 21 December 2012.

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