What It Takes to Avert a Regional Crisis Understanding the Uzbek Government's Responses to the June 2010 Violence in South Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

Uzbekistan played an important role during the June 2010 interethnic violence in South Kyrgyzstan by tightly controlling borders, allowing thousands of Kyrgyzstani refugees to cross into Uzbek territory, assisting in the shipment of international humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan, and collaborating with the OSCE in the investigation of the causes of the violence. What explains Uzbekistan's approach to the unrest in South Kyrgyzstan? Some scholars suggest that Uzbekistan's response was shaped largely by external actors such as Russia. Others posit that domestic pressures account for the response. This article advances an alternative explanation: Tashkent's response was largely a result of a consensus achieved at two levels: international and domestic. In explaining the impact of domestic level, the article emphasizes the role of bureaucratic politics—competition among various government agencies.

Keywords

Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan – Fergana Valley – interethnic violence – humanitarian assistance

In early June 2010, when interethnic clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks erupted in South Kyrgyzstan, many Kyrgyzstani citizens had hoped that the neighboring Central Asian states and larger countries such as Russia, the

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United States and China would intervene to stop the violence.1 Such hopes were dashed when Kyrgyz leaders were told by the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to deal with the conflict on their own. Suddenly, a country where the interests of many countries overlapped became no one's backyard.2

With the CSTO refusing to intervene, Uzbekistan played a crucial role in responding to the crisis and dealing with its aftermath. When the conflict erupted, the Uzbek authorities reinforced state borders and prevented various Uzbekistani vigilante groups from entering Kyrgyzstan. As the unrest unfolded, the Uzbek government allowed approximately 80,000 Kyrgyzstani refugees into Uzbek territory. In subsequent days and weeks, the Uzbek authorities and government-affiliated charity funds engaged in a nation-wide campaign to collect food and money donations to help the Kyrgyzstani refugees. Authorities in Tashkent also assisted in the shipment of international humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan through Uzbek territory.3 In the post-violence period, Uzbekistan actively collaborated with the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) established by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

What explains Tashkent's approach to the June 2010 violence? We need to understand the Uzbek government's handling of the fallout from the June 2010 violence for several reasons. First, the Uzbek government's behavior challenged statements by some Central Asian observers that had painted Uzbekistan as a militaristic country whose main goal was to utilize the weak- ness of neighboring states to gain control over their territories.4 Second, taking a fuller stock of the Uzbek government's handling of the unrest has significant policy implications. There is evidence that many Uzbek citizens and some top military leaders, appalled by the plight of co-ethnic Uzbeks during the violence, advocated military intervention into South Kyrgyzstan.5 If this is the case, uncovering how the Uzbek leadership managed to withstand these pressures and forge a consensus among competing government factions is crucial.

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1 Author's interviews with residents in Osh, June 10–18, 2010.

2 Presentation by Fiona Hill, director of us-Europe Center, Brookings Institution, at the "Conflicts in Eurasia Panel" hosted by the Finish Embassy in Washington, dc, February 3, 2011.

3 "Qirg'izistondan vaqtincha ko'chib kelganlarga insonparvarlik yordami to'g'risida" [About humanitarian aid for temporarily-displaced people from Kyrgyzstan], *Jahon Information Agency*, July 1, 2010.

4 "Bugun Kyrgyzstan Bar: Erteng jok bolup ketishi mymkyn?" [Kyrgyzstan – here today gone tomorrow?], *Aalam*, February 24–March 2, 1999; "Chakira-chokor… chek ara" [Ho hum, the border], *Asaba*, March 29, 2000.

5 Author's interviews with a senior Uzbek diplomat, Washington, dc, September 2011.

And finally, apart from a few cursory accounts, scholars of the region have paid scant attention to the Uzbek government's handling of the unrest.6

Writings on Uzbekistan's foreign policy and diplomatic relations in Central Asia provide some answers to the research questions posed in this article. These accounts generally focus on one of two levels of analysis: (1) the international or systemic level and (2) the domestic level. The systemic-level explanations argue that Central Asian republics' external behaviors are determined by structural conditions found at the international level and that the role of domestic factors was minimal. The domestic-level explanations emphasize the importance of domestic politics in the shaping of the regional governments' external behaviors.

Analysis of foreign policy in Central Asia from a systemic perspective often invokes the imagery of the classic nineteenth-century Great Game, which depicted the region as a battleground between two major colonial powers—Tsarist Russia and Great Britain. Proponents of the contemporary version of Great Game theory claim that Central Asia again turned into a sphere of great power competition. Various powers now competing for the region, however, are modern states such as Russia, the United States, China, Turkey, Iran, and India.7 These actors, as some observers claim, compete not only for control over the territory, but also for the region's vast resources.

The view that Central Asia is caught up in the New Great Game, however, did not go unchallenged by some scholars and analysts of Central Asia and

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6 Examples of works that explored Tashkent's response to the June 2010 violence include the following: Scott Radnitz, "The Unraveling of South Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, June 23, 2010, http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5354; Neil Melvin, *Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan*: *Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence*, Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series no. 3 (Open Society Foundations: Washington, dc, 2011); and Nick Megoran, *Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan*, Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper 2012/03 (Chatham House: London, 2012).

7 Examples of such writings include: Kleveman Lutz, *The New Great Game*: *Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003); Adam Wolfe, "The 'Great Game' Heats Up in Central Asia," *EurasiaNet*, August 3, 2005; Rajan Menon, "The New Great Game in Central Asia," *Survival* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 187–204; Andrei Tsygankov, "Projecting Confidence, Not Fear: Russia's Post-Imperial Assertiveness," *Orbis* 50, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 677–690; Nicholas Schmidle, "In Central Asia, New Players, Same Game," *Washington Post*, January 29, 2006; Daniel Kimmage, "Central Asia: Is Regional Turbulence Return of the Great Game? *Radio Free Europe*/*Radio Liberty*, July 19, 2005. Some Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik commentators also utilize the assumptions of a "New Great Game," which portray Central Asian states as insignificant actors. See Orozbek Moldaliev, "Aimak zhany 'Chon oindun' arenasyna ailanuuda" [The [Kyrgyz] territory is turning into a "New Great Game" arena], *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, June 26, 2009, http://www.presskg.com/tuusu/09/0626_9.htm.

Russia.8 While admitting that there is indeed competition among great powers in Central Asia, these scholars question the applicability of New Great Game theory to the analysis of contemporary Central Asia.9 Challenging the New Great Game theorists' portrayal of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian republics as insignificant actors, the New Great Game critics claim that the regional governments have an important say in their relations with great powers.10

Studies utilizing domestic-level analysis claim that Uzbekistan's foreign policy is largely a result of its domestic politics. One group of scholars emphasizes the role of state leaders and their policies. Such policy preferences have, among other things, included the pursuit of the following: (a) state sovereignty;11 (b) domestic political stability;12 and (c) economic reform.13 The second group emphasizes the salience of informal interest groups (clans, patronage networks) in the shaping of Tashkent's foreign policy.14 Such

8 The following publications criticized New Great Game theory: Richard Weitz, "Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia," *Washington Quarterly*, 29, no. 3 (2006): 155–167; Robert Legvold, "Great Power Stakes in Central Asia" in Robert Legvold (ed.), *Thinking Strategically*: *The Major Powers*, *Kazakhstan*, *and the Central Asian Nexus* (Cambridge, ma: American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the MIT Press, 2003); Nikolai Sokov, "The Not-So-Great Game in Central Asia", *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 403 (December2005), at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0403.pdf.

9 Igor Torbakov, "The West, Russia, and China in Central Asia: What Kind of Game Is Being Played in the Region?" *Transition Studies Review*, 14, no. 1 (2007): 152–162.

10 Examples of such works include: Alexander Cooley, *Great Games*, *Local Rules*: *The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nur Omarov, "Vneshniaia politika sovremennogo Kyrgyzstana: puti i metody optimizatsii," *apn Kazakhstan*, October 17, 2006; Shairbek Juraev, "The Logic of Kyrgyzstan's Base Policy," *ponars Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 72 (September 2009); Thomas Wood, "The Formation of Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Policy: 1991–2004." PhD diss., Tufts University, 2005.

11 Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan Politics and Foreign Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 20; Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Foreign Policy."

12 Leila Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy," *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 207; Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Foreign Policy."

13 Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy"; Gregory Gleason, *Markets and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 199.

14 Alisher Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups, and Patronage Networks: The Impasses of the Governance System in Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Survey*, 25, no. 1 (2007): 65–84; Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*: *Power*, *Perceptions*, *and Pacts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002): 137–152; Frederick Starr, "Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in

informal interest groups are said to compete among each other for political power and control over state resources.

Both systemic and domestic-level perspectives provide insufficient answers to the research question posed by this article. Broadly speaking, systemic-level explanations advance two assumptions to explain Uzbekistan's behavior. First, large powers dominate smaller states because they are larger and more powerful. Second, when two or three large powers compete in a given region, smaller states located in that region can benefit from this rivalry by playing one large power against another.

These assumptions, however, have limits when it comes to understanding Tashkent's behavior in the aftermath of the June 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan. The assumption that small states concede to large states because they are smaller and weaker borders on the tautological. If this assumption held truth, for example, then Uzbekistan would not have dared to withdraw from the Russia-led CSTO in June 2012.15 The argument that a small state plays one large power against another to extract dividends from geopolitical rivalries among great powers has little explanatory power because Russia, China, and the United States adopted a cautious, "wait-and-see" approach toward violencein South Kyrgyzstan.

Domestic-level explanations, particularly those emphasizing the role of state leaders and their preferences, have a degree of merit. It is evident that President Islam Karimov played a prominent role in guiding the Uzbek government's policy during and following the June 2010 violence. It is also clear that the Uzbek government's concerns for regional political stability were a major factor. Nevertheless, one drawback of the domestic-level perspective is that it tends to view the Uzbek state as a monolith. In doing so, such explanations fail to take full account of the competing and constantly changing interests of various domestic groups that influence the country's external relations. Moreover, domestic-level explanations have largely neglected the role of public opinion in shaping Uzbekistan's foreign policy priorities.16

Central Asia," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, Silk Road Paper, June 2006.

15 In addition, the Kremlin would have been able to compel Uzbekistan and other Central Asian governments to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states after the August 2008 war in the Caucasus. In reality, none of the Central Asian republics have recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

16 A few researchers have paid attention to the role of Uzbek public opinion during the 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan. Mylonas and Radnitz suggested that "[As] residents of Uzbekistan witness the incoming throngs of beleaguered fellow Uzbeks and hear their stories, they are likely to put pressure on their government to rescue those (primarily

More important, by emphasizing either the systemic or domestic level of analysis, a majority of writings has failed to view Uzbekistan's diplomacy as an evolving process influenced by developments occurring simultaneously at both systemic and domestic levels.17

In sum, writings on Uzbekistan's foreign relations explain only a part of the research puzzle. The systemic-level explanations tell us how asymmetries between large and small states play out in the international arena marked by uncertainty. Meanwhile, the domestic-level explanations inform us of how developments within states impact decisionmakers. Each approach alone, however, cannot account fully for a complex interaction between and among states that involves both international and domestic variables, as well as some unexpected chance factors such as social unrest. Therefore, there is a need to integrate both approaches to fully answer the research question.

One such integrative approach is Robert Putnam's two-level games theory. This approach views state officials as being strategically positioned between "two tables"—a table representing their domestic constituents and a table rep- resenting their external counterparts. As Putnam posits:

> [A]t the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision makers.18

According to Putnam, state behavior is enabled or constrained depending on what domestic constituents will ratify and what their external counterparts will accept. Thus agreements between states are more likely when the actors' interests at both levels overlap.

This article incorporates insights from Putnam's two-level game theory and asserts that the Uzbek government's response to the June 2010 violence in

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men) who stayed behind. The Uzbek government may then have to choose between suppressing its own people and invading its neighbor." See Harris Mylonas and Scott Radnitz, "Stopping Ethnic Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan," Nationalities Blog, June 22, 2011, http://nationalities.wordpress.com/2010/06/22/stopping-ethnic-pogroms-in-kyrgyzstan/.

17 Nick Megoran, "The Critical Geography of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Border Dispute: 1999–2000," *Political Geography*, 23 (2004): 731–764.

18 Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization*, 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427–460.

South Kyrgyzstan was a result of negotiations and compromise among actors that was achieved at both interstate and domestic levels. At the interstate level, Uzbek state policy toward Kyrgyz unrest was a result of the Uzbek government's intense negotiations with Russia, Kazakhstan, the United States, and the United Nations. At the domestic level, the Uzbek Presidential Administration had to forge a consensus among competing government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Uzbek National Security Agency, the State Border Protection Committee, and the Ministry of Defense—groups that advocated different solutions to the unrest. Uzbek state leaders also had to take into account an Uzbek public that was galvanized by the plight of co-ethnics.

The approach adopted in this article relies on two additional features. First, it posits that the context for a strategic interaction between and among decisionmakers is a dynamic one rather than being a stable interaction with fixed preferences and power asymmetries. Both international and domestic contexts are in flux. Developments at both levels affect perceptions of decisionmakers about power asymmetries between them and, as a result, lead to shifts in their preferences and policies. In this dynamic context, actors face a high degree of uncertainty regarding present circumstances and future outcomes.

Second, the article posits that the foreign policies of states can be significantly affected by perceptions and misperceptions that are held by key decisionmakers.19 President Karimov and senior state officials regarded the 2010 unrest in South Kyrgyzstan as a plot by external forces designed to cause regional turmoil and implicate Uzbekistan in a regional war. Such perceptions had played crucial role in the choice of policy.

A brief word on methodology. Diplomatic relations in Central Asian republics claimed much attention from both local and outside observers. As a result, a large body of written work on the subject exists in the English, Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek languages. The release of formerly classified us government documents (as evident in WikiLeaks releases in 2010 and 2011) has made available remarkable, yet untapped sources of information. Few scholars, however, have carried out a systematic analysis of

19 As Robert Jervis, a us scholar, claims, policymakers tend to see what they expect to see and to assimilate incoming information according to their preexisting perceptions. According to Jervis, this process is done in both rational and irrational ways. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

the existing writings and newly available documents to draw distinct trends and patterns.

My knowledge of regional history, languages (Russian, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and English), cultures, and people gave me a comparative advantage in conducting this research project. As a doctoral candidate at Johns Hopkins University in Washington B$, in 2003–2011, I interacted with a wide range of people, including policymakers, diplomats, scholars, and experts. During this period, I gathered substantial amount of data on politics and foreign policy in the United States and Central Asia.20

To gain in-depth understanding of foreign policy-making process in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, I held informal discussion and formal interviews with the people listed in Table 1.

Table 1 *Experts Interviewed (formally and informally) about foreign policy process in Central Asia and the June 2010 Violence in South Kyrgyzstan*

In Uzbekistan

(All discussions with Uzbek counterparts were conducted on the basis of anonymity)

- A former minister of foreign affairs of Uzbekistan
- Two diplomats
- A staffer in Uzbek President's Administration
- Three employees of Uzbek State tv and Radio Company
- Employee of the Ministry of Justice
- Staffers of the State National Security Service
- Two researchers affiliated with the State Institute of Strategic Studies under the Uzbek President
- Several researchers and professors working for Tashkent-based universities

20 I am indebted to the following individuals for informal conversations with me and their insightful comments on Central Asian politics:
Michael McFaul, former Adviser to U.S. President;
Marsha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment, Washington, D.C.; Erick McGlinchey, Associate Professor, George Mason University;
Frederick Starr, Chairman, Central Asia Caucasus Institute, SAIS, Washington; D.C. Fiona Hill, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.;
Svante Cornell, Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Washington, D.C.;
Jeff Goldstein, senior analyst for Open Society Institute, Washington, D.C.;
Erica Marat, Assistant Professor, National Defense University, Washington, D.C.;
Aftab Kazi, Fellow, Central Asia Caucasus Institute, SAIS, Washington, D.C.

In Kyrgyzstan

- Former Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Deputy of the Kyrgyz Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations
- Former President, Association of Political Scientists, Bishkek
- Co-Founder, Kyrgyz Fund for Development, Bishkek

Chair of the Comparative Politics Department, American University in Central Asia, Bishkek
Former Minister of Finance (1994–1996), Bishkek
Deputy of Kyrgyz Parliament
Deputy of Kyrgyz Parliament.

The paper is divided into three sections. The following section provides a brief description of the policymaking process in Uzbekistan to emphasize the role of bureaucratic politics, namely the interaction among various state agencies in the formulation of policies. Next, I provide a detailed treatment of Uzbekistan's response to the interethnic unrest in South Kyrgyzstan. The concluding section examines implications from Uzbekistan's handling of the Osh violence on Central Asianpolitics.

Policymaking in Uzbekistan: Institutional Environment and Key Players

The introductory section asserted that observers of Uzbekistan often link various policy outcomes to President Islam Karimov's inclinations or the machinations of various patronage networks. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the salience of bureaucratic politics in Uzbekistan; policy outcomes are often a consensus among different competing government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Uzbek National Security Agency, the State Border Protection Committee, and the Ministry of Defense.

Observers of Uzbek politics have long posited that Uzbek identity in public and private life is traditionally determined by one's belonging to five distinct geographic areas that make up separate provinces: Tashkent, Samarkand,

Fergana, Surhandarya-Syrdarya, and Khorezm.21 During the seven decades of Soviet rule, representatives of the so-called Samarkand and Tashkent clans were said to have dominated key economic and political positions, leaving other groups with dwindling opportunities.22

The current elite hierarchy is said to consist of two tiers.23 At the top tier, there are three influential groups whose leaders serve as members of President Karimov's inner circle: (1) a group tied to Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoev; (2) a group belonging to the chief of the Uzbek National Security Service (SNB), Rustam Inoyatov; and (3) a group around First Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov. Because power and wealth are intricately linked in Uzbekistan, these officials have developed reputations as the country's major oligarchs. The lower-tier consists of oblast governors, wealthy industrialists, landowners, and informal powerbrokers. Leaders of these groups are subordinated to groups that are linked to the oligarchs.

Some analysts believe that membership in patronage groups is primarily determined by one's regional affiliation.24 Mirziyoev is said to represent the powerful Samarkand clan; Azimov—the Tashkent clan; and Inoyatov—the Surkhandarya clan. The reality, however, is far more complex and fluid. Regional affiliation does play a role in Uzbek politics. Nevertheless, due to numerous purging campaigns by the country's top leadership, patronage groups in Uzbekistan are now built on several factors such as individual loyalty of officials, their common pragmatic interests, local ties, and past professional ties.25 In a clear sign of pragmatism, Uzbek officials maintain membership in multiple patronage networks to hedge their bets and defend their economic and political resources.

Information on the inner workings of the Uzbek government is sparse and inconsistent. But there is evidence that policymaking in Uzbekistan is not sim- ply about President Karimov's inclinations and patronage networks' machinations; in reality, it is a political bargaining process that involves the competing

21 Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia*: *The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

22 Roy, *The New Central Asia*; Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups, and Patronage Networks"; Collins, "Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia"; Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*.

23 Author's interview with Tashkent-based journalists, August 2012.

24 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Karimov vs. the Clans." *EurasiaNet*, April 22, 2005, http://www .eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp042305.shtml.

25 Author's interview with Tashkent-based journalists and analysts, Tashkent, August2012.

interests and varying levels of political influence of government bureaucracies, which strive to increase their clout and their agencies' financial budgets within the government system. In this regard, the SNB is often pitted against the Ministry of Interior (MVD), the Ministry of Defense, and the State Committee on Border Protection;26 the Ministry of Interior is said to compete with the Prosecutor's Office;27 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allegedly competes with the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, Investment, and Trade.28

Evidence of bureaucratic infighting surfaces from time to time. One such episode occurred in 2003–2004 at the height of Uzbekistan's security collaboration with the us-led antiterrorist alliance. The Uzbek President's Office and the SNB had initially agreed to the us Embassy's repeated requests to curb allegations of torture by allowing international observers to inspect several Uzbek prisons, which had been under the purview of the Ministry of Interior.29 Nevertheless, when the Uzbek Ministry of Interior vehemently opposed the opening of Uzbek prisons to international observers, the President's Office and the SNB backed down and shelved the plan.30

Another episode is linked with the appointment of a new mvd chief in early 2006. On December 26, 2005, five months after the resignation of Zakir Almatov, the head of the mvd who had coordinated the government's handling of the Andijan events in May 2005, President Karimov appointed Anvar Salikhbaev, a former deputy of the SNB chief, as the new minister of interior.31 The appointment was so unpopular with the rank-and-file of mvd that some police officers did not report to work to show their opposition.32 Two weeks later, amid mounting mvd opposition against the presidential choice, President Karimov

26 "Klanovaia operatsiia: Uzbekistan perenes udalenie glavy mvd" [A clan operation: Uzbekistan postponed the removal of Ministry of Interior chief], *Kommersant*, July 4, 2005, http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/588621.

27 Author's interviews with a member of Prosecutor's Office and a staffer in the Ministry of Interior. Tashkent, July 2006.

28 Author's interviews with two former staffers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 2003.

29 A view expressed by a former us ambassador to Uzbekistan at a conference held in Washington DC June, 2011.

30 Ibid.

31 "Karimov sdal vnutrennie dela: kontrolirovat' mvd Uzbekistana budut chekisty" [Karimov has passed over internal affairs: Ministry of Inteiror of Uzbekistan will now be controlled by security officials], *Kommersant*, December 26, 2005, http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/638557.

32 Author's interviews with two Uzbek journalists who worked for the Uzbek State tv and Radio Company, Tashkent, July 2006.

had quickly removed Salikhbaev and appointed Bakhodir Matlyubov, a veteran police officer, to the post.33

While sharing a common desire to maintain stability and have greater influence over how the country is run, leaders of various government agencies hold different ideas regarding political and economic development, government responsibilities, foreign policy, and domestic security. On economic issues, while senior Uzbek officials agree that attracting foreign investment and reforming key parts of the economy will improve the country's economic prospects, they differ on reform strategies in such key areas as land ownership, rent subsidies, and utility tariffs. Some officials, such as SNB chief Inoyatov, have opposed drastic changes that could have a negative impact on the country's stability. Others maintain that reform of these key areas is essential to sustain- able growth.

On political issues, a hardline faction represented mainly by Inoyatov and his subordinates within the SNB have advocated strong executive rule, tight control over society, and increased budgetary allocations to security agencies.34 Meanwhile, another group represented mainly by officials with eco- nomic orientation (Prime Minister Mirziyaev, Deputy Prime Minister Azimov, former Deputy Prime Minister Abdulla Kadyrov) have emphasized the importance of deep economic reforms and limited decentralization to garner popular support and ensure political stability.

Geopolitically, senior Uzbek officials distrust Russia, believing that Moscow is bent on destabilizing Central Asia and weakening Uzbekistan.35 The Uzbek officials' suspicions of Russia began to take shape in the early 1990s, especially during the 1992–1997 Tajik civil war during which Moscow had actively sought to sideline Uzbekistan as a regional mediator.36 Russia's controversial role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the 2008 war with Georgia, and the April 2010 government change in Kyrgyzstan have

33 "V Uzbekistane – novyi ministr vnuntrennyh del- B. Matliubov" [New minister of interior – B. Matliubov is appointed in Uzbekistan], *Ferghana.ru*, January 6, 2006, http://www.ferganane ws.com/news.php?id=2117.

34 Author's interviews with Uzbek journalists, Tashkent, October–November 2011.

35 Interview with Uzbek diplomats, Washington dc, October 2011.

36 Partly as a response to Russia's moves to sideline Uzbekistan in the region, Tashkent withdrew its troops from the cis peacekeeping force in Tajikistan in September 1996. See Lena Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (eds), *Central Asian Security Dynamics*: *The New International Context* (Washington, dc and London: Brookings Institution Press and Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001).

reinforced Uzbek officials' suspicions.37 Some top level Uzbek officials believe that pursuing closer ties with Washington and Beijing is key to counterbalancing Russia's influence in Central Asia.

Despite differing policy stances held by senior officials, the policymaking process is highly centralized, and the Presidential Administration plays a dominant role in shaping the country's domestic politics and external relations.38 As the ultimate arbiter of the system that he had created, President Karimov has been known for pursuing a nuanced policy of rewards and punishments that plays various government agencies and influential political and economic groups against each other in an effort to keep his hold on power intact.39 Frequent cadre purges and dismissals under Karimov have meant that no single Uzbek leader besides Karimov enjoys nation-wide recognition and support.

Having described the institutional context and actors in Uzbekistan, I now turn to a detailed examination of the Uzbek government's responses to the June 2010 unrest in South Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan's Response to the June 2010 Violence in Kyrgyzstan

The introductory section posited that the Uzbek government's response to the June 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan was the result of negotiations and compromise among actors at both interstate and domestic levels. This section provides a detailed description of how compromise was forged at each of these levels.

Initial popular protests against Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiev's government erupted in late March 2010 in the remote Naryn province. On April 7, the protest broke out in the capital, Bishkek. A clash between security forces and crowds of unruly men resulted in the deaths of more than 80 demonstrators.40 That same day, President Bakiev fled with his family to Jalal-Abad, from where he subsequently flew to Minsk at the invitation of Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko. Some Kazakh and Kyrgyz media outlets suggested that

37 As one Uzbek diplomat admitted, "By invading Georgia, they [the Russians] demonstrated to us that it [Moscow] can invade Uzbekistan as well." Author's interview with an Uzbek diplomat, Washington, dc, October 2010.

38 Matteo Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, state formation and foreign policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks abroad," *Central Asian survey*. 2007: 26(1):105–22.

39 Interviews with Uzbek journalists, Tashkent, October–November 2011.

40 The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe of the us Congress, "A Region in Crisis: The Violent Conflict in Kyrgyzstan," Hearing on Instability in Kyrgyzstan, July 27, 2010.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev arranged the departure of Kurmanbek Bakiev and his family from Kyrgyzstan.41

From the start of the violence in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbek leaders reacted with caution to the upheaval, anxious to prevent any sort of spillover effect.42 The April 9, 2010, statement by the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said the unrest was an internal matter, and it called on conflicting sides to exercise restraint. Privately, senior Uzbek officials perceived that the violent change of government was masterminded by Moscow to punish the Bakiev government for political disloyalty.43 That the Kremlin had quickly recognized the provisional authorities in Bishkek reinforced such perception.44

Alarmed by the Kyrgyz unrest and ostensibly eager to prevent Russia from playing the same card in Uzbekistan, Karimov began to make diplomatic overtures to Russia. Meeting Russian President Medvedev in Moscow on April 28, President Karimov said that positions of Russia and Uzbekistan on Kyrgyz unrest were aligned—to prevent the unrest from spreading to neighboring countries and to provide diplomatic backing to the provisional authorities as they restore order and gain legitimacy.45 The outcome of the meeting was the signing of an agreement on cooperation in the area of military supplies and humanitarian affairs in 2010–2012. Karimov also used the meeting to criticize

41 Kazakh President Nazarbaev ordered the Kazakh Air Force to airlift Bakiev and his family from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan and onward to Belarus. "Bakieva neozhidanno vyvezli v Kazahstan" [Bakiev was urgently flown to Kazakhstan], *Kyrgyz Service of rfe/rl*, April 16, 2010, http://rus.azattyq.org/content/Kurmanbek_Bakiev_Kazakhstan_/2013360.html.

42 Uzbek officials doubted the staying power of the Kyrgyz provisional authorities and questioned their ability to pay their gas bills on time. In late April, Uzbekistan threatened to cut off gas supplies to South Kyrgyzstan if Bishkek failed to repay its gas debt to Tashkent. "Poslednee preduprezhdenie" [Last warning], *Moia Stolitsa-Novisti*, April 30, 2010, http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/32056/.

43 In February 2009, President Bakiev's administration adopted a decree evicting the us base at Manas Airport after Moscow announced that it was providing a loan to Bishkek, which amounted to $1.7 billion. Three months later, however, the Kyrgyz government signed a new agreement with the United States that allowed the base to stay, albeit under a changed status. The agreement came after the U.S. administration suddenly increased the rent price for the base from $17.4 million to $60 million annually. In retaliation, Moscow sus- pended the shipment of subsidized fuel to Kyrgyzstan and launched a smear campaign against the Bakiev government in early Spring of 2010. Moscow's sanctions sparked public protests that culminated in the Bakiev government's dramatic collapse on April 7, 2010.

44 Author's interviews with Kyrgyz and us analysts, April–May 2010.

45 "Ne spontannyi vizit Karimova" [A non-spontaneous visit by Karimov], *Gazeta.ru*, April 20, 2010, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/04/20_kz_3354985.shtml.

several Russian media outlets for their suggestions that the Kyrgyz unrest would destabilize Uzbekistan. He said that such suggestions were unfounded and that Uzbekistan would be capable of thwarting security risks on its own.46 On June 6, 2010, President Karimov met with Vladimir Rushailo, Russia's special representative for relations with Kyrgyzstan, and they discussed ways to ensure stability in Kyrgyzstan and the region within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other international mechanisms.47 The details of the meeting were kept secret, but Rushailo's sudden visit to Tashkent indicated that both Russian and Uzbek senior officials were getting anxious about the inability of the Kyrgyz provisional authorities to contain instability. Two weeks before the meeting, clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks had erupted in Jalal-Abad, leaving at least two people dead and 71 injured.

The Jalal-Abad confrontation was a prelude to a full-blown interethnic conflict that engulfed South Kyrgyzstan in early June 2010. The conflict reportedly erupted following altercations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths in a small café on June 10–11 in Osh city. On June 12, clashes broke out again in Jalal- Abad. As the violence spread in South Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks appeared to be a minority group under siege. Unable to contain the violence, the Kyrgyz provisional government appealed to the Russia-led CSTO for security assistance.

Uzbek state's initial response to the outbreak of interethnic violence in South Kyrgyzstan on June 10, 2010 was to reinforce the protection of the closed state borders with Kyrgyzstan. State-controlled Uzbek media outlets remained largely silent during the first days of the interethnic hostilities in South Kyrgyzstan. Instead, much of the media coverage focused on the summit of the SCO heads of state that was taking place in Tashkent on June 10–11, 2010.

Information regarding the inner debates within the Uzbek government during the interethnic clash in South Kyrgyzstan remains sketchy. But several insider accounts indicate that the escalating violence posed a three-fold dilemma for senior Uzbek security officials.48 The first dilemma was how

46 In response to a border incident near the Uzbek enclave Sokh on May 29, 2010, Uzbek authorities deployed military detachments to Sokh and beefed up security around the enclaves. "Na kirgizsko-uzbekskoi granitse proizoshel ocherednoi incident" [A fresh incident on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border], *Ferghana.ru*, May 28, 2010, http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=14833.

47 "Islam Karimov vstretilsia s Vladimirom Rushailo"[Islam Karimov has met with Vladimir Rushailo," *ca-New.org*, June 8, 2010, http://www.ca-news.org/news:399961/.

48 Author's interviews with two senior Uzbek diplomats, Washington, dc, September–October 2010.

Tashkent ought to react to potential Russian plans to send Russian troops into the Kyrgyz section of the Fergana Valley. At a June 10 closed-door meeting held on the sidelines of the SCO meeting, President Karimov, Kazakh President Nazarbaev, and Russian President Medvedev discussed the escalation of violence in South Kyrgyzstan and potential joint responses, including the possibility of the CSTO sending in peacekeeping forces to Kyrgyzstan.49 Given Uzbek officials' strong belief that Moscow was behind the unrest in Kyrgyzstan, President Karimov reportedly resisted this plan and offered another option.50 Addressing the meeting of SCO heads of states on June 11, he said that Uzbekistan opposed external interference in internal Kyrgyz affairs. In particular, he stated: "We all are in solidarity with Kyrgyz people, we all are concerned about the difficult situation in the country, we are ready to help to regulate the situation and legalize the government, improve the socioeconomic condition in the country."51

The second dilemma was related to the first. If Tashkent supported the policy of nonintervention, the challenge was how to "sell" this stance to domes- tic constituents who were growing galvanized by the plight of co-ethnics. Many rank-and-file Uzbek bureaucrats, and, more important, some high-ranking generals, mainly representing the Committee on Border Protection, the Ministry of Interior, and the Defense Ministry, showed eagerness for swift military intervention into South Kyrgyzstan with the aim of restoring order and safeguarding the Uzbek minority.52 As one Uzbek diplomat admitted, Uzbek officials saw the events as "a genocide against Uzbek people" that was being committed with the active involvement of the Kyrgyz government and security services.53 Another Uzbek diplomat characterized the events as a "government-orchestrated pogrom against the ethnic Uzbek community" designed to cause the mass exodus of Uzbeks from South Kyrgyzstan.

President Karimov, Deputy Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov, and several senior officials representing the SNB strongly opposed military action, fearing

49 Sergei Ezhov, "Beda kotoruiu zhdali," *Uzmetronom*, June 22, 2010, http://www .uzmetronom.com/2010/06/22/beda_kotoruju_zhdali.html.

50 Ibid.

51 "O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti I.Karimovning ShHT davlat rahbarlari kengashining kengaytirilgan tarkibdagi majlisida so'zlagan nutqi (Toshkent, 11 iun', 2010)" [Speech of I. Karimov, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, at enlarged session of Council of heads of SCO states (Tashkent, June 11, 2010)], *Halk Suzi*, June 14, 2010.

52 Many of these officials had relatives in South Kyrgyzstan. Some of them were themselves originally from South Kyrgyzstan. Interview with an Uzbek journalist who is now in self-imposed political exile in the United Kingdom. October 2012.

53 Author's interviews with two Uzbek diplomats, September–October 2010.

that a regional border war would destabilize the whole region. The fact that Kyrgyzstan is a member of the CSTO played a considerable role in the thinking of Karimov and his interventionist-shy allies.54 CSTO members are treaty- bound to aid each other—including Kyrgyzstan—in case of external aggression.

President Karimov and his senior advisers had to use the full weight of their authority to calm trigger-happy officials, including military generals.55 As one Uzbek diplomat recollects:

> Many [Uzbek officials], including me, initially supported the [option of] intervention, but I changed my mind after speaking with [Deputy Foreign Minister] Kamilov. We worked very hard to explain to people that the Kyrgyz unrest was a plot [by Russia to implicate Uzbekistan in broader regional turmoil]. In the end, people understood and supported the government's line.56

As the inter-ethnic hostilities continued to spread, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a stern statement on 12 June 2010, a move designed to demonstrate to domestic audiences the government's strong concern for the plight of ethnic Uzbeks. The statement said:

> The public and people of Uzbekistan are seriously concerned about the events occurring in Osh city, in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Mass killing, plunder and burning houses of Uzbeks are intolerable. We believe that all these events, which are an intrigue of abominable forces, are very far from the interests of Kyrgyz people. These occurrences challenge the spirit of centuries-old, traditional, historic friendship among different nationalities.57

The third dilemma was how Uzbekistan ought to respond to mounting international pressure. As the South Kyrgyzstan crisis deepened, the United States, un, and European Union began calling on Uzbekistan to act swiftly and admit

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54 Ibid.

55 Author's informal discussion with a senior White House official who attended a meeting with President Karimov in which there was discussion of the Uzbek government's han- dling of the June 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan. Washington, dc, October 2011.

56 Interview with a senior Uzbek diplomat, Washington, dc, October 2010.

57 "O'zbekiston Respublikasi Tashqi Ishlar Vazirligi bayonoti," [Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan], *Halk Suzi*, June 14, 2010.

refugees. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the idea of allowing refugees, the Ministry of Finance representatives warned that it would strain the government budget and have unpredictable consequences for stability within the country.58

After a series of consultations with Russian, Kazakh, and UN officials,59 Uzbek authorities opened the borders on June 13, 2010, and allowed approximately 80,000 Kyrgyzstani refugees into Uzbek territory. The refugees were placed in approximately 75 camps set up near the city of Andijan. The Uzbek Foreign Ministry claimed that "during the first three days of refugee influx to Uzbekistan, the Uzbek Government rendered assistance amounting to more than 1.5 billion Uzbek Sums (about US$1 million)."60 The Uzbek government and government-affiliated charity funds, including the fund "Sen Yolgizemasan" run by the president's daughter, Lola Karimova, engaged in a nation-wide campaign to collect food and money donations to help Kyrgyzstani refugees in the Andijan camps. In subsequent weeks, the Uzbek government also assisted in the shipment of international humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan through the Uzbek territory.61

On a June 18 visit to Bukhara, Karimov provided details about how the Uzbek government viewed the Kyrgyz unrest. He also defended the Uzbek government's choice of policy:

> I am against the view "blood for blood, spirit for spirit." We must value our peace and stability and I call our people to be self-restrained, think first, and then do something. In the result of hot temper we can destroy our beautiful life in a moment. Some foreign people say that there is no need to investigate the point of the matter as these events are just antagonism of Uzbek-Kyrgyz people. I am absolutely against such views. Neither Uzbek nor Kyrgyz is guilty. All these things have been organized by external

58 Interview with Uzbek diplomats, Washington, D.C. September-October, 2011.

59 "D. Medvedev menen I. Karimov Kyrgyzstandy talkulashty" [D. Medvedev and I. Karimov have discussed Kyrgyzstan], *rfe/rl Kyrgyz Service*, June 13, 2010, http://www.azattyk.org/archive/ky-news/20100411/828/828.html?id=2069829.

60 "mid Uzbekistana: Sobytiia na iuge Kyrgyzstana nosiat organizovannyi harakter i z animi stoiat ser'eznye tret'i sily" [mfa of Uzbekistan: The events in South Kyrgyzstan appear to be organized by serious third forces], *ca News.org*, June 16, 2010, https://ca-news.info/2010/06/16/48.

61 "Qirg'izistondan vaqtincha ko'chib kelganlarga insonparvarlik yordami to'g'risida" [About humanitarian aid for temporarily displaced people from Kyrgyzstan, *Jahon Information Agency*, July 1, 2010.

> forces. To involve Uzbekistan to these events were also their purpose. We are great nations and we can solve our problems ourselves.62

Toward the end of June, as the atrocities stopped and a sense of normalcy returned to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan's policy toward the Kyrgyzstani refugees began to change. As of June 28, 78,675 refugees had gone back to Kyrgyzstan.63 Some returning Uzbek refugees said they were pressured into returning quickly to Kyrgyzstan so that they would be eligible to participate in the country's constitutional referendum.64 Other refugees chose to return voluntarily, mainly out of concern about what would happen to the property they had left behind. Uzbek state media outlets ignored the news about the return of refugees.

Instead, they engaged in a wide campaign designed to extol the prudent leadership of President Karimov and to juxtapose Uzbek stability against Kyrgyz unrest. State-controlled television channels featured reports that conveyed a strong sense of stability concerning interethnic relations in Uzbekistan and that downplayed the possibility of the kind of violent episode that engulfed southern Kyrgyzstan in mid-June. A June 29, 2010, *Halk Suzi* editorial by Nabi Jaloliddin, a member of the government-affiliated Uzbek Writers' Union, read: "Our nation is tolerant and humane one. Evidence of such quality can be seen in disinterested aid of Uzbek people shown to refugees in the result of Kyrgyz events. Our President's and people's self-restrained quality prevented the spread of these tragic events to the whole region."

Uzbek state media also published news pieces about Karimov's official conversations with foreign dignitaries and interviews with numerous foreign experts to show that the international community was impressed with Uzbekistan's handling of the unrest and its aftermath. A January 2011 editorial published by *Halk Suzi* declared:

> President Karimov visited Brussels on the invitation of Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission on January 24, 2011. Barroso expressed his great respect to Karimov in relation to the June events in Kyrgyzstan. He highly valued Uzbekistan's principle and

62 In subsequent days and weeks, Uzbek media outlets offered extensive coverage of Karimov's remarks. "Izchil islohotlarning amaliy natijalari. Prezident I. Karimovning 18 iyun kuni Buhoroga tashrifi" [Practical results of consecutive reforms. President Karimov's visit to Bukhara on June 18], *Khalk Suzi*, June 19, 2010.

63 "Uzbek Refugees Say They Were Pressured to Return to Kyrgyzstan," *EurasiaNet*, June 20, 2010, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61436.

64 Ibid.

constructive position, and by doing it Uzbekistan proved that it has a leading role in keeping the region of Central Asia in peace and stability. The President of European Commission once more declared his support for an international independent investigation; otherwise, the peace and stability cannot be achieved in Kyrgyzstan.65

Conclusion

The June 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan was a major test for the Uzbek government with implications for both its domestic politics and its external relations. When the violence broke out, the Uzbek government faced the potential of instability spreading across the borders, particularly to areas populated by sizable ethnic minority groups. Meanwhile, the plight of co-ethnics in a neighboring country had the potential to galvanize Uzbek citizens and lead to mass mobilization of vigilante groups across the country. Uzbek leaders recognized that potential Uzbek military intervention in the unrest would also have wider regional implications by involving larger countries such as Russia.

The article has demonstrated that Tashkent's policy of noninterference, offering humanitarian support, and cooperation with the international community in handling the aftermath of the violence was a compromise among various actors at both the interstate and domestic levels. At the interstate level, Uzbek officials ensured that their policy was supported by such countries as Russia, Kazakhstan, and the United States, as well as international actors such as the un and eu. At the domestic level, President Karimov's administration had to forge a consensus among senior officials representing various government agencies.

In retrospect, it can be argued that Tashkent's response to the June 2010 violence demonstrated a number of the Uzbek state's strengths. First, the events had shown the ability of the central government to speak and act with one voice despite the existence of significant policy differences within various government factions. Second, the events in South Kyrgyzstan highlighted the Uzbek government's capacity to rapidly mobilize state and societal resources in response to a regional humanitarian crisis. Finally, the unrest demonstrated the ability of the Uzbek state to utilize a crisis in a neighboring republic in the nation-building campaign to strengthen the unity of the Uzbek nation.

65 "Hamkorlikni rivojlantirish va havfsizlikni mustahkamlash yo'lida" [On the way of development of cooperation and strengthening security], *Halk Suzi*, January 25, 2011.

There are several implications arising from this conclusion. First, the Uzbek state is not a monolith. As this article had demonstrated, the Uzbek policy-making process is far more nuanced and complicated than it is typically portrayed. Second, despite its occasional aggressive rhetoric toward neighboring countries and its opaque policymaking process, Uzbekistan proved that it was a country that can abide by international norms. Third, showing concern for the plight of Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks and allowing thousands of Uzbek refugees into its territory, official Tashkent had actively pursued a policy toward compatriots in Central Asia, a policy stance that had marked a departure from Tashkent's previous policy of neutrality and noninterference in ethnic relations of neighboring republics.