Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy Change: Kyrgyzstan's U-Turns on the U.S. Air Base at Manas Airport

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Abstract

Mainstream theories of international relations explain the foreign policies of small states based on the function of external incentives and pressures. This article challenges such explanations and analyzes Kyrgyzstan's decisions concerning the U.S. air base at Manas between 2005 and 2010, which was a curious case of risk-taking in foreign policy by a small state. Applying a framework of "ideas, interests and institutions," the article shows how changes in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy reflected a shift in the domestic context of policymaking.

Keywords

Kyrgyzstan – international relations – Manas airbase – foreign policy – ideas – interests – institutions

1 Introduction

In February 2009, the then-president of Kyrgyzstan announced that the U.S. air base at Manas Airport would be closed.[1] Less than six months later, Bishkek made a turnaround, allowing the air base to stay, albeit under its new designation as a transit center. These decisions represented a curious case of proactive,

1 The air base had been established in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to support the U.S.-led War on Terror in Afghanistan.

high-risk foreign policy by a small and poor Central Asian state. The international relations literature does not allow much to small states with respect to their ability to freely initiate radical changes in foreign policy, especially if they risk relations with large partners.[2] How, then, do we account for what has been called "the most audacious geopolitical gambit"[3] by the leader of a small state such as Kyrgyzstan?

The literature[4] has pointed to the enormous material benefits that Kyrgyzstan's corrupt ruling regimes obtained through shady deals in fuel contracts for the air base as a primary motivation for the abovementioned decisions.[5] The external environment provided the necessary momentum for such an endeavor, with both the United States and Russia apparently keen to buy out the Kyrgyz leaders. However, the geopolitics and corruption arguments shed little light on the domestic political circumstances that enabled these high-risk policy decisions. Foreign policy "reflects characteristics of the political process that produces it,"[6] and this article seeks to elucidate these circumstances by placing Kyrgyzstan's air base policy in the wider context of domestic political sources of foreign policy.

The primary question this article addresses is how the domestic political context enabled Kyrgyzstan's high-risk decisions concerning the air base. It does so by using an analytical framework of "ideas, interests, institutions" (or "3-i"), which is a "constructed" framework that draws on distinct research strands within foreign policy analysis. Ideas, interests, and institutions are central explanatory concepts in the literature and more often than not are regarded as competing variables. The 3-i framework, by contrast, adopts an analytically eclectic approach, in that it accepts ideas, interests, and institutions as three related and concurrent dimensions of foreign policymaking.

2 Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, vol. 2 (1969): 291–310; Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstöhl, "Lilliputians in Gulliver's World? Small States in International Relations," working paper (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2004).

3 Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

4 E.g., Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*; Eric McGlinchey, "Exploring Regime Instability and Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan," *Asia Policy* 12, no. 1 (2011): 79–98; Kemel Toktomushev, "Regime Security, Base Politics and Rent-Seeking: The Local and Global Political Economies of the American Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, 2001–2010," *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 1 (2015): 57–77.

5 According to an anonymous reviewer, Kyrgyzstan also gained a better negotiating position following the closure of Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan in 2005.

6 Philip G. Roeder, "Soviet Policies and Kremlin Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1984): 171–93.

The findings suggest that the domestic political context changed in the post-2005 period in a direction that was conducive to what would otherwise be a surprising shift toward extreme foreign policy decisions. In particular, the "perfect storm" condition for President Bakiyev's adventurous decisions involved a) the national leadership's profit-oriented beliefs about foreign policy; b) the growing political insecurity of the ruling regime; and c) the emergence of centralized and politically insulated foreign policy decision-making institutions. These propositions illustrate how the extremity of Bishkek's foreign policy reflected changes within the domestic context of decision-making.

The argument proposed here does not offer a comprehensive causal explanation of specific foreign policy decisions. Foreign policy action, as a subject of social science inquiry, is inevitably and inherently a multicausal phenomenon. As U.S. President John F. Kennedy famously confessed, "the essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer—often, indeed, to the decider himself."[7] What this article seeks to do, therefore, is to enrich our understanding of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy through the application of domestic-level conceptual lenses inspired by foreign policy analysis (FPA).

Methodologically, this article adopts a qualitative and inductive approach to conceptualizing the relationship between data and theory. More broadly, it subscribes to the interpretive philosophy of social science, which "holds that the study of human behavior—and thus all the social sciences—ought to be historical, employing narratives as explanations, and not neglecting the meanings and beliefs of the relevant agents."[8] The textual material used for this purpose includes official government documents, policymakers' speeches, and published interviews and articles. In addition, it draws on academic literature, policy papers, and media analyses and relies on news reports on the events in question.

The article consists of four sections. The first section outlines the "ideas, interests and institutions" as the conceptual framework that will be applied to the study. It is followed by a brief contextual description of how Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy after the Tulip Revolution of 2005 turned into a high-risk activity. The third section addresses ideational, political, and decision-making dimensions of foreign policy based on the 3-i framework. The final section summarizes the discussion.

7 Quoted in Graham T. Allison, "While the World Trembled," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/09/books/while-the-world-trembled.html.

8 Mark Bevir and Jason Blakely, *Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9. See also Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

2 Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Ideas, Interests, and Institutions

There is no one single conventional framework for theorizing foreign policy change. Scholars have a significant degree of liberty in defining foreign policy change. This is well illustrated by an entry in a research encyclopedia on the subject, which defines foreign policy change as "a redirection to a lesser or greater extent of a state's foreign policy."[9] In addition, there are a wide range of "independent variables," or factors, that are considered to be explanations of foreign policy change. For example, the model of foreign policy change proposed by Hermann[10] includes "change agents" such as leaders, bureaucracies, domestic politics, and external shock. Gustavsson suggested distinguishing between international and domestic sources of foreign policy change, each featuring political and economic dimensions.[11] This diversity in definitions reflects the shared characteristics of these models, namely a belief in the multicausality of foreign policy in theory and a methodological openness to analytical eclecticism.

To assess the domestic sources of foreign policy change in Kyrgyzstan, this article adopts an analytical framework of "ideas, interests, institutions," or "3-i." It brings together what Hay called "a conventional set of independent variables"—that is, ideas, interests, and institutions—as related and concurrent sources of foreign policy action.[12] The 3-i is a standard reference in political

9 Spyros Blavoukos and Dimitris Bourantonis, "Foreign Policy Change," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed. Spyros Blavoukos and Dimitris Bourantonis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). In the earlier literature, a country's alignment with one of the superpowers often served as a reference point for tracking changes in foreign policy. See, e.g., Joe D. Hagan, "Domestic Political Regime Changes and Third World Voting Realignments in the United Nations, 1946–84," *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989): 505–41, 516; Kalevi J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Postwar World* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982). Recognizing the diversity of real-life phenomena that foreign policy change can entail, Hermann suggested distinguishing four degrees of change, ranging from adjustment changes to radical international reorientation (Charles F. Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 [1990]: 3–21).

10 Hermann, "Changing Course," 13.

11 Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?," *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, no. 1 (1999): 73–95, 83–85.

12 Colin Hay, "Ideas, Interests and Institutions in the Comparative Political Economy of Great Transformations," *Review of International Political Economy* 11, no. 1 (2004): 204–26, 204.

economy, social policies, and healthcare.[13] The comparative politics textbook by Kopstein and Lichbach proposed ideas, interests, and institutions as a framework for understanding the influence of global development on domestic politics.[14] In a rare case of the model being referenced in a foreign policy study, Checkel examined the role of ideas in Soviet foreign policy "by examining the institutional and political contexts that have shaped and filtered these ideas."[15]

When applied to foreign policy, the 3-i framework carries the simple message that every idea, interest, and institution is central to understanding foreign policy actions. Rather than being alternative or competing explanations, they represent related and concurrent dimensions of the domestic context within which foreign policy is made. However, given that in the FPA literature, the three "i"s each serve as central concepts of different theories,[16] clarification is warranted as to how ideas, interests, and institutions should be defined and what the linkage between the 3-i and foreign policy change might be.

The concepts of ideas, interests, and institutions cover a wide range of phenomena. For example, "ideas" may refer to individual beliefs, public political narratives, political ideologies, or national identity, among many others. Similarly, Morgenthau's "national interest"[17] is conceptually different from the interests of bureaucrats in the model proposed by Allison.[18] The 3-i framework

13 E.g., John Hudson, Gyu-Jin Hwang and Stefan Kühner, "Between Ideas, Institutions and Interests: Analysing Third-Way Welfare Reform Programmes in Germany and the United Kingdom," *Journal of Social Policy* 37, no. 2 (2008): 207–30; Jeremy Richardson, "Government, Interest Groups and Policy Change," *Political Studies* 48, no. 5 (2000): 1006–25; Jessica C. Shearer, Julia Abelson, Bocar Kouyaté, John N. Lavis and Gill Walt, "Why Do Policies Change? Institutions, Interests, Ideas and Networks in Three Cases of Policy Reform," *Health Policy and Planning* 31, no. 9 (2016): 1200–1211.

14 Jeffrey Kopstein and Mark Lichbach (eds.), *Comparative Politics: Interests, Identities and Institutions in a Changing Global Order*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.

15 Jeff Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," *World Politics* 45, no. 2 (1993): 271–300, 276.

16 E.g., Mark Bevir and Oliver Daddow, "Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, Comparative and Regional Studies," *International Relations* 29, no. 3 (2015): 273–87; Margaret G. Hermann, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 47–81; Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 653–73; Alex Mintz, "How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 1 (2004): 3–13.

17 Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Primacy of the National Interest," *The American Scholar* 18, no. 2 (1949): 207–12.

18 Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: HarperCollins, 1971).

builds on a particular set of phenomena. In the analysis presented here, ideas, interests, and institutions of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy refer to:

1. The top foreign policymakers' *ideas* on what the foreign policy agenda of their country is and how it should best be pursued;
2. Political survival *interests* of the leaders or the ruling regime; and
3. The structure of the foreign policy decision-making *institution*.

2.1 *Ideas*

Ideas relevant to foreign policy may include ideas "that develop or justify value commitments" and ideas that "provide guidance as to how to achieve preferred objectives."[19] This duality is also found in the "operational code" approach, which distinguishes between leaders' "philosophical beliefs" and their "instrumental beliefs."[20] Following the above, the top political leaders' beliefs need to be examined with respect to a) what the foreign policy issues and priorities are and b) how these priorities should be addressed.

A review of foreign policy ideas helps to assess leaders' risk acceptance, or preference for "risk-prone behavior over risk-averse behavior."[21] A crucial distinction must be made between two "ideal types" of leaders—namely, moderate/pragmatic leaders and radical/crusader-type leaders—in order to contrast leaders driven by certain ideas and goals (crusaders) with leaders whose actions reflect the contexts within which they operate (pragmatists).[22] According to Hermann and colleagues, a pragmatic leader is "less likely to pursue extreme policies of any kind."[23]

2.2 *Interests*

The concept of interest refers to the political interests of actors at the highest level of power—that is, the leaders of a country. Foreign policymaking is

19 Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds.), *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11.

20 Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1969): 190–222, 199.

21 Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, "Rethinking and Reconceptualizing Risk in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Sociocognitive Approach," *Political Psychology* 16, no. 2 (1995): 347–80, 370.

22 E.g., Joe D. Hagan, "Domestic Political Regime Changes and Foreign Policy Restructuring in Western Europe: A Conceptual Framework and Initial Empirical Analysis," *Cooperation and Conflict* 24, no. 3 (1989): 141–62, 147–48; Margaret G. Hermann, Thomas Preston, Baghat Korany and Timothy M. Shaw, "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (2001): 83–131, here 86.

23 Hermann et al., "Who Leads Matters."

the prerogative of this group, and achieving and retaining office is its primary interest.[24] Depending on the particular political context, a ruling regime's interest in political survival ranges from negligible to critical, which is theorized to have implications for foreign policy. Volgy and Schwarz noted that significant foreign policy changes are most likely to happen when they serve politicians' interests in surviving in office.[25] Factors such as "prospects of electoral defeat," "threat to regime survival," or "intraparty rivalry" gain primary importance for leaders in their assessment of foreign policy actions.[26]

Diversionary war theory provides a good illustration of the linkage between domestic political interests and foreign policy. According to the basic version of this theory, a struggling ruling regime is more inclined toward extreme foreign policy action in order to divert public attention from domestic problems.[27] Although diversionary war is a relatively narrow concept, the logic of regime insecurity as a potential push factor for foreign policy is widely accepted in the literature. Following this logic, this article assumes a) that a ruling regime's political power interests are one of the critical factors that inform foreign policy decisions and b) that an increase in a ruling regime's political insecurity can lead to a change in foreign policy.

2.3 *Institutions*

The third element of the 3-i framework refers to foreign policymaking institutions. While individuals are primary actors who carry ideas, interpret signals from outside, and make decisions, they do not operate as "free agents" but are embedded in particular institutional contexts.[28] Institutions, in our context, determine the rules of policymaking—that is, who makes foreign policy

24 Kenneth Schultz, "Domestic Politics and International Relations," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse-Kappen and Beth A. Simmons, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013), 478–502, 480–81; Randolph M. Siverson and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Selectorate Theory and International Politics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

25 Thomas J. Volgy and John E. Schwarz, "Does Politics Stop at the Water's Edge? Domestic Political Factors and Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Cases of Great Britain, France and West Germany," *The Journal of Politics* 53, no. 3 (1991): 615–43, 618.

26 Mintz, "How Do Leaders Make Decisions?," 9. See also Kjell Goldmann, "The Line in Water: International and Domestic Politics," *Cooperation and Conflict* 24, no. 3 (1989): 103–16, 105; Marianne Kneuer, "Autocratic Regimes and Foreign Policy," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1996): 133–53.

27 Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," 666.

28 Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," 277.

decisions and how. Importantly, Hermann and Hagan note that "understanding a government's formal structure is less important than understanding whose positions actually count at a particular point in time."[29]

Despite the diversity of theories on this subject, there is remarkable agreement on the linkage between decision-making institutions and foreign policy actions. In short, change toward high-risk foreign policy is more likely in systems in which resistance to the most powerful actor is weak. The larger, and thus the more dispersed, the decision-making group, the less likely it is for this group to resort to extreme foreign policy actions, according to the institutional reading of democratic peace theory.[30] The veto player approach suggests that the greater the number of veto players among decision-makers, the less likely it is for foreign policy change to occur.[31] For this reason, this article looks at how foreign policymaking in Kyrgyzstan changed along the continuum between dispersed/context-sensitive and centralized/insulated.

3 Audacity or Adventurism? Kyrgyz Foreign Policy after 2005

There is a remarkable consensus in the literature that Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy is predictable because of its smallness and weakness. The first president of the country, Askar Akayev, consistently described Kyrgyzstan as a small state whose foreign policy aimed at securing "big friends."[32] A critical aspect of the foreign policy of such a country would be to maintain "friendly relations with all neighbors and outside powers."[33] Talant Sultanov, the head of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, the government's think tank, concurred, stating

29 Margaret G. Hermann and Joe D. Hagan, "International Decision Making: Leadership Matters," *Foreign Policy*, no. 110 (1998): 124–37, 131.

30 Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson and Alastair Smith, "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (1999): 791–807.

31 Kai Oppermann and Klaus Brummer, "Veto Player Approaches in Foreign Policy Analysis," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1995): 289–325.

32 Askar Askayev, Statement during the General Debate at the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, October 2, 2003, https://www.un.org/webcast/ga/58/statements/kyrgeng031002.htm.

33 Andrew C. Kuchins, Jeffrey Mankoff and Oliver Backes, *Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia: Kyrgyzstan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests* (Lanham, MD: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015), 4.

that Kyrgyzstan is a small state that "cannot afford to speak with some and not speak with other countries,"[34] the implication being that "the domestic level of analysis, internal politics, has not actively contributed to shaping current Kyrgyz foreign policy."[35]

When President Askar Akayev was ousted in the course of the Tulip Revolution, few observers expected changes in the country's foreign policy. The Kyrgyz opposition did not have foreign policy issues on its agenda when it mobilized protesters in March 2005. As the regime fell apart, the new leaders reassured the public that Kyrgyzstan would honor existing international agreements.[36] By 2010, however, a "dishonored" international agreement loomed large in the context of events that led to the ousting of the second president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev. In 2008–9, Bakiyev launched a bidding war between Moscow and Washington over the fate of Manas Air Base. The result was a drastic deterioration in Russian–Kyrgyz relations in 2009–10, which fueled debates about Moscow's role in ending Bakiyev's regime during the April "revolution" in 2010.[37]

The sequence of Kyrgyzstan's decisions on the future of Manas Air Base represents a puzzling case of a foreign policy change toward greater extremity. Certainly, Kyrgyzstan's post-2005 foreign policy was not a case of fundamental international realignment. If one was to operate with the concepts of "alignment" or "orientation," President Bakiyev's general rhetoric did not depart from that of his predecessor. Both of them consistently referred to a multi-vector foreign policy, with Russia granted special status as Kyrgyzstan's strategic ally.[38] However, Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy became visibly more risk-accepting

34 Leila Saralayeva, "Talant Sultanov: Tema chuchuka, vozmozhno, privlechet bol'she turistov v Kyrgyzstan" [Talent Sultanov: The Chuchuk Theme May Attract More Tourists to Kyrgyzstan], *Novye Litsa*, January 18, 2016, http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/politics/talant-sultanov-tema-chuchuka_-vozmozhno_-privlechet-bolshe-turistov-v-kyrgyzstan.

35 Thomas J.C. Wood, *The Formation of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy, 1991–2004* (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2005), 345.

36 E.g., "Roza Otunbayeva: U Kyrgyzstana dolzhny byt' svoi natsional'nye interesy" [Roza Otunbayeva: Kyrgyzstan Must Have Its Own National Interests], *Radio Azattyk*, September 12, 2005, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/2430405.html; Manfred Quiring, "Roza Otunbayeva: 'My nakhodimsia mezhdu dvumia frontami'" [Roza Otunbayeva: "We Are between Two Fronts"], *Die Welt*, July 26, 2005, https://inosmi.ru/world/20050726/221168.html.

37 E.g., Evgeny Troitskiy, *Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan: A Challenge to Russian Foreign Policy* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2012).

38 Askar Akayev, *Dumaia o budushchem s optimizmom: Razmyshleniia o vneshnei politike i miroustroistve* [Thinking of the Future with Optimism: Reflections on Foreign Policy and the World Order] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 2004); Kurmanbek Bakiyev, "Inauguratsionnaia rech' Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki Kurmanbeka

after 2005 and included a series of U-turns in its relations with its most important foreign partners, Russia and the United States, over the future of Manas Air Base.

The change in Bishkek's approach to dealing with the geopolitical pressure became evident shortly after the Tulip Revolution, when President Bakiyev bluntly demanded that the United States pay more to Kyrgyzstan for hosting its air base.[39] This move came after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in July 2005, which adopted a joint declaration demanding that the United States set a timeline for the removal of its bases from Central Asia. Bakiyev, acting as interim president, argued that this declaration was legitimate considering that the "active phase" of operations in Afghanistan had been completed. Following a two-day visit by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Kyrgyz defense minister backtracked, stating that the U.S. air base would continue operations until "the situation in Afghanistan is normalized."[40]

In one of many U-turns, President Bakiyev then returned to the matter in February 2006, stating that Kyrgyzstan intended to renegotiate the amount the United States would have to pay for the use of Manas Airport, adding that US$200 million would be a fair rate and that Kyrgyzstan was "not a rich country that could afford to provide these facilities free of charge."[41]

At first, proactive bargaining worked well for President Bakiyev. In 2006 the United States agreed to increase the lease payment from about $2 million to $17.4 million a year. The joint statement of the two countries also mentioned that the United States would provide Kyrgyzstan with US$150 million in assistance.[42] Russia, in the meantime, had an offer of its own to make. In

Bakiyeva" [Inauguration Speech of the President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev], August 16, 2005, https://www.msn.kg/ru/news/10995.

39 "K. Bakiyev: Sroki vyvoda bazy SShA iz Kyrgyzstana svyazany s normalizatsiei situatsii v Afganistane" [K. Bakiyev: The Timing of the Withdrawal of the U.S. Base from Kyrgyzstan Is Associated with the Normalization of the Situation in Afghanistan], *Radio Azattyk*, September 6, 2005, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/2430173.html; Demetri Sevastopulo and Hubert Wetzel, "Baza 'Manas' podorozhaet vpiatero: Prezident K. Bakiyev vystavliaet SShA schet v $200 mln" [The Manas Base Will Rise in Price Fivefold: President K. Bakiyev Issues US$200 Million Invoice], *Vedomosti*, December 16, 2005, https://centrasia.org/newsA.php?st=1134712500.

40 "Amerikanskaia baza ostaetsia v Kirgizii" [U.S. base Remains in Kyrgyzstan], *Lenta.ru*, July 26, 2005, https://lenta.ru/news/2005/07/26/base.

41 "Kirgizy zastaviat amerikantsev platit' za bazu VVS v piat' raz bol'she" [Kyrgyz Will Force Americans to Pay Five Times More for the Air Force Base], *Lenta.ru*, February 15, 2006, https://lenta.ru/news/2006/02/15/ganci.

42 Jim Nichol, "Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the U.S. Manas Airbase: Context and Implications," (Washington, DC: Congressonal Research Service, 2009), 4.

August 2007, President Putin declared that Moscow was ready to invest up to US$2 billion in the Kyrgyz economy, adding that "we only need good projects" to be discussed and agreed by the governments.[43] This Russian offer triggered what became a bidding war over the future of Manas Air Base.

On February 3, 2008, President Bakiyev announced that Kyrgyzstan would close Manas Air Base.[44] Tellingly, this statement was made in Moscow during a meeting with then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Bakiyev accused the United States of not responding to Bishkek's call for discussing the "compensation" due to Kyrgyzstan. At the same meeting, Medvedev confirmed that the Russian government had approved providing substantial financial support to Kyrgyzstan, consisting of US$1.7 billion to fund hydropower plant construction, a $300 million soft loan, and a $150 million grant to the Kyrgyz government.[45] The Kyrgyz authorities denied that there was any connection between the decision on Manas Air Base and the financial support from Russia, stating that it was a "coincidence" that these news items were announced at the same time.[46] Medvedev stated, somewhat ambiguously, that the financial package agreement went "well beyond the framework of bilateral relations," adding that Russia's support of Kyrgyzstan was in line with the "special strategic allied nature" of the countries' relations.[47]

Their agreement proved to be the beginning rather than the end of this story. On February 19, 2009, the Kyrgyz parliament voted to cancel the air base agreement, giving six months for the air base to be vacated. However, following behind-the-scenes talks with U.S. representatives, it was decided that the air base should remain in operation. The chief of staff of the Kyrgyz president told the U.S. ambassador that Bakiyev's forthcoming announcement that the air

43 "Rossiia gotova vlozhit' v ekonomiku Kirgizii do $2 mlrd, zaiavil Putin" [Russia Is Ready to Invest up to $2 Billion in the Kyrgyz Economy, Putin Said], *RIA Novosti*, August 16, 2007, https://ria.ru/20070816/71795673.html.

44 "Bakiyev: Aviabaza Manas budet zakryta" [Bakiyev: "Manas Air Base Will Be Closed"], *Kloop*, February 4, 2009, https://kloop.kg/blog/2009/02/04/bakiev-aviabaza-manas-budet-zakryta.

45 Ibid.; "Goodbye, 'Manas,'" *Lenta.ru*, February 4, 2009, https://lenta.ru/articles/2009/02/04/base.

46 "Igor' Chudinov: Kyrgyzstan i SShA prodolzhaiut peregovory po aviabaze 'Manas'" [Igor Chudinov: Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. Continue Negotiations on Manas Air Base], *24.kg*, February 5, 2009, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/45915–2009/02/05/105491.html.

47 "Soobshchenie o zakrytii bazy v Manase stalo sensatsiei" [The Message about the Closure of the Base in Manas Was a Sensation], *Vesti.ru*, February 4, 2009, https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=249590.

base would be removed should be regarded as "a signal to begin negotiations."[48] The result was the agreement of June 22, 2009, between the United States and Kyrgyzstan on the establishment of a transit center at Manas Airport. In essence, this was a "raise the rent, rename the base" solution.[49] According to this new agreement, Kyrgyzstan would receive US$60 million annually—more than three times the previous rate of US$17.4 million, though less than the US$75 million ceiling that had been available to the U.S. negotiators.[50] The agreement was reached in April 2009, when Kyrgyzstan had already received US$300 million of the financial package promised by Russia.

Despite seeming financially beneficial, Bishkek's U-turn decisions proved politically risky. In the months following the Transit Center agreement, the Russian media launched a massive attack on President Bakiyev, which Cooley has referred to as a "soft power barrage."[51] Bakiyev was exposed as the leader of a corrupt regime and accused of planning to transfer power to his younger son, Maxim.[52] On April 1, 2010, Russia announced a 100% export duty on gasoline bound to Kyrgyzstan, triggering expectations of an imminent spike in gas prices in the country. Prime Minister Usenov complained that this "provocative" action was aimed at punishing Kyrgyzstan for the 2009 agreement with the United States.[53] President Bakiyev agreed with this interpretation, stating that Russia's unhappiness about Kyrgyzstan's independent foreign policy was the reason for the April revolt.[54]

48 "Kyrgyz Demand over $2 Billion to Keep Manas Open," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy, 09BISHKEK96_a, Bishkek, February 23, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK157_a.html.

49 Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, 126.

50 "Kyrgyzstan: Provisional Agreement Reached to Continue Operations at Manas," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK299_a, Bishkek, April 4, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK299_a.html.

51 Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, 127.

52 Viktor Bulavin, "V Kirgizii nachalas' operatsiia 'Naslednik'" [Operation "Heir" Begins in Kyrgyzstan], *Izvestiia*, March 23, 2010, https://iz.ru/news/359818; Grigorii Mikhailov, "Otets i syn" [Father and Son], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, November 2, 2009, http://www.ng.ru/cis/2009-11-02/5_kirgizia.html?id_user=Y.

53 "Kyrgyz–Russian Relations," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 02BISHKEK000408. Kyrgyzstan Bishkek, *The Moscow Post*, May 4, 2011, http://www.moscow-post.su/in_world/wikileaks_idet_po_kirgizskomu_sledu6590.

54 "Bakiyev: Ne predpolagal, chto samostoiatel'naia vneshniaia politika Kirgizii mozhet tak razdrazhat' Rossiiu" [Bakiyev: I Didn't Suppose that the Independent Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan Could Annoy Russia So Much], *Tut.by*, April 23, 2010, https://news.tut.by/politics/167921.html. See also "Bakiyev: Odna iz prichin perevorota—nedovol'stvo Rossii" [Bakiyev: One of the Reasons for the Coup is Russia's Discontent], *Deutsche Welle*, April 23, 2010, https://www.dw.com/ru.

As we have seen, the Tulip Revolution had implications for Kyrgyzstan's international relations. Initial expectations that the new leadership would take a pro-Western course and follow the leaders of other color revolutions did not materialize. However, President Bakiyev took a different approach to his predecessor regarding how best to pursue the declared multi-vector foreign policy. The change became evident early on, when the interim authorities voiced their intention to renegotiate the leasing rate with the United States under threat of unilaterally withdrawing from the agreement. The tactic of making great powers compete for access to the air base on Kyrgyz territory culminated in 2008–9 with agreements made, cancelled, renegotiated with, and, arguably (in the case of Russia), sabotaged.

3.1 *What Do We Get? A Peculiar "Pragmatism" in Post-2005 Foreign Policy Ideas*

"Chaotic," "erratic," and "inconsistent" were some of the adjectives observers used to describe Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy during Bakiyev's presidency, with a consensus belief that he lacked a foreign policy strategy as such.[55] The foreign policy of Bakiyev's predecessor, Askar Akayev, was similarly regarded as "a mish-mash of guileless reactions to a series of crises."[56] In part, this simply reflected the two presidents' lack of previous foreign policy experience. As the first foreign minister, Roza Otunbayeva, recalled, in the very early 1990s the country's leaders "simply had no positions ready on various international issues, and had to formulate them on the go."[57] Moreover, Kyrgyzstan's pre-Soviet history offered little in terms of clear-cut national identity to guide independent foreign policy. According to former foreign minister Muratbek Imanaliyev, Kyrgyz history was a myth and the Kyrgyz lacked "dominant ideas and defining landmarks both at national and individual level."[58] In short, as Huskey aptly put it, the country leaders faced "a dearth of usable national history with which to construct a new identity."[59]

55 E.g., Erica Marat, "Kyrgyzstan's Chaotic Foreign Policy," The Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 121, June 23, 2011, https://jamestown.org/program/kyrgyzstans-chaotic-foreign-policy; "Aleksandr Knyazev: Bakiev 'slabo kompetenten vo vneshnei politike'" [Alexander Knyazev: Bakiyev is "Poorly Competent in Foreign Policy"], *Regnum*, July 17, 2006, https://regnum.ru/news/674726.html, Kemel Toktomushev, *Regime Security and Kyrgyz Foreign Policy* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2014).

56 Wood, *The Formation of Kyrgyz Foreign Policy, 1991–2004*, 142.

57 Interview with Roza Otunbayeva, 2017.

58 Muratbek Imanaliyev, *Ocherki o vneshnei politike Kyrgyzstana* [Essays on Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Policy] (Bishkek: Sabyr, 2002), 134.

59 Eugene Huskey, "National Identity from Scratch: Defining Kyrgyzstan's Role in World Affairs," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (2003): 111–38, 112.

However, this tentative state of national self-conception does not preclude inquiry into the ideational base of the country's foreign policy. As the country's leaders started building a national identity "from scratch" in the early 1990s, they did likewise with the country's foreign policy conceptions. Different "development models," such as the "Swiss," "Turkish," and "South Asian" models, were proclaimed at different times.[60] In 1998 President Akayev issued his first "foreign policy doctrine," called "Silk Road Diplomacy," which was followed by a more formal document, the country's Foreign Policy Concept. Analyses of foreign policy concepts developed during Akayev's and Bakiyev's presidencies, as well as speeches and writings of the presidents and high-ranking advisors, show what elements of their foreign policy ideas did or did not change after the Tulip Revolution of 2005.

Two points reflect a continuity in the two leaders' understanding of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy agenda. The first is that Akayev and Bakiyev shared the same view of the limitations and vulnerabilities stemming from Kyrgyzstan's location and small size. Akayev noted that small states stand out because of their "inability, on their own, to withstand the powerful external pressures,"[61] such that seeking "big friends" like the United Nations, Russia and the United States should be a precept. Bakiyev continued this rhetoric, referring to Kyrgyzstan as a "poor and developing" country,[62] while the 2007 Foreign Policy Concept presented Kyrgyzstan as a vulnerable country because of its inland location, energy dependence, and the presence of terrorist threats.[63]

The second point concerned the necessity to keep relations open with all interested external actors and to avoid conflict. Akayev's "Silk Road Diplomacy," the country's first comprehensive foreign policy statement, explicitly stated that the "use of the prefix 'anti-' is fundamentally precluded with respect to bilateral cooperation."[64] Bakiyev echoed this sentiment, noting that "despite having a harsh record of history, the Kyrgyz do not have historical enemies."[65] After becoming president, Bakiyev declared in a speech that Kyrgyzstan would

60 Imanaliyev, *Ocherki o vneshnei politike Kyrgyzstana*, 134.

61 Akayev, *Dumaia o budushchem s optimizmom*, 301.

62 Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Statement at the General Debate of the 60th Session of the General Assembly (New York City, NY: Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic to the United Nations, 2005).

63 Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki [Foreign Policy Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic], January 10, 2007, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/4569?cl=ru-ru.

64 Askar Akayev, "President of Kyrgyzstan: Our Foreign Policy Doctrine is the Great Silk Road," *Executive Intelligence Review* 26, no. 15 (1999): 49–52.

65 Kurmanbek Bakiyev, *Dorogu osilit iduschii* [The Road Will Be Overcome by a Walker] (Bishkek: Megamedia, 2003), 11.

"build partnership relations with as many countries interested in supporting Kyrgyzstan as possible."[66]

Akayev and Bakiyev may have shared the same views, but Bakiyev's understanding of foreign policy departed from that of his predecessor in several ways. For example, Akayev showed a keen awareness of the notion of geopolitical competition between three great powers and readily engaged in debates about great power rivalry in the region.[67] Understandably, he denied that such rivalry even existed, preferring to portray the big powers as being in a non-zero-sum relationship.[68]

Bakiyev did not share Akayev's enthusiasm regarding the country's "big friends." In his inaugural speech, he bluntly rejected the idea that Kyrgyzstan would be a place "for the realization of geopolitical interests" of other countries.[69] His close advisors also argued that the country's relations with Russia, the United States, and China had turned into a conflict-generating "old jacket" that had to be dropped once and for all.[70] Bakiyev's speech from 2009 echoed this sentiment, demanding that Kyrgyzstan not "limit its foreign policy to existing relations and traditions."[71] The 2009 National Security Concept further downplayed the issue of alignment, stating that Kyrgyzstan was striving for a "'de-monopolization' of foreign policy priorities, diversification of links with partners, partnership link, equidistance from global leaders."[72]

The second departure in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy ideas after 2005 was a greater emphasis on pragmatism. Whereas none of Akayev's principal foreign policy speeches had mentioned this new approach, nearly all the key foreign policy-related documents and speeches after 2006 made reference

66 Kurmanbek Bakiyev, "Address to the People of the Kyrgyz Republic," Bishkek, September 28, 2006, http://ar-namys.org/read/22.html.

67 See, in particular, Askar Akayev, "Kyrgyzstan v izmenivshemsia mire" [Kyrgyzstan in the Transformed World] (speech to the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 7, 2002); Askar Akayev, "Kuda idet Tsentral'naia Aziia?" [Where is Central Asia Heading?], *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4, November 28, 2003, http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_2126.

68 His wording was "printsip i–i" (principle of and–and), as opposed to "ili–ili" (or–or) (see Akayev, "Kuda idet Tsentral'naia Aziia?").

69 Bakiyev, "Inauguratsionnaia rech."

70 Valentin Bogatyrev, "Vneshniaia politika: Kyrgyzstan dolzhen izbavit'sia ot starykh pidzhakov" [Foreign Policy: Kyrgyzstan Must Get Rid of Old Jackets], Institute for Public Policy, August 5, 2006, http://ipp.webtt.ru/ru/news/178.

71 Kurmanbek Bakiyev, "Speech Delivered to the Assembly of Kyrgyzstan's Diplomats," December 24, 2009, http://kyrgyzembassy.ru/?p=812#.XdObDjIzYWo.

72 Kontseptsiia Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki [National Security Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic], February 18, 2009, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/4797.

to pragmatism.[73] A speech that Valentin Bogatyrev, the head of the state-run think tank,[74] gave in December 2005 suggested two facets of a pragmatic foreign policy. Its first facet was dropping references to "ideologies." Bogatyrev argued that Kyrgyz foreign policy suffered from two "ideologemes." One was democracy, an "instrument of control" by Western countries, and the other was the "Soviet ideologeme," which required Kyrgyzstan to live "under the wing" of Russia.[75] The second facet of the newly found "pragmatism" was an inward-looking notion of "benefit." According to Bogatyrev, all international communications of the country should be guided by a simple question: "what does it give us, how is it beneficial for the country."[76] This shift was illustrated by the definition of the U.S.-led antiterrorist coalition. Akayev considered this coalition to be comparable to the anti-Nazi coalition during the Second World War.[77] After 2005, not only was such pompous language dropped, but any references to Afghanistan were as well. For example, the 2007 Foreign Policy Concept stated that the U.S.-led antiterrorist coalition offered "considerable opportunities for advancing [Kyrgyzstan's] development and security."[78]

The third departure in the post-2005 foreign policy narrative was a greater emphasis on Kyrgyzstan's independence in its foreign policy decisions. President Bakiyev accepted the view that Kyrgyzstan was a small and vulnerable state but at the same time took a rather belligerent stance on the country's "actorness." In his 2006 annual address, he declared that there were no "teachers and students" in international relations and that Kyrgyzstan was "able to decide on its own what and how things must be done in the country."[79] In another speech, he stated that the country was now building "equal relations with all, without facing humiliation from any other country, no matter

73 Bakiyev, "Address to the People of the Kyrgyz Republic"; Bakiyev, "Speech Delivered to the Assembly of Kyrgyzstan's Diplomats"; Ljubov' Borisenko, "Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov: Nasha natsional'naia diplomatiia na puti razvitiia" [Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov: Our National Diplomacy on the Path of Development], *MSN*, October 27, 2006, https://www.msn.kg/showwin.php?type=newsportal&id=16048; Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki.

74 International Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, renamed the National Institute for Strategic Studies in 2010 (http://www.nisi.kg/ob-institute/istoriya-nisi.html). Bogatyrev was also known as the president's advisor and speechwriter.

75 "Aktual'nyye problemy vneshnei politiki Kyrgyzstana" [Current Issues in Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Policy], Kyrgyzstan Brief 2 (Bishkek: Institute for Public Policy, 2006), 12.

76 Ibid., 13.

77 Akayev, "Kyrgyzstan v izmenivshemsia mire" [Kyrgyzstan in the Transformed World] (speech to the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, May 7, 2002).

78 Kontseptsiia vneshnei politiki Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki.

79 Bakiyev, "Address to the People of the Kyrgyz Republic."

how big and great."[80] The way the presidents defended Kyrgyzstan's freedom to build relations with the United States is illustrative. Akayev declared that Kyrgyzstan's alliance with Russia allowed a "corridor of opportunity" to build relations with the United States,[81] whereas President Bakiyev demonstrated no such caution. In a 2005 interview with Russian media on the future of the U.S. air base, then-interim president Bakiyev curtly stated that this was a matter of bilateral Kyrgyz–U.S. relations.[82]

As we have seen, Akayev's and Bakiyev's regimes revealed a similar understanding of the weak and vulnerable nature of Kyrgyzstan at the international level. At the same time, after the Tulip Revolution of 2005, Kyrgyz leaders promoted the view that foreign policy was delinked from ideological commitments and focused on a pragmatic, "what does it give us?" logic. Thus, although Bakiyev's air base gambit could be regarded as an instance of extreme foreign policymaking, its ideational basis was not any radical, value-driven ideology but a pragmatic or "mercantilist" approach to international relations.

4 Dominant Presidency and Its Insecurity

According to Volgy and Schwarz, foreign policy changes can be enabled by the ruling elites' "ultimate end," which is political survival.[83] This seems particularly relevant in the case of Bakiyev's presidency. Whereas Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy between 2005 and 2010 was characterized by inconsistency, the domestic political situation during this period was characterized by instability. How were the two related? This section moves to the second dimension of the 3-i framework to examine how the ruling regime's security changed over time and what might be inferred regarding its relationship to foreign policy changes.

Bakiyev's leadership faced challenges from Day 1. The Kyrgyz opposition movement that ousted Akayev was diverse, with no clear "hierarchy" within its leadership. Five different opposition movements were involved in mobilizing the protests in March 2005, and each of these movements was led by one or several opposition leaders. Once in power, the opposition alliance quickly

80 "Kurmanbek Bakiyev: My i dal'she budem provodit' vneshniuiu politiku, otvechaiushchuiu, prezhde vsego, interesam Kyrgyzstana" [Kurmanbek Bakiyev: We Will Continue to Pursue a Foreign Policy that Meets, First of All, the Interests of Kyrgyzstan], *24.kg*, August 5, 2006, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/5071-2006/08/05/5381.html.

81 Akayev, "Kuda idet Tsentral'naia Aziia?"

82 Kurmanbek Bakiyev, "Press Briefing at ITAR TASS," *MSN*, September 7, 2005, https://www.msn.kg/ru/news/11231.

83 Volgy and Schwarz, "Does Politics Stop at the Water's Edge?"

disintegrated, with many leaders finding themselves in their familiar role of opposition. Two issues exposed the problem among opposition leaders: the presidential elections and constitutional reform.

Immediately after Akayev fled the country, Bakiyev, as leader of one of the opposition movements, was installed as interim president. However, he was not the only leader from the "revolutionary camp" to run in the snap presidential elections. Two other opposition leaders, Felix Kulov and Adakhan Madumarov, had similar plans. The emergence of Kulov as a potential candidate was particularly important. The former vice president, who had challenged Akayev before being jailed, Kulov was a popular and experienced politician. With Bakiyev originating from the south and Kulov from the north of Kyrgyzstan, the tensions between the two sparked concerns in the public media about growing regional tensions.[84] On March 13, 2005, after they had both submitted the necessary documents to run in the elections, Bakiyev and Kulov announced a "gentleman's agreement"[85] in which Kulov agreed to withdraw from running for office and Bakiyev promised that he would appoint Kulov prime minister if he won the elections.

This agreement between Bakiyev and Kulov proved to be a case of partial accommodation within the political elite. In September 2005, once Bakiyev and Kulov duly occupied the offices of president and prime minister, respectively, several other opposition leaders ended up outside the cabinet. For example, Roza Otunbayeva, Alevtina Pronenko, and Ishenbai Kadyrbekov, all of whom were well-known opposition leaders until March 2005, lost their ministerial positions after "failing" to get parliamentary approval in September 2005.[86] On September 20, 2005, President Bakiyev dismissed Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov, one of Akayev's most vocal critics. News reports suggested that Beknazarov's dismissal indicated a crisis within the ruling group, likening

84 Viktoriya Panfilova, "Bakiyev i Kulov uzhe vse podelili" [Bakiyev and Kulov Have Already Divided Everything], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, May 23, 2005, http://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2005-05-23/11_bakiev.html; Georgii Stepanov, "Dva lidera 'Tiul'panovoi Revoliutsii' ne mogut podelit' vlast' nad Kirgiziiey" [Two Leaders of the "Tulip Revolution" Cannot Agree on Power-Sharing over Kyrgyzstan], *Izvestiia*, March 31, 2005, https://iz.ru/news/301098.

85 Zainidin Kurmanov, "Osobennosti politicheskogo razvitiia Kyrgyzstana v postrevoliutsionnyi period: Problemy vybora formy pravleniia" [Features of the Political Development of Kyrgyzstan in the Post-Revolutionary Period: Problems of Choosing a Form of Government], *Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kavkaz* 2, no. 44 (2006): 60.

86 "Prezident K.Bakiyev vnes v parlament kandidatury yeshche 6 ministrov" [President K. Bakiyev Introduced Six More Ministers to the Parliament], *Radio Azattyk*, September 29, 2005, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/2431136.html.

the case to Yulia Tymoshenko's removal by Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine.[87] Otunbayeva and Beknazarov would be on the frontlines of the opposition that ousted Bakiyev in 2010.

The consequences of Bakiyev's alienation of fellow opposition leaders became evident in 2006. Given the president's reluctance to push forward constitutional reforms that would weaken his power, opposition leaders mobilized for large-scale protests in November 2006. Some members of the parliament, led by opposition leaders Omurbek Tekebayev, Kubatbek Baibolov, and Temir Sariyev, established a "constituent assembly" to push through the constitutional changes. While the president resisted the pressure, thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets. Eventually, President Bakiyev signed the revised constitution that cut some of the president's executive powers and envisaged a party-based parliament that would form the government.[88]

Ironically, the adoption of the constitution in response to the street protests in November 2006 turned out to be both the most humiliating defeat for President Bakiyev and the beginning of a dramatic turnaround in the political struggle. By threatening to dissolve it, Bakiyev successfully pressed the parliament to adopt yet another revision of the constitution in December 2006. In January 2007, the parliament refused to reappoint Felix Kulov as prime minister, thereby ridding Bakiyev of an inconvenient "tandem" partner. Finally, in the December 2007 parliamentary election, the newly created pro-Bakiyev Ak Jol party won 71 of the 90 seats.[89] The election drew heavy criticism, with local observers accusing the regime of "cynical and monstrous" electoral fraud.[90]

However, establishing complete control over the branches of power did not help to make Bakiyev's regime settled and secure. In December 2008, seven opposition parties and four movements joined forces to set up the United People's Movement, a broad alliance with the declared objective of changing

87 Arkady Dolgov, "Prezident Kirgizii povtoriaet za Yushchenko" [Kyrgyz President Copies Yushchenko], *Gazeta.ru*, September 20, 2005, https://www.gazeta.ru/2005/09/20/oa_171327.shtml.

88 "S trebovaniiami prezidenta po vneseniiu popravok v novuiu redaktsiiu Konstitutsii parlament strany soglasen" [The Country's Parliament Agrees with the Requirements of the President to Amend the New Version of the Constitution], *24.kg*, November 8, 2006, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/9454-2006/11/08/9832.html.

89 *Kyrgyz Republic: Pre-Term Parliamentary Elections: 16 December 2007: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2008), 26.

90 Bermet Bukasheva, "Kyrgyzstan-2007: Apofeoz verolomstva i rukhnuvshie nadezhdy" [Kyrgyzstan 2007: The Apotheosis of Treachery and Dashed Hopes], *Novye Litsa*, September 15, 2016, http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/projects/soviet-kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-2007-apofeoz-verolomstva-i-ruxnuvshie-nadezhdy.

the ruling group and the political system.[91] Edil Baisalov, another outspoken critic of the regime, argued that the opposition should focus not on constitutional changes, but on the illegitimacy of the ruling regime, stating that "the current regime is not any stronger than Akayev's. It is just a house of cards that can crash even faster than Akayev's system."[92] The defection of Medet Sadyrkulov, who had been loyal to Bakiyev for many years and was known as a political "mastermind" in his office, to the opposition in late 2008 did not help to stabilize the regime.[93]

In a move that betrayed growing insecurity, the ruling regime made increasing efforts to silence its critics. For example, Kubatbek Baibolov, one of the opposition leaders, suddenly announced on January 17, 2008, that he had decided to quit politics for good so he would "not have to fear" for his family and children.[94] In March 2009, the well-known opposition-leaning journalist Syrgak Abdyldayev was severely assaulted, and in the same year, Medet Sadyrkulov and the journalist Gennady Pavlyuk were murdered. In all cases, the involvement of Kyrgyz law enforcement and the security services was established by the courts.[95]

91 "Oppozitsionnyye organizatsii v Kyrgyzstane obrazovali Ob'edinennoe Narodnoe Dvizhenie"[Opposition Organizationsin Kyrgyzstan Formthe United People's Movement], *24.kg*, December 24, 2008, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/44098-2008/12/24/101857.html.

92 "Edil' Baysalov ob oppozitsii i vlastiakh v interv'iu" [Edil' Baysalov in an Interview on the Opposition and the Authorities], *24.kg*, November 20, 2008, https://24.kg/archive/ru/bigtiraj/59155-news24.html.

93 Once out of power, Sadyrkulov reportedly reached out to other opposition leaders and foreignembassies, trying togetsupportforaplantounseat Bakiyev(Alexandra Li,"Beknazarov rasskazal, kak vstretilsia s Sadyrkulovym za tri dnia do yego gibeli" [Beknazarov Told How He Met with Sadyrkulov Three Days before His Death], *Kloop*, July 19, 2012, https://kloop.kg/blog/2012/07/19/beknazarov-rasskazal-o-vstreche-s-sady-rkulovy-m-za-tri-dnya-do-ego-gibeli. See also "New Kyrgyz Opposition Asks for Help," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK119_a, Bishkek, February 6, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK119_a.html.) On March 13, 2009, Sadyrkulov, along with two others, was found dead in a car near Bishkek. After April 2010, a court established that all three were murdered with the knowledge and participation of Janybek Bakiyev, the president's brother.

94 "Kubatbek Baybolov: Moia sovest' chista, i dlia sem'i dorozhe nashi shest' detei i piat' vnukov, chem kakie-to politicheskie pristrastiia" [Kubatbek Baibolov: "My Conscience Is Clear, and Our Six Children and Five Grandchildren Are Dearer to the Family than Any Political Attachments"], *24.kg*, January 17, 2008, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/30028-2008/01/17/73707.html.

95 "Napadenie na Syrgaka Abdyldayeva: Prigovor ne reabilitiruet osuzhdennykh" [Attack on Syrgak Abdyldayev: The Verdict Does Not Rehabilitate the Convicted], *24.kg*, May 12, 2018, https://24.kg/obschestvo/84250_napadenie_nasyirgaka_abdyildaeva_prigovor_nereabil

In addition, Bakiyev moved the date for the presidential election from 2010 to 2009, which observers interpreted as the hasty action of an embattled regime.[96] The local analyst Kadyr Malikov stated that the authorities were in a rush to get elected because of their rapidly deteriorating political standing.[97] The U.S. ambassador's cables make a similar assessment. Commenting on Kyrgyzstan's "bargain" with the Russians and the Americans over Manas Air Base, the ambassador reported that Bakiyev's urgent need for money had to do with "the energy crisis and a resulting $300 million budget shortfall."[98]

That the president was anxious to prolong the "life" of his regime was also evident from his efforts to change the rules of succession following his reelection in 2009. The president played a major role in the creation of a so-called "Presidential Council," which would decide who would assume the president's role in the event that the incumbent president were unable to serve. This Council would include, among others, the director of the newly created Central Agency for Development, Investments, and Innovations, Maxim Bakiyev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev's son and by then arguably one of the top decision-makers in the president's circle.[99]

itiruet_osujdennyih; Svetlana Moiseeva, "Dvukh sotrudnikov GKNB zaderzhali za souchastie v ubiistve Pavliuka" [Two GKNB Officers Detained for Complicity in Pavlyuk's Murder], *Vechernii Bishkek*, April 7, 2014, https://www.vb.kg/doc/268196_dvyh_sotrydnikov_gknb_zaderjali_za_soychastie_v_ybiystve_pavluka.html.

96 Given that the president was elected for five years in July 2005, the next elections were expected to be held in the summer of 2010. However, the Constitutional Court ruled that the next presidential elections would have to be held no later than autumn 2009 ("Konstitutsionnyi sud Kyrgyzstana reshil, chto vybory prezidenta strany dolzhny sostoiat'sia ne pozdnee oseni 2009 goda [obnovleno]" [The Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan Decided that the Presidential Elections Should Be Held No Later than Autumn 2009 (Updated)], *24.kg*, March 19, 2009, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/47985-2009/03/19/109633.html).

97 "Kadyr Malikov: U vlasti Kyrgyzstana v pliusakh—kredit ot Rossii i vyvod amerikanskoi voennoi bazy, a v minusakh—politicheskaia situatsiia v strane" [Pros: The Kyrgyz Authorities Secured a Loan from Russia and the Withdrawal of an American Military Base—Cons: The Political Situation in the Country], *24.kg*, March 19, 2009, https://24.kg/archive/ru/politic/48003-2009/03/19/109669.html.

98 Joshua Kucera, "'Bakiyev Can Be Bought:' U.S. Embassy Tied Rent for Kyrgyz Air Base to President's Reelection," *Eurasianet*, January 5, 2012, https://eurasianet.org/bakiyev-can-be-bought-us-embassy-tied-rent-for-kyrgyz-air-base-to-presidents-reelection;
"What Does Bakiyev Really Want for the Base? Maybe 'Only' $450 Million," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK108_a, Bishkek, February 5, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK108_a.html.

99 E.g., "Novye reformy Bakiyeva vyzyvaiut neodnoznachnuiu reaktsiiu" [Bakiyev's New Reforms Provoke Mixed Reactions], *Kloop*, December 18, 2009, https://kloop.kg/blog/2009/12/18/novye-reformy-bakieva-vyzyvayut-neodnoznachnuyu-reakciyu.

Insecurity among the ruling regime remained high throughout the five years of President Bakiyev's reign. In the early years (2005–6), the president struggled against an influential opposition—his recent allies—that dominated the parliament. Starting in late 2007, when the newly created pro-presidential party took full control over the parliament, the ruling regime went on the offensive, crushing dissenting voices and harassing key opposition leaders. In 2007, Nations in Transit's democracy score for Kyrgyzstan decreased by 0.25 points, the most significant change in any given year.[100] In 2009 Freedom House downgraded the country's regime from a semi-consolidated to a consolidated authoritarian regime.[101] However, the country's move toward a more authoritarian system had not eliminated the ruling regime's perception of its vulnerability, which partly stemmed from a consensus on the low legitimacy of the president and his party and partly from the regime's desire to further solidify its commanding position.

5 From Revolutionary Council to Family Council: Foreign Policy Decision-Making

Risky actions in foreign policy are associated with context-insensitive decision-making groups. Decision units that are responsive to the external political environment, in contrast, lean toward moderate actions. The evolution of high-level political decision-making in Kyrgyzstan between 2005 and 2010 lends support to these propositions. The opposition alliance that toppled President Akayev disintegrated shortly after the regime change. President Bakiyev then oversaw a gradual concentration of policymaking powers within a smaller group of his allies, confirming Malashenko's comment about "family" in Kyrgyzstan being a "political science concept."[102] Bakiyev's regime also developed into a regime explicitly centered around his family. This system developed over time, with a gradual shrinking of policymaking power over the course of at least four phases.

As noted earlier, although Bakiyev became interim president in the immediate aftermath of the Tulip Revolution, he was only one of several leaders of the anti-Akayev opposition. The interim government included several other

100 *Nations in Transit 2008*: Kyrgyzstan (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2008).

101 *Nations in Transit 2009*: Kyrgyzstan (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2009).

102 Vladimir Gorozhankin, "Rossiia dolzhna ispravit'sia i pokazat' sebia solidnoi stranoi" [Russia Must Improve and Show Itself as a Solid Country], February 11, 2005, https://iamik.ru/news/zarubezhe/46959.

high-profile opposition leaders, such as Foreign Minister (and future President) Roza Otunbayeva, Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, and Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov. These were all well-known political figures whose opposition to Akayev had a longer history than Bakiyev's.

In the early months, the principal check on presidential foreign policymaking was Bakiyev's foreign affairs minister, Roza Otunbayeva. Having stormed into the heart of protest mobilization in 2004–5, Otunbayeva was referred to as a "locomotive of the revolution," drawing comparisons to Ukraine's Yulia Tymoshenko. However, no less importantly, Otunbayeva was the country's single most experienced and influential diplomat.[103] Her appointment as foreign minister in 2005 was the record-breaking fourth time she entered that office. Between those appointments, Otunbayeva also served as Kyrgyz ambassador to the United States and later to the United Kingdom.

The early months of Bakiyev's presidency, when Otunbayeva was his foreign minister, saw relatively moderate foreign policy statements. In contrast to her successors, Otunbayeva rarely shied away from authoritatively speaking out about Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy priorities and intentions. Shortly after the regime change, she stated that Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy priorities remained consistent.[104] She also stressed that the air base agreements with the Americans and the Russians would both be respected and that the bases would continue operations full-scale. These statements were more reassuring than Bakiyev's periodic reminders that the conditions of the agreement with the United States needed to be revised.

After September 2005, when Otunbayeva had been removed from the government, President Bakiyev grew more determined to renegotiate the air base agreement. In December 2005, the first media reports emerged of Bakiyev's insistence that the base rent should be increased a hundredfold, from US$2 million to US$200 million.[105] In 2006 Bakiyev confirmed these reports, referring to this figure as fair and legitimate.[106] In this context, Otunbayeva tellingly

103 Among the natives of the Kyrgyz SSR, she was the most senior diplomat within the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shortly before the Soviet Union collapsed, Otunbayeva was approved as the Soviet ambassador to Malaysia. However, due to the turn of events, she instead became the first minister of foreign affairs of independent Kyrgyzstan in 1991.

104 "Za 15 let prezhnee rukovodstvo Kyrgyzstan prevratilo v bol'nichnuiu palate" [In 15 Years, the Former Leadership of Kyrgyzstan Transformed It into the Hospital Chamber], *Radio Azattyk*, April 17, 2005. https://www.azattyk.org/a/1237428.html.

105 Sevastopulo and Wetzel, "Baza 'Manas' podorozhaet vpiatero."

106 "Kirgizy zastaviat amerikantsev platit' za bazu VVS v piat' raz bol'she."

remarked that she had become an "obstacle for many in the government" who were pursuing personal interests.[107]

Prime Minister Felix Kulov was another political heavyweight and a potential "veto player" after Otunbayeva's departure. In 2005 Kulov was one of the most popular politicians, not least because he was one of the few leaders who openly challenged Akayev, before becoming known as a "prisoner of conscience" when the regime put him in jail. The post-2005 Bakiyev–Kulov alliance was an uneasy one. Although they both claimed unity when confronted with opposition protests, relations between them remained cold, to the extent that Kulov resorted to an "open letter" distributed via the media to communicate his political messages to the president.

Kulov's potential "veto player" capacity could be observed in connection with Kyrgyzstan's possible accession to the World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program. Kulov was in favor of joining the HIPC and signed an acceptance letter to the World Bank in December 2006. The president's other advisors, namely State Secretary Adakhan Madumarov and Foreign Minister Alikbek Djekshenkulov, vigorously opposed this move. President Bakiyev initially revealed no strong preference.[108] Immediately after Kulov's resignation, however, he assumed an anti-HIPC position, accusing the government of "confirming its own helplessness."[109] The U.S. ambassador's cable also suggests that it was a rift among the regime's decision-makers that ultimately prevented Kyrgyzstan from acceding to the HIPC program.[110]

The third phase of power concentration among Bakiyev's loyal supporters started with the president's newly created party winning 78 percent of seats in the parliament in December 2007. Unlike his predecessors, the new prime minister, Igor Chudinov, was an entirely nonpolitical figure. Domineering political allies and ministers such as former State Secretary Adakhan Madumarov and Foreign Minister Alikbek Djekshenkulov were gone. Policy influence now lay

107 "Roza Otunbayeva: Ia byla ne 'zhilets' v slozhivsheisia sisteme vlastnykh koordinat" [Roza Otunbayeva: I Was Not a "Resident" in the Current System of Power Coordinates], *Radio Azattyk*, September 28, 2005, https://www.azattyk.org/a/1243882.html.

108 "Kirgiziya: Prezident Kurmanbek Bakiyev zaiavil, chto strana dolzhna vstupat' v HIPC tol'ko pri uslovii sokhraneniia nezavisimosti" [Kyrgyzstan: President Kurmanbek Bakiyev Says that a Country Should Join the HIPC Only If Independence Is Maintained], *Fergana News*, December 4, 2006, http://www.ferganews.com/news.php?id=4321.

109 Sergei Kozhemyakin, "Chto stoit za otkazom Kirgizii ot programmy KHIPIK?" [What Is Behind Kyrgyzstan's Refusal of the HIPC Program?], *Pravda*, March 1, 2007, http://www.arba.ru/news/1468.

110 "HIPC Initiative Victim of Kyrgyz PM Shuffle," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 07BISHKEK80_a, Bishkek, January 26, 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BISHKEK80_a.html.

with two small groups closely associated with the president's inner circle.[111] One group was led by Medet Sadyrkulov, the head of the president's administration, who was widely known as a mastermind of Bakiyev's rise to prominence, including overcoming opposition pressure in late 2006 and devising the establishment of control over the parliament in 2007. Sadyrkulov was allegedly allied with the ever-influential younger son of the president, Maxim Bakiyev.[112] The other group included the president's brother, Janybek Bakiyev, and the speaker of the parliament, Adakhan Madumarov.

These two groups had an uneasy relationship, struggling for greater influence within the president's circle. In a scene reminiscent of mafia films, on December 31, 2007, Sadyrkulov received a box containing a human finger and ear; Janybek Bakiyev was later found to be behind this "warning."[113] On January 8, 2009, Sadyrkulov resigned following an alleged alliance struck between the president's brother and son.[114] Soon he was busy reaching out to partners abroad and to foreign embassies to get support for his plan to unseat Bakiyev. On March 13, 2009, Sadyrkulov was found dead in a car near Bishkek. Although the incident was staged as a car crash and subsequent fire, the court later established that Sadyrkulov (and two other men in the car) had been murdered before the fire. Janybek Bakiyev was identified as the key organizer of the murder.

Sadyrkulov's resignation coincided with Bakiyev's decision to cancel the air base agreement with the United States. The U.S. embassy cable cited Sapar Isakov, the then-head of the government's international relations department, as saying that Sadyrkulov's resignation removed the last obstacle for Bakiyev's family members to make the U.S. air base decision.[115] Isakov also stated that

111 "Azimbek Beknazarov: 'Semeino—Klanovaia Sistema—Glavnyi vrag moego naroda'" [Azimbek Beknazarov: "The Family Clan System Is the Main Enemy of My People"], *Fergana News*, May 2, 2008, https://www.ferganews.com/articles/5727.

112 Ibid.

113 "Svideteli utverzhdaiut, chto otrezannyye ukho i palets eks-rukovoditeliu administratsii prezidenta Kyrgyzstana vruchili po ukazaniiu sem'i Bakiyevykh" [Witnesses Claim that the Cut-Off Ear and Finger Were Handed to the Ex-Head of the Presidential Administration of Kyrgyzstan by Order of the Bakiyev Family], *24.kg*, June 22, 2012, https://24.kg/archive/ru/community/131941-svideteli-utverzhdayut-chto-otrezannye-uxo-i.html.

114 Elmira Ibraimova, a close ally of Sadyrkulov's and a high-ranking member of the presidential Ak Jol party, reported that the alliance between Janybek and Maxim Bakiyev emerged two months before Sadyrkulov's resignation ("Former Kyrgyz Officials Plan 'New Opposition,'" Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK109_a, Bishkek, February 5, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK109_a.html; "What Does Bakiyev Really Want for the Base?").

115 "Kyrgyz Insider Sees Mercantile Interests Dominating Policy Decisions," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK517_a, Bishkek, May 28, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK517_a.html.

Foreign Minister Ednan Karabayev, who was known to be one of the relatively "pro-Western" Kyrgyz diplomats, was dismissed in January 2009 because he had been opposing the forthcoming decision on the air base.

With the departure of Sadyrkulov and the weakening or departure of his allies within the government, the highest policy decision-making position in the country was now firmly in the hands of the president's family members. Of this group, it was Maxim Bakiyev who emerged as the actor with the greatest influence on matters related to foreign policy, including its political and economic dimensions. This was most evident from the reports from the U.S. ambassador, for whom Maxim Bakiyev became the vital contact following the announcement that the U.S. air base would be removed. According to one of the cables, Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev was "extremely deferential" during a dinner of the U.S. *chargé d'affaires* with Maxim Bakiyev, as were the waiters.[116] In another cable, the U.S. ambassador notes that Maxim Bakiyev had "influence and access through a broad swath of the government" and expresses his belief that relations with him "can pay important dividends for the USG [United States Government]."[117]

The rise of Maxim Bakiyev and a group of his confidants fits the description of a small group insulated from the external political context. The president's son was not an elected official who would have been exposed to communicating with the broader public. His closest advisors were some of his former classmates or business partners, including one U.S. citizen.[118] President Bakiyev seemed to be glad to delegate policy influence to his son. According to one former deputy foreign minister, President Bakiyev "did not understand much in foreign policy, nor was he interested in it, allowing much freedom for his son."[119] A survey of the country's political analysts found that Bakiyev stood out as a president who "relied too much on spin doctors and advisers."[120] Partly corroborating this, President Bakiyev's foreign policy advisor reported to the U.S.

116 "Kyrgyzstan: Dinner at Maxim's," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK744_a, Bishkek, July 15, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK744_a.html.

117 "Lunch with Max: Soup to Nuts," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK1065_a, Bishkek, September 22, 2009, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK1065_a.html.

118 Evgeny Gourevitch, Alexey Eliseev, and Mikhail Nadel.

119 Interview conducted in 2017.

120 Murat Suyunbaev, "Sravnivaem prezidentov Kyrgyzstana" [Comparing Presidents of Kyrgyzstan], *Region.kg*, December 8, 2014, http://www.region.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1255:2014-12-08-06-25-05&catid=4:politika&Itemid=5.

ambassador that the president was "increasingly disoriented and torn amongst the different internal factions" and was turning "excessively to alcohol."[121]

As the above has shown, high-level decision-making became more concentrated in post-2005 Kyrgyzstan. During the first stage, President Bakiyev had to share policy influence with other opposition heavyweights, including the country's first foreign minister and future president Roza Otunbayeva and, later, former Vice President Felix Kulov. Both had been high-caliber leaders of the opposition against Akayev but found their stay in power shortened as President Bakiyev quickly consolidated his power. After the 2007 parliamentary election, no "veto actors" were left who could have resisted the small circle of the president's advisors and family members. Moreover, the resignation of the influential advisor to the president Medet Sadyrkulov left the president's son Maxim Bakiyev and his brother, Janybek Bakiyev, completely unchallenged. What started as a broad-based revolutionary council in March 2005 had been transformed into a narrow family council by April 2010.

6 Conclusion

At the time of its occurrence, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan did not portend a change in foreign policy. However, Bakiyev's regime ended during the aftermath of a major foreign policy gamble. Making the United States and Russia bid for Bishkek's decision on Manas Air Base could not possibly have been a safe policy, and it backfired. How was such a shift toward risk-taking possible in Kyrgyzstan?

This article has argued that the Tulip Revolution led to changes in each of the three dimensions of the 3-i framework, which together caused a slide toward high-risk foreign policy. First, President Bakiyev's foreign policy ideas lacked the strong commitment to ensuring the goodwill of "big friends" of a "small state" that had been highly evident in the rhetoric of his predecessor, Askar Akayev. Second, post-2005 political developments put constant pressure on the ruling regime's security. Despite having gained control over every branch of power by 2008, Bakiyev's presidency lacked broad popular legitimacy and he found himself under increasing pressure to solidify its standing vis-à-vis the street-based opposition. Third, foreign policymaking institutions

121 "Presidential Advisor Laments Kyrgyzstan's Slow Decline," Wikileaks Public Library of U.S. Diplomacy 09BISHKEK430_a, Bishkek, May 4, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BISHKEK430_a.html.

evolved from a model with multiple veto players to one that was strongly centralized and controlled by the president's family members.

More broadly, this article sought to appraise the domestic political underpinnings of foreign policymaking in Kyrgyzstan. Sandwiched between giant neighbors in the north, east, and west, Central Asian states are too often portrayed as unitary actors who rationally navigate external constraints. Attempts to unbracket the above assumptions, on the other hand, too often lead to bracketing policymaking as a function of solid and presumably rational "regimes." In view of this, this article suggests that regional scholarship on foreign policy will only benefit from a greater focus on actors and processes at the domestic level.