Policing Public Protest in Central Asia

Accepted version of an article published in *Central Asian Affairs*:
Marat, Erica. " Policing Public Protest in Central Asia", *Central Asian Affairs* 1, 1 (2014): 5-23.

Erica Marat
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
erica.marat@gmail.com

Abstract

While Central Asia's Soviet-era physical infrastructure crumbles, and the quality and availability of public healthcare and education decline, the police remain the one institution that controls the state's most remote territories. This article argues that, over the past two decades, the functions of Central Asian police forces have become increasingly punitive. Their negative influence was particularly visible in the after- math of public protests in the 2000–2010s that resulted in fatal clashes between police units and civilian population. These watershed events were followed by government decisions to overhaul their police forces to preempt a recurrence of public protest. Depending on how willing the incumbent regimes are to control political dissent and how capable the state is in performing these control functions, changes in the Interior Ministries follow. When political will is matched by the economic and administrative resource of the state, policing functions are distributed among additional state institutions. But when the regime lacks the resources to upgrade policing techniques to the desired level, it almost always requests international support to facilitate police reform.

Keywords

Police – protest – MVD – military – reform

Since the collapse of the Soviet regime, the police in Central Asia have become ever more politicized and detached from society.[1] Militarized and corrupt, the

1 David Lewis, *The Reassessment the Role of OSCE Police Assistance Programming in Central Asia* (Occasional Paper Series No. 4. Open Society Institute, 2011); International Crisis Group, "Central Asia: The Politics of Police Reform," *Asia Report* 42, December 10, 2002. Studies show that about 40 percent of respondents in Europe and Central Asia are dissatisfied with the

doi 10.1163/22142290-00101003

police are the most basic element of state control. Formally, it enforces the law and holds the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Informally, it represents the extent of the incumbent regime's reach across the country. This article argues that, over the past two decades, the role of police forces in Central Asia has expanded wherever the reach of other state institutions has declined, and their omnipresence prevents the emergence of political and civic pluralism throughout the region. Their negative influence was particularly visible in the aftermath of public protests in the 2000–2010s in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Such demonstrations, whether political in nature or driven by the population's economic grievances, nevertheless challenged the political power of the local and/or national government. In the meantime, Kyrgyzstan's efforts to reform the police seem to demonstrate the difficulties of democratizing an institution of coercion even in a more politically open environment.

Most of the protests that erupted in rural areas reflected a complex web of power relations between the protests' alleged organizers and bottom-up public processes.2 The protests were growing in size and frequency over time before they exploded suddenly into larger mobilizations. This scenario was visible in Kyrgyzstan's pro-opposition demonstrations in Aksy village in 2002, the riots in Uzbekistan's Andijon town in May 2005, Kazakhstan's riots in Zhanaozen organized by mining employees in December 2011, and Tajikistan's clashes between government troops and guerilla formations in 2008–2009. The common thread in all these cases is that civilians died when police forces opened fire on pro- testers or armed guerillas, thus establishing a new low in the post-Soviet history of state-sanctioned violence against regime opponents and civilians.

These watershed events were followed by governments' decisions to over- haul their police forces. Central Asian governments sought to both pre-empt a recurrence of political violence and to ensure that, in the future, the police would be able to disperse any outbreaks of non-state violence, whilst aiming to minimize civilian causalities. The regimes interpreted this apparent increased need for repression as the failure of the police to perform their assigned task

---

quality and efficiency of the police. See M. Fatou Diagne, D. Ringold, and S. Zaidi, "Governance and Public Service Delivery in Europe and Central Asia: Unofficial Payments, Utilization and Satisfaction," *Police Research Working Paper* no. 5994, The World Bank, March 2012.

2 On local protest dynamics in Central Asia see: Alisher Khamidov, "The lessons of the 'Nookat events': central government, local officials and religious protests in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 2 (2013): 148–160; Eric McGlinchey, "States of Protest in Central Asia," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 299 (September 2013); Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

of monitoring any political undercurrents in society in order to prevent anti-governmental mobilization. Building on the legacy of the closed, punitive Soviet police system, the Central Asian regimes invariably use the police in order to strengthen their own hold on power.

The article relies on interviews with political and police experts in Central Asia, representatives of the police, as well as members of the international donor community in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan between 2010 and 2013. The article comprises three parts. First, it analyzes the alienation of the police from society and the corresponding increase in brutality meted out by rank-and-file personnel during the post-Soviet period. It examines the strategies adopted by the four states to improve the ability of the police to collect knowledge about the population in the 2000s, following a series of landmark clashes between the police and public protesters during those years. Finally, the article traces each country's trajectory in transforming its police force.

The Present State of Affairs

The Soviet Interior Ministry (MVD) began to shift in its purpose from serving the political regime to serving the population in the 1980s, as part of the reforms launched by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.3 That transformation, however, remains incomplete in virtually all the post-Soviet states outside of the Baltic region.4 Like the rest of post-Soviet states, the Central Asian countries inherited police forces that placed a priority on protecting the political regime ahead of protecting the rule of law and ensuring the safety of citizens. A policeman promoted to the rank of general traditionally leads the MVD, while civilian employees perform administrative tasks. All Interior Ministry personnel perform a wide range of functions, from traffic control and community policing to investigating serious crimes and carrying out joint operations with the Defense Ministry during emergencies. The military functions of the MVD are carried out by specially trained divisions. None of the republics eliminated the militarized wings of the MVD, the OMON (*otryad militsii osobogo naznacheniya*), OMSN (*otryad militsii spetsial'nogo naznacheniya*) or SOBR (*spetsyal'nye otryady bystrogo reagirovaniya*), whose prototype was created in

3 Louise Shelly, "The Soviet Police and the Rule of Law," in L. Greene, D. Weisburg and C. Uchida, eds, *Police Innovation and Control of the Police* (New York: Springer New York, 1993).

4 A. Beck, and Y. Chistyakova, "Crime and Policing in Post-Soviet Societies: Bridging the Police/ Public Divide", *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy* 12, no. 2 (2002): 123–137.

1979 in Moscow to prevent terrorist attacks at the Olympic Games. By the late 1980s, versions of the OMON had been established throughout the Soviet republics to prevent political demonstrations.5

The post-Soviet police are decentralized in structure, but centralized in control.6 Small units are assigned to a territory (*uchastok)*, but are subordinate to the central government in the capital city, not to local officials. Since the 1990s, however, the Soviet officer rotation mechanism has collapsed. Instead, preference is now given to patronage connections rather than to professionalism, while police loyalties have increasingly moved away from the national government to local political leaders, powerful business interests or crime networks. In parts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, police officials may well show stronger loyalty to local government leaders,7 even there, central authorities are able to control cadre appointments and direct reform efforts. Unlike the staff of other state institutions, MVD officials enjoy access to special hospitals and resorts, a surviving Soviet tradition to ensure the police's political loyalty.

Over the past two decades, the Central Asian police have become the most visible representative body of the state throughout the country. But at the same time, they have become more alienated from society, compared with during the Soviet period.8 The average, rank-and-file policeman is omni- present in public spaces, particularly in urban areas, but at the same time, his presence is a stark reminder to the public of the coercive and punitive political order.9 Because of their right to use violence, the police — unlike doctors, teachers, or other state employees — are able to extort bribes from private citizens and racketeering operations. The police have thus become a self-sustaining institution, quite able to live off whatever bribes can be extorted from the population.10 These trends are indicative of both the post-Soviet

5 B. Taylor, *State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013); Ibid., Shelly.

6 S. Hensell, "The Patrimonial Logic of the Police in Eastern Europe," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 5 (2012): 811–833.

7 Anna Matveeva, "The Perils of Emerging Statehood: Civil War and State Reconstruction in Tajikistan," *Development as State-making* (Working Paper no. 46, Crisis States Research Centre, March 2009); Erica Marat, "Kyrgyzstan's Fragmented Police and Armed Forces," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, no. 11 (2010).

8 Interview, NGO activist working with the police, Astana, October 2012.

9 Best shown in a study of Russian police by O. Semukhin, and K. Reynolds, "Russian citizens' perceptions of corruption and trust of the police," *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*, (April 2013).

10 Ibid., Lewis 2011. On the police as one the state's predatory and corrupt institutions see Johan Engvall, *The State as Investment Market: An Analytical Framework for Interpreting*

state's detachment from society in Central Asian countries, in particular, and of the general tendency of post-Soviet political elites to rely on the loyalty and brutality of the police. The latter trend is also evident in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and parts of Ukraine.[11]

Studies of the police in other countries demonstrate that police alienation and police brutality are part of a vicious circle that intensifies over time unless change is introduced top-down by political leaders or bottom-up by non-state actors.[12] Alienated police officers might be able to decrease levels of crime, but the institution often loses its capacity to predict and prevent any escalation of tensions and mobilization among disaffected groups. Even in repressive regimes, growing police brutality is an undesirable situation, as it invariably breeds further protest. Instead, a softer, less harsh means of enforcing political order, such as through propaganda and a culture of obedience, is always preferable. Whenever the level of police violence increases, an authoritarian regime will look for ways to prevent the spread of violence.[13]

Way & Levitsky draw a useful comparison between post-Soviet regimes that rely on high- and low-intensity coercion – highly visible acts of violence versus a less visible suppression of opposition through policing and surveillance, respectively.[14] According to this view, the state is more likely to successfully oppress political dissent if it relies on both its coercive capacity and its cohesion within the state apparatus. Countries like Armenia (at least in the 1990s), Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan likely meet these criteria. These states use either high- or low-intensity coercion to suppress both everyday dissent and mass riots. Even after highly visible acts of violence and the bloody suppression of mass demonstrators, these states continue to rely on the coercive apparatus fueled by patronage, loyalty and the possibility for personal enrichment through extortion. By contrast, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (as well as Georgia and Ukraine in the early 2000s) have few instruments

---

Politics and Bureaucracy in Kyrgyzstan (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2012), 154, 180–184. Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*(Pittsburg: Pittsburg University Press, 2012), 24–25.

11 A. Osipian, "Corrupt Organizational Hierarchies in the Former Soviet Bloc," *Transition Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (2010): 822–836.

12 J.D. Grant, and R.T. Galvin, *Agents of Change: A Study in Police Reform* (New York: JohnWiley & Sons, 1975).

13 L. Steven, and A.W. Lucan, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14 L.A. Way, and S. Levitsky, "The Dynamics of Autocratic Coercion after the Cold War," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29 (2006): 387–410.

of coercion at their disposal and, therefore, are more vulnerable to being overthrown by mobilized opposition groups.

While Central Asian political regimes exhibit varying degrees of authoritarianism, they all reacted to the deepening alienation and brutality of the police in the 2000s by announcing police reform programs. The decision typically followed a bloody conflict, a turning-point that highlighted the widening gap between the police and the local community. All four states also preserved the Soviet-era structure of the MVD. The changes in the last decade have been mostly evident in the increased number of police contingents, transferring of police functions to other state agencies, and attracting international assistance to boost the capacity of the police. On rare occasions, the political regimes tried to bridge the gap between the police and the population by improving the police's public image.

Police and Information Gathering

To pre-empt political violence, the police must extensively monitor the population. This includes improving the ability of the police to collect knowledge about the population and/or to have access to a better quality of such knowledge gathered by other state or private actors.15 Democratic governments might use many of the same methods of knowledge collection.16 But the key difference is whether or not the public is aware of the surveillance, approves of the rationale for such knowledge collection, and can potentially prevent the government from using practices that it does not deem democratic.

Central Asian police have changed their intelligence-gathering methods in two ways. First, they have expanded the scope of surveillance. The police and the security apparatus are entitled to extract information about civic groups, individuals and communities through direct coercive methods, interrogation, and arbitrary arrest. Other methods include wiretapping, measuring public opinion, and collecting data on group events, such as local protests, religious rituals, and political mobilization efforts. The regime uses the police and other

15 P. Tremblay, and R. Rochon, "Police organizations and their use of knowledge: A grounded research agenda," *Policing and Society* 1, no. 4 (1991): 269–283.

16 D. della Porta, "Police Knowledge and Protest Policing: Some Reflection on the Ital- ian Case," in D. della Porta, and H. Reiter, eds., *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

state institutions to detect undercurrents in society that might potentially challenge the political establishment. New knowledge-gathering methods have been gradually advanced in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but they have not been accompanied by new public oversight mechanisms.17 In all four states, but particularly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, police surveillance is complemented with a wide range of coercive institutions and mechanisms, including national security committees, the office of the prosecutor general, and the ministry of defense. However, the police, particularly units serving at the community level, are more deeply involved in the lives of ordinary people, who do not directly participate in politics.

Secondly, knowledge may be collected through community policing, a system designed to build trusting relationships with members of society by helping ensure public safety and preventing crime and violence. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have adopted such an approach with the support of the international donor community.18 In both countries, community policing programs were included at the insistence of the donors as part of the democratization and security assistance packages designed to improve political stability by increasing trust between the police and communities at risk. However, although community policing is a widely recognized method that views policing as a public service, not a punitive process, there is only a fine line drawn between police forces that act in the interests of the public versus those that act on behalf of the political establishment. Particularly in countries with strong authoritarian tendencies, community-policing programs imported through international assistance are likely to be co-opted by the political incumbents.19 Countries request international assistance particularly when political elites are concerned about their own security. Under the pretense of "police reform," authoritarian regimes are able to secure external funds to augment police capacity. Unless a country has an outspoken civil society and independent mass media able to oversee the work of the police, community

17 On Uzbekistan: Interview with ethnic Uzbek activist in Osh, June 2012; Interview with Kyrgyz MP, Washington, DC, March 2013; Bobomurod Abdullaev, "Uzbekistan: Police Surveillance Fears", *IWPR.org*, February 21, 2005; on detailed online surveillance in Uzbekistan see report by OpenNet Initiative, December 21, 2010, https://opennet .net/sites/opennet.net/files/ONI_Uzbekistan_2010.pdf (accessed December 12, 2013). On Kazakhstan: interview with representative of the Center for Social Partnership of the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna, Astana, October 2012.

18 Ibid., Lewis 2012.

19 B. David, *Changing the Guard: Developing Democratic Police Abroad (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

policing will become yet another method that the state uses to spy on its own citizens.20

These two types of knowledge collection are, however, not mutually exclusive. An authoritarian state may use both foreign material aid and expert assistance to launch community policing and to devise their own surveillance programs. However, as the Central Asian region demonstrates, political incumbents will seek external assistance to create community policing programs only if they lack state resources for police to repress domestic dissent. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have used domestic resources to expand the ways their police forces and other state institutions collect knowledge about society, by contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan both appealed for international help in 2002 and 2009, respectively, to reform their police forces. Both governments requested international support for implementing police reform, mostly in the form of equipment and training.

Central Asia: *Transforming Police Functions since 1991.*

	Police took over functions of other state institutions	**Police functions performed by other institutions**	**Foreign expertiseis used**	**Foreign material aid is used**
Kazakhstan	V	V	V	
Uzbekistan	V	V		
Kyrgyzstan	V		V	V
Tajikistan	V		V	V

In contemporary Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, more governmental agencies engage in policing than was the case under the Soviet regime. Although Uzbekistan has been open to some international consultations on policing methods, foreign training has not fundamentally changed the work of the police as such. In Kazakhstan, the government has transferred the police's former functions to other ministries and sought international advice on how best to reform the police. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in the meantime, heavily rely on both international expertise and financial aid that is often conditional to the police undergoing training on human rights issues.

International efforts to democratize police forces are limited, however, by the donors' tendency to work with the very same political officials and

20 B. David, "Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It," *Issues in International Crime*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).

government agencies that rely on the coercive power of the police. While governments often wind up better able to control their civilian populations after police reform, the improvement is often due to equipment and training provided by donors, rather than by any genuine transformation of the local law-enforcement culture.21 As demonstrated by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, authoritarian leaders will try to use international assistance to better control perceived threats to their regime. Despite achieving such mixed results, however, the international community continues to actively promote post- communist police reform.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – Mobilizing National Resources

The governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have been able to implement changes in the MVD thanks to domestic resources. Kazakhstan regularly consults with international donors on security-sector reform in general and on specialized issues such as money-laundering, human trafficking, drug- trafficking, and border control.22 But the government has sought domestic resources to better equip police personnel and improve technical support for MVD units.23 Kazakhstan maintains a formidable military police squad that, among other functions, is responsible for policing "mass and group violations of public order".24 Occasionally, the Kazakhstan MVD organizes events to boost trust between the police and the society, such as inviting

---

21 C. Thomas, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); S. Baranyi, and J.E. Salahub, "Police reform and democratic development in lower-profile fragile states," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 32, no. 1 (2011): 48–63; D. Lewis, "Who's Socialising Whom? Regional Organisations and Contested Norms in Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 7 (2012): 1219–1237; R.M. Oakley, M.J., Dziedzic, and E.M. Goldberg, *Policing the New World Disorder: Police Operations and New Public Security* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1998).

22 Marlene Laruelle, and Sebastien Peyrouse, *Globalizing Central Asia, Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development* (New York: M.E. Sharpe 2012), 51, 63; U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan, "2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report", February 27, 2009, http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov/incsr2009.html, (accessed July 29, 2013).

23 "Politseyskoy reformoy v Kazakhstane zanimayutsya eksperty s Dauning strit" (Experts from Downing Street are dealing with Kazakhstan's police reform), *Gouljan.org*, March 18, 2013, http://www.guljan.org/news/pablicity/2013/March/127 (accessed July 30, 2013).

24 Kazakhstan Interior Ministry, "Istoriya Vnutrennikh voisk MVD Respubliki Kazakhstan" (History of Interior Troops of Republic of Kazakhstan's Interior MVD), vvmvd.kz, no date, http://www.vvmvd.kz/rus/about/Pages/vvhistory.aspx (accessed July 30, 2013).

volunteers to accompany police patrols in urban areas.25 Uzbekistan, by contrast, rarely tries to reduce public fear of the police, but here the MVD have been deployed alongside the military during emergencies. For instance, police were involved in the heavy –handed actions incident during the Andijon massacre in 2005. They also participated in stepped-up neighbor- hood patrols during special events such as Uzbekistan's Independence Day or in the refugee crisis caused by the ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.

In Kazakhstan, prior to 2011 most efforts to reform the police were carried out top-down by the MVD and under the direction of the president's administration.26 The changes were mostly focused on improving the reach and material assets of the police (e.g. new cars, uniforms, weapons), rather than on how policing is carried out on a daily basis or during emergencies. Some of the primary goals in reforming the police included reducing low-level corruption, whereas patronage networks within the police and political leadership circles were left unaddressed. Efforts to improve the state's capacity to police protesters picked up considerably after December 16, 2011, when the MVD used deadly force to end a face-off between police and protesters in the western cities of Zhanaozen and Shepte. Oil-drilling workers in that region had gone on strike in May to protest at the low wages offered by the energy giant KazMunayGas.27 But on December 16, violence erupted as residents of Zhanaozen celebrated independence day. Accounts by the miners and officials disagree about what caused the violence, but clashes between the two groups ended with 16 unarmed miners being shot dead and tens injured by the police. The brutal treatment of the protesters by the police exposed the gulf between the police and the population, particularly the marginalized groups. According to some accounts, the miners did not realize that the police were armed with real bullets.28 The protests continued on the next day in the neighboring town of Shepte, where one protester was shot dead.

Labor issues have sparked occasional riots by miners since the mid- 2000s, but they were often resolved without involvement by law-enforcement

25 "V preddverii Dnya kazakhstanskoy politsii almatintsy odnu noch' porabotali s politseyskimi" (In anticipation of the Day of Kazakhstan Police, Almaty residents spent one night working with policemen), Zakon.kz, June 23, 2013.

26 Interview with a high-ranking member of Nur Otan party, Astana, October 2012.

27 P. Salmon, "Repression Intensifies Against Kazakh Oil Workers' Uprising," *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 19, no. 1–2 (2011): 507–510.

28 "Kazakhstan: Video from Zhanaozen of Police Beating up a Wounded Man," *Ferghana News Agency*, December 22, 2011.

units.29 The Kazakhstan leadership regarded the December 2011 incident as a failure on the part of the local government to pre-empt violence.30 The incident also revealed the ignorance of top political leaders regarding the situation in remote areas. In spite of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's rhetoric about security sector reform and his continuous calls for police reform since the late 1990s, the police proved unable to suppress the riots before they became a serious challenge to the political order in the country. Most police reform programs prior to December 2011 had been ad hoc efforts to provide the security sector with better equipment, rather than fundamentally transform law-enforcement practices.31

Following the December 2011 riots, Kazakhstan assigned some police functions to institutions that have better representation and capacity across the country. Specifically, the Center of Social Partnership of the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna is now authorized to collect detailed information about social issues based on 40 variables. This includes data such as employment status, size of households, stress level among single-parent families, food prices, access to education and entertainment in remote areas.32 These variables are intended to be cross-analyzed to measure the potential for protest across the country and the data used to increase policing of the at-risk population, so as to prevent mass riots. Samruk-Kazyna, while often informally referred to as a second government, was chosen particularly for its capacity to implement nation-wide projects in the economic sector. The Fund has a nation-wide presence and vast financial resources at its disposal to engage inambitious projects.

Some of MVD's functions have been transferred to other government agencies. For example, the state's de-tox facilities were reassigned to the Ministry of Health in 2010 and temporary detention centers and responsibility for the rehabilitation of minors went to the Ministry of Education.33 Although the police have since received better equipment and financing, little has been done to reframe the police mindset from its Soviet legacy of acting primarily as an instrument of oppression against society's unruly elements

29 Saule Yessenova, "Worker Riot at the Tenghiz Oilfield: Who is to Blame?" *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, February 21, 2007.

30 Interview, representative of Samruk Kazyna Fund, Astana, October 2012.

31 Ibid., Lewis 2011.

32 Interview representative of Samruk Kazyna Fund.

33 Committee of the penal system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Kalmykhanbet Kasymov: Politseiskie reform," kuis.kz, no date, http://kuis.kz/ru/smi/295 (accessed August 1, 2013).

into a recognizably service-oriented, crime-preventing entity.34 The police overhaul was also stalled because the reform was entrusted to the MVD officials themselves. Various political factions rely on the MVD to hide their own corrupt activities and show little interest in reorganizing the police. Unlike other elements of the security sector that have indeed seen better financing and improved public trust,35 Kazakhstan's police continue to be one of the least trusted public institutions.

In Uzbekistan the Andijon massacre in May 2005, which resulted in hundreds of deaths and refugees, was followed by even greater political repression. The response also blurred the MVD's policing and military functions. President Islam Karimov placed the MVD's terrorism and extremism units under the SNB (National Security Service) within the Defense Ministry, while the police still remained heavily militarized.36 The SNB, led by Rustam Inoyatov since 1995, was by 2005 the most powerful security enterprise in the country and known to eavesdrop on government officials and the regime's political opponents alike.37 Although the details of the Andijon tragedy remain subject to controversy, the events highlighted the regime's readiness to deploy deadly violence against its perceived opponents.38 Uzbekistan's police omnipresence was already evident before the events of May 2005, but following this episode, both the country's security apparatus and the number of political prisoners noticeably increased.

Uzbekistan's police and security sector are infamous for operating based on secretive rules and obscure patronage networks.39 No law on the functions of the MVD has ever been made available to the broader public. Accounts from local experts suggest that, particularly in rural areas, the police are involved in organized criminal activities and either facilitate or directly control

34 Ibid., Lewis 2011.

35 Sebastien Peyrouse, "Security Reform in Kazakhstan", in M. Hartog, ed., *Security Sector Reform in Central Asia: Exploring Needs and Possibilities*, Centre for European Security Studies, Greenwood Paper No. 25 (2010): 19–26.

36 Rustam Burnashev, and Irina Chernykh, "Changes in Uzbekistan's Military Policy after the Andijan Events," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2007): 67–73.

37 "Rustam Inoyatov: SNB vs MVD," *Registan*, July 30, 2013, http://registan.net/2013/07/30/rustam-inoyatov-snb-vs-mvd-2/, (accessed August 1, 2013).

38 For detailed accounts of Andijan unrest: David Lewis, *The Temptation of Tyranny in Central Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 51–71; Human Rights Watch, "'Bullets Were Falling Like Rain.' The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005", *HRW Report* 17, no 5 (June 2005); Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan: No Justice 7 Years after Andijan Massacre", May 12, 2012.

39 Ibid., McGlinchey.

drug-trafficking, human trafficking, and other smuggling operations.40 While little is known about the structure and operations of Uzbekistan's police, the level of police involvement both in random violence against citizens and systemic torture and arbitrary arrests are believed to be among the highest in the former Soviet sphere. The police are also infamous for facilitating human trafficking, forced labor, and extortion rackets on behalf of national and local patronage networks.41 In effect, the Uzbek police have transformed from being an enforcer of the authoritarian regime, into a complex network of criminal syndicates.

Despite lacking any visible attempt to increase police accountability, Uzbekistan expressed interest in cooperation with the police programs offered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In 2011–2013, the OSCE trained Uzbek police officers in basic human rights and how to boost the quality of its criminal investigation police units. According to the OSCE training syllabus, the 25–50 police officials from various parts of the country enrolled "in the training courses will study the basic principles of human rights and the international system of human rights protection".42 As in Kyrgyzstan during 2002–2010 and Tajikistan since 2010, the OSCE-Uzbekistan collaboration took place without the involvement of any non-state observers and members of the media. The OSCE organized similar community policing programs in Turkmenistan in 2007.43

Since the early 2000s, Uzbekistan has also received security-assistance pack- ages from the US government for developing programs aimed to reduce drug sales, human trafficking, and corruption, as well as to develop forensic science programs.44 The US assistance has remained limited because of the country's

40 Erica Marat, "Human behavior - Trafficking increases in Central Asia", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 2011.

41 "Uzbekskaya militsiya – poslednyaya khronika razlozheniya" (Uzbek police – latest chronology of destruction), *Uznews*, February 19, 2013, http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=&cid=30&nid=22111 (accessed August 2, 2013); Democratic Party "Erk" of Uzbekistan, "Kak SNB i militsii fabrikuyut dela protiv musul'man" (How NSS and police fabricate cases against Muslims), *Uzbekistanerk.com*, no date, http://uzbekistanerk.com/rus/?p=3263HRW (accessed August 3, 2013).

42 OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, "OSCE trains police officers in Uzbekistan on international human rights standards", *OSCE.org*, February 14, 2013, http://www.osce.org/uzbekistan/99593 (accessed August 3, 2013).

43 "OSCE Centre helps train Turkmenistan officers in community policing", *Uzreport.uz*, May 29, 2007.

44 U.S. Department of State, "State/INL Uzbekistan Program", December 6, 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/178367.htm (accessed August 24, 2013).

poor human rights record and lack of political reform.45 US security assistance packages also sought to increase respect for human rights among the Uzbek military. However, neither the OSCE training nor US security-assistance programs has led to any visible changes in how Uzbekistan's police operate.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – Experimenting with CommunityPolicing

Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have received significant donor support for police reform and capacity-building and for the security sector in general. A multitude of donors are involved, including the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), USAID, and the EU. The programs are designed to increase the accountability of the MVD, to reduce corruption, and to increase public trust in the police. Efforts to democratize the ministry's work are set as a necessary priority of donor help in which mate- rial assistance is meant to serve as a means, not the goal, for collaboration. During 2006–2011, Kyrgyzstan was one of the largest recipient of the INL aid in Central Asia, compared to $1.7 million in Uzbekistan and $3 million in Turkmenistan. Tajikistan was the only country where INL spent more over the same time period - $46.3 million.46 Community policing, in particular, is put forward by assistance programs as an incremental step toward more account- able and trusted policing. But because of the lack of democratic governance, as well as the dire need for modernization on the part of the Kyrgyz and Tajik police, technical assistance is often the only provision implemented, while that of the democratization mandate lags far behind.47

Kyrgyzstan was an early convert to community policing, thanks to the help of the international community. In 2002 president Askar Akayev called for international assistance to reform the police following the killing of five protestors in Aksy village in the southern part of the country.48 These protests had been organized to support the imprisoned opposition leader Azimbek

45 Joshua Kucera, "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia: Who Benefits?" *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series* 7, September 2012.

46 U.S. Department of State, "State/INL Kyrgyzstan Program", December 6, 2011http://www .state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/178372.htm (accessed December 12, 2013).

47 Erica Marat, "OSCE Police Reform Programmes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Past Constraints and Future Opportunities," *EUCAM Policy Brief* 27, October 2012.

48 A. Bloed, "The Slow Process of Police Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: Some Lessons Learned", in N. Uildriks, ed., *Police Reform and Human Rights: Opportunities and*

Beknazarov, and they took place in his native village. NGOs then denounced the president for using the police against unarmed protesters, an incident which also helped rival figures to build an anti-regime coalition. Akayev's appeal for international help to reform the police received instant support from the OSCE. He, however, chose not to seek input from the active and vocal NGO leaders in Kyrgyzstan about how the reform should proceed. This led to a backlash from civil society organizations, which accused the donors of aiding an authoritarian regime in its efforts to create a stronger police force that it could use to quell political opposition.49

Between 2003 and 2008, roughly 4,000 MVD employees learned how to deal with mass protests in non-lethal ways, such as by using rubber bullets, tear gas, and breaking crowds up into smaller groups.50 In addition, the ministry received in-kind assistance that included tens of police vehicles, hand-held radios, and hundreds of computer workstations. Five training centers were established within the ministry's academy alone. Thanks to the external donor support, Akayev and his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, also introduced elements of community policing, although years passed before it spread through- out Bishkek and then to parts of the country at large. Most of the community policing attempts, however, were limited to various pilot programs that were then interrupted by the regime changes in 2005 and 2010. The donor organizations involved in police reform typically had 2–3 year project cycles, and personnel rotated through the OSCE office in Bishkek. Both police brutality in Kyrgyzstan and the lack of a police presence during emergencies indicate the MVD's continuing alienation from society.

During 2002–2010 police reform programs were carried out with limited involvement of civil society, but with ample support from the international community. The issue that had precipitated the reform – the lack of public trust in the police – was not effectively addressed. On the contrary, Bakiyev used the police to cover up his regime's ties to the criminal underworld and the security apparatus, as well as to arrest and torture his political opponents.51 Such methods of policing clearly reflected the needs of the incumbent regime, not the broader public's understanding of how the government should react to

---

Impediments in Post-Communist Societies (Antwerpen-Oxford: Intersentia, 2005), 35–39; Ibid., International Crisis Group, 2002.

49 Ibid., Bloed; Lewis 2011.

50 Kyrgyzstan Interior Ministry, "Programma reformy organov vnutrennikh del," *mvd.kg*, no date, http://www.mvd.kg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=186&Itemid=70&lang=ru (accessed August 24, 2013).

51 Ibid., Engvall 2011; Marat, 2010.

mass protests or act in everyday life. For the most part, between 2002 and 2010, Kyrgyzstan's MVD preserved the Soviet institutional foundations of law-enforcement, including the ministry's Soviet-era departments, mission statement, and training system. However, unlike in neighboring states where a pervasive police presence in urban areas is the norm, Kyrgyzstan's police are criticized by NGOs and the broader population for their absence in times of crisis. The police, for example, failed to stop looting and street crimes in Bishkek following both regime changes. Therefore, it appears that not only police violence but also police neglect have become targets for reform.52

The MVD opted to begin the post-2010 reform effort by changing certain laws and regulations. Frustrated with the slow pace of change, Kyrgyz NGOs and activists are increasingly paying attention to the reform effort, largely criticizing the MVD's lack of progress. Members of NGOs and individual activists, in turn, have insisted that the reform plan be widely discussed with the population. Several individual activists have traveled across the country to talk to local groups about the reform.53 Starting in 2011 several NGOs and individual activists publicized their own, often competing, visions of police reform. Some of the non-state actors met with MPs and the OSCE for joint discussions. The meetings rarely produced specific recommended actions, which was not a problem as MVD officials have tended to ignore recommendations from civil society. The NGOs criticized the ministry's reluctance to break up patronage networks and sack corrupt officials. Individual activists thus adopted one of three strategies to promote their own views on police reform: 1) taking responsibility for some of the MVD's functions (e.g., testing old and new personnel), 2) generating wide public support through discussions in various parts of the country, and 3) allowing civilians to apply for positions within the MVD. All three strategies entail building alliances with like-minded police officers who occupy the top ranks. Through these forms of police-public collaboration, both sides are able to learn to understand each other's perspectives and limita- tions. Although MVD-civil society collaboration has scored only modest results, such as securing the appointment of a minister with a civilian background or involving NGO representatives in police personnel attestation programs, there have been setbacks as well. For example, while Shamil Atakahnov, a civil- ian known for his advocacy of reform the police, was appointed to head the

52 Here, and in other parts of the paper, I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising these important points.

53 Interviews: Kalicha Umuralieva from "Nashe Pravo" NGO (Bishkek, October 2012) and member of Club of Liberal Youth & Free Generation Alliance (Bishkek, June 2013).

ministry in 2012, he was removed three months later partly because of his lack of popularity among police personnel.54

In Tajikistan, President Emomali Rakhmon became interested in police reform after a series of guerrilla attacks swept through the Rasht Valley in 2008 and 2009.55 The attacks surprised the government, which had considered the area to be under the firm control of the state security forces.56 The president's interest is essentially two-fold: first, to strengthen the operational capacity of the police across the country, including the acquisition of better equipment and training for police personnel. Second, to ensure the police are able to penetrate the population by building better trust relationships or by frightening civilians into collecting intelligence on regime opponents. After accepting international assistance to democratize its police forces, Tajikistan has received additional assistance from the United States and EU countries to strengthen border control, fight drug-trafficking, and improve its law-enforcement agencies.57 The OSCE office in Dushanbe, together with INL, has implemented several community policing projects across the country. Furthermore, newly created community police units have been trained to work closely with local community members and at-risk groups (such as young males and the unemployed) to prevent crime and violence. Community police units are designed to develop and strengthen relationships among community members, local government officials, and police, "by creating multiple forums for interaction and involvement, including Community Policing Partnership Teams."58 By May 2013, 19 Community Police Centres (CPC) had been launched in nine districts across Tajikistan. In addition to CPCs, local police offices also received equipment and training.59 Particular emphasis was made in border areas with Afghanistan where police are more likely to have to deal with violent extremism.

54 "V Kirgizii smenilsia glava MDV" (Kyrgyzstan's Head of MVD is Changed), *Lenta.ru*, February 22, 2013.

55 Interview, representative of international donor organization, Bishkek, October 2011.

56 International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threat", *Asia Report* #205, May 24, 2011.

57 Kucera, "U.S. Military Aid to Central Asia: Who Benefits?"; George Gavrilis, "Central Asia's Border Woes and the Impact of International Assistance," *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series* No. 6, May 2012.

58 USDOS and the Emergence Group handout on Tajikistan.

59 U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, "U.S. Government Opens Two Community Policing Centers in Dushanbe," May 16, 2013, http://dushanbe.usembassy.gov/pr_05162013.html (accessed August 24, 2013).

Rakhmon's interest in West-supported police reform grew as other parts of the country came under fire. In the summer of 2012 the Tajik police and army clashed with armed opposition groups in Khorog, following the killing of Abdullo Nazarov, a general in Tajikistan's national intelligence service. Political leaders believed the outbreaks of violence occurred because the police were not able to gather sufficient information about the loyalties of the rural population, as well as the willingness of locals to protect opposition forces and extremist movements.60 As part of an effort to build trust between the police and the local populations, Tajikistan has moved to rename its "militsya" as "politsiya", demonstrating that the police are no longer a Soviet-type militarized group, but a modern law-enforcement agency that is ready to address the local communities' concerns.61 Although the OSCE office in Dushanbe lauded the change, it has produced nothing substantive so far. The programs on police reform and the introduction of community policing began with great enthusiasm among both donor organizations and Tajikistan government officials. Three years into the reform, however, the police-society interaction has not changed; instead, the police have become even more omnipresent in remote areas. The reform has failed to address corruption in the higher political ranks, and rather it has focused on creating a more robust police force to protect the regime. While receiving international support, the police attacks on opposition activities have continued unabated.

Conclusion

The rising number of public protests in Central Asia in the 2000–2010s was met with violent police efforts to quell mass mobilization. Central Asian political regimes thus realized the need to revise the functions and the image of the police. The ruling regimes sought to ensure that the police, as the most omni- present of state institutions, were able to pre-empt any public protest that would challenge the power vertical at the local or national level. The trajectories of police transformation in each of the Central Asian countries, however, have differed. Two main factors influence the way the police operate – how willing the incumbent regimes are to control political dissent and how capable the state is in performing these control functions. When the political will is matched by the economic and administrative resource of the state, policing

60 Ibid., Crisis Group, 2011.

61 Nazar Turduev, "The Tajik authorities are going to reform militia," *Voice of Freedom*, October 18, 2010.

functions are distributed among additional state institutions. But when the regime lacks the resources to upgrade policing techniques to the desired level, it requests international support for police reform. By receiving international assistance, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were tasked to democratize the police in addition to improving its capacity. Regardless of the nature of the transformation or the source of financial resources, all four states pursued similar goals. But only when the broader political landscape became more open to political pluralism, as in Kyrgyzstan, did meaningful, albeit slow, change become a possibility.