

The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Erica Marat

SILK ROAD PAPER
October 2006



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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www.silkroadstudies.org

“**The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia**” is a *Silk Road Paper* produced by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. The *Silk Road Papers* series is the Occasional Papers series of the Joint Center, published jointly on topical and timely subjects. It is edited by Svante E. Cornell, Research and Publications Director of the Joint Center.

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program is a joint transatlantic independent and externally funded research and policy center. The Joint Center has offices in Washington and Uppsala, and is affiliated with the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University and the Department of Eurasian Studies of Uppsala University. The Joint Center is the first of its kind and is today firmly established as a leading focus of research and policy worldwide, serving a large and diverse community of analysts, scholars, policy-watchers, business leaders and journalists. The Joint Center aims to be at the forefront of research on issues of conflict, security and development in the region; and to function as a focal point for academic, policy, and public discussion of the region through its applied research, its publications, teaching, research cooperation, public lectures and seminars.

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ISBN: 91-85473-23-5

Printed in Sweden

Distributed in North America by:

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
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1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785
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Distributed in Europe by:

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Preface

The Joint Center's research on narcotics, organized crime and security in Eurasia has been developing since 2003. Within the framework of this larger project, one of the major findings has been the linkage of state weakness and the development of organized crime. This linkage, involving a variety of relations between the narcotics industry and state officials and bodies, threatens all states of the region, though its effect is disproportionate on small and weak states near Afghanistan, the world's main producer of heroin. As such, this report by the Joint Center's Research Fellow Dr. Erica Marat aspires to shed light on the two states perhaps most affected by this problem: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As Dr. Marat shows, the interaction between organized crime and the state takes different shapers depending on the political and economic realities of a country at a given time. This study will contribute significantly to a better understanding of the narcotics problem in Central Asia. Moreover, the study also makes a significant contribution to the theoretical literature on the linkage of organized crime and politics. As such, it is of interest to a wider audience.

The Joint Center's research on narcotics and organized crime in Eurasia has received generous support by several donors, all of which have contributed to making this study possible. Sponsors of the project include the Office of the Swedish National Drug Policy Coordinator, the Swedish Emergency Management Agency, and the Research Council of the Swedish Agency for International Development (Sida). The Joint Center gratefully acknowledges this support.

Svante E. Cornell
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Summary and Recommendations

This study investigates trends in the relationship between state structures and criminal actors in Central Asia, including indications of merger between crime and state. The study specifically focuses on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the smallest and weakest states in Central Asia, who have been affected by this phenomenon to a higher degree than its larger neighbors. It argues that the legacies of the Soviet regime have a powerful impact not only on the functioning of state structures, but also on the way non-state criminal actors emerged in the Central Asian states' periphery. With weak state institutions unable to supply basic public services and a large percentage of the rural population lacking entrepreneurial skills, intermediaries between the state and the rural communities emerged as the gap between the two widened in the 1990s. Among them, leaders of industrial and production sites, sportsmen, former inmates, shuttle traders and other actors with some experience in economic activities or with political connections benefited from the collapse of the Soviet regime. These actors mobilized into networks on the local and transnational level much faster than post-Soviet states could develop national political institutions and reestablish old economic ties. Central Asian traditionalist cultures that welcome *machismo* and approve of violence facilitated the establishment of control by organized criminal groups and their leaders in areas where state institutions were especially weak.

Over time, these criminal elements developed political ambitions, and state actors themselves became interested in cooperating with powerful local entrepreneurs. Criminal leaders sought to expand their own activities and/or receive political immunity by either permeating political institutions or building relations with state officials. The state, however, was also in need of support from non-state actors when political competition turned particularly severe. Government officials, parliamentary candidates and even presidents resorted to the help of powerful criminal leaders to advance their own

capabilities in the political domain. The study shows that while the political and criminal worlds cooperate and benefit from such interactions, society suffers the most. The state becomes detached from the needs of the impoverished population, corruption at all levels hinders small- and medium-size economic activities, and rates of violence significantly rise among the grassroots who also feel unprotected. The spread of criminal actors promotes nepotism, leads to the suppression of freedom of speech, deters modernization processes, allows criminals to use state institutions against the state, and hinders economic growth. All of these consequences of the state-crime nexus are also the key components defining the weak state.

Though similar in many ways, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan exhibit diverging logics of the state-crime merger. In Kyrgyzstan, the political and criminal domains exist as two separate phenomena which occasionally interact whenever state officials and leaders of the criminal underworld find common interests. State structures, such as president's administration, prime minister and ministers, and parliament are susceptible to pursuing relations with or falling under a forceful submission of criminal actors. Tajikistan's situation is different. Although the country has to cope with large inflows of drugs from Afghanistan, there is a limited mobilization of criminal actors outside the state. This, however, implies that Tajikistan's governmental institutions are penetrated with corruption, which has a pyramid-like structure with high officials being the ultimate benefactor. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan's open economic and political climate in the 1990s and Tajikistan's civil war in 1992-1997 contributed to the evolution of these two different types of state-crime relationships.

The present study suggests that various long-term implications can be drawn based on the different versions of the state-crime merger. In Kyrgyzstan, the following trends are likely to develop in the foreseeable future:

- President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's experience with organized criminal groups after the March 24 Tulip Revolution will likely prevent him from open cooperation with the criminal underworld. While allying with reputed criminal leaders to establish control in some parts of the country, Bakiyev's regime found itself under their dependence. This was followed by numerous showdowns between state officials and

politically charged criminals. Corruption in the state is likely to remain, with many political leaders involved in criminal activities. However, top power echelons are likely to refrain from openly supporting criminal leaders. Political elites will also try to retain control over the underground world through law-enforcement structures.

- Kyrgyzstan faces a unique opportunity to limit state-crime relations with the help of local civil society networks. Following the March 24, 2005, revolution Kyrgyz civil society activists learned new ways of influencing state leaders and law-enforcement structures in an organized and peaceful way. Ideally, the state should rely on local NGOs' reporting of organized criminal activities and use that to distance and disassociate from the criminal underworld.
- The February 2005 parliamentary elections, eventually resulting in the ouster of president Askar Akayev, had illustrated that only candidates with strong financial backgrounds are likely to win under the majority voting system. Women and candidates with weaker financial basis are effectively barred from the process. Therefore, to avoid this trend in the next elections, elements of a plurality electoral system should be introduced. A mixed majority/proportional voting system could create possibilities for candidates from various backgrounds to succeed and will foster formation of political parties, but also reduce the power of businessmen and criminals in parliament.
- Due to poor governance and corruption during the reign of both Akayev and Bakiyev, Kyrgyzstan will not be able to pay back its external debt, which amounts to roughly 130% of its GDP, anytime soon. A large part of internationally borrowed funds did not reach the grassroots level. Potentially, because Bakiyev's positions at home and abroad are weakening, he will increasingly rely on Russia's economic and political support.

Tajikistan, in turn, will likely evidence the following long-term implications:

- President Emomali Rakhmonov's informal control over economic sectors in the country in combination with his systematic suppression

of political opposition ensured him victory in the November 2006 presidential elections. This victory will further expand Rakhmonov's economic and political capabilities and secure his hold on power until 2020. However, his overwhelming reliance on informal connections and loyalties within state structures will lead him to further suppression of unwanted political forces, even greater rates of corruption, and cultivation of his individual power.

- Tajik society, suffering from widespread poverty, supports Rakhmonov's regime in spite of awareness of its corruption, due to its great achievements in post-civil war peacekeeping. It is doubtful that Rakhmonov will be able to retain the same support unless he implements meaningful economic reform and fights poverty. The new generation of Tajik youth, lacking education and employment and whose memory of the civil war is not as strong, might potentially become a source of destabilization.
- The existing mixed voting system in Tajikistan, given the dominance of the ruling party, presently represents an effective shield against the political opposition. However, if Rakhmonov's regime will allow opposition forces to exist without suppression, this system could become a model for democratic development in the Central Asian region. For that, Rakhmonov should try to build functional relations with the religious opposition, the Islamic Renaissance Party, and not try to split it.
- Like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's external debt substantially exceeds its GDP. Although the structure of Tajikistan's international debt is different from the one in Kyrgyzstan, Rakhmonov learned how to sustain a façade of democratic leadership, while also effectively resisting international donors' efforts to liberalize the domestic market. Tajikistan is facing a dangerous situation of being a major transit country for drug trafficking, dependent on international assistance and reliant on informal relations in government structures.

At the regional level, the failure of domestic policies to address the spread of organized crime and curb corruption at all levels averts inter-state

cooperation on curbing drug-trafficking and transnational organized criminal networks. At the same time Central Asian states' inability or lack of incentive to develop education systems, healthcare, police, provide jobs and other social services feed mobilization of organized criminal groups and the rise of their leaders. Indeed, none of the Central Asian states can achieve these goals on their own. International assistance is needed to provide these social services.

Organized crime will continue to exist in the Central Asian states as long as national governments are not able to provide their citizens with jobs, reduce poverty, and enforce the rule of law. General economic development is important as well. The example of Kyrgyzstan suggests that civil society can play a decisive role in countering the political influence of criminal leaders. But it is often up to particular regime incumbents as to whether they choose to cooperate and, to what extent, with the underground world. While there is hope for an improvement in both countries, the Kyrgyz and Tajik cases vividly illustrate that by choosing to align with criminals for their own political and economic ends, regime incumbents are susceptible to authoritarianism and cause the degradation of the society's well-being.

Introduction¹

Globalization processes are often held accountable for explaining the rise of transnational organized criminal networks. The broadened variety of transportation means, advanced communication technologies, and lowered transaction costs associated with globalization have intensified the movement of people, facilitated the exchange of ideas, and allowed flows of vast capitals. States are no longer in a position to control the markets, instead markets exercise power over states. New possibilities created by globalized markets have been used instrumentally not only by governments, but also by non-state actors engaged in criminal activities.² Especially weak states have become “privatized” by the external and domestic players of the international market.³ Externally, international organizations and businesses have imparted great influence over states’ participation in the global economy. Domestically, large businesses and criminal groups are able to impact states’ functioning. Often domestic actors, legal or illegal, also act transnationally, surpassing state’s sanctions or interests. Whereas today we can more easily observe transnational and international trends across the globe, we lack understanding regarding the domestic traits of development. How do domestic actors gain the ability to influence state functioning? What are the factors for domestic groups to mobilize at a transnational level? How do domestic groups set hurdles to states’ functioning? How do they infiltrate the state? These questions call for answers amid the accelerated growth of

¹ The author thanks Dr. Svante Cornell, Research Director of the Central Asia – Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, for his contribution to this report. Also, special thanks to Alena Bartoli for her valuable comments.

² Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

³ William Reno, "The Privatization of Sovereignty and the Survival of Weak States", Béatrice Hibou, ed., *Privatizing the State*, London: Hurst, 2004.

transnational criminal and terror organizations after the fall of the Soviet Union and after the September 11 attacks.

This study seeks to answer the above questions, focusing on the examples of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The report's main goal is to understand how criminal actors and organizations arise in states with a weak central power and what effect they produce on the functioning of the state and society. That is, how criminal actors such as drug barons, owners of illicit businesses and local mafia chiefs are able to expand locally and transnationally while also bringing in corruption into state structures and harming social fabric. In this analysis, the legacy of the Soviet regime in conjunction with local cultural peculiarities in both states is paid specific attention.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were both chosen for an in-depth study in the analysis of state-crime relations because of both countries' relative political and economic openness, their development of their civil societies, and due to significant shifts in their political power transformations after receiving independence in 1991.

Structure

The study is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters analyze the rise of organized crime in the post-Soviet period without and within state control. Institutional and cultural preconditions for the emergence of powerful non-state actors with criminal connections are differentiated. Specifically, chapter one discusses the emergence of criminal authorities in areas where state control was weak or absent in the post-Soviet period. Various ways of how non-state and state actors profit from licit and illicit business activities are discussed. The Soviet legacies of planned market economy and communist ideology are taken into consideration while analyzing the rise of a class of criminal authorities in the post-Soviet period. Chapter two examines how criminalization trends to arise within the state. In particular, it investigates why political figures seek connections with the criminal world and how corruption affects the state's governability. Various examples from the post-Soviet space are presented.

The following two chapters are dedicated to case studies of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The way in which distinct political developments in those states since the early 1990s and up to 2006 produced different types of state-crime relations is examined. It is argued that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while being similar in many ways, also have evidenced two alternative paths of the mergers of political forces and organized criminal groups. The final chapter analyzes the long-term institutional implications of the state-crime nexus. Such aspects as the electoral system, the structure of law enforcement agencies, external debt, international financial support and domestic and regional security policy are analyzed. This study incorporates data collected through interviews with numerous experts from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Interviewed experts represent government institutions, NGOs, mass media outlets, academic institutions, think tanks, international organizations and the business sector.

Background

Weak states, failed economies, and inter-ethnic tensions are the most common causes of the emergence of mafias and criminal gangs in various parts of the world. While there are a number of common factors that inspire the increase of organized crime in different parts of the world, it is possible to identify those peculiar to the post-Soviet space. Since the 1980s, organized crime has developed throughout the post-Soviet area, including its satellite East European states. From the early 1990s, criminal networks grew irrespective of the degree of the openness of political regimes or economic development in all of the post-Soviet states. In Poland and Lithuania, criminal groups developed along with an open post-communist government. In Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, organized crime emerged against the backdrop of corrupt governments. Such trends raise questions as to whether the Soviet past encouraged the spread of non-state actors in the post-independence period. What features of the Soviet regime prompted the emergence of organized crime?

The example of Central Asian states demonstrate that fifteen years after receiving independence, post-Soviet government still functions on the premise that external forces represent the main source of domestic

instability. Security policies designed by the Central Asian governments give only marginal consideration to the domestic causes of instability. The existing policies focus on threats of regional importance, such as interstate conflicts and massive terrorist attacks. Regional military exercises are carried out to combat large-scale fights with terrorist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Al Qaeda.⁴ Russia and China have acted as the main suppliers of heavy armament for air and ground assaults. While such a broad approach to domestic security justifies the functioning of national militaries, it also stands as an inadequate perception of the potential security issues presented by weak state institutions, fuzzy borders, and impoverished populations. For each Central Asian state today, there is a greater chance of destabilization caused by rivalries among competing factions of political, business or military elites, rather than confrontation with terrorist organizations. Instability arises from the mobilization of criminal non-state actors, illicit businesses, and chaotic inter-state migration. Corruption and personal interests in economic enrichment among political actors also play an important role.

However, to date, none of the Central Asian states has developed coherent and encompassing strategies to strengthen mechanisms that would prevent the activities of criminal networks and individuals with criminal backgrounds. Organized crime in the Central Asian states embodies groups and individuals engaged in illicit businesses and racketeering. Whether these entities manifest themselves as a radical religious group, a gang involved in drug trafficking or a political figure controlling illicit businesses – all are interested in material profits. Their interests are achieved through various means, but all seek to impose configurations in the state's functioning according to their own interests.⁵ Organized crime prevents economic development, causes social frustration and political crises.

With that in mind, the study addresses the following aspects.

⁴ Aziz Soltobaev, "Collective Security Exercises in Central Asia: Wrong Medicine?" *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 19 May 2004.

⁵ Discussed in introductory chapter in Béatrice Hibou, *Privatizing the State*.

▪ First, the Soviet controlled economy and its large agricultural sector played an important role in the emergence of criminal authorities in places where state control was weakest. Like those of most post-colonial Third World states, the Central Asian political regimes were not capable of exercising control in remote areas and along national borders after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As argued by Fearon and Laitin, the state's ability to pay the labor market is the major source of the strength of its ability to control the national territory.⁶ This implies that poverty is part a state's weakness and that the poorer is the population, the greater is the propensity toward civil disobedience and the outbreak of violence. When administrative instruments of the Soviet regime, such as the application of a strong ideology and planned economy, dissolved, the Central Asian governments were no longer able to control society. The sudden openness of the Soviet economy in the early 1990s introduced some elements of a capitalistic state, creating a situation where it was possible for some individuals, and not the entire society, to accumulate private capital.

As a result of the disintegration of the socialist economy, the massive rural population was severely hit by a sudden decrease in subsidies. Only individuals with some entrepreneurial skills, usually younger people who were able to adopt quickly in the free market environment, were able to manage private goods and accumulate capital in the early years of independence. Likewise, former heads of production sites who already controlled some economic sectors had access to industrial sites, land and other types of state property. Often, the first capital was accumulated from the smuggling of legal and illegal goods and through racketeering, and the looting of state property. The shadow economy was the only economic sector that actually saw growth and not decline in the first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁷ In the mid- and late-1990s, the drug

⁶ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War", *American Political Science Review*, 97 (1), 2003; Nicholas Sambanis, "Poverty and the Organization of Political Violence", *Brookings Trade Forum*, 2004.

⁷ As argued by Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995.

economy became a major factor in personal enrichment in Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and parts of Kazakhstan.

- Second, post-Soviet state structures were not able to react to the domestic rise of criminality, especially in rural areas. Underfinanced and demoralized after the collapse of the communist regime, most state institutions functioned by the old modes of impersonal responsibility and heavy bureaucracy within the *Nomenklatura*. The military sector, for example, continued to operate based on the notion that the main security threats arise from the possibility of an invasion by another state. Until the late 1990s, Kazakhstan officially still viewed the possibility of a nuclear attack as the foremost national threat.⁸ Similarly, Russia continued to maintain a massive army that was reinforced by patriotic sentiments to resist external attacks and large-scale military invasions.

Today, political and legal cultures in the region still perpetuate the communist ideals of permissible and impermissible institutional and individual behavior. Everyday perceptions of the significance of political activity and economic rationality among state actors do not correspond with the principles of the free market. The activities of state institutions and individual actors are still guided by short-term benefits as opposed to the establishment of viable, long-run political and economic policies. All Central Asian presidents, with the partial exception of Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, constructed a façade of democratic development in their efforts to acquire international recognition and domestic legitimacy. Despite organizing frequent elections, most Central Asian presidents did not tolerate the development of political opposition, independent media, and civil society. Furthermore, soaring corruption rates undermined political transparency in the post-Soviet states and the emergence of a free market.

- Third, with weak entrepreneurial skills among the members of post-Soviet societies and government institutions functioning in the old Soviet mode, the transformation of the post-Soviet states from socialist economies

⁸ Military Doctrine of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted in February 11, 1993; the second doctrine was adopted on February 10, 2000.

to free markets took place much more slowly as compared to the advancement of non-state actors. As the iron curtain of communist rule fell, criminal networks were able to, for the purposes of illicit trade, make use of liberalized border regimes between eastern and western, as well as southern and northern states, more quickly than the post-Soviet states could reestablish old economic ties in the new transnational context. Non-state actors throughout the post-Soviet space benefited from freer and more frequent flows of people, ideas, and capitals to a greater extent than did the governments. In effect, in the early 1990s, criminal groups throughout the post-Soviet Union developed in networking complexity much quicker than the states themselves. Over time, expanded organized criminal groups developed political ambitions. Political participation created limitless possibilities to enlarge economic enrichment and influence. Obviously, the merger of the political and criminal spheres has numerous negative repercussions.

Organized Crime Without the State

On Post-Soviet State-Building

Both international and domestic elements contribute to the state-building process. The international community's recognition of a state's borders and form of government represents an external set of elements that fosters state-building. Domestically, the formation of effective institutions of state governance is the key prerequisite to the state's functioning. While the international influence on state-building is predisposed to the advancement of internationally driven norms of state governance, local state formation is influenced by the state's historical experience of political, economic, and cultural events. The balance of both directions of influence towards state-building – international and domestic – is important for the creation of a viable and strong state. The prevalence of the domestic dimension in developing states gives rise to ethnic-nationalism and authoritarianism. While, as argued by Charles Tilly, the greater the intervention of the external factors in the state creation, the less the processes of state-building are dependent on local factors.⁹

Colonial experience represents one of the most common types of extensive external intervention into state building. The formation of the sub-Saharan African states is one common example of an experience of strong external intervention into state-building. The Soviet Union is another example where the legacies of Russian domination in the Central Asian and South Caucasian states influenced developments to the present day. Although the Central Asian nations have a long history of civilizational development with indigenous socio-economic structures based on nomadic as well as sedentary

⁹ Charles Tilly, "Foreword" in Anton Blok, *The Mafia of A Sicilian Village, 1860-1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneur*. Illinois: Prospect Heights, 1974.

traditions, the history of colonialism left distinct footprints. Furthermore, any attempt to reconstruct the pre-Soviet cultural systems of social relations, such as the court of the elderly or the makhalla, risks being conducted through the prism of the biases of the colonial regime.

Each Central Asian nation followed a different path in state-building, despite sharing intrinsically similar sets of Soviet institutions of governance. While some states chose relative economic and political openness (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), others established a new brand of authoritarianism in the independence era (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Such variation in post-Soviet state-building in the Central Asian states cannot be explained simply through analysis of the Soviet regime's structural impact upon the independence period. The varying decisions made by the Central Asian leaderships must be explained as bearing a certain degree of autonomy from the Soviet past on the one hand, and preconditioned by a set of "soft" domestic factors (such as religious sentiments and social capital) on the other.

Another important aspect of the state-building process is that the concept does not merely refer to the transformation of state and society from "traditional" into "modern".¹⁰ A transformation of political regimes from authoritarian into more democratic forms of governance may occur without changes at the grassroots level. For example, the international community's recognition of all Central Asian states' sovereignty *per se* drove them to form governments *de jure* independent from Moscow's rule and to transform from a communist into a more democratic form of governance. Yet, though institutions of democratic state building, such as party systems or elections, were formed, little change was noticeable in societal behavior. Civic values associated with democratic participation found little support among the population, especially in rural areas.¹¹

¹⁰ Tilly, "Foreword".

¹¹ As discussed in chapter 2, the development of civil society in Kyrgyzstan is an exception in the region.

The link between the emergence of organized crime and the collapse of the Soviet Union has been extensively studied with regard to the Russian case.¹² Most experts agree that amid decaying post-Soviet bureaucracy in the early 1990s, the Russian government sought support among the *Nomenklatura* and population by allowing privatization and distributing vouchers.¹³ Partial or full privatization of public enterprises such as the central bank, agricultural and industrial sectors by the *Nomenklatura* was done with the purpose of replacing state administration by means of economic dependence of private actors from state directives. As a result, the new class of businessmen was comprised of state officials and those who had connections with the state, or family ties with state officials.¹⁴ Hence, political, kinship or friendship privileges in combination with massive privatization factored into the formation of a limited group of the Russian *nouveau-riche*.

Former Russian president Boris Yeltsin's government was able to establish some overarching control over the business sector. However, toward the end of the 1990s, once business opportunities were informally granted by the state, the actors were able to evade taxes. The Russian class of neo-businessmen reached the point where the state could no longer regulate the limits of their personal enrichment. According to Forbes magazine, about one hundred people in Russia own one-quarter of the country's economy in the late 1990s. The situation changed after Vladimir Putin stepped into power.¹⁵ Controversies over Yukos and the imprisonment of its CEO, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, illustrate the Putin government's strategy to increase its

¹² Among other studies: Handelman, *Comrade Criminal*; Mark Galeotti, *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2002; Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002; Phil Williams, ed., *Russian Organized Crime. The New Threat?*, London: Frank Class, 1997.

¹³ Reno, "The Privatization of Sovereignty and the Survival of Weak States".

¹⁴ This issue is discussed in details by Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, "Privatization and Political Change in Post-Soviet Russia" in Hibou ed., *Privatizing The State*. London: Hurst, 2004; Anders Åslund, "Novykh russkikh obogatili tri osnovnykh istochnika" [The Wealth of the Russians Comes from Three Main Sources], *Izvestiya*, 20 June 1996.

¹⁵ Mary Hennock, "Yukos: Russia's Policy Battleground", *BBC News*, 6 July 2004.

control over large businesses. Khodorkovsky was an active member of the Communist Party during the Soviet Union and therefore had ties with the government. Yukos was charged with tax evasion amounting to almost \$7 billion. A number of other large-scale businessmen who were able to impact Russian political life were persecuted by the government on various charges, but most commonly on the charge of illegal appropriation of state property. Despite Putin's policy against oligarchs bred during Yeltsin era, the current government is to a large extent comprised of wealthy officials with background in large businesses – what some observers call a new oligarchy.

The overall conclusions drawn from the Russian case are also applicable to the Central Asian one. The scale of enrichment of certain businessmen has, indeed, been smaller than in Russia. The pace and scope of privatization of state property has also been much lower. However, each Central Asian post-Soviet leadership, with the partial exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, resorted to similar means of attaining control over state bureaucracy through the redistribution of property rights and economic commodities. In Kazakhstan, the process of privatization had many similarities to the Russian case. In Kyrgyzstan, the Akayev government was very liberal in the redistribution of state property and the maintenance of direct and indirect control over the country's large and medium businesses. In Tajikistan, this process began, to a large extent, after the civil war. By creating a loyal state through distributing economic opportunities, these states gained some coherence among its institutions. Distribution of economic opportunities created an informal structure within the state. Along with a loyal state, however, public officials became increasingly detached from the needs and feelings of the impoverished population.

In the 1990s, the gap between “state” and “society” in the post-Soviet Central Asian states was so obvious and wide, that scholars on Central Asia preferred to study them separately, as two coexisting phenomena.¹⁶ The post-Soviet legal systems and state structure did not meet the expectations and needs of Central Asian society as the state was not able to maintain the Soviet style of

¹⁶ Pauline Jones Luong, ed., *The Transformation of Central Asia: State-Societal Relations from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

planned economy, nor could it reclaim its authority in the peripheries to the extent enjoyed during the Soviet period. At the same time, society had little ability or motivation to influence the political process. In such a situation, a small fraction of politically and economically charged non-state actors served as intermediaries between the state and the society. Small-scale businessmen, a richer class of entrepreneurs, and criminal actors emerged in localities where the state-society gap was especially wide. Similarly, radical religious movements and organized criminal gangs substituted for state authority in places where it was absent.

The Two Models of State-Crime Relationship

According to Bailey and Godson (2000), the relationship between state structures and organized crime in developing states can be distinguished into two generic types.¹⁷ Depending on the state's ability or wish to exercise control over the activity of organized criminal groups and their leaders, the state and the underground world might coexist as two separate, yet interacting phenomena, or have a strong merger between them. Both types of state-crime relationship produce different impacts on the state functioning. The first type of organized criminal network is connected through underground links, representing a strong parallel authority outside the official state structures. Although the government and the parliament are legitimately elected in free and fair elections, underground networks may exercise significant control at the local level and be largely involved in legal and illegal businesses.¹⁸ In this type of the state-crime relationship, some state structures, such as border guards and police, might be involved in organized crime, however, they will operate without regard for central state's regulations.

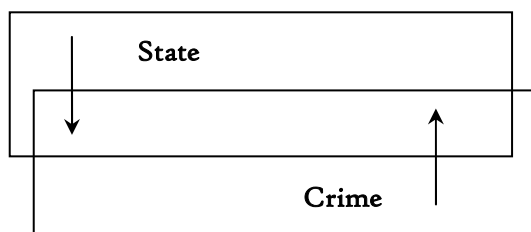
¹⁷ John Bailey and Roy Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability: Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican Borderland*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2000.

¹⁸ Thoroughly discussed by Bailey and Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability*.

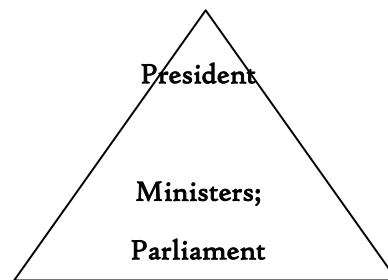
The second generic type emerges under government's control and penetrates throughout all state structures. It is a top-down construction that begins at the highest echelons of government and extends down to local governments. All governmental structures, including law enforcement, military, and border guards are under the centralized state's oversight. Therefore, corruption at any level has a pyramid-like structure, and the president, at the top of the hierarchy, is typically the primary benefactor. Unlike the first type, organized criminal groups are not as much a *consequence* of weak governments, as the *product* of corrupt political officials. The system produces a plethora of rent-seekers who are interested in the continuity of political regime under which they are able to benefit economically and politically.

The following sections argue that today Kyrgyzstan represents the first type of the state-crime relationship, while Tajikistan provides an example of the second type of state-crime relationship.

Two types of state-crime relationship



Type I: Some state actors seek cooperation with criminals; Criminal leaders seek to penetrate the state



Type II: All state structures are involved in criminal activities; Corruption has a vertical hierarchy

Both types of state-crime relationship show how criminal groups will act in competition with the weak state or the corrupt state will control and get involved in organized crime. The former case is exemplified by failing states, with weak institutions and large shadow economies. In these cases, non-state actors do not require the state's approval to operate in the legal and illegal economies, they also do not pay taxes.¹⁹ Yeltsin's Russia, Tajikistan during the civil war, post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan, and Shevarnadze's Georgia are all examples of the first type of relationship between politics and crime. The second case is descriptive of states with stronger governments that can enjoy a high degree of legitimacy and have a high popular approval rating in the society. In addition, there is some presence of violence and corruption in the state and in the society due to poverty, unemployment, and local corruption.

Illustrative examples of post-Soviet countries where the state is able to exercise a strong control over organized crime are post-civil war Tajikistan, Akayev's Kyrgyzstan, Putin's Russia, and Kazakhstan since the late 1990s. In this relationship, the state will have various degrees of involvement into criminal activities. For instance, Akayev's government, although being able to limit non-state mobilization of criminal actors, was itself highly corrupt. By contrast, Georgian current president Mikheil Saakashvili's government showed a strong zeal towards fighting corruption in the state and also crackdown organized criminal groups operating outside the state structures. Only the Baltic and East European countries were able to deter organized crime to the extent that it is no longer possible to clearly identify whether the underground economy exists more outside the state or within the state.

Both types of state-crime relationships are present in the Central Asian states. In Kyrgyzstan, the second type of criminal networks' functioning was dominant under the Akayev regime. Licit and illicit businesses were under the direct or indirect control of a small fraction of government officials. The dynamic shifted towards the first type of organized criminal grouping after the "Tulip Revolution" of 2005. Several criminal groups and mafia chiefs were able to assert more freedom of action due to weakened state control. In Tajikistan, the picture is somewhat reversed as compared to Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁹ Bailey and Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability*.

Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing through the civil war, strong criminal networks dominated the weak state: they were formed on the basis of clan identities and political disagreements. The networks were armed and exercised resilient control in the peripheries. Toward the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, Tajik president Emomali Rakhmonov was able to establish solid control over opposition forces by gradually curbing their participation in the government and parliament. Organized crime still has a strong presence in Tajikistan, but the government is capable of imposing a high degree of regulation over organized crime to prevent non-state political actors from benefiting from the shadow economy.

As states were transforming themselves since the collapse of the Soviet Union, state-crime and crime-politics relationships were changing as well in the Central Asian and other post-Soviet states. Besides the change of political regimes, post-Soviet revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan clearly brought more subtle adaptations in state-crime relations. Moreover, although the change of presidents in Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus represented a form of continuity with the previous political regimes, the new government incumbents in each of these countries sought to (re)build the balance with large-scale businessmen, including organized criminal groups. Relations were violent and forceful in the cases of Russia and Belarus, and more hidden in Azerbaijan and Armenia. Various coalitions and confrontations emerged as a result of the reshuffle or change of political elites.

Some powerful political figures with strong support inside the government, among the opposition or organized criminal groups attained high-ranked positions and thus became a sizeable challenge to presidents or ruling elites.²⁰ In Georgia, then justice minister and later president Mikheil Saakashvili accused former minister of interior Kakha Targamadze for his connections with the shadow economy and an alleged attempt to stage a palace coup.²¹ In

²⁰ Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security", *Problems of Postcommunism*, 53 (4), 2006.

²¹ "Leading Reformer Concerned about Drug Trafficking Menace in Georgia: A Q&A with Mikhail Saakashvili", *Eurasia Insight*, 1 July 2002.

Azerbaijan, president Ilham Aliyev sacked several powerful but corrupt ministers from the old government headed by his father Heydar Aliyev, including minister of economic development Farkhad Aliyev, over similar accusations.²² In Armenia and Tajikistan, although being able to retain strong domestic authority, presidents also face significant competitors from among powerful ministers. In Armenia, criticism of the presence of criminal figures in parliament became public for the first time in Fall 2006, somewhat reminiscent of the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Hence, any amendments in the hierarchy of political actors within one government influenced its ability or wish to curb the illegal economy and its criminal actors. With every election of the parliament and change in presidential administration, the dynamics reverberate in the non-state sector as well.

Compared to their regional neighbors, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan took a different path after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Uzbek and Turkmen leaderships quickly seized control of all economic sites and state assets. The governments continued the policy of maintaining a planned economy and allowed little privatization. This prevented the emergence of small and medium scale entrepreneurs in cities and, especially, in villages. Moreover, working conditions for Uzbek and Turkmen agrarians have significantly worsened since the Soviet period. The extent of impoverishment of the Uzbek agrarians is comparable with the situation in Tajikistan. The main source of the Uzbek agrarians' impoverishment is the Uzbek government's control over the production and retail of cotton. The Uzbek cotton collectors and producers have to sell harvest to the state for fixed prices that are considerably lower than market prices.

The business and political elites in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are affiliated with the central state. At times it is difficult to draw a clear line between the two groups. The Uzbek and Turkmen governments remain the main domestic economic actors that decide about the countries' market regulations. However, it is also evident that the Uzbek government has accumulated political opposition that is active outside the national borders.

²² Fariz Ismailzade, "President Aliyev's Shakeup: A Changing Portrait", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 11 November 2005.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is the primary example of an armed group that was able to instigate instability in Uzbekistan as well as neighboring states. While Uzbek criminal groups are not known to be directly involved in the government to the same extent as some of its neighbors, they resort to a greater degree of violence against state structures and civilians.

The secular opposition groups Erk and Birlik are also largely mobilized by leaders residing outside Uzbekistan. Members of these opposition groups are involved in small and medium-size businesses in Uzbekistan or abroad. At the local level, small and medium-size businesses are closely guarded by village and government authorities. The business community, be it foreign or local, in order to lead economic activity, has to comply with the state's strict regulations and meet primarily the interests of the government. The crackdown on protestors on May 13-14, 2005 in Andijan, leading to deaths of hundreds of civilians, illustrates the Uzbek state's readiness to resort to any means to suppress threats to its authority from non-state actors. The protests, allegedly instigated by the armed supporters of two dozen local businessmen but involving ordinary civilians, were violently suppressed by the Uzbek military. In the case of Turkmenistan, the government appears to be in control of the shadow economy, including drug trafficking.²³ It should nevertheless be noted that Turkmenistan is a closed society where the little information available is often linked to oppositional forces.

Center vs. Periphery

In his research into the Sicilian mafia, Catanzaro notes that organized criminal groups are able to adapt and transform in a changing political context due to a number of factors: "The mafia's behavior has always been a specific combination of ancient and modern, a mixture of private violence and the legitimate violence of the state, of competition for economic resources in the market and the absence of regulatory standards for economic

²³ Rustem Safronov, "Turkmenistan's Niyazov Implicated in Drug Smuggling", *Eurasia Insight*, 29 March 2002.

activities other than violence”.²⁴ Catanzaro theorized on the rise of the mafia and its ideational underpinnings in the Sicilian example and touched upon the importance of the informal relations between state and non-state actors in the beginning of state and nation making.

Catanzaro’s conclusions are relevant beyond the Italian case in the eighteenth-twentieth century and are useful for considering any young state’s encounter with organized crime. There are important implications to be drawn from the Italian history of organized crime in the development of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Sicilian mafia emerged after the periphery encountered the national state in the mid-eighteenth century when Italy received its lands previously held under Spanish rule. The patronage system of local administrative units over an uneducated rural population in combination with conservative values that welcomed machismo and gender inequality in society encouraged non-state violence in peripheral and urban domains. Similar trends can be observed in Central Asia, as well as other parts of post-Soviet space. The central government’s nation- and state-building projects developed simultaneously with the society’s criminalization. The Soviet Union’s communist ideology and socialist economy preconditioned contemporary organized crime. During the Soviet era, the communist ideology transmitted through state institutions was the main instrument of public control. Ideological sentiments were reinforced through education, military institutions, hospitals, farms and factories, recreation centers, books, television and any other media possible. In addition to strong indoctrination by the state, entrepreneurial skills and capitalistic values were alien to the Soviet economy.

The Soviet regime also reinforced local tribal and clan identities by establishing administrative borders based on the local communities’ cultural divisions, seeking to replicate soft boundaries of specific groups.²⁵ Such policy reinforced local identity groups at family, makhalla, clan and tribal

²⁴ Raimondo Catanzaro, "Enforcers, Entrepreneurs, and Survivors: How the *Mafia* Has Adapted to Change", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 36(1), 1985.

²⁵ Olivier Roy, "Kolkhoz and Civil Society in Central Asia's Independent States" in Ruffin M. Holt and Daniel C. Waugh ed., *Civil Society in Central Asia*. University of Washington Press, 1999; Luong, *The Transformation of Central Asia*.

levels. In many instances kolkhozes were divided along ethnic lines. For instance, in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan there are ethnic Uzbek villages. Ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Chechens were also placed in distinct administrative entities. In this way, the post-Soviet Central Asian rural population had strong collective identities created and reinforced by the communist regime.²⁶ Contemporary Central Asian societies and states continue to use the administrative divisions made by the Soviet regime, rather than the divisions that existed in the pre-Soviet period. Arguably, this sense of collective identities, based on cultural divides, had been the source of genuine political loyalty throughout the Soviet period and into independence. However, in the independence period, ethnically divided communities became sources of social tension.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, neither security structures, nor social institutions of education or health care were able to administer citizens. Without market, strong state, or security in the 1990s, rising criminal actors and groups provided economy, security, and politics at the local level. Criminal non-state actors strengthened especially in rural areas among the impoverished population. Local informal leaders could establish a non-state control by racketeering farmers, while also providing some protection against other competing criminal groups. For instance, a local leader could emerge in one village who would secure the safety of farmers and shepherds against criminal gangs from neighboring villages, while also collecting material rewards for his “services”. In some places such local leaders could expand their control onto other villages by using force.

Another means of acquiring local authority that would be in competition with the central state was privatizing economic sites on which the rural population was dependent. As in other public domains during the Soviet era, the agricultural sector was developed based on the principle of decentralization of administrative authority between farmers, with a strong center at the town or regional level. The state distributed the land, tractors and combines, seeds, and pesticides. The control over production and retail was state-centered and any changes in the agricultural sector were initiated

²⁶ Roy, “Kolkhoz and Civil Society in Central Asia’s Independent States”.

only by the government. In the independence period, although the Central Asian governments privatized or leased land plots to the rural population, most peasants found it difficult to coordinate production without the directives of the central authority.

In this way, Soviet agrarians were made to be politically uncharged and inactive. They were deprived of control over their own production ends and sense of personal responsibility. The Soviet regime sought to raise a proletariat class disinterested in material benefits, but driven by communist ideology. As with regard to limited entrepreneurial skills, farmers and shepherds were unable to manage local resources independently, and to take the initiative and responsibility for private planning. The population in peripheries lacked the ability to voice its own interests publicly and politically. With the weakening of central command of the agricultural sector and light industries, state-owned assets were looted and infrastructures deteriorated by the lack of responsibility at a personal level amid devastating economic grievances. Those who had better access to public resources and occupied higher administrative positions at the village level could financially and professionally benefit from the collapse of Soviet socialism by legally or illegally appropriating assets controlled by the state. The distribution of scarce agricultural and industrial resources remaining after the disintegration of the USSR were thus concentrated among individuals, households, and within limited groups of former mid-level party members. In contrast, Soviet intellectuals and Party activists represented the urban population that spoke Russian and had a better understanding of political and economic processes at the domestic and regional levels.

The Central Asian rural areas that were socially detached from the urban areas, however, provided the vital portions of the economy. With the exception of natural resource-rich Kazakhstan, all states of the region were structured to possess large agricultural sectors that dominated the national economies. At the time of independence, the agricultural sector employed 60% of the Central Asian population.²⁷ This implied that more than half of the local population had to reorganize itself out of large state-owned

²⁷ Roy, "Kolkhoz and Civil Society in Central Asia's Independent States".

kolkhozes and sovkhozes and into private agricultural entities. At the state level, this reorganization meant that land plots, equipment, farms and cattle had to be redistributed and privatized among villagers. The leadership of the Central Asian states conducted privatization and redistribution reforms that were unfair to the rural population. Only people already occupying some public position or having informal ties with the government were able to profit from privatization. Conventional farmers were not able to benefit from economic liberalization.

For instance, in the post-independence era, cotton production remained under the Tajik and Uzbek governments' control. The conditions for Tajik peasants worsened because government officials pursued policies benefiting themselves and not workers in the agricultural sector.²⁸ Currently, the Tajik ministry of agriculture does not distribute all necessary devices for harvesting cotton such as seeds, technologies, pesticides, etc. Instead, local heads of villages force peasants to purchase products necessary for farm-work from the state and obtain other devices independently. For instance, Tajik peasants may buy gasoline from the local government and finance the purchase of seeds from the resale of that gasoline. In this way, an internal debt between peasants and the government is formed, where peasants fall into an even deeper dependence on the state. According to a Tajik representative from an international organization, the government does not encourage private planning because it is aware that Tajik peasants will probably choose to harvest products that promise higher revenues than does cotton.²⁹ As a result of the weakened agricultural sector and an absolute dependence on the government, the Tajik periphery is easily regulated by the state.

The village was also an important source of social connections during Soviet times. All top politicians and party members had some connections with villages where they may have grown up or where their fathers and grand-

²⁸ "Tajikistan's Cotton Sector: A Train-Wrecked Waiting to Happen", *Eurasia Insight*, 31 May 2006.

²⁹ Author's interview with a Tajik representative from Soros Foundation's Dushanbe office, Dushanbe, June 2006.

fathers were born.³⁰ The native village of any political official during Soviet times and at independence was an important indicator of the official's political views, social network, and even predisposition to corruption. Today the rural areas in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are represented in the parliament mainly by figures with criminal reputations. The paths many of them took to involvement in state politics are similar. Many parliamentary candidates from peripheral areas gained local support through illegal economic activities because of the lack of state control and through instrumentilizing the traditionalist culture among the rural population.

The rise of religious sentiments to fill the lack of social control, identities, and values in the post-independence era is one of the most central discussions in the current literature on Central Asia. In this sense, the rise of religious sentiment in the post-Soviet Central Asian states can be contrasted with increased criminality; both represent structures parallel to the state – not controlled by the government, but capable of capturing the rural population. The spread of religious sentiment was especially intensive precisely in the periphery, where the post-Soviet governments failed to perpetuate or replace weakened communist institutions. A number of institutions that formerly were subsidized and sanctioned by the state were replaced with religious ones. Religious sentiments permeated the region from the institution of marriage and health care to school education and political participation. Society replaced civic practices with religious and traditional ones. Reemerging with the onset of independence, such phenomena as bride kidnapping, traditional healing based on superstitions, and respect for older people, were in competition with the state structures.³¹ Naturally, law enforcement agencies became constrained by social practices. Law enforcement agents, themselves, are susceptible to the influence of traditional community codes of conduct, rather than civic ones.

³⁰ Roy, "Kolkhoz and Civil Society in Central Asia's Independent States".

³¹ Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes, *Lost Voices: Central Asian Women Confronting Transition*. London & New York: Zed Books, 2005.

Licit and Illicit businesses

Two types of illicit businesses exist in the post-Soviet Central Asian states. The first type of illicit businesses is internationally banned and includes the drug trade, trafficking in humans and arms, and the looting of natural resources. The second type is more ambiguous; these businesses represent economic activity that is regarded by individual states as illicit because no appropriate legal base is present for its regulation. The state establishes monopoly over such activities or sees them as a threat to the development of certain economic sites. An appropriate example of illicit economic activity is in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where the state controls all major economic sites, including cotton production and the gas trade. The government heavily controls private initiative. In contrast, since the Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments were more oriented towards an open market economy, illicit business in these states is often the outcome of the inefficient legal base.

If countries with strictly controlled economies, such as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are compared with those possessing open market economies like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, it is evident that the existence of illicit business has different repercussions in the long-term because of the “nature of rules” being violated.³² Ironically, underground economic behavior in closed market states is likely to entail more positive outcomes as opposed to the outcomes produced in open markets. In heavily controlled markets, underground economic activity will create a domain in which the state will need to consider the adoption of an appropriate legal base. Whereas in open markets with more liberal regulation of private initiatives, illicit economies have better chances to flourish. The drug trade in Kyrgyzstan had better chances to thrive because of the Kyrgyz government’s more liberal approach to imports and exports. For similar reasons, Kyrgyzstan became a regional central point for the shuttle trade of Chinese goods, both legally and illegally imported.

³² Edgar L. Feige, "Underground Activity and Institutional Change", in Joan M. Nelson et. al., ed., *Transforming Post-Communist Political Economies*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.

In Kazakhstan, the government is represented by the business elite and the president Nursultan Nazarbayev is one of the richest figures in the country. What makes Nazarbayev different from other Central Asian presidents is that although he retains a strong economic capability, there are a number of other wealthy figures in the country who are also firmly established in political life. The state is decentralized in its control over economic resources and therefore represents a horizontal network of relations comprised of multiple nuclei. In such an environment, informal relations have a high likelihood of developing. For the most part, this is due to Kazakhstan's rich reserves of oil, gas, and other resources. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, however, informal control over the economy is concentrated in the hands of a limited group within the executive branch, therefore most of the relations between the state and the criminal world are also carried out in the central government. Such concentration of control in one political domain raises dissatisfaction in other institutions of the state. Most importantly, however, this concentration of control lowers society's trust in the state. Although some domestic stability is present in Kazakhstan, Central Asian analysts regard Kazakhstan's elite as being similar in many ways to his regional neighbors in terms of corruption and nepotism.

As mentioned earlier, with few exceptions, poorly governed privatization processes in the post-Soviet states did not create capitalist societies with strong middle classes but produced a class of neo-businessmen in conjunction with an impoverished and politically disoriented population. This class of neo-businessmen emerged in the mid 1990s against the background of an increasing percentage of the population living below the poverty line. Economic transformation from the communist to capitalist model led to the asymmetric distribution of capital and economic dependence – a large percentage of the poor were reliant on economic performance, management, and taxes of the small group of extremely rich. There are some signs of an emerging middle class in Kazakhstan thanks to the increasing industrial sector.³³ In Russia and most other post-Soviet states, the small middle class

³³ For more information on the dynamics of Central Asian economies: Malcolm Dowling and Ganeshan Wignaraja, *Central Asia's Economy: Mapping Future Prospects to 2015*, Washington & Uppsala: Silk Road Paper, CACI & SRSP Joint Center, July 2006.

represents a primarily urban population. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the middle class is virtually non-existent.

However, towards the late 1990s, when the richer layers of society sought political participation, the picture of asymmetric interdependence was inverted. Business elites with political aspirations became increasingly dependent upon the support of the large class of impoverished population. In rural areas, political candidates had to campaign among a predominately poor population. Thus, interdependency developed between the two polarized segments of society: the politically ambitious rich were dependent on the poverty-stricken majority during election periods, while the poor were reliant on the performance of business elites throughout their hold on power. The fact that political and business elites are dependent on popular support is a sign of some sophistication within the election system in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Some political pluralism is present and, moreover, the legal basis for the election process is intact.

Shuttle Traders' Fortune

Most of today's criminal figures accumulated vast capital by beginning as small-scale businessmen. Because the general legal base for taxation, imports and exports, and the banking system was not developed during the early years of independence, the first generation of entrepreneurs often acted in a legal vacuum. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the existence of an open market allowed some individual private actors to prosper as a result of the shuttle trade, smuggling, and the development of private businesses. Such chaotic economic activity gradually developed spontaneous regulatory systems between various private actors. Shuttle traders and dealers acted as micro-providers of social cohesion in the local communities by importing and retailing goods and services. That is, while the central governments were building nation-states, non-state groups were building their own economic and social networks. Informal networks triumphed in domains where the state law enforcement was not able to penetrate, especially in smuggling, migration and trafficking in drugs, persons, and arms. A comment by one Kyrgyz expert that "each nowadays credible Kyrgyz criminal businessman

began as a shuttle trader” reflects the evolution of a small businessman into a criminal.³⁴

Starting from the mid 1980s, the Soviet banking system in combination with corruption among lower-level personnel allowed fiscal maneuverings for entrepreneurs. One of the most common banking manipulations was the falsification of checking books (*chekovaya knizhka*). Entrepreneurs were able to open checking accounts and use them for purchasing goods throughout the Soviet Union. When goods were purchased, money was transferred to the salesperson via paper checks. According to banking regulations, the buyer had up to 45 days until the money was withdrawn from his/her account. Because of widespread corruption among lower-ranking banking personnel, entrepreneurs were able to receive check books that showed much higher sums of money than they had in their possessions. For instance, as one entrepreneur from Uzbekistan recounts, by bribing a person responsible for keeping track of checking books, he could have 100,000 Rubles written in his account instead of 1,000: “Two extra zeros are ‘accidentally’ added to my checking book after I pay a small bribe”.³⁵ That is, the entrepreneur could purchase goods for a much higher sum of money than he had de facto on the banking account. After purchasing, he had 45 days to resell the goods and fill the checking account with the necessary sum of money. If he was unable to sell the goods within the given period, he made a transfer from another checking account for the necessary sum of money and that gave him an additional 45 days. In this way, he could legally continue prolonging the period of his real payment to the bank for a maximum of four times, or 180 days.

These manipulations were widespread throughout the Soviet Union. They gained more complexity in the early 1990s when there was a severe deficit of goods and money throughout all of the post-Soviet states. Manipulations were staged in various fields where there were legal loopholes: different exchange rates of the Ruble, absence of legislation on taxation, and incoherent functioning of the banking system. In the late 1980s and early

³⁴ Author’s interview with a Kyrgyz NGO representative, Bishkek, June 2006.

³⁵ Author’s interview with a Kazakh journalist, Almaty, June 2006.

1990s, there was a growing trend of taking credits from banks by individual entrepreneurs and not returning them. There were also those who opened banks, promising unrealistically high interest rates that reached as high as 200%. After collecting money, these banks would claim bankruptcy. Since no appropriate legislation regarding fiscal fraud existed, most charlatans could escape easily. In particular, shortages of food and everyday products fostered the black market. As one entrepreneur comments, “Whatever you brought to the market, whatever you imported, – be that sugar, vodka or toilet paper – everything was sold out right away. I know those who made their first millions on selling Chinese rubber shoes.”³⁶ The situation with importing goods, however, changed in 1992, when new taxation systems were developed by most post-Soviet states.

Sports and Prisons

The control of communities of sportsmen is another peculiarity of the relationship between the state and organized crime in the post-Soviet states. In a situation peculiar to the post-Soviet space, the criminalization of sports communities occurred for a number of reasons. The sports sphere was highly developed by the Soviet leadership. Numerous sportsmen from various Soviet republics achieved the world’s highest records due to considerable investment by the communist regime into sports. Talented students from cities and peripheries were accommodated in special boarding schools in large cities to receive athletic training. Sometimes attendance at athletic schools provided the only possibility for rural youth to move into cities.

The trend of retired and active sportsmen being recruited into criminal organizations emerged in the early 1980s.³⁷ Usually former wrestlers and fighters were under special scrutiny by the Soviet government. Experienced sportsmen could have a strong influence on younger sportsmen and younger people in general. Special legislation was developed in 1981 that facilitated the imprisonment of suspicious sportsmen. According to Kazakh expert Yan Otlavsky, the legal reinforcement against sportsmen only pushed them to

³⁶ Author’s interview with a Kazakh journalist, Almaty, June 2006.

³⁷ Yan Otlavsky, “Sport i sud’ba” [Sport and Fate], *Crime.kz*, 29 October 2003.

build stronger links with the criminal world of Soviet prisons.³⁸ Upon release, former convicts with backgrounds in sports, who had limited options in re-entering the job market due to the loss of their professional qualifications, found their niche in the criminal world. Towards the end of the 1980s, the physically strong criminal figure became a cult image among younger people. Boxing, wrestling, and Asian martial arts became more popular among male teenagers. This fashion only strengthened the underground world across the Soviet Union. Street crime and smuggling was booming in the 1980s.

This trend toward the merging of the sportsmen community with criminal groups continued in the independence period. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sportsmen community became one of the institutions that the government could no longer finance. Many sports schools and facilities disintegrated. Those that continued to function were privatized. The financing of sports events and athletic schools by local political and business figures gave them access to control over sportsmen. In the Central Asian and South Caucasian states, control of the National Olympic Committees turned into one of the most prestigious positions also associated with high level corruption and organized crime.³⁹ Small groups of sportsmen are controlled by various political figures and non-state actors. The control over the sportsmen communities is often equivalent to control over physical force. Leaders of criminal gangs use boxers and wrestlers in showdowns with their competitors.⁴⁰ In particular, sportsmen seize informal control over businesses through violent means or by using threats of violence, rape, kidnapping, by looting property, stealing cars, forcing people to work, executing contract murders, and other brutal acts requiring physical strength. In the Central Asian states, sportsmen are frequently detained for participation in racketeering, contract murders, banditry and ransacking.

³⁸ Otlavsky "Sport i sud'ba" [Sport and Fate].

³⁹ Anara Tabyshalieva, "Political Violence on the Rise in Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 25 January 2006.

⁴⁰ Kairat Osmonaliev, *Ugolovnaya politika Kyrgyzstana: voprosy teorii i praktiki* [Criminal Politics of Kyrgyzstan: Questions of Theory and Practice]. Moscow: Institute of Legal and Comparative Studies, 2005.

Kyrgyz wrestling and martial arts remained the most successful on a world-wide scale due to abundant inflows of finances into athletic schools and training facilities. Other spheres of sports suffered a continued downfall. Having some connections with political and business elites, retired sportsmen initiated their own businesses. A number of former world champions, either involved in businesses or connected with criminal groups, were assassinated by their criminal rivals in the 1990s and 2000s. Sportsmen communities were also actively mobilized in riots precipitating the March 24 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan.

Similar to retired sportsmen who had difficulties in finding work according to their own specialization or interest, the state did not facilitate the social adaptation of ex-convicts. The Soviet punitive system was infamous for possessing programs inefficient in the social re-integration of ex-inmates. Soviet prison conditions were harsh and poor and conducive to the formation of hierarchies among convicts. Furthermore, the number of incarcerated was traditionally high in the Soviet Union. As a result of the rigorous Soviet punitive apparatus and almost non-existent programs for reintegration of ex-inmates, many criminals, after serving prison terms, were not able to enter the job market. There was also a strong social stigma in Soviet society against ex-inmates that prevented them from finding civilian jobs. Both social groups resigned themselves to underground activities. Ex-inmates were involved in an even broader scope of criminal activities than those for which they were initially imprisoned.

Like the sports sphere, the Soviet punitive apparatus with all its peculiar flaws found its continuity during the post-independence period. Fifteen years after independence, prisons and the punitive legal system have hardly experienced any reform in the Central Asian states. They continue to be a physical space where criminality is bred in an established intra-institutional hierarchy of relations between inmates. There are inmates with “higher authority” that have more comfortable living conditions in prisons and who are able to maintain control over other inmates as well as over criminal groups outside the prison. Moreover, imprisoned mafia chiefs have leverage over prison workers and sometimes parliament and government members. Prisons in Central Asia also remain very secretive institutions. There is

virtually no information available about governments' treatment of prisoners or institutional problems. Mass media outlets also pay only marginal attention to the problems in prisons. However, tensions in prisons provoked by convicts in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have led to dramatic consequences.⁴¹

Thus, organized criminal groups in the Central Asian and other post-Soviet states are known for being comprised of former sportsmen and former inmates. Sometimes these groups are infamous for having connections with or being controlled by political figures. The assassination of former Kyrgyz member of parliament Tynychbek Akmatbayev during his visit to a Bishkek prison was one of the cases when tensions between the political and criminal worlds ended in violence. The 31st Bishkek colony is notorious for being a hub of drug trade and, according to some Kyrgyz experts, Akmatbayev tried to take over control of the illicit business in prisons.⁴² The 31st colony's insider rules, also identifiable as those representing the "thieves' world" order, impel inmates to assassinate any state official entering the prison's territory. Although, allegedly Tynychbek could know the rules, he was attacked by inmates because he was not aware of the fact that the information about his visit leaked into the prison. Tynychbek was assassinated on October 20, 2005, he was the younger brother of reputed mafia boss Rysbek Akmatbayev and headed a parliamentary committee on law enforcement issues.

The Importance of the Drug Economy

Situation in Brief

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2005 World Drug Report, the cultivation and production of opium in Afghanistan comprises over 85 percent of world output of this drug, making the country

⁴¹ The chapters on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan present a detailed discussion of the consequences of prison riots.

⁴² Author's interview with Aleksander Zelichenko, Kyrgyz specialist on illicit drug trade, Bishkek, June 2006. Zelichenko comments that 70-80% of inmates in Kyrgyzstan are addicted to heroin; some of them tried drugs for the first time only during their imprisonment. Reportedly, such intensive use of drugs was brought about after Aziz Batukayev, a reputed mafia boss, was imprisoned for the first time in 1996.

by far the most important producer of drugs in the Eurasian continent.⁴³ The transportation of Afghan opium and heroin through the Central Asian countries significantly increased in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to Iranian and Pakistani improved law enforcement activities against the drug trade. The Central Asian states' drug seizures have gradually increased since the late 1990s, and the region remains, alongside Iran, the main transit pathway for drugs from Afghanistan en route to Russia and European states.⁴⁴ In 2003, Iran seized the largest amount of opiates in the world, 97,575 kilograms. Among the Central Asian states, Tajikistan seizes the highest amount of opiates annually, amounting to some 2,370 kilograms in 2003. The rest of the states seized considerably smaller amounts in 2003: Turkmenistan – 138, Uzbekistan – 151, Kazakhstan – 192, and Kyrgyzstan – 46 kilograms. Turkey is another country with high seizure rates; a reported 305 kilograms were captured.⁴⁵

If the efficiency of anti-drug campaigns proves to be successful in one region, other regions might experience a rapid increase in production and transit of drugs. This conclusion raises the question as to whether reduction of a drug's supply will potentially be balanced by the demand in Europe and Russia. Given the example of the Southeast Asian states, due to the increased efficiency of law enforcement mechanisms, opium production in that region drastically decreased after the mid-1990s. The decline entailed deeper impoverishment of the local population, but, according to the UNODC's report, if this trend continues, the region may become virtually drug-free. The techniques used in coping with the drug problem in Southeast Asian countries are known to be extremely harsh, with the death penalty being the highest punishment. Amputation of drug criminals' hands is a common procedure in a number of Southeast Asian states. It is unlikely that any of the Central Asian states will use similar techniques in preventing the drug trade.

⁴³ 2005 *World Drug Report*. UNODC, 2005.

⁴⁴ Alexander Zelichenko, *Istoriya Aganskoi Narkoeksmansii v 1990h* [*The History of Afghan Narco-Expansion in the 1990s*], August 2003, available at http://zhurnal.lib.ru/z/zelichenko_a_1/ (accessed October 10, 2006.).

⁴⁵ UNODC, 2005 *World Drug Report*.

The situation in Afghanistan, whether deteriorating or improving, is directly reflected in the Central Asian states. The more opium is produced in Afghanistan and the looser is the domestic control over the opiate cultivation, the more Central Asian states are affected by drug trafficking. Tajikistan, being the poorest country in the post-Soviet space, has the heaviest burden on drug seizures. The legacies of the civil war, including an impoverished population, lowered education and literacy rates, and violent state-opposition relations bolster the drug economy. After the end of the civil war, Afghan drugs became the key issue in Tajik domestic security and a major point of concern for the international community.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the main regional producers of cannabis due to favorable climatic conditions. Together with other countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the region makes up about 5% of the world's total production of cannabis.⁴⁶ The cultivation and production of cannabis is not difficult, as the plant can grow in virtually any climate. According to UNODC's estimates, cannabis is found in 163 out of a total 197 countries (or 83% of all countries).⁴⁷ Profits from the cannabis drug are not as high as those from opiates. But the production of cannabis drugs is more decentralized and therefore difficult to track. Central Asian cannabis is illegally exported mainly to Russia and the Baltic states.

In the last decade, there have been identifiable minor and major routes of drug trafficking through the Central Asian states, altogether comprising "the northern-route". In Tajikistan the known routes tend to be smaller, more numerous, and chaotic compared to other states of the region. The Kyrgyz State Commission for Drug Control identified four major routes passing through Osh, Batken, Altyn-Mazar and a route close to the Tajik city of Khojand.⁴⁸ In Uzbekistan, the cities of Termez, Tashkent, Samarkand and Syrdarya lie on the major transit routes. In Kazakhstan drugs from

⁴⁶ UNODC, 2005 *World Drug Report*.

⁴⁷ UNODC, 2005 *World Drug Report*.

⁴⁸ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, March 2006, available at <www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2006/vol1/html/> and The Kyrgyz State Commission for Drug Control <www.dca.gov.kg>.

Afghanistan are transported via Almaty, Shymkent, Georgievka and Astana.⁴⁹

Involvement of women in drug trafficking became an alarming trend since the early 2000s. Various estimates indicate that 30% of drug traffickers are women coming mainly from rural areas. Women smuggle drugs as a cover, they are not as likely as men to come under the suspicion of border guards. However, women are also the primary victims for often abusive and humiliating searches for drugs.⁵⁰ In addition, teenagers under 14 years old are widely used for collecting cannabis because law enforcement cannot institute criminal proceedings against children who are under age.⁵¹ Young adults aged 14-35 constitute the majority of drug addicts. Especially in Kazakhstan, drug addiction occurs among high-school students from middle- and high-income families. Experts on the Central Asian situation with concern for drug trafficking agree that the region, besides turning into a major transit zone for Afghan drugs, has become a major consumer.⁵²

The Afghan-Tajik Border

According to experts from the UNODC Dushanbe office, the Afghan-Tajik border is the most difficult area for drug smugglers in the Central Asian region.⁵³ Large amounts of heroin are captured on this border. Some primitive signs of organization of drug trafficking are noticeable in various parts of the Afghan-Tajik border. The level of organizational sophistication varies across the following three regions:

⁴⁹ Jacob Townsend, "The Logistics of Opiate Trafficking in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan", *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4(1), 2006.

⁵⁰ Nancy Lubin, "Who's Watching the Watchdogs?" *Journal of International Affairs*, 56 (2), 2003.

⁵¹ Observations made by Dmitry Yarov, "Okolo dvuh tysiach detei vynuzhdeny zanimat'sya trudom v stolitse Kyrgyzstana" [About Two Thousand Children Forced to Work in Kyrgyzstan's Capital], *24.kg*, 6 May 2006.

⁵² Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia*. Washington & Uppsala: Silk Road Paper, CACI & SRSP Joint Center, January 2005.

⁵³ Interview with a UNDOC's Dushanbe office representative, Dushanbe, June 2006.

The Pamir region

Small groups or individual smugglers cross the Afghan-Tajik border to hide drugs in the ground. Smugglers from Afghanistan pit drugs (*zakladki*) into ground on the Tajik territory. The drugs are further removed by associated people on the Tajik side. Such smuggling implies that a primitive, ad hoc cooperation takes place between a drug supplier in Afghanistan and a receiver in Tajikistan, with the likely involvement of a third party that serves as a coordinator across the border.

Khatlon region

There was a steady increase in drug smuggling in Khatlon region starting from 1998. Today the region is the most affected by smuggling. Therefore the border in Khatlon area is heavily militarized. Yet, smugglers from both sides of the border are able to synchronize their activities, watching when border guards are not present and throwing drugs over special protection fences.

Parkhar and Shurobat region

Drug smugglers in the Shurobat region use the most violent techniques in crossing the Afghan-Tajik border. They are also the most organized as compared to similar groups in the Pamir or Khatlon regions. Groups of smugglers usually consist of ten to a hundred people, with strictly divided functions among them. There are couriers who carry drugs, observers who watch if the area is free from borders guards, associates who are in charge of information exchange between group members, and militants who provide armed protection if necessary. In essence, smugglers are organized into armed groups with well-defined internal structures. In case of an armed confrontation with border guards, such groups can defend themselves.

Should the drugs pass to Tajikistan, it becomes much more problematic to eliminate illicit products on the territories of other states. There are two main explanations for this. First, smugglers on the Afghan-Tajik border, although organized into small trans-border groups, still have much weaker coordination than organized criminal groups in northern Tajikistan, other Central Asian states, Russia or Europe. A more complex organization of

smuggling along ethnic, regional and family ties takes place in these countries.

The second explanation is linked to the fact that because smugglers on the Afghan-Tajik border act on a more ad hoc basis, their regional counterparts use more sophisticated techniques in order to camouflage drugs. Those techniques range from packing drugs into small amounts of food products such as nuts, rice and fruits, to shipping them along with large quantities of various goods. There have been cases in which international trade companies based in Tajikistan were involved in drug trafficking. Furthermore, once drugs are trafficked across the Afghan-Tajik border, drug smugglers are likely to have some connections with local or regional law enforcement agencies or political elites.

An important aspect of the drug smuggling on the Afghan-Tajik border is that hard currency is rarely involved. The trade is based on informal agreements, deposits, and loans. If a buyer on the Tajik side fails or refuses to pay for drug products to the supplier in Afghanistan, the latter can resort to violent means of financial extortion. For instance, cases of kidnapping and stealing are common. Sometimes debts dating several years back are claimed by suppliers.⁵⁴

Drugs are used as a type of a currency by medium and large scale smugglers. Money is laundered through the exchange of legally sold products such as cars, furniture, land and real estate. After drugs are exchanged for goods, they are resold for convertible currencies. These transactions take place mostly between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. More organized entrepreneurs exchange drugs for large quantities of food or other products in the Central Asian states and Russia to import to Tajikistan. Drug money is thus laundered in Tajikistan and after that paid back to suppliers in Afghanistan.

Drugs and Corruption

Similar to other spheres of organized crime, the Central Asian states were not prepared to deal with increases in drug trafficking and drug consumption

⁵⁴ Author's interview with UNODC Tajik office representative, Dushanbe, June 2006.

problems. The difficulty in controlling drug trafficking may be explained by the existence of weak institutional features such as the internal organization and loyalties on the part of the border guards and various other law enforcement agencies to certain commanders and not agencies, and poor personnel training. A problem specific to the Tajik border guards is their lack of even basic communications equipment. Reportedly, border guards feel at a disadvantage as compared to drug smugglers who operate in small, organized groups and use a range of techniques to cross the border.⁵⁵ Simultaneously, border crossings performed by drug dealers between Afghanistan and Tajikistan involve residents of both states, and are conducted during the night time and through Panj river.

Cases of corruption are reported among law enforcement agents in each Central Asian state. Corruption occurs primarily as a result of the bribing of law enforcement officials by detained drug dealers. Seized drugs are then returned to circulation by law enforcement officials.⁵⁶ From the case of Tajikistan, it is possible to notice differences in local officials' lifestyles. While some lead modest lives, others have more extravagant lifestyles.⁵⁷ In each Central Asian state, low-ranked officials are typically the primary detainees for corruption charges. In both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, policemen and border guards are often held accountable for drug smuggling, while higher-ranked government members remain immune to legal investigation.

About 200 people are employed at the Drugs Control Agency (DCA) in Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek, Osh and Issyk-Kul. There are 400 people in Tajikistan's DCA. Since the DCA has enough information about some state officials, they are often restrained from reporting it to a broader public or starting criminal investigations. The Tajik DCA is under the informal

⁵⁵ Townsend, "The Logistics of Opiate Trafficking in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan".

⁵⁶ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*.

⁵⁷ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*; A number of Kyrgyz experts comment that the Bishkek Drugs Control Agency (DCA) is fulfilling mainly a data gathering function.

supervision of government structures. Sometimes, information publicized by the DCA is censored. In response to such criticism, representatives of the Kyrgyz and Tajik DCAs claim that corruption does not affect the work of their organization because the process of personnel recruitment is transparent.⁵⁸ Furthermore, personnel salaries are high in comparison to the local standard. In addition, Kyrgyz and Tajik DCAs also admit that little collaboration exists between their agencies, let alone with Uzbekistan. As a Kyrgyz DCA representative comments, the Bishkek office obtains information about its colleagues in Dushanbe mostly through observing the official web page of the Tajik DCA.⁵⁹

Another similarity between anti-drug initiatives and institutions in the Central Asian states is the population's low level of trust in government structures. There is little confidence evident among the public in the efficiency of the law enforcement structures' fight against drug trafficking and organized crime. Not only are law enforcement structures criticized for pervasive corruption, but they are also criticized for fueling the spread of drug trafficking and addiction in order to attain more profits from their own activities. Low salaries, poor professional training and stiff hierarchies in the security structures are the most common explanations for high-levels of corruption.

In addition to national initiatives, international investigations by UNODC and the UN Convention against Corruption are important to fight the merger of state structures with organized crime. At the same time, the international community's efforts to fight drug smuggling can be counterproductive and lead to reverse results. Nancy Lubin argues that since the agencies coping with drug trafficking are deeply corrupt, they might use foreign logistical and technological assistance to increase their own profits from controlling smuggling. For instance, in Uzbekistan, as Lubin points out, law enforcement officers plant drugs on political opponents or religious figures in order to persecute them on drug charges.⁶⁰ In other words, it

⁵⁸ Author's interview with a DCA representative, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁵⁹ Author's interview with a representative of Kyrgyz DCA, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁶⁰ Lubin, "Who's Watching the Watchdogs?".

cannot be taken for granted that after special training programs, local personnel will become more efficient and honest in coping with the drug trade. In most instances, reporting corruption in law enforcement agencies depends on the governments' initiatives to curb involvement of public officials in illegal businesses.

The immediate consequence of the Central Asian states' weakness in combating the drug economy is expressed in the fact that often only small drug couriers are captured by law enforcement agencies. These are mostly poor people whose income is entirely dependent on risky and small-scale smuggling of drugs. Once detained for drug smuggling, the transgressors are expected to pay high bribes to escape legal persecution or even violent treatment from law enforcement officials. Drug barons and mafia bosses, who mastermind the drug trade and receive the largest profit from it, rarely come onto the law enforcement's radar. The leaders of the drug trade can only be curtailed by the members of the central state government, sometimes through informal means such as direct bullying, increase in taxation, forceful capture of property, and imprisonment for corruption or criminal charges. Confrontations and violent showdowns between various organized criminal groups is another examples of when drug-barons' activity is curbed.

Besides the inability of the Central Asian states to develop, adopt and implement anti-drug programs, there is little coordination of anti-drug activities at a regional level. There are states that are interested in cooperation on anti-drug joint programs and those that remain unresponsive to the growing problem. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan have been traditionally cooperative on the issues concerning regional security, including the issue of drug trafficking. In contrast, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have adhered to unilateralist approaches in dealing with transnational organized crime and the drug economy. Uzbekistan's planting of land mines across the perimeter of state borders under dispute with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan following the mobilization of the IMU in summer 1999 was motivated by the Uzbek security interest in preventing the crossing of drug dealers and militant groups into the country. Since 1999, dozens of Tajik and Kyrgyz citizens have died and were injured from stepping on land mines, however few reports of land mines preventing the infiltration of illegal groups are

known. The governments of both states have been requesting the Uzbek side to demine the interstate border area. However, the borders remain militarized and no reports of Uzbek citizens suffering from mines are available.⁶¹ Demining borders require high financial costs and qualified mine pickers that Uzbekistan cannot afford. This is the region's most radical policy towards control of borders against drug trafficking and it undermines initiatives for regional cooperation and increases distrust among the states.

Tajikistan is the state in the Central Asian region most affected by the drug economy. Tajik state officials provoked international scandals by smuggling and trading drugs during and after the civil war. Allegations exist against various political figures for their involvement in the drug trade across the Central Asian region. However, it remains difficult to provide sufficient evidence in support of these allegations. Russia's on-going engagement in Tajikistan's domestic security issues is an important factor in the country's situation with regard to drug smuggling. A number of regional analysts have expressed concerns about Russian military involvement in drugs smuggling. Until spring 2004, the Russian forces controlled 90% of some 1,500 kilometers of the Tajik border with Afghanistan. The Russian military were suspected of smuggling drugs by aircrafts and helicopters from Afghanistan and Tajikistan to Russia; these crafts were not allowed to be checked by the Tajik side.⁶² However, the Tajik authorities were criticized by the international community and Russia for not being able to control drug trafficking, while the Russian media constructed a negative image of Tajik citizens' involvement in the drug trade.

In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, the president and parliamentarians have repeatedly claimed that there were state officials with criminal ties who seek to elevate their own political power.⁶³ In particular, political candidates from southern parts of the country were indirectly referred to as drug barons.

⁶¹ Erica Marat and Said Diloarov, "Uzbek demining pledge strives to mollify neighbors", *Eurasia Insight*, 16 July 2004.

⁶² Author's interview with Muzaffar Olimov, Director of "Sharq" research institute in Dushanbe, June 2006; Lubin, "Who's Watching the Watchdogs?"

⁶³ Arkady Gladilov, "Kurmanbek Bakiyev: Vybory budut svobodnymi" [Kurmanbek Bakiyev: Elections Will Be Free], *Kabar News Agency*, 29 April 2005.

Criminal groups from the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan are known for controlling the trade of hashish to local consumers. According to local experts' estimates, there are some 22-24 organized criminal gangs operating in Kyrgyzstan, most of them active in the northern parts of the country.⁶⁴

In Turkmenistan, the head of state is often criticized for benefiting from the poorly controlled import and trade of Afghan drugs. Since the Turkmen leader has a strong hold over all state structures and has planted military personnel throughout all public spheres, he has built a pyramid-like structure where he benefits from corruption at every level.⁶⁵ The Turkmen leader was also claimed to have ties with the Taliban regime, which could have facilitated large scale smuggling of heroin through Turkmenistan. During the Taliban era, 80 tons of drugs were reportedly smuggled annually through Turkmenistan, though little reliable data exists.⁶⁶ On several other occasions, Turkmen high officials was reported to provide support transfer and storage of large quantities of Afghan drugs.

Drugs and the Continuity of Political Regimes

Although contributing to the existence of organized crime and empowering individual actors with economic power, drug trafficking represents an indirect, yet persistent threat to the continuity of a political regime. Corruption in law enforcement structures and increased involvement of the population in drug trafficking undermines the governability of the state. However, it does not immediately reduce the power of the political regime. The financial support provided by Bayaman Erkinbayev, a slain Kyrgyz parliament member, who had a reputation as a drug baron, to the mobilization of demonstrations against Akayev's regime in February-March 2005 is one of the few examples of drug money being involved in political opposition against the state. In addition, many times, political actors engaged

⁶⁴ Olga Bezborodova, "I v Bezumii Buvaet Sistema" [And in a Chaos there Can Be a System], *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 9 February 2006.

⁶⁵ *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy*. Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004.

⁶⁶ Rustem Safronov, "Turkmenistan's Niyazov Implicated in Drug Smuggling".

in drug dealership are interested in some continuity and stability of the state because it ensures a certain hierarchy in informal relations among state structures and political figures. In particular, the ability to have a legitimate status of a border guard or custom chief can be granted only by the state. The opportunity to attain a job in law enforcement agencies through bribery can only be guaranteed if there is a stable institutional framework for government positions.

If the state leadership does not take action against drug trafficking, it risks being impacted by drug money involved in the promotion of favorable parliamentary candidates or in the corruption of law enforcement agencies. The situation in the Central Asian states can potentially be compared with some Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Colombia, where elements of the government and opposition are complicit in the existence of the drug economy. The reach of various political forces and government institutions in these states are dependent on the support of drug traders and therefore are susceptible to pressure from organized crime.⁶⁷ The experiences of both states illustrate how drug money can be a factor in the strengthening of some political factions and, at the same time, undermine the cohesiveness of public officials with the state. Accusations of involvement in the drug economy can become a tool for the removal of political opponents in a setting where every party might have links to the shadow economy.

Corruption in the state complicates economic initiatives on the part of the grassroots population. Ordinary citizens are not protected by the state in their economic activities, they are subject to abuse and evasion on the part of public authorities.⁶⁸ Additional artificial barriers are intentionally created in the state bureaucracy in order to receive payments from private actors, be they legal or criminal.⁶⁹ In such unpredictable environments, long-term economic planning entails high risks as compared to short-term planning. Throughout various economic fields, entrepreneurial activities lack long-

⁶⁷ David C. Jordan, *Drug Politics: Dirty Money and Democracies*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

⁶⁸ Feige, "Underground Activity and Institutional Change".

⁶⁹ Feige, "Underground Activity and Institutional Change".

term investments, but are oriented at quick benefits. At a national scale, such logic affects financial inflows into education, reconstruction, and development. At a micro level, short-term planning leads to the exhaustion of natural resources and to the deterioration of social stability.

In addition to undermining state structures, the underground economy damages the social fabric by promoting banditry and encouraging civil disobedience and drug use. A society dominated by criminal authorities becomes increasingly lawless, as the black market becomes dominant over the legal economy. Illegal actions and corruption are accepted by the society. The image and prestige of law enforcement agencies declines. Furthermore, clientelism and tribalism are not condemned and are justified as norms necessary for successful political functioning. As in other types of illicit businesses, the involvement of drug traders in parliamentary or government structures secures the continuity of the shadow economy. Positions in the state structures grant impunity and personal security to the political figures involved in the drug trade.

Drugs and Street Crime

A situation where state and societal actors cooperate, compete, and use violence on the basis of drug economy incentives has been labeled “colombianization” in the literature on drug economies.⁷⁰ According to David Jordan, colombianization specifically refers to disintegration of social fabric because violence caused by the drug trade and use becomes a permanent state of society’s functioning. Violence is no longer exercised by organized criminal groups, but can affect any member of the society. Widespread violence, in turn, decreases trust in the society and between the society and the state. There are obvious signs of colombianization noticeable in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; and more latent processes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

⁷⁰ Jordan, *Drug Politics*.

An interesting point mentioned by Aleksander Zelichenko is the presence of a “micro-criminal subculture” in Kyrgyzstan.⁷¹ Hazing, violence and a strong hierarchy differentiating between weaker and younger members on one end, and strong and older members on the other, are the main symptoms of this subculture. The hierarchy is reinforced by violence and humiliation. This subculture is noticeable across various public institutions which, in turn, evidence a general idea of a hierarchy of a broader functioning of the state. High schools, where older students extort younger ones is one such example. Because the phenomenon of student racketeering is widespread, the local police no longer pays attention to smaller cases of violence, but prefers to deal with informal leaders who can guarantee that criminal actions do not pass beyond the limits of that school or district. A similar logic is found in armies, where hazing among soldiers allows army commanders to deal only with the army’s higher personnel and not consider interests of the entire institution. Likewise, the community of sportsmen functions along an informal hierarchy.

This subculture of structured violence is a legacy of the Soviet period. It became a mass phenomenon in the 1970s throughout the Soviet schools, armies, prisons and sports clubs. However, its re-emergence during the post-independence period has been dynamic – ranging from becoming more intense to declining in 1991-2006. The subculture was reinforced in Kyrgyzstan after the March 24 events amid general chaos in political structures. Rysbek Akmatbayev’s frequent appearances in mass media outlets and public places increased the popularity of criminal actions among younger people.

The spontaneous organization of drug traffickers and addicts is seen at the street level throughout the Central Asian region. In villages and in cities mostly young people organize in groups for obtaining, retailing or consuming hemp or heroin. The places, also known as “holes” (*dyra*), where drug

⁷¹ Author’s interview with Aleksander Zelichenko, Kyrgyz specialist on illicit drug trade, Bishkek, June 2006.

retailers and addicts gather, can be located in central parts of cities.⁷² Although local police are often aware of these “holes”, they do not address their existences due to on-going extortion of these individuals. Usually young people with low income frequent these places. Wealthier youth consume drugs at places inaccessible to law enforcement. While hemp is considered to be a light drug consumed or tried by many young people, only the wealthiest drug addicts can afford cocaine.⁷³ Heroin falls between these two margins and is consumed by people with various economic backgrounds. It is possible to buy cannabis products outside ‘holes’: in schools, universities, or markets. According to various case studies of small gangs organized around the drug consumption, members of those groups come from similar social backgrounds. They also constitute a closed network of peer relations.⁷⁴

Interestingly, as one Tajik expert believes, religious sentiments serve as a strong preventive factor against drug consumption and trafficking in Tajik society. Religious feelings and knowledge also prevent people from joining Islamic groups that propagate fundamentalist views. Strong social networks based on family or the fear of family retaliations or friendship prevent the rise of violence in the society. One Tajik sociologist notes: “Everybody in Tajikistan has some support system among relatives or friends that protects them from being harassed on the street.” That is, the subculture of violence present in Kyrgyzstan is not as noticeable in Tajik society. The rates of street crime are lower than in Kyrgyzstan. Tajik prisons also differ in terms of informal hierarchies among inmates. The administration in punitive institutions usually holds the highest authority over inmates. Therefore, imprisoned criminals have limited power not only inside prisons, but also outside of them. Some parallels are noticeable across other institutions. For instance, unlike in Kyrgyzstan, street showdowns between school students are punished by the police.

⁷² Botagoz Kassymbekova, "Kyrgyzstan: Fire in the 'Holes'", *Transitions Online*, 9 December 2004.

⁷³ According to various reports, every fourth young person has tried marihuana at least once.

⁷⁴ Kassymbekova, “Kyrgyzstan: Fire in the ‘Holes’”.

From a micro analysis of street gangs it is possible to conclude that networks in the drug economy are comprised of people linked by some common social and cultural identity: be that the same university, age group, income, ethnic background, family ties or place of birth. In other types of illegal activities, such as racketeering, gambling and money laundering, members of criminal groups also come from similar social and economic backgrounds. Likewise, as addressed later in the study, religiously oriented groups like the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir are known to align people with similar ethnicity, social background and place of birth.

Unlike licit businesses that function according to legal regulations by paying a labor force, illicit businesses always require a certain level of trust between owners, dealers, and retailers. Such informal relations are easier to establish between members of one kinship-based group. Underground economic activity requires the formation of informal relationships between varieties of actors, from political figures to border guards, to labor migrants. Solidarity is sought between the most trusted actors, who value blood ties over enrichment interests. Organized crime also arises along the lines of ethnic identity at the transnational level. Trafficking in narcotics, humans, and arms is an example where criminal groups cooperate on the grounds of ethnicity.

The strength of local organized criminal groups that is derived from international links is less studied. In particular, ethnic connections of organized criminal networks engaged in the drug trade are not paid sufficient attention. For instance, the relationship of local criminal actors active on the political scene in the Central Asian states and the support provided by similar actors in Russian and European states are usually mentioned only marginally. But, similarly to other illegal businesses in the region, the drug economy functions with a strong reliance upon informal connections, such as family ties and ethnic identities. There are, reportedly, identifiable Russian, Afghan, Azeri, Tajik, Chechen and Kyrgyz drug mafias.⁷⁵ There is some coordination between these groups, but each is more active on the territory of

⁷⁵ Tamara Makarenko, "Kyrgyzstan and the Global Narcotics Trade", *Eurasia Insight*, 8 December 1999.

its own state. Organized groups dealing involved in with drug smuggling form themselves along ethnic lines at a transnational level. As reported by the Kazakh Committee for National Security, Kazakhstani citizens of Tajik decent comprise the majority of organized groups involved in the drug trade.⁷⁶

Drugs and Radical Movements

There is an almost universal consensus in the literature on post-Cold War security that while ideological movements considerably deteriorated with the collapse of the Soviet regime because of decreased financing from communist governments, terrorist organizations, driven by mainly financial interests, gained an unprecedented capacity. Drug money was one of the main sources for the rise of insurgent and extremist groups in the Central Asian region. Because of the change of the sources of financing and the guiding motives that shifted from state-encouraged ideological mobilization to private interest-driven non-state groups, the nature of post-Cold War conflicts transformed as well.⁷⁷ In other words, the economy of non-state militant groups is maintained through the looting of resources and illegal businesses, rather than through help from state structures. Their continuity is thus contingent on state weakness, rather than on state strength.

There are indeed causal links between the drug economy and the armed mobilization of non-state actors that challenge state forces by instigating armed clashes and terrorist attacks against security forces or state structures in Central Asia. That said, do terrorist organizations in Central Asia arise as a result of the shadow economy and weak institutions or does the drug economy prosper due to mobilization of non-state actors? What are the common features of the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992-1997, the IMU attacks in Batken in summers 1999-2000, suicide bombings in Uzbekistan in spring

⁷⁶ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*.

⁷⁷ Cornell and Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade"; Monika Heupel, *Friedenskonsolidierung im Zeitalter der "neuen Kriege". Der Wandel der Gewaltökonomien als Herausforderung [Peace consolidation in times of new wars. The change of force economies as a challenge]*. Reihe: Forschung Politik, 2005.

2005, and the one-day outbreak of violence on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border on May 12, 2006?

The functioning of radical religious groups has long been associated with the illegal economy, and especially with drug trafficking. The IMU armed attack of the Kyrgyz border guards on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in summer 1999 was interpreted by a number of Central Asian experts as an attempt to divert attention from drug trafficking routes by instigating a conflict.⁷⁸ Similarly, the drug economy was on the rise during the civil war in Tajikistan. The crime-terror nexus has also been gaining capacity in the South Caucasus before the September 11 attacks.⁷⁹

The drug trade is closely connected with trafficking in arms. According to Zarylbek Rysaliyev, deputy chief of the Kyrgyz General Board of Criminal Investigations (GBCI), all organized criminal groups operating in the Ferghana Valley are involved in drug trafficking and, as a consequence, are able to obtain various types of armaments.⁸⁰ This includes Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which was labeled as a more peaceful organization, but has been maintaining its activities thanks to funding from drug trafficking.⁸¹ Religious values are important in the movement's recruitment process. However, its leaders maneuver between religion and illegal business in order to secure continuity of the movements' existence. Even groups operating in northern Kyrgyzstan and controlling the trade of cannabis products are able to exchange drugs for arms in Kazakhstan. Amid instability following the March 24 events, more people in Kyrgyzstan began to buy arms from illegal sources. In essence, Kyrgyz law enforcement officials agree that most groups that are armed and

⁷⁸ Mikhail Gerasimov, "Religioznyi narkotrafik" [Religious Narcotrafik], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 3 November 1999; Mekhman Gafarly, "Narkobiznes i islamskii ekstremizm" [Narco-business and Islamic Extremism], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 October 1999; Svante Cornell, "Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17(4), 2005.

⁷⁹ Svante Cornell, "The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration", *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 4 (1), 2006.

⁸⁰ Author's interview with Zarylbek Rysaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁸¹ Author's interview with Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006.

promote radical ideas of changing political systems in the Central Asian states are involved in the drug economy.

The economy of arms and drugs has merged into one market, comments Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of GBCI.⁸² There are numerous combinations in which drugs and arms are exchanged between religious militant groups with their counterparts in the Central Asian region and Afghanistan. It is difficult for the Kyrgyz or Tajik law enforcement and security structures to trace these processes of arms and drugs inflows because there is a lack of capacity to control national borders, even in the most strategic parts of the Ferghana valley.

Starting from 2004, the Kyrgyz special forces have been discovering large stocks of armaments and explosives in the southern parts of the country. Islamic radical militants engaged in assaults against state troops in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2004. As a representative of the Kyrgyz GBCI concludes, these groups are preparing to set off more offensive activities against government troops.⁸³ An alarming trend among religious groups is that Kyrgyz security forces have been discovering more and more armaments after detaining Hizb-ut-Tahrir's members. In the 2000s, religious groups such as IMU, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Akromiya, according to Kyrgyz law enforcement officials, obtained arms in large quantities.⁸⁴

All religious radical groups mobilized around ideology, however, towards the late 1990s, became increasingly involved in drug trafficking. The IMU, formed by two young Uzbeks, Tohir Yuldashev and Jumaboi Khojaev (who later adopted the alias Juma Namangani) and uniting a number of small Islamic organizations active in eastern Uzbekistan, began its activities in the Uzbek city of Namangan in December 1991, at the point when the formal

⁸² Author's interview with Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁸³ Author's interview with Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁸⁴ Author's interview with Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006; Zeyno S. Baran, Frederick Starr and Svante Cornell, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, Washington & Uppsala: Silk Road Paper, CACI & SRSP Joint Center, July 2006.

power of the Soviet Union had nearly dissolved. A group of young men demanded land to build a mosque, but were refused by the Communist Party. After clashing with government forces, Yuldashev and Namangani moved to Tajikistan and then to Afghanistan. They were able to build contacts with Islamic non-state and state organizations in Pakistan, Chechnya, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, etc. Yuldashev and Namangani moved across state borders, recruiting members on the basis of ideological issues and finding financial support from a variety of sources. Some representatives from the Kyrgyz ministry of interior believe that Namangani is still alive and that he is acting in cooperation with Al Qaeda.⁸⁵

The IMU's development as a political movement is illustrative of how collapsed Soviet ideology was quickly replaced by radical religious non-state actors. In the IMU's case, religious sentiments served as the driving force to form a structure parallel to the state regulations. The IMU reportedly continued to expand throughout the 1990s with the support of Al Qaeda. But the movement perpetuated its existence not only based on a political and religious agenda, but also thanks to funding from drug trafficking. To date, according to the Kyrgyz ministry of the interior, membership in the IMU and other radical groups reaches roughly 10,000 in the Ferghana Valley.⁸⁶ Most of the IMU members come from Uzbekistan's eastern cities, such as Andijan and Namangan.

A one-day violent clash at the Tajik-Kyrgyz border on May 12, 2006 showed that it is no longer possible to clearly identify the goals of criminal groups or their membership in a specific criminal organization. Although the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments officially declared that the intruders were IMU members, many local experts claimed that it was an outbreak of violence caused by a criminal grouping involved in drug trafficking.⁸⁷ As a result, there was no consensus about who instigated the armed clash with Tajik and

⁸⁵ Author's interview with Omurbek Suvanaliyev, Kyrgyz deputy minister of interior, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁸⁶ Author's interview Azamat Kutmanaliyev, representative of Kyrgyz GBCI, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁸⁷ Bakhtiyor Valiev and Cholpon Orozobekova, "Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Raid Stokes Fears", *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, 19 May 2006.

Kyrgyz border troops and why they did so. Similar to the IMU's terrorist acts in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it has become difficult to separate militant Islam from drug dealers.

Any terrorist outbreak undoubtedly generates some government response at the national and regional levels. The two main regional organizations – the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization – built their rationale for joint military activities based on the experience of violent clashes between government troops and non-state actors. A potential expansion of the IMU has justified both organizations' rhetoric for actions. At the national level, all Central Asian governments, with the exception of Turkmenistan, announced fundamental reforms in the military and security sectors. Every state revisited its military doctrine or security concepts after the late 1990s. Kazakhstan, for instance, began to focus more on problems of regional importance, rather than aspects of global nuclear security. Kyrgyzstan has been perhaps the most active in reshaping its military structures. After the Batken events, president Akayev launched a revision of the Soviet-type national army that was labor-based, to make it a more decentralized structure. The reform announced by Bakiyev in May 2006 sought to convert the army into a small and mobile structure. Following the May 2006 one-day war, president Bakiyev continued the process of decentralization and separated the National Border Guard into a structure independent from the defense ministry. In Tajikistan, attempts to restructure the military into a more mobile and rapid-reaction force is undermined by the state's weak financial basis for improvement. Dispersed loyalties among military personnel toward various officials in the government are another obstacle to the sector's reform.

However, the Islamic threat and the issue of drug trafficking also allowed the Central Asian regimes' incumbents to pursue their personal interests of preserving and strengthening their own political power. Government repression of unwanted political figures follows every terrorist outbreak in Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the Batken armed conflict in 2000 allowed Akayev to score high support at presidential elections. Bakiyev, on the other hand, organized a military parade on the day when the political opposition declared its plan to stage a peace demonstration in Bishkek. In this way,

Bakiyev diverted public attention away from the opposition's criticisms of the government's corruption and alleged links to organized crime.

Supply vs. Demand

The amount of Afghan heroin smuggled via the Central Asian region has varied over time depending on the political situation in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In general terms, however, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the drug economy has been on the rise in Central Asia. In addition, the Central Asian local population and weak governments were the first to be blamed for increased rates in drug trafficking, while external factors were granted less importance. An increased demand in Russia and Eastern Europe is usually not considered as a significant impetus for the local cultivation and retail of drugs. Scholars and policy makers tend to ignore the implications of the international setting in domestic developments. The demand for larger drug inflows in western countries has negative repercussions for the developing countries.

Unlike the existing studies of the drug-governance nexus in the Central Asian states, the analysis of the impact of the drug economy on state functioning in Mexico incorporates the importance of the U.S.-Mexican border in fostering the domestic production of drugs in Central America.⁸⁸ It is shown that ample demand for drugs in the U.S. market profits local traffickers in Central America. The U.S. market represents fertile soil for expansion of the drug economy in Central America that in turn connects local criminals and officials in both countries. Individuals enmeshed in the drug economy increasingly penetrate state structures at the local and state levels in the Central American states.

Such treatment of the problem of the drug trafficking issue is hardly noticeable with regard to the Central Asian states, as Europe fails to take responsibility for the demand-driven nature of the Eurasian drug trade. The Tajik government is blamed for an ineffective battle fought against Afghan drugs, while Tajik labor migrants encounter vile attitudes from Russian and

⁸⁸ Bailey and Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability*.

Kazakh law enforcement agencies. The Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Turkmen border guards are berated for corruption and joint activity with drug traders. The perception that the international market is a major factor in the Central Asian states' underdevelopment and susceptibility to organized crime is almost nonexistent.

A perspective that emphasizes the necessity of reducing demand for drugs in order to curtail the supply in impoverished Central Asian states is presented by Lubin.⁸⁹ She argues that international organizations should focus as much on decreasing the demand as on counter-narcotics programs in the Central Asian states. The manifold increase in price of opium and heroin exported from Central Asia to Russia and Europe primarily enriches the drug dealers in Russia and European countries, as opposed to the Central Asian population that is involved in smuggling and the Afghan population in harvesting the drugs. Western and Eastern Europe are still the major world markets for drug consumption. The number of heroin users in European countries is estimated at 1.5 million (0.5% of the total population).⁹⁰ Russia leads the European toll in drug abuse, with more than 1% of the population aged 15-64 as heroin users; the rates are also on the rise in the UK and in parts of Central Europe.

The drug trafficking issue is important for the Central Asian region because of its geopolitical location: while sharing a border with the world's major drug producer – Afghanistan, its northern frontiers are next to large drug consumers – Russia and Europe. Due to such an unfortunate geopolitical situation, the drug economy inevitably becomes the key factor in the mobilization of non-state actors. Therefore, regional solutions for the drug problem and, as such, the elimination of one of the most pressing factors to the Central Asian states' functioning, should be viewed within the broader scope of tackling the supply and demand variables.

The successful fight against the drug economy is similar to the fight against terrorist groups such as the IMU. Once the extremist militant group was

⁸⁹ Lubin, "Who's Watching the Watchdogs?"

⁹⁰ UNODC, 2005 *World Drug Report*.

weakened in the U.S.-led Afghan war after 2001, the Central Asian governments also felt relief over their security concerns. However, since the drug trafficking issue is commonly regarded as contingent only to domestic settings, broader geopolitical approaches are not undertaken. Hence, the international community has been continuously addressing this issue from the national and regional perspectives.⁹¹ Indeed, along with considering local traits of the spread of organized criminal groups, strategies to combat the drug economy must have a systemic international approach.

A number Kyrgyz and Tajik members of parliament claim that although there are U.S.-supported Drug Control Agencies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for several years, the fight against drug trafficking can hardly be called satisfactory.⁹² The scheme of drug dealership is well established. It is divided according to territories and functions across the Central Asian region. The local DCAs have limited ability to efficiently coordinate the law enforcement and security structures at the regional level. Kyrgyz MP and member of the parliamentary committee against organized crime Tagayev criticized the U.S. actions in Afghanistan, recalling that no heroin-producing laboratories were destroyed in the course of anti-terrorist operations.⁹³

Other Sectors of the Shadow Economy

Besides the drug economy, trafficking in human beings is one of the most pressing problems among organized criminal activities in Central Asia. Women, children and labor migrants are common victims of trafficking. Indeed, trafficking in human beings is closely connected with trafficking in drugs.⁹⁴ The direction of human trafficking and human smuggling leads to Middle Eastern countries, Europe and to Russia. Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh is one of the major transit points for trafficking in human beings to those countries.

⁹¹ UNDP, "Central Asia: Human Development Report", 2005.

⁹² Author's interview with Kyrgyz and Tajik MPs, Bishkek and Dushanbe, June 2006.

⁹³ Author's interview with Rashid Tagayev, Kyrgyz MP, Bishkek, June 2006.

⁹⁴ Author's interviews with representatives of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Dushanbe office, Dushanbe, June 2006.

In Tajikistan, the country most affected by human trafficking, criminal groups that “export” human beings operate on ad hoc basis. Groups that have a more systematic organization operate mostly in Russia. The rates of trafficking in human beings were considerably higher during the years of civil war. Besides being only an “export” drug country, Tajikistan has also become a transit country for trafficking and smuggling in humans from Afghanistan. Most traffickers in humans use Kyrgyz passports.⁹⁵ This indicates that criminals had to establish contacts with public structures in Kyrgyzstan in order to attain blank passports. Although, reportedly, the Tajik office of the International Organization of Migration has been successful in preventing trafficking of human beings since its establishment in 1999, the problem has worsened because of a poor law enforcement system countering trafficking in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.⁹⁶

Proving criminal acts related to transnational trafficking is another difficulty for both the Tajik and other regional law enforcement agencies. It is often difficult to collect evidence in order to list charges against criminals. Since the export of human beings and drugs involve criminal actors from two or more countries, such illegal activities must be investigated at the transnational level. Coordination of the Tajik law enforcement agencies with similar structures in the Central Asian region is complicated due to inefficient bureaucracy. Personal relations between law enforcement officials play an important role in transnational communications. Often, law enforcement agencies are bound to solve transnational crimes based only on locally accessible evidence.

⁹⁵ Mass falsifications of Kyrgyz passports impelled the Kyrgyz government to increase passport protection standards. Author’s interview with a Kyrgyz representative of the Interior Ministry’s local office in Bishkek, June 2006.

⁹⁶ According to the IOM staff, the organization has been able to shut down exportation of women from Tajik airports.

Organized Crime Within the State

The Genesis of State-Crime Relations

The previous chapter showed how the weakness of the Central Asian states created a permissible environment for the formation of organized criminal groups in the 1990s. Chaotic privatization and the government's poor access to rural areas created a domain for the emergence of a wealthier class of entrepreneurs that acted as middlemen between an impoverished population and the state. However, such groups were not able to function without the state. They could not act in total anarchy or in a legal vacuum. Non-state actors required the functioning of the centralized state that would reinforce some societal integrity, redistribute lands and business enterprises, and provide minimal cohesion within the national territory. Even the government's demarcation of the national territory into administrative units, its organization of local and parliamentary elections, and its provision of welfare to some parts of the country facilitated the functioning of organized crime. Put differently, organized criminal groups emerged in the locations delineated and reinforced, but not fully controlled by the state, where some economic activity was possible.

As noted by Catanzaro through an examination of the case of one of the strongest and long-lived European mafia groups in Sicily, the mafia rises as a response to deprivation of the periphery's links with the center, but the mafia expands with the center's support.⁹⁷ Both sides seek their own interests in forming alliances. While the politically charged local criminal elements are keen to elevate their own status at the national level by winning parliamentary status or being recruited into the government and ministries, the central state enters into alliances in order to gain the ability to exercise

⁹⁷ Catanzaro, "Enforcers, Entrepreneurs, and Survivors".

control in the peripheries. In post-civil war Tajikistan, former field commanders were engaged to work in ministries. The Tajik government had to accommodate all major actors of the civil war in order to maintain peace in all parts of the country. Political actors supported by various military squads with local authority in peripheral regions caused the swell of state institutions. New positions had to be created within ministries to accommodate members of the Tajik opposition and of the government troops. During the first years after reaching a peace agreement, all “power” ministries included representatives of both the religious opposition and the government.

In Kyrgyzstan, neither Akayev’s, nor Bakiyev’s government could resist the fusion of mafia and state interests. From the example of both the Kyrgyz and Tajik cases, it is possible to point out precisely which state institutions are susceptible to patronage relations and infiltration by criminal actors. The manipulation of the taxation system is an example of both parliamentary and government maneuverings to meet the interests of a limited group of businessmen instead of attempting to inspire the growth of small and medium-size businesses. Large businesses owned by the political elites continue to grow, but initiatives from the grassroots level are either not supported or being suppressed. Border regulations, the development of rural sectors of the economy, the alleviation of poverty and the enhancement of the welfare system remain underdeveloped at the micro level as a result of the states’ detachment from society.

Political figures were interested in having ties with criminal leaders to use them against their own political or business competitors. Criminals and mafia bosses are used for the intimidation of unwanted figures in the government or parliament. Often the help of criminals is needed during pre-election periods, when competing candidates are threatened with assassination if they refuse to give up a parliamentary race. In fact, the more a political figure feels challenged by his competitors, the more likely he is to resort to the assistance of criminal forces. In this manner, the criminalization of the state takes place at the initiative of state officials and not the non-state criminal figures. A win-win situation evolves between both parties. Political officials may gain from threatening their rivals, while criminal figures

receive support from the state. As a result of cooperation between politicians and criminals more crimes are carried out, criminal leaders feel more free to appear publicly, and competition increases between various criminal groups.

The Kyrgyz example of the post-March 24 criminalization of the state has been a showcase of these trends. Competition over geographical borders of economic activity was one of the reasons for an increase in showdowns between criminal elements and political figures in post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan. An aggressive competition unraveled not so much between southern and northern political figures, as between north-north or south-south groups. In the southern city of Osh, the hotel owned by Bayaman Erkinbayev was seized by aggressive crowds; in Naryn oblasts' Ak-Ulak city, Nurlan Motuyev violently claimed ownership rights over a coal mine. The ownership of numerous small businesses was also disputed in northern Kyrgyzstan. Clashes occurred over the control of bazaars, gas stations, and supermarkets. The cleavage between northern and southern Kyrgyzstan was rather more evident among top political elites in the government structures than among local businessmen or local candidates. Similar tendencies were present in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution in December 2004. Businessmen and political figures allied with Vladimir Yushchenko tried to cross geographical boundaries and take control over economic areas in which they were previously inactive.

Criminal elements that fusion with the state are uninterested in economic growth at the national level. As mentioned earlier, an impoverished population is the core of their electorate. Representing an autonomous subgroup within the state and society, organized criminal groups are able to maintain economic activity outside of state limitations. By winning positions in the local governments or the parliament, the candidates gain indirect authority over local tax agencies and security structures.

Informal instrumental relations between local authorities and the state create the possibility of reciprocal resource and service exchange.⁹⁸ Informal bonds grow to the extent that they exist parallel to state institutions, sometimes

⁹⁸ Catanzaro, "Enforcers, Entrepreneurs, and Survivors".

making it impossible for state structures to interact through formal and legal means. As a result of rampant corruption in the late 1990s in almost all Central Asian and South Caucasian states, the importance of “names” overreached the significance of law enforcement institutions and procedures. In other words, interpersonal relationships and solidarity between state and non-state actors substituted for social and economic coherence, thus marginalizing the role of the state.

In states where the government merges with criminal groups, individuals’ names often gain more influence than do state institutions as the public trust in such institutions deteriorates. This trend is also a primary sign of a state’s diminishing legitimacy. Once Akayev’s corruption scale became clearer in the later 1990s, his public support had significantly eroded. In Kazakhstan, there are several sources of large-scale corruption, within the government as well as among business organizations. Therefore, the Kazakh government is not the only institution accused of corruption.

However, economic impunity and greater legitimacy are not the only leading reasons for criminal elements to enter politics. The intentions might arise from personal views towards concrete policies or people might propel businessmen with corrupt or clean businesses to attain some political authority by seeking a parliamentary seat or a position in the government. Economic capital, in these cases, serves as backing for political ambitions. The case of reputed Kyrgyz mafia chief Rysbek Akmatbayev, to be discussed later, was a primary example of an individual using his economic and criminal influence in order to enter the political arena on the basis of his deeply held personal agenda. Rysbek Akmatbayev sought revenge against prime minister Felix Kulov, whom he accused of complicity in the murder of his younger brother, Tynychbek Akmatbayev.⁹⁹

By winning a parliamentary seat, Rysbek Akmatbayev was able to attain greater leverage over the president and the parliament by mobilizing his authority in the political and criminal worlds. Also, there are instances in each Central Asian state when an individual or a group of businessmen show

⁹⁹ Leila Saralaeva, "Tense Stand-off Ends Peacefully in Kyrgyz Capital", *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, 1 April 2006.

support or disagreement with the ruling regime, although not searching for political impunity or legitimacy. Indeed, elections are the most common occasions for the increase in interests from business circles toward political life. Various political parties are directly or indirectly supported financially by businessmen. In Kyrgyzstan, reportedly, the March 24 Tulip Revolution and most other mass demonstrations were financed by businessmen, who also had criminal connections.

Party Politics

Post-Soviet political openness in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan gave rise to a plethora of political parties. However, those political formations developed in dissimilar conditions, with different speeds, and pursued various political agendas. In Kyrgyzstan, there was a weak social base for any political party and they clustered around charismatic individuals; in the early 1990s, in Tajikistan, in contrast, a large percentage of the population was involved either in the government communist party or in religious opposition formations. In both cases, the party leaders needed financial resources to acquire, maintain or increase their party memberships. This could be achieved not only by proclaiming certain political or religious slogans, but also through the financing of local precincts in order to promote political candidates. In fact, the functioning of political parties amid some political pluralism among elites, but low participation among the population, created competitiveness that could be won mainly through material base. By the late 1990s, there were more than 30 parties formed around various state officials and lawmakers in Kyrgyzstan. Strong PR was the major source of political parties' popularity. During election periods, political parties resorted to business elites for financial support.

As argued in this paper, the accumulation of private capital in the post-Soviet independence era was possible through fiscal manipulations and the privatization of industrial sites, through massive smuggling of goods, or through trafficking in drugs, humans, and arms. Therefore, it would be right to assume that underground economic activity made it possible for some political parties to generate membership or promote certain political leaders. This is particularly evident due to the fact that the necessary party building

experience in the pre-Soviet or Soviet periods was lacking. The communist party in Kyrgyzstan and other post-Soviet states that traditionally enjoyed some support among the older generation is the only exception. On the other hand, parties based on religious doctrines could find support from their compatriots in Islamic states. However, secular movements encountered more challenges in development. It proved to be difficult to mobilize impoverished rural population around class identities or certain political views. Since there was limited understanding of the market economy and of the democratic state, these values could not serve as guiding principles for political party formation.

Election Campaigns

Most of the political analysis of the Central Asian states is conducted during election periods. The number of publications, assessment reports, and policy analyses swiftly rises at times of parliamentary and presidential voting. Often these reflections are pessimistic, with many features of undemocratic behavior by the candidates reported. Despite the negative reporting, events that lead to fraudulent elections and frictions between governments and opposition parties are largely left out of the examination. As a result of such a superficial understanding of the local political dynamics, accounts on the amount of observers sent to the voting precincts or the OSCE's analysis of the use of the mass media outlets during the elections periods may be misleading about more general trends. For example, a political candidate may win an absolute majority at a local precinct by meeting all standards of the pre-election campaign, but retain extremely low popularity at the national level. Wealthy candidates with illegal businesses or local trade monopolists are usually universally supported at their electoral precincts but on a country-wide scale are known as criminal authorities. In Kyrgyzstan, Bayaman Erkinbayev and Rysbek Akmatbayev are the foremost examples of this situation.

As regards top government officials, unbalanced attention from the international community allows them to adapt their behavior accordingly. Local political actors act differently in pre- and post-election periods. During the election periods, candidates work towards attaining local support by

staging a variety of the necessary elements of an open political campaign. Sometimes their campaigns are accompanied with the traditional organization of community-wide dinners and support for various social groups. While such behavior generally falls within what is defined as an open and fair political campaign, it is often financed by illicit businesses owned either by the political candidates themselves, or their supporters. International observers' scrutiny of the behavior of political candidates decreases after elections. This means that political candidates may no longer continue to adhere to the standards of democratic behavior.

Sluggish democratization and economic development are accompanied not only by a slow shift in value systems, but also by stronger traditionalism and religiosity within the rural population. In this regard, the government merger with criminal actors is both the result of and the reason for slow social change. As shown in this section, political candidates with connections in the criminal world are able to win parliamentary seats and attain government positions thanks to traditional values perpetuated in the rural society. After being elected, however, these candidates are not interested in the liberalization of values and economic development of their electorates.¹⁰⁰ Thus, wealthy candidates often instrumentalize cultural values as opposed to political ones with regard to their interactions with the rural population in their own political campaigns.

Candidates' material capabilities and patronage relations represent the core elements of electoral campaigns in rural areas throughout the Central Asian region. In the Kyrgyz 2005 parliamentary elections, candidates competed based on the numbers and scope of charity actions, mass celebrations and prayers in the pre-election period. Some former parliamentary candidates estimate that each pre-election campaign costs about \$150,000. The money is spent mainly on bribing voters. Each voter received about 500-1,000 soms

¹⁰⁰ Again, this argumentation follows the logic of Catanzaro's (1985) explanation of the Sicilian mafia's evolution in the eighteenth century. Caranzaro compares how economic deprivation and traditional social values allowed the Sicilian mafia to rise and perpetuate over decades.

(\$10-\$20) from candidates. Depending on the voting district, pre-election expenditures might rise up to \$750,000.

Charitable contributions and celebrations allow the candidates to distribute food and money to the poor that are otherwise scarce. The range of charity events usually includes financing religious activities, supporting local schools, elderly people and orphanages or other institutions that carry positive social significance. Intentionally or not, the targets for candidates' support are chosen according to the values perpetuated in the Kyrgyz and Tajik villages, such as religious feelings, respect for the elderly, sympathy for orphans, aspiration for elementary education, etc. In particular, religious affinities are addressed through the following activities: candidates sponsor trips to Mecca, build mosques, organize community-wide meals during Ramadan, and provide support to the local Islamic clergy and schools. Such initiatives contribute to the strengthening of social capital and the social fabric of village communities. However, these activities also lead to a pattern by which the wealthier is the candidate and the more extensive are his or her patronage networks, the greater are the chances to win parliamentary representation or attain governmental position. A strong economic basis and patronage relations also assure the stability of one's position in the parliament and government. Such reinforcement of the political activity of wealthy actors with criminal backgrounds continues to further detach society from the state.

The role of the elders' court is a vivid example of traditional values used instrumentally in political campaigns.¹⁰¹ Support for elder men¹⁰² within a village community has a significant weight on the electorate's choices throughout the Central Asian states. The state's reinforcement of cultural hierarchies is especially strong in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government's encouragement of stratification of the society along the lines of traditional community structures – makhalla – reinforces a conservative value system

¹⁰¹ Talaipek Koichumanov, Joomart Otorbayev and S. Frederick Starr, *Kyrgyzstan: The Path Forward*, Washington & Uppsala: Silk Road Paper, CACI & SRSP Joint Center, November 2005.

¹⁰² "Aksakal" (Kyrgyz) or "oqsokol" (Uzbek), meaning "white beard" referring to elder men.

within the population. Although leaders of makhalla are elected, most of the times they have to be represented by elderly males. Women and younger members of makhallas are thus discriminated against despite professional backgrounds which may qualify them for leadership roles. Makhalla leaders also act as mediators for the distribution of state subsidized resources. This creates a dependency on the part of other members of makhalla on their elder representatives. The state is in the position of controlling communities thanks to the traditionalist nature of makhallas.¹⁰³ The concept of makhallas is the Uzbek government's combination of the Soviet tools of centralized control over resource allocation and the promotion of Uzbek nationalism.

By encouraging traditional social ties as the basis for the development of civil society, the state brokers the creation of vertical relations within the population. Both the elders' court and makhalla undermine the emergence of horizontal ties between younger generations, women, and professional groups. These traditional formations value authority that is driven by socio-biological characteristics, such as age and gender. The relations inspired by these vertical traditionalist formations turn the rural population into a vulnerable and easily exploited entity.

From the viewpoint of political candidates from peripheral areas, the predominance of traditional values and state weakness present endless possibilities for the expansion of their own authorities. Traditional values, economic deprivation within the rural population, and the candidates' strong economic base are driving factors for the reinforcement of organized crime in the Kyrgyz and Tajik peripheries. Traditionalism and religiosity are used instrumentally in political campaigns; both cultural parameters represent comfortable and tactical gears for political candidates to score credits of trust and approval from villagers. Acts of honor towards village elders and reinforcement of religious sentiments through the support of mosques and madrassahs ensure lasting electoral popularity. A political candidate might be involved in violence, yet supported by the elders or religious clergy in his village. In effect, in rural areas, villages elect a persona, not a political figure.

¹⁰³ Botagoz Kassymbekova, "Uzbekistan's Mahalla - A Democratic Tool for Authoritarian Rule?" *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 19 November 2003.

In the long run, such political candidates are disinterested in social change and economic development because modernity and economic growth will increase political activity within the rural population. This, in turn, complicates the procedure of political campaigning for candidates with weaker financial capabilities or non-religious views and women. Wealthy candidates from peripheries are also uninterested in merging state politics with religion, as secular regimes allow them to provide the local population with religious rhetoric which the government cannot or does not want to maintain.

The authority of locally elected candidates has geographical limitations. Because such candidates are elected thanks to their economic capabilities, they are supported only by the electorate at the particular voting precinct. The political authority of candidates with criminal connections exists only in areas where their economic activity is present. Aside from narrowly-defined popular support, there is a broad range of negative repercussions caused by the infiltration of wealthy candidates with criminal connections into the parliament and government.

In this respect, parliamentary candidates from urban areas encounter greater challenges in election campaigns. Higher levels of education, better living conditions, and capitalist orientations within urban populations set higher standards for parliamentary candidates. The candidates are expected to be known not only for achievements in the business sector, but also for achievements in the political, social, academic or other spheres. Female candidates also have greater chances of being elected. The proportion of voters living in extreme poverty is significantly lower than in rural areas. Businessmen with clean businesses are likely to be elected. For instance in Bishkek, known journalists Kabai Karabekov and Bolot Maripov, have strong social bases.

Organized Crime and the State's Governability

Organized criminal groups undermine the state's ability to have a direct reach to localities beyond the capital city and urbanized territories. By becoming a structure parallel to the state or being merged with the political domain, organized criminal groups inhibit the ability of law enforcement

agencies to punish crimes and foster a free market economy. A small group of criminal elements promote injustice and tyranny within the majority of the rural population.¹⁰⁴ Criminal groups provoke insecurity within the population, lower trust in the government and increase out-migration. They create a system of hierarchical social relationships in a violent environment, where the state has limited ability to intervene. At the same time, after merging into a hierarchical group, criminal authorities suppress the voices of the population under their control and discourage public participation.¹⁰⁵ While possessing the monopoly on violence at the local level, organized criminal authorities suffocate the emergence of civil society and the development of political participation. Thus, negative repercussions for state-building and state governability can be portrayed in the following five aspects.

- First, organized crime acts based on strong family relations and clan ties. Infiltration of criminal actors into politics fosters clientelism and nepotism, hence undermining the formation of governments based on political merit, ideology, or party affiliation. Involvement of large-scale businessmen in state structures slows administrative reform and increases the deficit of professional cadres. The government cadres are selected according to partnership ties or blood connections. Criminalization within the state provokes nepotism. The Sarygulov clan in Kyrgyzstan, for instance, was known for its immense financial and political influence in the state thanks to its ability to control the country's economic resources. Dastan Sarygulov chaired the state-owned gold-mining company "Kyrgyzaltyn", while his brother served as an ambassador to Germany – the richest Kyrgyz embassy. It was also evident that Kyrgyzstan's gold reserves did not contribute their expected share to the GDP and represent a source of massive corruption. A scandal over the disappearance of 1,5 tons of gold was effectively suppressed by the government apparatus in 1993. To mute the scandal, the government violated the right of freedom of speech by suing

¹⁰⁴ Along the argumentation of Charles Tilly, "Foreword" in Luigi Barzini, *From Caesar to the Mafia*, New York: Bantam Books, 1972.

¹⁰⁵ Blok, *The Mafia of A Sicilian Village, 1860-1960*.

Zamira Sydykova, editor-in-chief of an independent newspaper, *Res Publica*, who claimed that Akayev was enmeshed in large-scale corruption and owned houses in Turkey and Switzerland.¹⁰⁶

▪ Second, a state infiltrated by business elite with criminal ties will inevitably seek to suppress freedom of speech and infringe upon the free media. Intra-governmental showdowns between various business actors will be concealed from the public eye through the use of non-democratic means. In Kyrgyzstan, corrupt cadre politics entailed stronger oppression of the independent and opposition mass media outlets. The persecution of Sydykova in the late 1990s was regarded as a litmus test of Kyrgyzstan's ability to be an "island of democracy". Her provocative publications sparked discussions about Akayev's corruption and the transparency of the government. Eventually, Kyrgyzstan's democratic image became more an illusion than a reality. Akayev's corrupt cadre politics, showdowns with Sydykova as well as with a number of other independent media outlets were obstacles to his intentions to prolong his presidential term in 2000.

▪ Third, a government that puts personal interests ahead of institutional interests will further isolate itself from society. The common mistake repeated by many Third World leaders is that by allowing even small forms of corruption into cadre politics and the business sector, the government widens the gap between itself and the population. In a situation of economic deprivation and weak political institutions, only leaders who genuinely and aggressively fight corruption while building institutions of democracy, are able to retain popular support. Of the post-Soviet states, Georgia is an example of a government's success in fighting corruption and enjoying stable popularity ratings despite economic devastation. Georgian president Michael Saakashvili's continuous battle with organized criminal groups operating in the government as well as in the large businesses is illustrative of a weak state's ability to suppress non-state criminal actors and encourage the formation of transparent institutions. Bakiyev's government, on the other hand, was able to gain quick popular support thanks to its anti-corruption

¹⁰⁶ "The Independent Press is Having a Rough Time in Kyrgyzstan", *Prism*, 23 January 1998.

rhetoric in the aftermath of the March 24 revolution. However, although Bakiyev came into power on the wave of mass protests, over the course of one year he became increasingly detached from his electorate due to his corrupt cadre politics. By appointing figures that would suit his political and economic interests and not the interests of his key political allies or the legislative branch, Bakiyev built a government that functions according to patron-client relationships. In effect, after ruling for over a year, Bakiyev replicated most of the mistakes made by Akayev during his fifteen-year presidency.

- Fourth, criminal authorities are able to use the state against the state. Parliamentary candidates with criminal backgrounds or government members accused of corruption resort to the same institutions of the state, as ordinary citizens or clean political figures. Mainly law enforcement institutions or banking systems are easily accessible and attractive to criminal authorities. In Kyrgyzstan, Rysbek Akmatbayev, once acquitted of homicide charges, proved to be a difficult case for the Central Election Committee to rule out the parliamentary mandate he won with over 70% of the vote. Rysbek Akmatbayev used the services of professional lawyers to retain his mandate despite public discontent with his political participation. Other instances include, as mentioned earlier, using free market rules and loose border regimes. Criminal authorities have a greater leverage over these institutions than do individuals with more limited financial capabilities.

- Fifth, the infiltration of business elites in the government and parliament is accompanied by sluggish economic growth, since it increases corruption and nepotism, and insulates state institutions further from society. Although Kyrgyzstan's GDP has steadily increased since 1995, external debt swelled up to 120% of the GDP by the early 2000s. The agricultural sector continued to deteriorate and a large share of the rural population migrated to Bishkek and abroad in search of better labor markets. Mostly young people fled from rural areas, emptying the work-age population in villages. Despite general economic growth in the mid 1990s, the percentage of the poor continued to increase.

All five consequences of the infiltration of business elites with criminal connections into the government – nepotism, suppressed freedom of speech,

widened state-society gap, using state institutions against the state, and hindered economic growth, are also the key components defining the weak state.

The Role of Civil Society

The Central Asian states offer an interesting comparative example of how the development of free mass media and civil society can impact the state's handling of organized crime. Although it is too early to claim that active civil society participation prevented the merger of criminal elements with state politics, there are some encouraging signs of mass media being an intimidating factor for corrupt politicians. The cases of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, where the media periodically reports instances of corruption in the state or the activity of organized crime should be contrasted with the situation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The boost of civil society in post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan shows that civil society institutions can become a stronger force against the lawlessness created by criminal groups and individuals against the backdrop of a weak state.

Today, the Kyrgyz government or parliament can no longer ignore the voices of civil society or NGOs, let alone curb their activities. Instead, criminal figures tried to intimidate NGO leaders through the use of violence against them. The April 2005 violent attack against the leader of the Kyrgyz NGO For Democracy and Civil Society, Edil Baisalov, encouraged thousands of people to join in a mass protest against the infiltration of criminal figures into government structures. According to various estimates, between 10,000 and 17,000 people marched in a peaceful demonstration in central Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, on April 29, 2006. The demonstrators held posters and flags symbolizing their protest against the government's weakness vis-à-vis the criminal world. This open confrontation between the Kyrgyz NGOs, political officials and criminal authorities marked a significant development nationally and regionally. It illustrated how the third sector had developed into a coherent and self-sufficient force supported by the urban population against the backdrop of a weak state and widespread criminality.

Demonstrations against the state-crime nexus in Kyrgyzstan gave rise to a new type of culture of civic participation that promotes peaceful values and

transparent governance. Potentially, Kyrgyz civil society's mobilization against the infiltration of organized crime into state politics will serve as a model for non-governmental activists in other Central Asian states. To a certain extent, Kyrgyz NGOs broke the legacy of civic political inactivity and submissiveness cultivated during the Soviet era. At least among the urban population with higher education, the expression of political interests, voicing concerns over a corrupt regime and the rise of criminal elements in a collective and peacefully organized venue have become a habitual behavior. Kyrgyz NGOs also facilitated consolidation of the political opposition and solidified the union between president Bakiyev and prime minister Kulov.

Sources of Civil Society's Empowerment

The increasing magnitude of civil protests against the state in regard to the development of a democratic political culture has been thoroughly studied with regard to East European states.¹⁰⁷ Ekiert and Kubik argue that several analytical perspectives can explain the mobilization of the civil society to contest political regimes in the post-Soviet era. Among them, Ekiert and Kubik point out actors' calculated political opportunities, the "existence of traditions, repertoires of collective action, and mobilizing collective action frames", and the availability of material resources. All these perspectives assume that civil society will rather express its discontent with the state's actions and not mobilize in support of policies. Through analyzing specific events of civil society mobilization, such as collective protests, it is possible to track the non-elite actors' democratic consolidation.

The protests in Kyrgyzstan before, during, and after the March 24 Tulip Revolution provide an opportunity to shed light on the maturing culture of civil society's political participation and its contribution to a weak state's functioning. Clearly, the repertoires of civil society protest begin to take shape in post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan. What began largely as a "rent-a-mob" effect in the aftermath of parliamentary elections in February-March 24, 2005, and continued after the ouster of president Akayev, evolved into a

¹⁰⁷ Crzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, "Contentious Politics in New Democracies: East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 1989-93", *World Politics*, 50 (4), 1998.

conscious political behavior among middle-class and urbanized Kyrgyz. That is, organized and premeditated NGO demonstrations act as watchdogs of the Kyrgyz government, disallowing at least the open manifestation of corruption and susceptibility to the influence of criminal authorities. In the period of the next few years, it is possible to expect the development of even more organized oversight of the policy sphere by civil society institutions.

The shaping of civic action is predetermined to a large extent by the existing legislature. The Central Asian states present an illustrative comparison of how various degrees of the political system's openness gave rise to or hindered the development of the civil society. Taxation and registration procedures are the key indicators of the government's instruments to control social mobilization throughout the post-communist world.¹⁰⁸ Most post-communist states adopted favorable conditions toward the formation of civil society and evidenced a rapid increase of civic participation. However, states which imposed limitations on the rise of civil society organizations have done that through heavy taxation and complex procedures for registration. Almost the entire Central Asian region, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are regarded as states belonging to the latter group.¹⁰⁹ Even in Kyrgyzstan, although registration procedures were loose and simple for civil society formations, they failed to be guaranteed legal protection and economic advantages because of unfavorable taxation legislature for non-profit organizations.¹¹⁰

Administrative hurdles for the development of civil society organizations in other Central Asian states prevent individual and collective actors from articulating their own interests, be they emphasizing liberal or traditional values in the society. By imposing various degrees of limitation on the formation of civil society, states like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and, to some extent, Tajikistan undermined possibilities for legal non-state actors to use

¹⁰⁸ Andrew T. Green, "Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54 (3), 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Green, "Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies".

¹¹⁰ The presence of the legal protection and economic advantages is seen as the core for civil society formation-conducive registration procedures.

the opportunities offered by globalized markets. In other words, unlike illegal non-state actors who were able to advance their own interests domestically and transnationally by surpassing state regulations, interest groups or individuals not involved in illicit businesses encountered obstacles from the state. In Kazakhstan, where the civil society's ability to voice criticism toward the government is somewhat comparable to the situation in Kyrgyzstan, Nazarbayev's dominance and a lack of political competitiveness indicates that any policy initiative should stem from the president himself.¹¹¹ With the seeming openness of the political system, control of the mass media, especially during the election periods prevents civil activists from building institutional frameworks for collective actions. There are some foundations for interest-based civil society networks, however, most of them express non-partisan views, thus retaining little leverage over policy building.

Civil society institutions in Central Asia also encounter some disapproval from the local public for functioning solely thanks to international funding, provided mostly by western financial organizations and governments. The criticism against local NGOs mainly arises from the pro-Russian public and political figures, who criticize western organizations and governments for promoting their own interests by financing civil society organizations. However, many are unaware of the fact that Russian foreign policy in the Central Asian region is mostly oriented towards supporting political regimes as opposed to non-state actors.

At times civil society in the form of NGOs and opposition media outlets turns into the only source of criticism of the spread of criminality. Several Central Asian media outlets encourage anonymous forums for online readers, thus creating a prolific framework for the exchange of information and rumors about political leaders and criminal authorities. These forums have become an important stage for many Central Asians to learn about informal relations among various political forces. The informational

¹¹¹ Daniel Kimmage, "Kazakhstan: Nazarbaev Landslide Buries Future Problems", *Eurasia Insight*, 8 December 2005.

aggregate in these forums is now increasingly being used by academics and government officials for attaining a sense of the public mood.

Unlike illegal criminal actors that arise in the periphery, civil society activists develop in capital cities. The state's weak presence in rural areas allows criminal networks to mobilize, whereas the state's functioning boosts civic participation in urban areas. That is why, with some optimistic signs, Central Asian NGOs are not capable of dealing with issues such as trafficking in drugs and other sectors of the transnational shadow economy. Often newspapers are more focused on political life in the capital city rather than on the rise of criminality in peripheral areas. Since interest-based organizations are for the most part non-profit and external funding is the primary source for the material base of these formations, their expansion is considerably slower as compared to criminal non-state actors.

Kyrgyzstan: Unpopular State Leaders and Famous Mafia Chiefs

Political Participation as a Continuing Economic Process

When Askar Akayev was elected to head independent Kyrgyzstan in 1990, he enjoyed almost universal support from the population and political elites. His closest political allies were comprised of known academics, members of the art community, and journalists. By the mid-1990s, several of the prominent intellectuals and journalists who had initially supported Akayev gradually moved into the opposition. Likewise, the number of opposition parties and mass media outlets able to criticize Akayev's government swiftly increased towards the late 1990s. In the early 2000s, after winning a third presidential term, not only did Akayev's former supporters turn into his fervent opponents, but it became easier to identify the limited fraction of political and business elites who still supported him, rather than naming his opposition, constituting a much larger group. After ten years of leadership, Akayev was accused of participation in corrupt cadre politics, large-scale economic manipulations and, as a result of this, ineffective leadership. Akayev's family members – his wife, son, daughter and son-in-law – were frequently accused of hindering the functioning of state institutions by interfering in the economic and political sectors. The former first lady, Mairam Akayeva, was considered one of the most corrupt political officials. Her charity foundation "Meerim" was suspected of money laundering and illegal appropriation of state assets.

A similar trend was taking place vis-à-vis Kyrgyzstan's relations with international donors. After a decade of leadership, Akayev lost much of the approval from the international community and was often criticized for undemocratic governance. Akayev's fifteen-year path from total triumph and successful leadership in the early 1990s to his becoming a deeply corrupt politician raises a number of questions. Why did Akayev, while enjoying

high popularity and showing some progress in strengthening a democratic state in the 1990s, surrender to corruption? When and why did Akayev's administration begin distributing state positions to candidates according to economic capability instead of political vision? Along with an apparent supply from the business elites, was there a demand within the government to have criminal figures involved in politics?

The previous sections showed what constituted the "supply" forces in the criminal world: a new class of businessmen emerging in rural areas where the population lacked entrepreneurial skills and the state was not exercising its functions. Neo-businessmen developed political ambitions in the late 1990s and increasingly infiltrated the state. However, it still remains ambiguous as to why the state actors allowed the criminalization of the political domain. Clearly, the involvement of criminal figures in politics had numerous negative repercussions visible to the wider public.

The expansion of the shadow economy and drug trafficking in the Central Asian states created a class of illegal businessmen acting independently of government control. Not only were such businessmen able to maintain their own businesses, but they were able also to infiltrate the state by using their economic power. Attaining state position turned into a bargaining game between state officials and business elites, where the state acted as a consumer of the wealthy candidates' supply. Politically ambitious businessmen created a "free market" of bribes for government officials in order to be recruited into the state. The value of government positions increased as state structures became better organized and guaranteed institutional power to political incumbents in the mid 1990s. But since informal relations within the government still prevailed over the legal ones, Akayev's administration and members of his family were able to impose an informal control over distribution of official governmental positions. This combination of some institutional framework in the state structure and a heavy reliance upon informal relations led to a situation where the highest echelons of the political elite could systematically allocate virtually all public positions – from judiciary to parliament – according to the prospective candidates' financial capabilities and not political views. Thus, during the reign of Akayev, the state's formal structure had a legal basis, but was also a

source for systematized corruption. Towards the late 1990s, amid a generally liberal environment in the country and some political opposition, Akayev built a loyal government through corruption and informal control over businesses.

The economic motives of the neo-business elite coincided with the political interests of Akayev's ruling regime. By involving business elites in possession of strong local support in various parts of the country into the state structures, the Akayev government gained indirect control over the social bases of these elites. The sale of positions in the government provided Akayev with political and social support. The informal rates for state positions significantly rose in the 2000s. Although it is difficult to estimate exact numbers, rumors suggested that positions as heads of oblasts, ministers, and foreign service posts were especially high-priced. After Akayev's ouster in March 2005, the large extent of corruption in the government became clearer as the former president's secret diaries were revealed. The diaries included records of bribes collected by Akayev and members of his family from top officials, businessmen, and private companies.¹¹² The prices ranged from \$30,000 to \$250,000. Most ministers, the prime minister, ambassadors and some parliament members were included in the list. Such maneuverings within the government took place in a situation of the Akayev government's formal and informal authority over law enforcement structures, the legislature, and tax agencies.

Thus, in the late 1990s, there was a noticeable trend of criminalization within the government. Government officials who were initially recruited according to political affiliations and not financial capabilities, showed a strong inclination toward corruption. Likewise, local entrepreneurs sought to elevate their own legitimacy by attaining government positions. Embezzlement and bribery flourished inside the government in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s. An enormous external debt against the background of devastating poverty inevitably raised suspicions that most of the international grants, credits, and financial assistance to the Kyrgyz government were embezzled. As in other states, "white-collar" corruption is difficult to investigate and persecute as

¹¹² *Akipress*, 21 April 2005.

law enforcement agencies are often dependent upon governmental officials. High-ranked state officials, especially those from law enforcement agencies, possess greater impunity as compared to the local government offices. Agencies fighting organized crime, drug trafficking, or corruption possess a high degree of impunity and, at the same time, have direct contact with their subjects.

Corruption among state officials also fostered a link between the state and non-state criminal actors.¹¹³ The main driving force of the relationship between government officials and influential criminal actors was competition over profitable economic sectors. In Kyrgyzstan, the main economic sectors of competition between the government and organized criminal groups were gold mining, the ownership of tourist sites, hotels, markets, casinos, restaurants, and gas stations. Evidently, the lack of a proper legislative base, which would regulate the business sector, encouraged competition between state and non-state actors over medium and large-sized businesses. In such an environment not only did non-state actors seek to gain access to the business sector through corruption and legal loopholes, but state officials were also often engaged in legal as well as illegal enterprises.

In 2000, Akayev was able to prolong his presidency despite low popular support and devastating poverty. The Constitutional Court's decision to grant Akayev the right to run in the presidential elections in 2000 for a third term in spite of constitutional provisions to the contrary was regarded by local mass media as a result of corruption. Constitutional court chairperson Cholpon Bayekova was drowned in criticism for favoring the ruling regime. Other high-ranking officials also supported Akayev in the 2000 presidential elections. The controversial parliamentary elections in February-March 2005 contained the largest ever proportion of candidates from among the business elite. In a number of electoral precincts, the business elites overran popular political figures that had served in the parliament previously, but represented the opposition, such as Adakhan Modumarov, Azimbek Beknazarov, and Kurmanbek Bakiyev. As a result of the Akayev government's maneuvering

¹¹³ Osmonaliyev, *Ugolovnaya politika Kyrgyzstana: voprosy teorii i praktiki* [Criminal Politics of Kyrgyzstan: Questions of Theory and Practice].

to enlist only favorable figures in the parliament, unsuccessful candidates collected crowds to protest against rigged election outcomes.¹¹⁴

Notably, the rise of criminality in Kyrgyzstan following the March 24 revolution was a rather gradual process. Organized crime in Kyrgyzstan did not emerge overnight. Criminal elements were active before the March 24 events, but their activity was more underground during the Akayev regime. Akayev could control the business elites by pervasive engagement in the economic sphere. Although the president and his family members reportedly influenced all legal sectors of the economy, the underground world could not pose an open threat to the government. The criminal world gained public attention only after a number of political figures were scandalously assassinated in the few months following the revolution. In the post-March 24 reality, political assassinations turned into a more profitable political strategy than political campaigns. Achieving political power and seizing control over economic sectors became easier through violence than through legal means.

When Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan on March 24, there was a shift in the power balance between the state and non-state actors. The previous president's implicit control over the business sector was disturbed by his sudden departure. As a result, the country's large and medium-size businesses were exposed to savage competition between politically and economically empowered individuals. The Kyrgyz mobile company Bitel GSM was the most visible case of a competition between its former owners allied with Aidar Akayev, the son of Askar Akayev, and the newly established government.¹¹⁵

Yet, the fusion of economic interests between criminals and state officials was likely to intensify even had the shift in power on March 24 not occurred. While it is obvious that the March 24 change of political regime revealed the corruption among the top governmental officials and their connections with

¹¹⁴ Erica Marat, *The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After*, Washington: Jamestown and Brookings, 2006.

¹¹⁵ Maks Kobonbaev, "Costs and Benefits of the 'Kyrgyz Revolution'", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 6 April 2005.

the criminal world, the level of corruption in the Akayev government allowed criminal elements to gain autonomy and escape persecution. The parliament elected in 2005 was the final result of wealthy criminals' ability to infiltrate the political process.

The Post-March 24 Period

Physical evidence of Akayev's corruption helped opposition leader Bakiyev to gain quick popularity by promising cleaner politics and a fair redistribution of the assets illegally appropriated by the previous regime's members. The key members of the Bakiyev government – the then general prosecutor, Azimbek Beknazarov, the head of the president's administration Usen Sydykov, and deputy prime minister Adakhan Modumarov declared a fight against corruption in the state by promising to follow the Georgian example of designing an anti-corruption policy.

However, appointed after the March 24 revolution, general prosecutor Azimbek Beknazarov had failed to differentiate between economic and political crimes. He announced amnesty for former members of Akayev's government who had committed economic crimes during the reign of Akayev, but applied a similar logic to the criminal world. Rysbek Akmatbayev was one of the criminals released after the March 24 revolution. Though the real motives are unknown, the Kyrgyz deputy of minister of interior, Omurbek Suvanaliyev, alleged that Beknazarov probably had received a bribe from Rysbek shortly after the revolution. Beknazarov allowed Rysbek Akmatbayev to have a legal trial with the purpose of acquitting him of all charges.¹¹⁶

Despite attempts to clean up the government, the members of the post-March 24 state administration had to align with local political and business elites in order to gain country-wide influence. The revolution caused a substantial weakening of the central state and a simultaneous increase in the autonomy of political actors in the periphery. The state sought to extend its reach to regions where dissatisfaction with the previous political regime was

¹¹⁶ Author's interview with Omurbek Suvanaliyev, Kyrgyz deputy minister of interior, Bishkek, June 2006.

demonstrated following the rigged parliamentary elections in early 2005. Many local political actors, meanwhile, considered the change of political regime as a sign of new opportunities to advance their own ranks in the government and expand businesses. The rent-seekers increasingly resorted to the help of criminals to grasp as much political power and economic benefit as possible. As Kyrgyz parliamentarian Rashid Tagayev comments, “Everyone – from state officials to criminals – moved beyond legal frameworks after the revolution.”¹¹⁷ Numerous informal interactions between the new government leaders and local elites followed the revolution, which included bargaining and confrontation about power sharing and (re)distribution of economic resources. On the other hand, then acting president Bakiyev, made too many promises to too many office-seekers in order to gain popularity before the presidential elections.

According to Tagayev, today, it is possible to file a corruption case against any political official in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, because corruption is present among law enforcement structures and some government members have connections with criminal groups, state officials prefer to avoid sabotage. The March 24 revolution opened a window of opportunity for various types of illegal activities and misinterpretations of the existing legal system. The breaking of laws was evident in virtually every sphere of political life: from the highest political officials to low-ranked public employees. There were also a number of attempts at a violent takeover of markets and industrial sites.

Who is Kurmanbek Bakiyev?

Like other Central Asian presidents, the current Kyrgyz president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was among the mid-level specialists in the periphery who, amid the general economic breakdown, transitioned from being a part of the Soviet state-controlled agricultural sector to being a capitalist actor with some private capital. After graduating from the Russian Kuibyshev

¹¹⁷ Author’s interview with Rashid Tagayev, Bishkek, June 2006.

Polytechnic Institute in 1972, Bakiyev served as a mechanical and electronic engineer in the southern Kyrgyz provincial city of Jalalabad. From 1985 to 1990, he headed a factory and continued to gradually climb the Party ladder by becoming the first secretary at the Party's town committee in Kok-Yangak in 1991. As Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, Bakiyev, similar to his counterparts across the post-Soviet space, changed his position from a communist party activist into a locally elected deputy. There are similar examples among political and business elites in all of the post-Soviet states where peripheral actors achieved economic success due to initial intact access to state-owned resources.¹¹⁸

In 1997 Bakiyev reached the position of governor of the Chui oblast and, in December 2000, he was appointed by Akayev to the position of prime minister. Following a bloody clash between civilian protestors and police in the southern Aksy village in March 2002, Bakiyev resigned from his government post and moved into the opposition. Allegedly, with the support of a number of southern political figures, including adviser to the president Usen Sydykov, Bakiyev was lobbied to head the opposition bloc in November 2004. As another opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva claims, Bakiyev was "informally" promoted by the eldest Kyrgyz statesman from southern Kyrgyzstan, Absamat Msaliyev.¹¹⁹ As the revolution unraveled and Akayev fled from Kyrgyzstan on March 24, 2006, Bakiyev was chosen to occupy the position of an acting president. This abrupt victory over Akayev's regime was unexpected for Bakiyev and his followers. Some reports suggest that Bakiyev himself was afraid of the crowds in central Bishkek on May 24 and tried to find refuge in a safe place on that day.¹²⁰ Bakiyev was elected president with almost 90% of the vote on July 10, 2006, but his popularity

¹¹⁸ It should be emphasized that Bakiyev's case is rather common for the post-Soviet states: most of political elites in the early 1990s and today, except for the Baltic States, have a strong background in Party membership and occupied administrative positions in urban or rural areas at the time of the Union's collapse.

¹¹⁹ *Delo nomer*, 1 March 2006.

¹²⁰ Author's interview with a Kyrgyz entrepreneur who was active during the March 24 protests, Bishkek, June 2006.

quickly declined. His main political opponents today represent both the northern and southern parts of the country.

Although Bakiyev was nationally elected, the control over the peripheral areas was still in the hands of the local business elites. Due to demoralized security forces in the post-March 24 period, the president could neither pursue and prosecute criminal groups, nor fully ignore their existence. Bakiyev's alleged connections with Rysbek Akmatbayev, a known mafia chief, evolved shortly after the revolution. For Bakiyev, connections with powerful local authorities in northern Kyrgyzstan was both a blessing and a curse. The president, coming from southern Kyrgyzstan, needed the support of northern political and business elites. Alignment with Rysbek offered Bakiyev instant authority over businesses in Issyk-Kul oblast and parts of Chui oblast.¹²¹ Rysbek's younger brother, Tynychbek Akmatbayev, who was also known for his criminal past, was elected to chair a parliamentary committee dealing with organized crime and law enforcement. In the union with Rysbek, the president found a counterweight to other powerful political and criminal elements that supported various state officials. However, the death of Tynychbek in a prison riot in October 2005 propelled Rysbek to undertake more aggressive actions against his political and criminal adversaries. While Rysbek acted in alleged unison with top state officials, he maintained a greater degree of violence in his actions. A number of contract murders were associated with Rysbek, including the assassination of a famous actor Usen Kudaibergenov, parliamentarian and organized crime leader Bayaman Erkinbayev, and sportsman Raatbek Sanatbayev. The president and other state officials, however, soon fell under Rysbek's dependence and suffered from rapidly declining popularity.

Despite securing the support of influential regional authorities in northern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev inevitably found his own legitimacy declining and public support diminishing. In essence, Bakiyev could regulate the state, but became increasingly detached from the society. His connections with the criminal world brought him not so much economic power, as the insurance

¹²¹ Author's interview with a Kyrgyz law-enforcement representative, Bishkek, June 2006.

of support from the local mafia chiefs. As a remuneration to the informal criminal elements' for their support of his political authority in northern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev embarked on a carousel ride of reappointments of state officials. He sacked state officials unwanted by criminal figures but supported by the wider public, such as Beknazarov and members of the Security Council. The president's relations with the prime minister Felix Kulov were endangered after Tynychbek's death. Rysbek publicly declared a jihad against Kulov, whom he accused of having connections to imprisoned mafia boss Aziz Batukayev, an ethnic Chechen, accused of killing his brother Tynychbek. Rysbek's accusations against Kulov revealed the possible divide between criminal groups supporting the president and those supporting the prime minister. While publicly attacking Kulov, Rysbek was able to meet with Bakiyev to demand the president's personal investigation of Tynychbek's assassination.

Another example of Bakiyev's weakness in regard to the criminal world was his open oppression of the parliament speaker Omurbek Tekebayev, who was an open critic of the president's ties with known mafia chiefs. Tekebayev had served in the parliament uninterrupted since 1991. He was among the main leaders of the Tulip Revolution, however, he became increasingly critical of Bakiyev's policies. As speaker of the parliament, Tekebayev enjoyed not only parliamentary support, but remained a popular lawmaker nationally. He was also perceived by the Kyrgyz public as an uncorrupt and dynamic political figure. Despite his nation-wide popularity, Bakiyev's actions against his political opponents illustrated his dependence upon illegal non-state actors.

With the March 24 revolution, the establishment of a number of criminal actors in politics was evident. Kyrgyz organized criminal groups were no longer an expression of social deprivation and inequality, but represented a mighty political power capable of achieving their political and economic ends through the use of advanced technologies, arms, and vast financial resources.¹²² Kyrgyz criminals were not interested in merely manipulating the work of law enforcement agencies that prevent the spread of corruption

¹²² The argument of organized crime's evolution is thoroughly examined by Catanzaro (1985).

and criminality. They used violence or the threat of violence against state officials as their main instrument to manipulate the state apparatus and extend their direct control over state policies.

If earlier political actors had been connected with criminal elements illegally and in a subversive way, following the controversial parliamentary elections in February-March 2005, the relations between criminals and politicians took on a new form. New hybrids of power relations developed within the state between criminals and politicians. Common economic interests between criminal and political actors merged within the state apparatus. Both groups could operate in sync in maintaining licit and illicit businesses while simultaneously representing the state and enjoying legal status.

The Story of Rysbek

Rysbek Akmatbayev is the epitome of the Kyrgyz organized crime boss active in the country's political sphere. Better known by his first name, Rysbek was the most controversial criminal in Kyrgyzstan. His biography includes accusations of homicide, violent showdowns with various leaders of organized criminal groups, and active political participation in the post-March 24 period. Rysbek's image was used in boys' backyard games involving role playing, where he stood as a negative, yet powerful character. Popular songs were paraphrased with his name inserted into songs' texts. In sum, his popularity in Kyrgyzstan was nearly mythic. Already in the 1990s, he was known in virtually every corner of the country.

Yet, from a theoretical point of view, Rysbek's case is a vivid illustration of the multiple asymmetries between government officials and criminals in Kyrgyzstan and other similar states where organized criminal groups challenge political elites. He was able to actively enter the political arena and render himself immune to state prosecution after the March 24 Tulip Revolution. His name appeared in the news chronicles almost on a weekly basis in Kyrgyz and international mass media outlets. The fact that the general prosecutor cancelled all charges against him and his criminal accomplices following a quick trial in January 2006 and thus allowed him to run in parliamentary elections was interpreted as Rysbek's ability to dictate his interests to government structures. However, shortly after the

controversial trial, three of his accomplices were assassinated by unknown assailants.

Rysbek was born in 1960 in the town of Cholpon-Ata in the northern Issyk-Kul oblast. He attended a local sports school and was already known for his criminal activities in the 1980s. By the early 1990s, he was one of the most known and powerful figures in the Issyk-Kul oblast, its informal leader who controlled local businesses.¹²³ Rysbek and his gang competed not only with similar criminal gangs in northern Kyrgyzstan, but also with the network of businessmen associated with former president Askar Akayev's son, Aidar Akayev.¹²⁴ Rysbek had a reputation as a local "Robin Hood" for his racketeering of rich entrepreneurs and investment into the local infrastructure. He was one of the leading organizers of sports events in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s and sponsored football and wrestling championships. Rysbek survived two assassination attacks in 1996 and 2000, reportedly instigated by his long-time foe Aziz Batukayev.¹²⁵

Kyrgyz experts comment that Rysbek was supported by both presidents Akayev and Bakiyev. As Suvanaliyev recounts, "Rysbek was Bakiyev's inheritance from Akayev".¹²⁶ The former president resorted to Rysbek's help starting from 1996.¹²⁷ Akayev had used Rysbek for intimidating his political rivals. He continued to cooperate with Rysbek in the 2000s. He was also allegedly backed by the region's richest businessmen, who helped him find refuge in Europe. Suvanaliyev comments that "90 percent of members of parliament were afraid of Rysbek and were showing their support as much as they could". After Rysbek was elected into parliament, a number of parliament members tried to consult with law enforcement agencies on how to behave with regard to Rysbek. Most of the current members of parliament

¹²³ Elena Skochilo, "Na Vzlete" [On The Rise], *Gazeta.kg*, 11 May 2006.

¹²⁴ Author's interview with a Kyrgyz businessman, Bishkek, March 2006.

¹²⁵ "Ubit Rysbek Akmatbayev" [Rysbek Akmatbayev was Killed], *Akipress*, 10 May 2006.

¹²⁶ Author's interview with Omurbek Suvanaliyev, Bishkek, June 2006.

¹²⁷ Author's interview with a Kyrgyz businessman, Bishkek, March 24.

had known Rysbek personally before being elected. Those who had some businesses, encountered Rysbek's racketeering already in the 1990s.

According to Rysbek himself, he was an "uncrowned" thief in law.¹²⁸ In 1992, he refused to be recognized as one because against the rules of the "thieves' world", he was once a member of the Komsomol and a Pioneer, and had experience in the army service. Thieves in law, or "Vory v zakone", is a Soviet-era label for individuals who act according to the laws of the criminal world by denying the power of political and law enforcement structures. "Vory v zakone" follow criminal ideals and a special code of honor, and organize themselves in groups and strict hierarchies. There are thieves in law in prisons and in politics. During the Soviet period "vory v zakone" maneuvered in the heavily controlled socialist economy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the imperfect legislature allowed private actors to maneuver unconstrained by state control.

Rysbek's team was comprised of about 100 people actively involved in criminal activities.¹²⁹ Rysbek was able to attain a somewhat positive image because of his open confrontation with the Chechen group led by Batukayev. He was regarded as a fighter against non-Kyrgyz criminals on Kyrgyz soil. The Chechen community in Kyrgyzstan numbers about 3,500 people, most of which live in the Lebedinovka village on the outskirts of Bishkek. The Chechen community came to Kyrgyz territory in 1944 as a result of Stalin's deportations. In the independence period, there was no visible discrimination in the society against ethnic Chechens or other Caucasian nationalities. However, Chechens were notorious for owning large-scale businesses, often operating in illegal spheres. The Chechen mafia was little known to the wider public before Rysbek engaged in open confrontation with its leader.

The Chechens in Kyrgyzstan also have a reputation as an ethnic group that possesses a constant antagonism toward the government. Rysbek's death generated fear that Chechen or Uzbek criminal groups would occupy this place in the underground world and act against national interests. However,

¹²⁸ Skochilo, "Na Vzlete" [On The Rise].

¹²⁹ Authors' interview with Aleksander Zelichenko, Bishkek, June 2006.

as the Kyrgyz law enforcement officials ascertain, having this experience when criminal leader dominate over state structures, they will not allow anyone to attain a criminal authority like Rysbek did. Various political leaders also altered their behavior after Rysbek's death. There was a noticeable easing of tension in the parliament concerning personal security and the spread of organized crime.¹³⁰

Rysbek built an Islamic-style monument commemorating his father's death in his hometown of Cholpon-Ata. Besides becoming the town's biggest and most expensive monument, it is a major tourist attraction. In his numerous interviews to the Kyrgyz mass media outlets, Rysbek tried to build an image of himself as a deeply religious man. His supporters read the *namaz* during the Bishkek protests, organized by Rysbek against Kulov in November 2005.

Rysbek received almost 80 percent of popular support in the by-elections of April 10, 2006, in his constituency in Balykchi. By running in the elections, Rysbek wanted to replace his younger brother Tynychbek Akmatbayev, assassinated in October 2005. In addition to do that, since he blamed mainly the Kyrgyz prime minister Felix Kulov for organizing the assassination of Tynychbek, Rysbek allegedly hoped for revenge. A seat in the parliament, besides increasing his political leverage over the state structures, provided Rysbek with legal immunity. Rysbek's victory was expected to be swift due to his and his family's high level of popularity among local residents. Several days before the elections, Balykchi residents gathered in meetings to show support for their candidate and several policemen attendant at these meetings were beaten up by Rysbek's allies. Voicing concern with Rysbek's political participation turned into a dangerous pursuit among state officials. Rysbek was blamed indirectly by the local mass media for staging the assassinations of a number of known political figures after the March 24 revolution.

After Rysbek's assassination, his closest family members and supporters from Balykchi demanded a meeting with president Bakiyev. According to Kyrgyz analysts, the president's consent to meet with Rysbek's supporters

¹³⁰ Author's interview with various Kyrgyz law-enforcement officials, Bishkek, June 2006.

signified his susceptibility to criminal authorities.¹³¹ Rysbek's story follows a clear trend of how slain political figures' family members can become active in the country's public life despite the loss of their notorious relatives. Close family members of the two Kyrgyz parliament members assassinated in 2005, Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev and Bayaman Erkinbayev, quickly mobilized political and economic gears to participate in state politics. This was possible due to the fact that most of the assets owned by assassinated political figures and their local influence were consigned by their families. In the case of Surabaldiyev, his nephew Zhanysh Kudaibergenov won a parliamentary seat in by-elections, defeating Roza Otunbayeva. Erkinbayev's wife became increasingly active in her pursuit of a parliamentary seat after his assassination. Rysbek himself was his brother's successor in the parliament.

Rysbek clearly had strong supporters and foes in the government, law enforcement structures, and parliament. His friendly and conflicting relations with political officials created latent disagreements within the government. Rysbek was also informed about various political officials' incidents of corruption. At the same time, his ties with the government revealed how other organized criminal groups and their leaders are related to various political forces in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, Rysbek's open accusations against Kulov hinted at the prime minister's possible connections with the Chechen mafia, whose imprisoned leader, Aziz Batukayev, was allegedly involved in killing Tynychbek. Therefore, Kulov was among the first to be suspected of directing the assassination. A number of parliamentarians and law enforcement officials who openly criticized Rysbek or had a relationship of rivalry with the mafia boss were also under suspicion.¹³²

Notably, if Rysbek remained an active political actor, his leverage in the parliament could symbolize the criminal world's superiority over the state. This could lead to a tipping point in which law enforcement structures would

¹³¹ Arkady Dubnov, "Chisto avtoritetno. Prezident Kirgizii vstretitsya s roditelyami Respeka Akmatbaeva" [Purely Authoritative. The Kyrgyz President Will Meet with Rysbek Akmatbayev's Parents], *Vremya novostei*, 16 May 2006.

¹³² "Rysbek Akmatbaev ubit. Versii prichin ubijstva" [Rysbek Akmatbayev Is Killed. Versions of the Causes of His Assassination], *Tazar.kg*, 12 May 2006.

take the initiative and fight organized crime and its leaders without the consent of other government structures. Suvanaliyev called it the “death squadron” – a situation reminiscent of European countries dealing with left-wing terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s, or Spain’s dealing with the Basque terrorist group ETA in the 1990s.¹³³

Rysbek’s case is unique because unlike other political leaders who had ties with the criminal world, but had attained legal impunity and some personal security after entering state institutions, his public exposure made him an easy target for his political and criminal rivals. Suvanaliyev comments that Rysbek’s death was easy to predict and that the only unknown question was when the murder would be committed and who would do it.

Since Rysbek’s death, his criminal group active in Issyk-Kul region and several smaller groups in southern Kyrgyzstan have lost much of their internal cohesiveness. They have become weaker and disoriented; more of their members have been detained by the Kyrgyz police. By summer 2006, there were still some criminal groups functioning in Kara-Balta and Lebedinovka, but they were also under the close supervision of the Kyrgyz police.

Following the death of Rysbek, a kingpin from southern Kyrgyzstan “Black Aibek” (Aibek Mirsidinov) was mooted to occupy the vacated place of the all-powerful national mafia boss. Similar to Rysbek, “Black Aibek” had been convicted several times, however, he managed to get released from his prison terms. After the Tulip Revolution, Aibek became familiar to the wider public due to his frequent public appearances and violent showdowns with competing criminal groups from northern Kyrgyzstan. In spring 2006, Aibek was involved in a shooting near the southern city of Jalalabad. Kyrgyz member of parliament Alisher Sabirov, also from the South, warned that Aibek was plotting an assassination of one of his colleagues in the parliament.¹³⁴ According to Zelichenko’s analysis, Russian criminal groups began considering the placement of their own representative in Kyrgyzstan

¹³³ Author’s interview with Omurbek Suvanaliyev, Kyrgyz deputy minister of interior, Bishkek, June 2006.

¹³⁴ Author’s interview with a Kyrgyz MP, Bishkek, June 2006.

to take over the vacated place.¹³⁵ The lucrative drug economy and a relatively open political system is the main attraction for Russian criminals.

An important conclusion can be made from the discussion of various ways in which criminal figures such as Rysbek are protected by government officials. Before the March 24 revolution, the Kyrgyz police were able to dominate organized crime groups and their leaders. However, once political figures built stronger connections with certain leaders in the criminal world, the work of law enforcement was hindered considerably. The rise and fall of Rysbek after the March 24 revolution, as well as his life line as a criminal leader able to influence political circles in Kyrgyzstan, shows that by merging with the criminal world, Kyrgyz politicians risked falling into dependence upon it.

Organized Crime and Law Enforcement

State institutions infiltrated by local business elites seeking their own economic benefits wind up serving their personal interests ahead of the needs of state or society. Criminal elements also receive greater autonomy in expanding their own activities geographically and influencing policies while serving in parliament or government structures. Autonomy in action, or, put otherwise, legal status of political officials engaged in illicit businesses, is the major transformation of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The autonomy of action coexisting in parallel to the state grants endless opportunities for political figures with criminal backgrounds: from social control to expansion of illicit business, to submission of border guards and drug trafficking.

In their fight against organized crime, the Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies encounter a problem common to all post-Soviet states and beyond. In order to fight powerful criminals, law enforcement officials are bound to resort to means that trespass legal and formal frames. Those means may include state racketeering of large businessmen, intimidation and blackmailing criminals. Because of the disadvantage of law enforcement officials in equipment, the

¹³⁵ Author's interview with Aleksander Zelichenko, Kyrgyz specialist on illicit drug trade, Bishkek, June 2006.

shortage of authority in some areas of the country, and dismally low salaries in comparison to criminals' profits, they are often forced to act illegally themselves while dealing with organized crime. The Kyrgyz example shows that the greater the shadow economy compared to the state budget and the stronger the organized criminal groups, the more law enforcement agencies tend to violate the law while fighting criminals. According to Suvanaliyev, starting from 2002, profits from the shadow economy topped the value of the state budget.¹³⁶

Law enforcement agencies are constrained by people with criminal connections or criminal background who are also involved in the Kyrgyz state structure. Parliament members and representatives of the judicial institutions set hurdles for the ministry of interior's investigation of crime. Although, according to a representative of the ministry of interior, often the Kyrgyz police has enough legal basis and evidence to capture criminal figures and disband organized crime groups, political officials use their leverage to thwart the efforts of law enforcement.¹³⁷

There are cases when members of parliament or representatives of judicial bodies openly hinder investigations. Often judicial representatives and the general prosecutor release detained criminal figures despite the fact that the police finds sufficient evidence for their capture. Political officials with criminal backgrounds or connections resort to the help of professional lawyers who are able to defend them in courts. Having enough power to do so, they hire several advocates. The judiciary is the final decision-maker on legal charges against criminal figures or groups and due to corruption in courts, criminals are often released following legal trials. Further, criminals in state structures resort to the help of the mass media in order to build a positive image about their own activities. Similarly, they engage other state structures into restraining the ministry of interior. Due to the imperfection of some legal acts, some political officials interpret them according to their

¹³⁶ "Omurbek Suvanaliyev: U nas poyavilsya shans pokonchit' s orgprestupnost'yu v strane" [Omurbek Suvanaliyev: We Received a Chance to End Organized Crime], *Delo Nomer*, 24 May 2006.

¹³⁷ Author's interview with a representative of the Kyrgyz ministry of interior, Bishkek, June 2006.

own interests. This happens because some legal acts contain insufficient detail or confusing statements, thus creating loopholes. As discussed earlier, Rysbek's legal case was illustrative of how several political officials openly tried to obstruct the police.

After the removal of Rysbek in May 2006, Suvanaliyev predicted that there are numerous candidates who seek to fill the vacated position of a nationwide mafia boss. However, according to the deputy minister, it will be possible for another criminal as strong as Rysbek to emerge only if someone from among the government officials is interested enough in supporting the underground world. Today, according to Suvanaliyev, most small criminal groups from south Kyrgyzstan have merged with the bigger ones. Namely, there are three major organized criminal groups operating in Kyrgyzstan: *issykkul'skaya* (from Issyk-Kul oblast), *karabaltinskaya* (from Kara-Balta) and *batukaevsкая* (headed by Batukayev). The main sources of their financial base are drug trafficking, contraband, gambling establishments, prostitution, and small and large commercial structures.¹³⁸ Many Kyrgyz organized criminal groups, as well as their leaders, come from villages or small towns such as Cholpon Ata, Tokmok, Talas, and Kara-Balta. Members of those groups are usually from the same villages and ethnic groups.¹³⁹ In southern Kyrgyzstan, there are about three powerful organized groups operating in three oblasts. Most organized criminal groups are comprised of about 60 members.

Other forms of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan include trafficking in arms and humans, racketeering, gambling, theft of animals and cars, production and smuggling of alcohol, tobacco, smuggling of gas and oil from Kazakhstan, hunting of wild sheep, and looting of nonferrous metals. Trafficking in humans involves trafficking of women and labor migrants. There are also cases of the abduction of people for forced organ donation. In the early 1990s, the looting of precious metals and their sale to China was one of the major sources of profit for the black market in Kyrgyzstan. There is

¹³⁸ *Delo Nomer*, 24 May 2006.

¹³⁹ Author's interview with Aleksander Zelichenko, Kyrgyz specialist on illicit drug trade, Bishkek, June 2006.

also a “golden mafia” dealing with gold resources in various parts of Kyrgyzstan. The mafia extends into government structures that have been maneuvering the adoption of legislature in order to secure their own access to gold resources. Russia and Europe remain to be the final destination for most illegal goods from the Central Asian states.

In a regional comparative perspective, it is seen that the Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies try to act within legal frameworks. Due to their weak financial basis for criminal investigations, some law enforcement representatives complain that it is often difficult for them to capture contract murderers. Instead of capturing individuals on allegations of murder, Kyrgyz law enforcement must detain criminals for other crimes, such as carrying illegal arms and possessing drugs.

Tajikistan: Guns, Drugs, and Politics

“*Leninabad rules, Kulyab protects, Pamir dances, and Karategin trades*”¹⁴⁰

Today, Tajikistan is rated as one of the most corrupt states in the post-Soviet space.¹⁴¹ The merger of the political and business sectors was intensive in the post-civil war period. The economic sector became heavily controlled by state actors acting in support of the incumbent president Imomaly Rakhmonov. As commented by the *Charogi Ruz* newspaper, the wealthiest layer of Tajikistan society today is comprised of political figures and not businessmen.¹⁴² Years after the end of the civil war, the Tajik economy resembles a pyramid-like structure, where the highest political authorities occupy the top of the corruption scheme. This scheme is functionally comparable to a semi-feudal system of government.¹⁴³ The non-state actors, although active in remote parts of the country, are dominated by powerful networks created by government figures. Rakhmonov’s political party and family members appear to be two such patronage networks. Both networks are suspected of large scale corruption and appropriating control over the country’s major economic sites.

In order to understand the fusion of the state with organized crime in Tajikistan, it is imperative to trace developments during the war and the peace process. What followed the 1997 Peace Accord, that is, the type of

¹⁴⁰ Modern Tajik proverb; Elena Lyborsakya, "1/6 Chast' Sushi: Islamisty za Demokratiu i Pluralism" [1/6 Part of Dry-land: Islamists for Democracy and Pluralism], *Lenta.ru*, 13 April 2005.

¹⁴¹ According to the Transparency International, in 2005 Tajikistan is rated as corrupt as Somalia and Sudan. Among the post-Soviet states, only Turkmenistan stands as more corrupt. Information available at: <http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2005>

¹⁴² Dododjon Atovulloyev, "Pamir: Khronika bespredela" [Pamir: The Chronicles of Lawlessness], *Charogi Ruz*, 1 (101), 2005.

¹⁴³ This comment is made by Dr. Svante Cornell, Research Director at the Central Asia – Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program, July 2006.

government and parliament, the opposition forces and political showdowns between the president and a number of political officials are important to take into consideration while analyzing the infiltration of organized crime into the state.

The Civil War and Birth of Warlords

The Tajik civil war was a complex and multidirectional phenomenon in the post-Soviet space that reflected predicaments within both the ethno-cultural composition of local society and the Soviet leadership. Such factors as clan divisions, governmental hierarchy, availability of economic and military resources, proximity to war-torn Afghanistan and a clash of Russian, Uzbek, and Iranian interests are the most common explanations of the prolonged civil conflict that unfolded shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this array of factors, most researchers apply cultural variables in the analysis of the war. It has been argued that the civil war unraveled because of strong clan identities that were reinforced by the Soviet Union in the 1920-30s, when the administrative borders of modern Tajikistan were established. Several decades of rivalry between Tajikistan's isolated regions, Leninabad oblast, the Karategin and Hissor valleys, Kulyab oblast, and the Pamir mountains, was inspired by divisions along religious and political lines between Tajiks.¹⁴⁴ While Tajiks from Garm and Gorno-Badakhshan were supporting the United Tajik Opposition and at least some supported the idea of an Islamic state, the northern clans from Khojent (Leninabad), which had been in power during the Soviet era, promulgated secular policies and were pro-Russian even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Aside from this, militias from Kulyab, the home region of President Rakhmonov, arose to replace the northern groups as the main power-brokers fighting the UTO. These inter-clan separations reflected administrative divisions between Soviet-divided

¹⁴⁴ Pavel Cheremisin, *Istoriya Konflikta v Tajikistane* [*The History of Conflict in Tajikistan*]. Moscow: Moscow State Pedagogical University, 1997; V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikul'sky, *Anatomiya Grazhdanskoi Voyny v Tadjikistane (etno-sotsial'nye processy i politicheskaya bor'ba, 1992-1996)* [*Anatomy of the Civil War in Tajikistan (Ethno-social Processes and Political Struggle, 1992-1996)*]. Moscow: Rossiiskii Gumanitarnyi Nauchnyi Fond, 1997; Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, "The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics", *Accord*, 10 March 2001.

oblasts as well. This implies that cultural variables can also be explained through the prism of the Soviet Union's legacies. Certain cultural divisions were exacerbated under the Soviet Union as the hierarchy in the national Tajik government was informally constructed according to the geographical origin and clan membership of state officials.

The rise of the Tajik Islamic party represents a much more complex phenomenon, than simple mobilization of rebels around religious or clan identities. The intricacy of the party's evolution is preconditioned by a set of post-Soviet legacies in the military administrative sector. The Islamic party's ability to rapidly militarize and recruit personnel is the most important element in its rapid expansion in the early 1990s. The Tajik government was not able to thwart the swift militarization of non-state actors because the state did not retain sufficient military capability at independence.¹⁴⁵ The collapse of the Soviet Union not only undermined the Tajik economy, it created an institutional void in the national security field and the legislative branch. Unlike all other post-Soviet states where most Soviet military assets were nationalized after the bloc's collapse, the Russian-controlled 201st Rifle Division took over the jurisdiction of virtually all military facilities in Tajikistan. The Tajik state entered the independence period without an army or any military institution, besides the police.

This was an exception in the experience of post-Soviet states' development, but also in the development of post-colonial states in general. Every new state across the post-colonial world, be it in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, or South Asia, aspiring for domestic and international sovereignty needed some amount of armed forces at independence.¹⁴⁶ A young state requires a sufficient military to establish a monopoly over the use of violence, the collection of taxes, and border control. The power struggle in such a vacuum intensified along the lines of clan identity, differences between southern, northern, and eastern groups, as well as among southern

¹⁴⁵ Author's interview with Muzaffar Olimov, Director of "Sharq" research institute in Dushanbe, March 2004.

¹⁴⁶ This is one of the central arguments in Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nation*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

groups that were not regulated by law enforcement agencies or other state formations. In order to form the Popular Front, the Tajik government spontaneously distributed armaments to civilians. The government and the opposition tried to recruit the maximum amount of people to prevail in the war by higher numbers of draftees. Former criminals were actively recruited by both the government and religious opposition troops.

The leading force behind the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), the Islamic Renaissance Party, emerged in 1990, following the Congress of Muslims of the USSR, and functioned as a pan-Soviet Muslim organization.¹⁴⁷ The party began as an ideological movement, but because of large support in the Karategin region, it eventually developed into a group representing the political interests of that region. According to Olimova and Olimov, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the IRP sought to gain political power in order to participate in the privatization and redistribution of state economic assets, such as industries and factories.¹⁴⁸ Encountering a strong resistance from the government during the presidential elections in 1991, the IRP, together with a number of other smaller religious opposition groups, began to mobilize military capabilities in order to assert its political interests.

The UTO, in turn, was formed in 1991 and since then has transformed from a radical Islamic movement and a powerful militant organization, into a political party propagating the importance of religion, but separating it from the state. The secularization of the UTO's political agenda was preconditioned by the general public's wish to retain religious feelings apart from the state. The UTO also received international recognition as the UN was mediating bi-party negotiations between the Tajik government and the opposition starting from 1993. The main sources of the UTO's armaments were allied forces in Afghanistan, the Iranian government, and the party's seizure of Russian-controlled military equipment. Reportedly, during the civil war, the UTO conducted economic activity domestically, regionally and

¹⁴⁷ Saodat Olimova and Muzaffar Olimov, "The Islamic Renaissance Party", *Accord*, 10 March 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Olimova and Olimov, "The Islamic Renaissance Party".

internationally by owning enterprises in the Central Asian states and Russia.¹⁴⁹

Although the Peace Accord, reached in June 1997, put an end to armed confrontation between the government and opposition, several militant gangs continued to operate on the Tajik territory. Movements operating in the mountainous area near the capital Dushanbe, were eliminated only by 2001. In total, since 1997, the Tajik government has eliminated about ten large and medium-sized militant gangs active in the country.¹⁵⁰ These gangs had well-organized networking with clearly defined leaders and functions for each member. They were capable of resisting law enforcement agencies by resorting to the use of arms. The Tajik government's failure to control the militarization of the opposition was paralleled by its inability to eliminate the expanding drug economy on its territory. Both conflicting sides, including the Russian troops, were involved in drug trafficking that remained uncontrolled during the years of the civil war.¹⁵¹

Economic interests indeed prevailed in the state-opposition peace negotiation process in 1995-1997. In the late 1990s, a far-reaching merger between the state and the drug economy took place. Government officials as well as opposition members had financial capital that was largely obtained from the sale of drugs and weapons. Similar to militant gangs that refused to comply with the peace agreement, a number of members of the Tajik government used their status and experience in the civil war to further promulgate illicit economic activity. Former field commanders from the opposition and pro-government troops were recruited into government positions and their paramilitary squads integrated into the national military. These government officials were also able to use the state to receive protection in illegal fiscal operations. While corruption was evident throughout state institutions, corruption

¹⁴⁹ Cheremisin, *Istoriya Konflikta v Tajikistane* [*The History of Conflict in Tajikistan*].

¹⁵⁰ "Mirazhi" [Mirages], *Versiya*, (22), 2002.

¹⁵¹ Turko Dikayev, "Absolutnyi Bred' Generala Manilova" [Generals Manilov's 'Absolute Rave'], Vladivostok Center of Organized Crime, 27 May 2004, <www.tribune.uz>.

charges against various political leaders, both supporting the government and the opposition, became the president's tool in eliminating unwanted figures.

Tajikistan's strong reliance on international donor assistance compelled the government to eliminate such obvious links between state officials and the drug economy in the 2000s. Those involved in the drug economy were encouraged to legitimize their capital by opening bank accounts and investing the money into legal businesses such as the construction of hotels, small industrial sites, and services. In this way, top government officials in Tajikistan transferred their sources of enrichment from illegal businesses into legal ones, with the starting capital originating from criminal activities, particularly the drug trade.

A massive out-migration of Tajik young people to Russia impacted the peace process significantly. In the mid-1990s, amid devastating human losses in the civil war and economic downfall, a large portion of the Tajik labor force left the country in search of better opportunities. Already by the late 1990s, the estimated number of Tajik labor migrants in Russia was in the hundreds of thousands. More than a million Tajiks were made refugees.

Post-Civil War Power Relations

A largely unknown former sovkhos (state farm) director, Rakhmonov was elected president in November 1994 with Russian and Uzbek support. More than a decade after the civil war's end, Rakhmonov is widely supported by the population despite the obvious corruption of his regime. He is lauded for his achievement in building a functioning state with identifiable power branches and a separate army. He is also seen as the major figure responsible for the prevention of Tajik state collapse after the Peace Accord was reached. There is a subtle understanding among people that the current government is determined to hold on to power for at least the next seven to fourteen years (the constitutionally allowed period of Rakhmonov's presidency) and will not give up its political power without a fight. The memory of the civil war still largely predetermines people's political behavior. The Tajik public in general accepts Rakhmonov's regime despite its corruption, nepotism, and despotism. One local employee of an international organization commented

that “the people will rather support a government that is corrupt, than a government that shoots”.

Yet, Rakhmonov’s opponents see his government as a melting pot of the criminal and political domains. The major criticism stems from the fact that he allowed former field commanders to occupy governmental positions and suppressed professional civilian politicians.¹⁵² The minister of security Khairuddin Abdurakhimov, minister of interior Khumdin Sharifov, defense minister Sherali Khairuloyev, minister of emergencies Mirzo Ziyoiev, former chair of the committee on border guards Saidanvar Kamolov, and speaker of parliament Makhmadsaid Ubaidulloyev are all former field commanders or were active participants in the civil war.

The President’s political party, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) formed in 1998, holds an absolute majority in the parliament. No other political party was close to forming a parliamentary bloc. There are four representatives from the communist party and two from the Islamic party. Following the death of the IRP’s leader Abdullo Said Nuri in August 2006, only Muhiddin Kabiri represents the religious opposition in the parliament. There are also ten independent parliament members who do not belong to any political party and are former representatives of various law enforcement agencies. The PDP members also occupy most positions in the government.

As a result of such premeditated one-party dominance, the government is the main initiator of legislative acts. As commented by some members of the Tajik parliament, the legislative branch plays a figurative role in developing legislature. Parliamentary seats are “distributed” among members of the PDP before elections.¹⁵³ There is a limited ability for international elections observers to influence the outcome of parliamentary voting. With the PDP’s majority in the parliament and only a small opposition, the regime maintains the necessary support for pursuing its own interests. Often it is a particular minister’s personal and professional qualities or a relationship to the president that predetermine the number of bills prepared by his or her

¹⁵² Cheremisin, *Istoriya Konflikt v Tajikistane* [*The History of Conflict in Tajikistan*].

¹⁵³ Author’s interview with a Tajik MP, Dushanbe, June 2006.

ministry. For instance, in 2005-06, the ministers of industry, justice, and education were especially active and produced a large volume of legislature compared to their counterparts from other ministries. The president also has strong leverage over deciding what bills should be presented to the government. After bills are designed by the government and informally approved by the president, they are almost certainly passed by the parliamentary majority.

Although most parliamentary seats were informally distributed among PDP members, the IRP nevertheless attempted to mobilize its efforts in the pre-election period in 2006. According to the IRP, the pre-election period is important to the party's potential functioning because active mobilization of its members helps preserve the image of a viable political force. According to official estimates, there are 22,000 members in the Islamic party, but party members claim it reaches 40,000. The PDP has roughly 100,000 members. The communist party had about 44,000 members, but has shrunk to 10,000. Other parties have significantly lower membership.

The president's party and the functioning of seven other political parties contribute to the legitimacy of the ruling regime. Though the Tajik opposition has a voice in the parliament, it has little leverage. In fact, representatives of the Tajik religious opposition in the parliament help the government to construct a façade of democracy. As one Tajik parliamentary commented, the opposition serves the role of a "shirma" (cover) that masks the government's repressive policies.

The government mostly cooperates with conservative representatives, who propagate the establishment of a religious state. By definition, such cooperation between Rakhmonov's government and conservatives is dysfunctional. It allows the government to create a vision of collaboration with the opposition that propagates radical ideas. More liberal members of the Islamic party who act against a religious state are largely ignored by the government. This strategy of selective communication with the Islamic opposition leaders helps Rakhmonov to increase the chances of an internal party split between liberal and conservative wings.

Since 1997, Rakhmonov has tried to limit the opposition's participation in the parliament and government structures. Similar to Akayev, Rakhmonov was also able to implement constitutional changes in order to prolong his own presidential term. Both presidents' maneuverings included both open and hidden confrontation with opposition leaders or government members who potentially could challenge state power. The presidents' activities were based on sustaining their own holds on power instead of contributing to the continuance of the state.¹⁵⁴ Rakhmonov has used violence against his most notorious supporters, who could potentially represent political competition in future presidential races. Rakhmonov's renown comment "with blood we came and with blood we will leave" reflects his political attitude towards unwanted members of his government and the parliament.¹⁵⁵

The Peculiarities of Organized Crime in the Post-War Period

The civil war in Tajikistan destroyed the type of criminal organization typical of Soviet society. Most "thieves in law" of the Soviet breed were actively recruited in the civil war both by the government and the opposition. However, within roughly three years after the signing of the Peace Accord, most of those criminal leaders were eliminated from the political process. Some of them were killed in various circumstances, while others were imprisoned. Sangak Safarov, Faizali Saidov and Abdulamon Ojembekov were typical representatives of the criminal underworld enmeshed in the drug trade that formed during the Soviet period.¹⁵⁶ Safarov and Saidov were both from Kulyab. Saidov was an ethnic Uzbek and a close ally of Safarov's, who led a Kulyab-based government squad. Before the civil war, Safarov served a prison term for 23 years. In 1993, the two field

¹⁵⁴ Bakhtiyor Naimov, "Prospects for the Upcoming Presidential Elections in Tajikistan", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 22 February 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Atovulloyev, "Pamir: Khronika bespredela" [Pamir: The Chronicles of Lawlessness].

¹⁵⁶ Kirill Nourzhanov provides an excellent analysis of Tajik warlords during and after the civil war: Kirill Nourzhanov "Saviors of the Nation or Robber Barons? Warlords Politics in Tajikistan", *Central Asian Survey*, 24 (2), 2005.

commanders had a violent conflict with each other, as a result of which both were killed.¹⁵⁷

Salimov served in top government positions, including that of minister of interior and as Tajik ambassador to Turkey. After the end of civil war, Salimov moved into the opposition. He was imprisoned by Rakhmonov in April 2005 after being accused of attempting to stage a coup d'état. Similarly, another warlord and former confidant of Rakhmonov's, Ghafor Mirzoyev, was arrested in August 2004 over same accusations. As with Tynychbek Akmatbayev in Kyrgyzstan, Mirzoyev, although allegedly involved in criminal activities, was elected to head a parliamentary committee on the rule of law, defense and security. He also headed the National Olympic Committee, and briefly the Drug Control Agency. In August 2006, Mirzoyev was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Other reputed criminal figures reportedly involved in drug trafficking but eliminated from politics were Makhmud Khudoiberdyev and Ibodullo Boitmatov. Both men fought on the side of the Tajik government, occupying leading positions in the president's guard. Khudoiberdyev, an ethnic Uzbek, instigated several attempts at a military revolt in 1996-1998, when he claimed control over the northern parts of Tajikistan. Khudoiberdyev was killed in October 2001 by his deputy Sergei Zvarygin as a result of a conflict. Boitmatov, also an ethnic Uzbek, supported Khudoiberdyev during the civil war. He was killed in 1997 as a result of a clash with state troops.¹⁵⁸

Drug money, possession of large quantities of weapons, and military squads controlled by all of Rakhmonov's former allies were decisive in the showdowns between them. Political power stemming from the shadow economy fostered further competition between former field commanders and the president over economic resources in the country. There are other numerous examples of post-civil war showdowns between the Tajik

¹⁵⁷ In-depth recounts of violent showdowns in post-civil war Tajikistan are depicted by Alexander Zelichenko in *Istoriya Aganskoi Narkoeksmansii v 1990h* [*The History of Afghan Narco-Expansion in the 1990s*].

¹⁵⁸ Zelichenko, "Istoriya Aganskoi Narkoeksmansii v 1990h" [*The History of Afghan Narco-Expansion in the 1990s*].

president and former field commanders. Among imprisoned politicians whom Rakhmonov had accused of attempts to instigate a coup d'état are: his former closest political allies Yakub Salimov, member of the Islamic opposition party Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov, successful businessman Djamshed Sieyev, academic and founder of the political party "Tarrakiyet" (Progress) Rustam Faiziyev as well as many other leading political actors.¹⁵⁹ But with the imprisonment of Mirzoyev, Rakhmonov was able to eliminate all major influential political figures with criminal connections.

According to Dodzhon Avtulloyev, a Tajik political dissident since 1993, Rakhmonov intentionally surrounded himself with people who were previously involved in criminal activities.¹⁶⁰ This allowed the president to have a more controllable cabinet, with members risking to be persecuted for previous crimes in cases of disobedience. Before persecuting Safarov, Salimov and Mirzoyev, Rakhmonov had promoted them into the highest government ranks. However, after all these men acquired stronger political power, Rakhmonov preferred to eliminate them on charges of terrorism or complicity in drug trafficking. In anticipation of the November 2006 presidential elections, Rakhmonov was eliminating an increasing number of political opponents. Among them, Ubaidulloyev, Chair of the National Bank Murodali Alimardonov, and minister of trade Khakim Soliyev were seen as the prospective political figures to be forcefully removed from their positions.¹⁶¹

Thus, roughly a decade after the end of the civil war, large-scale organized criminal groups and their notorious leaders were disbanded. These groups operated either outside the state or their legitimacy overlapped with the state.¹⁶² Criminal groups operating outside the state often formed ad hoc and can change their specialization depending on the opportunities available. An

¹⁵⁹ Atovulloyev, "Pamir: Khronika bespredela" [Pamir: The Chronicles of Lawlessness].

¹⁶⁰ "U Rakhmonova Vyhod Odin – Uhod" [Rakhmonov Has One Solution – Resignation], *Charogi Ruz*, 2 (112), 2006.

¹⁶¹ This comment is made by Rakhmonov's former adviser who published incognito in "Mest' Presidenta" [The President's Revenge], *Charogi Ruz*, 1 (111), 2006.

¹⁶² Nourzhanov, "Saviors of the Nation or Robber Barons?"

interesting difference between the Tajik and Kyrgyz organized crime networks is that although in Tajikistan there are some organized criminal groups operating in various parts of the country, they have not mobilized against the government or president. Those groups deal with drug trafficking and are led by former field commanders. According to one Tajik official, those groups do not represent any immediate threat to the president or his political regime.¹⁶³ Moreover, they will potentially mobilize in support of Rakhmonov, should the necessity arise. Criminal actors in Tajikistan often act individually or organize on the basis of close family ties. Whether drug smugglers or traffickers in human beings, for the most part their actions are poorly coordinated at the transnational level. Criminals acting on Tajik territory can coordinate with various groups abroad at different time periods. Such spontaneous organization of criminal individuals and groups complicates legal investigations and the tracing of their activities.

Yet, it would be incorrect to claim that all those who participated in the Tajik civil war were criminals. Indeed, both the government and opposition forces recruited criminals of the Soviet breed. But the bulk of field commanders had civilian backgrounds and were not involved in criminal activities before the Tajik conflict erupted.

‘Organic’ Corruption

It is common for the president to publicly criticize top government officials for large-scale corruption. The following conversation between the president and a minister took place on the Tajik national TV channel:

President: “I know how much you stole last month! Don’t you think you can get away with this without me seeing!”

Minister: “Your highness, I am deeply sorry, I promise not to do this again.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Author’s interview with Tajik representative of an international organization, Dushanbe, June 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Recited from a narration of a Tajik public employee, Dushanbe, June 2006.

Addressing the president with “your highness” has become a common phrase among Tajik state officials. Such public dialogues do not affect ministers’ or president’s popularity as corruption is known to the wider public but not condemned.

An interesting conclusion about the scope of illicit economy is made by one member of the Tajik opposition. According to his estimates, an amount equal to the Tajik state budget – roughly \$500 million – is owned by the president’s family.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, the turnover of illicit economy is estimated to be almost double the size of the country’s GDP: \$2-3 billion against \$1.5 billion, respectively. At the same time, most large businesses are owned by government officials or their relatives; large businesses outside the state’s radar are virtually non-existent. Since 1997, corruption in the state has been on the rise; governmental positions that used to be purchased for \$10,000, almost a decade later cost \$100,000. Rakhmonov’s brother-in-law, Khasan Sadulloev, in particular, appears to be involved in Tajikistan’s large-scale businesses.¹⁶⁶ Beginning in the early 2000s, Sadulloev was able to gain control not only over businesses belonging to private actors, but also to those belonging to members of the government, thus curbing the political influence of some powerful figures. For instance, he is thought to have eliminated Ubaidulloev from controlling businesses in the capital Dushanbe.

Rakhmonov’s extended family is infamous for organizing large celebrations and squandering money. Government officials and parliamentary members usually take part in the president’s family events. The president himself has a reputation for breaking official protocols at formal meetings with national or foreign officials. The tradition of giving expensive gifts at formal and informal occasions is also widespread. It was reported that state officials gave presents worth dozens of thousands of dollars at the wedding of Rakhmonov’s daughter. Such behavior shows the president’s and the government’s carelessness about their own public image on the one hand, and the society’s acceptance of clientelism at the state level, on the other.

¹⁶⁵ Author’s interview with a representative of Tajik opposition, Dushanbe, June 2006.

¹⁶⁶ Author’s interview with a representative of Tajik opposition, Dushanbe, June 2006.

The Tajik political situation represents an illustrative example of how clan identities outweigh official procedures. As Rakhmonov's regime became stronger and gained more control over the government structures as well as the national economy, it was possible to see that the number of natives from Rakhmonov's birthplace, Kulyab, active in the state structure was increasing. Domination by Kulyab representatives inevitably undercut the political influence of the Khojent, Gorno-Badakhshan, and Karategin clans that during the Soviet Union had possessed stronger positions in the government.

Against the backdrop of Rakhmonov's uncovered squandering behavior, Tajikistan's economic situation presents a bleak picture. An average salary today consists of \$5-15 per month – the lowest rate in the post-Soviet space. In rough terms, about 60 percent of the Tajik population is estimated to live on remittances sent home by Tajik labor migrants in Russia and Kazakhstan. 15 percent survive on international aid, while 25 percent are dependent on the drug trade.¹⁶⁷ The state is thus unable to provide a viable labor market. With corrupt government and an impoverished population that is dependent on external financial inflows or upon the illegal economy, Tajikistan is a country with a wide state-society gap. The state is not able to control the society through the labor market or through the collection of taxes and the society has no power to impact the state's functioning.

The Situation Today: Rent-Seekers and 'Dead Souls'

The run-up to the November 2006 presidential election in Tajikistan revealed some peculiarities of the government-opposition relationships, corruption and the functioning of various state institutions. Both the government and parliament proved to be very loyal towards Rakhmonov in his endeavor to prolong his presidency. Including the business sector, all major political and economic players in Tajikistan acted in cooperation with the president. Rakhmonov, having such a solid support domestically, is also able to sustain collaboration with international donors. Domestically, the president relies on informal relations with PDP members and representatives of the business

¹⁶⁷ Atovulloyev, "Pamir: Khronika bespredela" [Pamir: The Chronicles of Lawlessness].

community through allocating economic opportunities. Yet for the international consumption, he encourages some political plurality through permitting the IRP and several smaller political parties to participate in the elections.

Besides the three dominating parties, the PDP, IRP and the Communist Party, a number of smaller ones were formed by various political leaders with backgrounds in the humanities or social sciences. Among them, the Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Social-Democratic Party, the Agrarian Party, the Party of Economic Reforms, and *Rastokhez* were able to accumulate some membership and develop a political platform. The Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms were formed in the second half of 2006, and some Tajik experts comment that both parties are the government's construct to create an illusion of democratic pluralism in the wake of presidential elections.¹⁶⁸ Experts also argue that membership in all newly formed political parties, including the PDP, is largely inflated and is comprised of "dead souls".¹⁶⁹ Should party leaders leave or become weaker, their parties usually cease functioning. For instance, after the leader of the opposition Democratic Party, Makhmudruzi Iskandarov, was imprisoned for accusations of terrorism, his party became inactive.¹⁷⁰

Tajikistan's long-term prospect of power transformation should be taken into consideration. Rakhmonov is no longer concerned with the survival of his political regime, but extending his political and economic power. Unlike Akayev, Rakhmonov will retain popularity among the masses as long as the country remains stable. Even the religious opposition chooses to play along with Rakhmonov's guidelines of creating a strong presidential state that places personal interests ahead of national ones. It implies that corruption is

¹⁶⁸ Artem Fradchuk, "Soprotivlenie Bespolezno" [Resistance is Unnecessary], *Charogi Ruz*, 2 (112), 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Khurshed Atovullo, "'Mertvye Dushi' v Predstoyaschih v Tadzhikistane Vyborah" ['Dead Souls' in the Upcoming Elections in Tajikistan], Center for Journalistic Investigations, 23 August 2006. Here, Atovullo refers to a metaphor from the novel "Dead Souls" by Nikolai Gogol.

¹⁷⁰ Fradchuk, "Soprotivlenie Bespolezno" [Resistance is Unnecessary].

likely to rise and international funds are likely to continue to be embezzled by regime incumbents.

A strong pro-presidential party and a weak opposition leads to a situation when the most active forces in the 2006 elections are comprised of rent-seeking members from the government and opposition political candidates who have some public support, but must embellish their own political popularity in the election run-up. The stability of political regimes in Tajikistan and other Central Asian states, therefore, should not be confused with the efficiency of the state's functioning. Informal relations often prevail and trespass legally established divisions of state powers. These relationships allow for sustaining a stable government with predictable outcomes during elections. However, as the case of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution shows, informal relations in the government are susceptible to rapid collapse and lead to public disappointment with the government. Whether change is brought about through a popular revolution or in a more violent way, loyalties formed among rent-seeking state officials will inevitably be refocused and adapted according to the new regime incumbents' interests.

Long-Term Implications

The existing state-crime relations in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan bear long-term implications. Both countries shed light on how the established relations between criminal authorities and government structures may impact the functioning of various state institutions, the formation of domestic and foreign security policies, as well as the activities of civil society organizations. It is possible to identify both systemic and singular influences of the state-crime nexus on presidents' actions, the efficiency of voting systems, law enforcement agencies, states' ability to pay back their external debts, as well their impact on domestic and regional stability.

Presidents

President Bakiyev's bitter experience with organized criminal groups and their leaders from 2005 to 2006 will likely prevent him from merging with the criminal world during his presidential term, yet corruption in the state is still likely to persist.

More than a year after the March 24 revolution, the Kyrgyz government experienced numerous showdowns with various criminal groups and their leaders. Bakiyev's government was able to slowly take control over organized criminal groups that had become increasingly politicized after the revolution. Indeed, while crime levels did not decrease, the imprisonments or violent removals of known criminal leaders led to the development of a less turbulent situation in the Bishkek, Issyk-Kul, Jalalabad, and Osh regions. Although there is a high possibility that Bakiyev will repeat Akayev's mistakes and impose strong control over the business sector, today Kyrgyz civil society groups are able to exert extensive pressure on the president. The March 24 revolution, besides allowing Bakiyev to become president, also enormously strengthened the confidence of NGO groups that had developed their own repertoires for contesting or supporting state policies.

President Rakhmonov's informal control over large businesses in the country, meanwhile, insulates him from his political competitors. In the early 2000s, after Rakhmonov purged former field commanders who could potentially challenge him in the 2006 presidential elections, the president's control expanded to cover both the legal and illegal economies in the country. This will become the main factor contributing to Rakhmonov's undisputed victory in the 2006 presidential elections. However, Rakhmonov's corrupt government, although supported by the masses, can potentially be destabilized because of an overwhelming reliance on informal networks in the government and legislature. The Tajik government seems to exist without concern for the interests and needs of the society. Its informal structure cuts across constitutionally established hierarchies and therefore state actors are concerned with holding on to their positions. This creates a substantial gap between the government and the society, which inevitably fosters the emergence of non-state actors to substitute for local shortages of state authority in peripheral areas.

In order for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to escape this cycle of the state-crime relations where the state or criminal actors interchangeably gain political dominance, they should learn how to collaborate with political actors who exist beyond the state level. These actors include local NGOs financed by external donors or more traditional forms of civil society.

In Kyrgyzstan, the government must try to develop mechanisms to handle effective interactions with civil society groups. Today, this is the only rational choice for the Kyrgyz state. Functional relations between the state and NGOs will strengthen the state's domestic and international legitimacy. Likewise, any attempt to suppress the activity of local NGOs, especially if they have ties with Western donors, will create tensions between non-state actors and the government.

In Tajikistan, the government must follow the Kyrgyz example of creating possibilities for the development of local civil society groups. Though it is likely that most NGOs will seek relations with Western donors, when drawing on observations of the Kyrgyz experience, after a certain period, those NGOs can gain the ability of formulating their own agendas independent of external funds. Kyrgyz NGOs have also illustrated their

skillfulness in voicing their own concerns in a non-violent and organized way. As seen in Kyrgyzstan, with maturing civil society and an increased political engagement among the population, law enforcement agencies, ministries and parliamentarians will seek to resist the merger of top political officials and criminal leaders.

Voting Systems

In Kyrgyzstan following the March 24 revolution, the Bakiyev government was concerned with reforming the voting system from a majority system into a plurality system. Such a change might bear positive as well negative repercussions on the state's ability to curb the merger of criminal and political worlds. The 2005 parliamentary elections, conducted with the majority voting system, illustrated that only candidates with strong financial backgrounds, who enjoyed wide support within their local precincts, were able to win seats. This was the first time since Kyrgyzstan's independence that women were not elected to the legislature. In contrast, a plurality voting system, or elections organized according to party lists, can potentially allow women and candidates operating with a weaker financial basis to be elected into parliament.

However, voting systems based on party lists can potentially strengthen pro-presidential parties and suppress opposition groups. Political parties acting in support of Bakiyev's political regime would be provided with greater freedom of action, and would be encouraged to consolidate internally. At the same time, minor political parties will seek to cluster around wealthy political figures. If the ruling regime becomes susceptible to authoritarianism and tries to promote only candidates from pro-presidential parties, the role of political campaigns in local precincts is likely to decrease.

A party list system also increases the possibility of a split in the political alliance between Bakiyev and Kulov. The prime minister's "Ar-Namys" party has significantly broader popular support, therefore the legislature could be overbalanced by pro-Kulov candidates. This will weaken the president's powers. Yet, on a positive side, the party list system can potentially force the myriad of small and weak political parties to consolidate. After the March 24 revolution, the political climate in

Kyrgyzstan exuded opportunities for political participation by public and non-state actors. In July 2006, the number of officially registered political parties in Kyrgyzstan reached 82. This is double the number of a year earlier, which indicates a significant increase in political party formation.¹⁷¹

A mixed voting system in Kyrgyzstan could be an optimal solution. The mixed system functioned during parliamentary elections in the 1990s and 2000, which allowed the parliament to be a stronger counterweight to the president. The mixed system was changed to a majority system with Akayev's referendum in 2003. Along with a changed voting system, Akayev also reformed the parliament's structure from two chambers into one chamber, thus decreasing the size of the legislative branch. However, by changing the structure of elections, informal relations between the central power and interested candidates may nevertheless adapt according to official institutional frames.

In Tajikistan, parliamentary seats are distributed among pro-governmental members. Tajikistan's mixed voting system, although granting possibilities for female candidates, represents a strong shield against the political opposition, especially the IRP. Tajikistan's current mixed election system is not contributing to the democratization of the state because before it was introduced in the 2000 parliamentary elections, the president's party already subsisted as a strong political force, not balanced by other internal or external competitors. Only PDP members have the opportunity to win the majority of parliamentary seats. PDP candidates have better access to mass media outlets and have ties to the central elections committee. That is, although the IRP has a strong social basis, the party is not able to permeate the parliament. Only the IRP's two main leaders were able to gain parliamentary seats in the 2005 elections. The government is thus able to legitimize its own decisions through elections and through controlled mass media outlets.

Potentially, however, Tajikistan could become a model for a democratic state in the Central Asian region, if functional relations between the secular state and its religious opposition are built. For that, the secular forces must avoid

¹⁷¹ *Akipress*, 3 July 2006.

intentionally forcing the IRP into radicalization. Likewise, the IRP must moderate its ideology and emphasize its liberal orientations instead of its conservative ones.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Formidable ties between law enforcement agencies and organized crime were already formed during the Soviet period. After independence, these ties intensified due to the states' low financing of the public sector and the growth of the shadow economy. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan provide examples that show how the capacity of law enforcement agencies to fight organized crime significantly diminishes if top political figures team up with criminal bosses. At the same time, law enforcement can be used against unwanted figures in state structures, the business sector, or the shadow economy. This collaboration usually takes place at the level of the judicial power or the parliament. However, such collaboration is also directed by top political officials. At the lower level, border guards are susceptible to using their own status in order to benefit from cross-boundary smuggling.

In Kyrgyzstan, as a result of the post-March 24 increase of criminality, the personal safety of law enforcement officials considerably deteriorated. This became one of the reasons why the ministry of interior displayed strong resistance against the rise of criminal leaders. In Tajikistan, by contrast, law enforcement agencies acting under an informal submission to the president are empowered against criminal actors. Rakhmonov's extensive reliance on informal connections in governmental structures inevitably entails the violation of the existing legal system by law enforcement structures as well by the president himself.

Drug Control Agencies

Although Kyrgyz and Tajik experts criticize the work of their local DCA offices and claim that DCAs merely implement data gathering functions, there are some positive signs in the agencies' functioning. For instance, the position of the head of DCA is not considered to be as corrupt as in previous years. When Ghafor Mirzoyev was appointed to head the agency in 2004, the Tajik DCA was labeled as one of the most corrupt institutions. After he was

imprisoned, the agency's reputation began recovering. Hence, the local administration's involvement in corruption is a decisive indicator of DCAs' efficiency.

Both the Kyrgyz and Tajik DCA offices are sponsored to a large extent by USAID and UNODC. As argued by regional specialists, regional competition between Russia, China and the U.S. impacts the functioning of the Central Asian DCAs.¹⁷² The Kyrgyz and Tajik DCAs, forming an important part of the law enforcement system at the local and regional levels, are at times paralyzed by showdowns between national governments and international actors.

External Debt

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will not be able to pay back their international debts in the near future. These debts amount roughly to 130% and 125% of the states' GDPs, respectively. A large part of those internationally borrowed funds did not reach the grassroots level and were pocketed by government officials. Yet, the countries still strongly depend on international financial assistance and therefore, both Bakiyev and Rakhmonov are ready to accept conditions from donors in order to reform the economic and public spheres.

Bakiyev's government crucially relies on international assistance in alleviating poverty in order to retain its own popularity at home. But the Kyrgyz president also turned for economic help to Russian investors. Unlike humanitarian aid, which is aimed at social programs, economic cooperation with Russia is established at the governmental level and is even more likely to foster corruption in political circles. By expanding trade and economic cooperation with Russian investors, Bakiyev could limit the direct involvement of political officials in bilateral business deals.

Rakhmonov's government learned to maintain a façade of democracy while receiving international financial assistance. Rakhmonov's domestic popularity is greater than Bakiyev's, but his political position would be

¹⁷² Johan Engvall and Kairat Osmonaliev, "Uncertain Future for Kyrgyzstan's Drug Control Agency", *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, 28 June 2006.

considerably weakened without foreign assistance in the social welfare sector. Numerous international organizations active in Tajikistan are engaged in health care, education and the developing agricultural sector. International organizations also provide employment opportunities to young professionals, mainly in Dushanbe. Some international organizations, however, such as the Soros Foundation, encounter hurdles placed by the government.

Domestic Security Policy

It can be concluded that the massive and chaotic accumulation of legal and illegal capital was a one-time event in the early days of post-Soviet independence. It is unlikely that such an immense rise of private actors in a short period of time would once again take place in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan. The legal basis for the functioning of the business sector has been developed in both countries. This presupposes the protection of legal businesses from racketeering. However, legal systems are overshadowed by informal relations in the government and in the business sector.

Kyrgyzstan is currently concerned with the spread of religious extremist and terrorist movements on its territory. The increase of terrorist organizations in Kyrgyzstan is mainly caused by the political climate in Uzbekistan that generates more and more radicalized opposition groups. By escaping persecution in Uzbekistan, those groups find refuge on Kyrgyzstan's territory.

Kyrgyzstan's state-crime relations are likely to decrease, or alternatively, the merger between criminal actors and political leaders could become more concealed from the public eye. Over the last few years, the Kyrgyz public has become more critical of corruption at all levels. Allegations of corruption may become a serious restraint in political actors' efforts to gain nation-wide approval.

Tajikistan's main security concern is the drug economy that is difficult to control through state structures. With a heavy dependence on international assistance, the Tajik government nevertheless plays a dangerous game by functioning according to informal relations. The state budget is directed at

sustaining the security of the ruling regime. With 40 percent of the population under 18 years of age, the Tajik government's spending on social programs is incompatible with its military expenditures that, according to unofficial estimates, comprise about 17% of GDP.

Regional Security

State-crime relations prevent regional cooperation regarding organized crime. Since domestic policies fail to address the spread of organized crime and drug trafficking due to informal relations between political officials and criminal leaders, regional integration is even less likely to occur. Unless the problems of corruption and the merger of political and criminal circles are handled domestically, there is little possibility of developing regional cooperation in combating drug trafficking. Corruption among border guards is also not conducive to the increase of inter-state intelligence exchange.

State Deficits

The key challenge for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is decreasing the deficits of state in peripheral areas. The shortage of state institutions in the peripheries must be actively addressed by the national governments as well as the international community. Developing the educational system, healthcare, mass media, and other social services will have a long-term impact on the political process. A more educated, politically informed, and healthy population will be able to make more conscious choices during elections. If the state and international donors support the rural population with basic health care services, employment and education, parliamentary candidates will have to rely more on their political and economic electoral platforms rather than on direct bribing of the electorate. Improving the welfare services in peripheries will create an incentive for the political organization of the population into interest groups. Indeed, all these objectives cannot be achieved by the states alone. International assistance is imperative for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. But international assistance must also come with improved anti-corruption programs.

Educational programs in the peripheries should concentrate on a wider range of issues. To date, the bulk of western-supported educational programs in the

Central Asian states are directed at training on human rights issues and in the humanities.¹⁷³ But besides the humanities and social science spheres, programs improving vocational training and agricultural programs, engineering, as well as the teaching of natural sciences, medical studies and computer science should be implemented. While natural sciences and medical studies might require higher expenditure and lengthier periods of investment, they will in the long run secure a balanced distribution of professional skills within the rural and even urban populations.

Training the rural population to plan harvesting, usage of land or other pertinent activities in the agricultural sector is of great importance as well. Farmers and agricultural workers must attain entrepreneurial skills with the support of international community, local NGOs, and specialized government structures such as the ministry of agriculture or ministry of economic development. For instance, the work of the Asian Development Bank in Tajikistan in the field of cotton production can potentially prove to be an example of effective collaboration between an international organization and a national government, unless the Tajik government continues to hinder the initiative.

Decreasing the deficits of state should come along with the states' attempts to increase the rule of law in the society and across state structures, as well as to avert infiltration of criminal and corrupt individuals into the political domain.

¹⁷³ For an excellent analysis of problems of Western academic programs in Central Asia see Botagoz Kassymbekova, "Seeds for Poor Harvest", *Transitions Online*, 16 February 2005.

Conclusions: Two Models of the State-Crime Nexus

This study has attempted to explain the domestic and regional sources of the rise of organized criminal groups that seek political participation either through legal or illegal means. It was concluded that criminal groups evolve mainly in rural areas because of domestic political and economic settings. Their expansion, however, is predetermined by regional and international factors, such as the demand for drugs in Europe and Russia or enhanced means of communication and transportation. When criminal groups expand, the weak state is susceptible to the influence of organized crime in order to attain access to remote areas.

To show how state-crime relations evolved in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, this study examined the Soviet legacies that contributed to the rise of organized criminal groups. The large impoverished agricultural sector in which agrarians lacked basic entrepreneurial skills stimulated the rise of individual private actors who were able to obtain capital through privatization, the shuttle trade, and smuggling. As the Soviet Union declined, the criminalization of the sportsmen community, corruption among law enforcement structures and a violent subculture at the street level were reinforced. Drug trafficking was an important factor in the rise of criminals and in the organization of transnational crime in the 1990s. The drug economy was imperative in radical religious groups' attainment of arms.

The criminalization also occurred within governments and parliaments. In the mid-1990s, some Kyrgyz state official began to rely on the help of criminal actors in order to intimidate their rivals. This marked an increasing merger of state structures with criminal authorities. The situation significantly worsened after the March 24 revolution when both state officials and non-state criminal actors saw a new window of opportunity in seizing maximum political power or control over economic sectors. The

merger between criminals and politicians intensified as both relied on mutual cooperation, however many top state officials also found themselves falling into a dependent relationship with the criminals. In Tajikistan, the bulk of state officials after the civil war had access to guns and drugs. They were able to legalize capital attained through arms and drug sales during the civil war. Those who represented a challenge to Rakhmonov's regime were eliminated in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a result of these suppressive politics of the Tajik president, most of his current loyalties are maintained through rent-seeking behavior, where the ruling regime distributes economic opportunities to its supporters and eliminates unwanted figures.

Thus, although Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are both weak states where the government is connected to organized crime, both countries have a different logic of the emergence of the state-crime nexus. The main distinction is the following:

- In Kyrgyzstan government officials resorted to interactions with the criminal world in the mid-1990s. State officials used mafia bosses to bully their own competitors, thus creating a connection between the state and criminal world. The Kyrgyz state and criminal structures overlap, but are also visible as two coexisting phenomena.
- In Tajikistan, the connection between the drug economy and the state were formed over the course of the civil war from 1992-1997. In the late 1990s, most top government officials were involved in drug trafficking. In the early 2000s, organized crime and the state became deeply interrelated phenomena.

The negative repercussions of the state-crime merger include nepotism within state structures and the economic sector, suppressed freedom of speech, a widened state-society gap, the use of state institutions by criminal actors against the state, and the hindrance of economic growth. Furthermore, figures that seek parliamentary positions by bribing their electorates as

opposed to competing on the basis of adept political campaigns are disinterested in the modernization of society. Traditionalist values, religious sentiments and a lack of entrepreneurial skills among the masses allow rich parliamentary candidates to maneuver thanks to their economic capital in order to participate in the political process. Such candidates, as shown from the example of Kyrgyzstan, might be unpopular at a national level, yet be keenly supported in local precincts. In Tajikistan, corruption in the state although evident, is still accepted by the society that is fearful of a repetition of a civil conflict. All these elements, accompanying the state-crime nexus, are also the main components of a weak state.

There are, however, some positive signs in Kyrgyzstan's fight against the infiltration of organized crime in the state. After the death of reputed criminal boss Rysbek Akmatbayev in May 2006, Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies are taking a stronger hold over the rise of other criminal leaders that would be able to influence political process. On the part of Kyrgyz state officials, their experience after the March 24 revolution played an important role in a realization that the merger of the criminal and political worlds can lead to the state's dependence upon underground forces. Kyrgyz civil society was outspoken in reporting on the connections between state officials and mafia bosses.

The situation is bleaker in Tajikistan. The state is the major owner of the economic sector and is deeply corrupt. The Tajik president is a symbol of post-war stability, but also has an image a dishonest politician. If these trends continue in Tajikistan, new instabilities will inevitably arise among competing political figures over economic resources. Obviously, the widespread involvement of Tajik politicians in the drug economy and money laundering undermines the economic development of the country.

Organized crime will continue to exist in the Central Asian states as long as national governments are not able to provide their citizens with jobs, reduce poverty, and enforce the rule of law. General economic development is important as well. The example of Kyrgyzstan suggests that civil society can play a decisive role in countering the political influence of criminal leaders. But it is often up to particular regime incumbents as to whether they choose to cooperate and, to what extent, with the underground world. The Kyrgyz

and Tajik cases vividly illustrate that by choosing to align with criminals for their own political and economic ends, regime incumbents are susceptible to authoritarianism and cause the degradation of the society's well-being.

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