



FPC Briefing: The costs of believing you are not in the Game- Underlying Factors and the Political Economy of Conflict in Kyrgyzstan

Hema Kotecha

After the uprising in April, the Otunbaeva-led interim government's challenges looked mighty, but still manageable. Since the large-scale violence in June these have grown inexorably to include post-conflict recovery and reconciliation. Violence steadily continues and animosities grow. The international community is overstretched as well as mindful of Russia's historical role in the region: it is also dependent on 'democratisation' as the mode of its support to Kyrgyzstan, whether peace-building or service sector development. Meanwhile, political-criminal ties and corruption function as powerful framers of the country's development. The restructuring of allegiances and political settlements are likely to be more obscure than the democratic process, for which there are many potential spoilers. This paper argues that for international interventions and the new parliamentary democracy not to fail, clear-eyed political-economy and conflict-risk analysis, as well as sound and nuanced local engagement, must be at its core, no matter how 'technical' the assistance.

The Interim Government's initial commitment, upon coming to power on the wave of popular unrest in April 2010, was to address the causes of that unrest by improving basic services, livelihoods, reducing corruption and intimidation. Firstly, it was clear they needed to gain acceptance, achieve lawful monopoly of force, including command of the security sector, and use it to provide legitimate and regulated security to the population. They promised democratic reform.

However, since the atrocities and mass displacements in Osh and Jalalabad which started on the night of the 10th June, the size of the challenge has grown immeasurably to include post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction in a highly politically contested and fractious environment.

Furthermore, the events in Osh and Jalalabad have thrown up questions about control and allegiances of some of the armed forces and its commanders,¹ the basic capacity of the new leadership to manage the country and the feasibility of its new democratic path.² Whilst there are few doubts as to the honest intentions of President Otunbaeva it is not clear that these are matched by those in the rest of the political elite and those she must depend upon - as indicated, for instance, by continuing abuse by police in the south.³

¹ Roza Otunbaeva publicly admitted that some commanders acted contrary to orders. There is footage and other evidence that some troops allowed, if not participated in, the violence against Uzbeks. It is widely acknowledged that commanders provide the 'services' of their troops for money and are have personal ties with criminal groups, gangs and political figures, which may have played a role. Different army units may have local loyalties or their commanders allied with local politicians or extra-legal economic actors.

² A considerable democratisation challenge has been set by the new Constitution approved at the Referendum on 27th June, leading to elections on October 10th which turn Kyrgyzstan into the only parliamentary democracy in Central Asia. Roza Otunbaeva is now leader of the transition in her role as President until December 2011, those standing for political office have been asked to leave their government roles and the Interim Government has become a Technical Government for administrative reasons.

³ See Human Rights Watch documented cases and UN statement: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE66J0RF._CH_.2400.



As the country was reeling from the violence, initial statements of concern and support from the west were indecisive despite pledges of humanitarian funds. Russia and the CSTO rejected the invitation of a direct peacekeeping role (discussed below).⁴ Over eight weeks later, international organisations still face the question of 'what to do', amidst financial restrictions, overstretch of peace missions elsewhere and acknowledgment of Russia's historical role in the region. The plan towards reconciliation, reintegration and reconstruction appears indistinct.

The UN is currently considering the form of its long-term assistance programme. The EU and OSCE took some time to ponder and negotiate the results of a needs-assessment mission on 24 June for an international police presence or OSCE Police Task Force,⁶ which finally became known as an 'Advisory Group' and was approved for deployment on 23 July. They will not deploy, however, until September. Negotiations with Kyrgyz authorities played a part in the delay, but even without recent protests against the police mission,⁷ this initiative faces considerable institutional, mandate and capacity constraints to achieving the substantial impact on the situation that is popularly expected, with limited, advisory, non-executive roles. Reconciliation and rebuilding of Osh and Jalalabad has been announced with the establishment of a committee to oversee the process.⁸ A National Investigation Committee on causes and consequences of the violence was established by Presidential Decree and must submit its findings by the 10 September.⁹ A parallel International Investigation will be led by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Kimmo Kiljunen.¹⁰ \$1.1bn was pledged at a donor conference in Bishkek on 27 July.

⁴ CSTO members have proposed stabilisation measures and will announce a package soon. Kyrgyzstan was anyway due to receive military hardware including armoured vehicles and helicopters.

⁶ The contingency call for applications: "If deployed, the OSCE Police Task Force would have three main tasks: monitoring, mentoring and advising their counterparts in the police force of Kyrgyzstan. The International Police Officers of the Task Force would have no executive police powers and they will be unarmed." There was some discussion on the form of the police contingent e.g. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's special representative for Central Asia, Kimmo Kiljunen, said on Thursday "The OSCE are leading negotiations on that issue. I know that the foreign ministers of the EU are already discussing the option that there would be police crisis management support for the country," <http://en.rian.ru/exsoviet/20100625/159573490.html>

⁷ More recently, the police mission faced opposition in the form of well organised local protests against the decision by the head of state to invite the OSCE. Local actors would fear scrutiny and interference - indicated by Osh's mayor, a likely organiser of the protests. openly opposing the OSCE Police Advisory Group. Discontent with this decision may also have been fomented by the security ministries, fearing the impact on their positions, and from those with interests in the region's illegal trade, which depends upon control of security forces.

⁸ Curiously, although Jan Fischer's name has appeared in several articles as leading the committee and his deputy as Khadanbaya Khaktagulov, there does not seem to be a public announcement of this, whilst Khaktagulov has stated that he will desist from pursuing political aspirations until his work in reconstruction of the south has been successful. <http://business.akipress.org/news:92791>. Over 850 arrests have been made and cases opened against suspected instigators of the Osh events. Human rights activists are concerned about their lack of access to lawyers <http://eng.24.kg/community/2010/07/01/12432.html>

⁹ <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/104579/kyrgyzstan-after-one-month-since-tragedy-in-the-south-the-government-established-the-investigation-committee.html>

¹⁰ <http://en.rian.ru/world/20100722/159908835.html> ""This concerns other organizations too. We will look into the methods of such cooperation," Kiljunen said in answer to a question about the possibility of including experts from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the investigation."



Nevertheless (and meanwhile), the underlying set of factors at play in the region continue to frame the struggle for power, not least the nexus of political and government elite with criminal gangs in the south. There is an urgent need for relevant, political, local engagement to accompany any international technical assistance or reform programme.¹¹

The commentary below concerns the need for an intelligent approach from the international community to supporting long term stabilisation in Kyrgyzstan and, as a cornerstone, the development of a reliable, independent, security sector. It argues that if the socio-political realities of security in the south of Kyrgyzstan are not understood *comprehensively*, then international interventions to establish structural measures from above will allow the same problems on the ground to fester. Furthermore, they risk complicating the pre-existing conflict factors as well as those created by the recent atrocities. The international community cannot afford to leave these underlying factors unaddressed. The recent events showed how hidden fears and ambient tensions can quickly spiral into vicious attacks. A particular set of circumstances created the space and the triggers for this, but it has indicated a need for engagement to be deeper and more nuanced.¹²

A security assessment is required in a broader sense, encompassing political, social and economic dynamics and drivers. It should include the causes underlying and reproducing tense ethnic relationships and informal, extra-legal and illegal activities and should seek to map the political economy of the changes in progress. This goes no less for understanding how to engender reconciliation - clearly intertwined with security.¹³

The temptation within international organisations for quick deliverables must be resisted; the current restrictions on financing and political will might make this

¹¹ It will not be easy to ensure these processes actually create confidence and support reconciliation, especially while time passes and violence continues. It is not the aim of this paper to deal directly with all these difficulties. Significant conflict sensitivity is needed not to foment further conflict or create entrenchment into defensive positions by those accused or perceive themselves accused by association, as indicated by Ministry of Interior foot dragging or, reports of protests in Osh against the police mission: http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyz_In_Osh_Protest_Against_International_Police/2104222.html.

¹² Whilst this is not the place for a full institutional analysis or alternative proposals, one might briefly constructively consider a major and common institutional constraint to achieving carefully responsive intervention: the constant dependence on and referral to the 'centre' (Brussels, Vienna, New York). This also means that ground-level operations focus their reporting on the needs of the 'centre' to receive information (with the tendency to focus on the positive and only on the operation) which can outweigh the motivation to strive towards depicting reality. Reporting takes place in a framework and a language that is obeys the strict guidelines of the organisation and is amenable (including publicly) to its participants: clearly this precludes information relating to the specific characteristics, complex politics and ambient situation on the ground. To meet the need for more sensitive interventions, IOs should look to create a more nuanced, responsive mechanism on the ground which can operate more flexibly. One possibility might be a group of country representations in the capital. Such participants could already start at a far deeper level of discussion and knowledge of the country, than the headquarters. Such a structure should focus their attention *downwards* -to the implementers - in terms of sharing analysis and reacting minutely. They should be encouraged to use their personal networks and influence capacities with individuals in the government and other political actors - for which huge operational budgets are not required, but whose impact could be decisive (though immeasurable).

¹³ Each of the donor initiatives mentioned above have potential to fuel the conflict but they can also support reconciliation if they are conducted with sensitivity and strategic awareness of long-term peace-building processes and needs.



harder - but in fact, all the more necessary if not to allow the problem to grow. As one experienced international observer expressed it, if the international effort is not based on ground-up understanding of the security situation, "it will go into sand, you are trying to build the pyramid from the top".

Building Security and Peace, Key Actors

There is little doubt now that the triggers to the subsequent horrific inter-ethnic conflict were organised and planned provocations. Whilst inter-ethnic relationships can be influenced by history, resource distribution, representation and the generational reproduction of fears and insecurities, structural factors such as dependencies on competing elites maintain them and feed off them. These need to be understood in order to analyse potential spoilers and "war economy" interests that can present obstacles to building peace.¹⁴

To gain the necessary political understanding, the emerging restructuring of former socio-political dependencies, collaborations and networks needs to be examined and monitored. Much of this is obscure by its very nature but some understanding can be gleaned from studies of the dynamics of power change in 2005.¹⁵ Business and local power dependencies, interdependencies and client relationships play a vital role in the population's relationship with the state. At a macro level, these need to be managed and given consideration by any new government in order to prevent the creation of groups that effectively perceive their interests threatened by new power structures and democratic models, and will then act on that basis.

A matter of prime urgency is to take in hand the security sector and ensure some level of immediate, objective and independent¹⁶ security service that does not leave society - and social groups - responsible for their own security¹⁷ or dependent on protectionism from gangs and thus allied to certain strongmen. The long-term implications of civilian security and vigilante groups must also be considered; continued dependence on non-professional security provided by the DND, new 'civil defence groups' known as *druzhniki*, whilst currently officially sanctioned, cannot ensure stability. The longer they are have authority and people depend on them for protection, the more confidence they are likely to have in intervening and exercising power. The risks they pose include their

¹⁴ E.g. in Afghanistan, see Goodhand, Jonathan (2004) 'From war economy to peace economy? Reconstruction and statebuilding in Afghanistan.' *Journal of International Affairs, Special Edition on International Institutions and Justice*, 58 (1). pp. 155-174.

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN015703.pdf>

¹⁵ For 'Tulip Revolution' as trigger for 'hyper-democracy' and 'counter-revolutions' see Scott Radnitz, "What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?", *The Journal of Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2005, p.137-9

¹⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6601U720100701> The current challenge is tied up with reconciliation: Kyrgyz are highly defensive about the accusation and international media representations that they were the 'perpetrators' and people in Bishkek asked me 'what do you think of Kyrgyz? Do you think they are aggressive people?' People clearly are taking it personally. Yet the complicity of some Kyrgyz troops in the attacks on Uzbekistan is undeniable and lack of trust by Uzbeks and defensiveness of Kyrgyz - as well as the real fact that there were fatalities and attacks on both sides - are a significant obstacle to reconciliation.

¹⁷ As were the organised barricades of mahallas.



developing into competing factions. The more consolidated they become as the source of security, the more unstable the provision of security and the security situation may become.¹⁸ There are plenty of examples internationally where such security groups have fuelled continuing conflict.

Apart from the more publicly visible actors, several power groups should be mapped - including the 'siloviki', security services developed out of the Soviet KGB - over which Janysh Bakiyev (brother of Kurmanbek) famously had/has control. Some former generals and ministers of interior and defence have been politically active as well as fulfilling their official roles, such as Mirslav Niyazov, one of the current Kyrgyz negotiators with the US over the Manas base.¹⁹

Clearly the delicate balance of powers and allegiances under Bakiyev's regime has been disturbed and the new pattern will be established through struggle.²⁰ The May-June events in the south dramatically illustrated this political-economic restructuring through power struggles and political settlements. The situation also enabled criminal gangs in the south to show their strength to the Interim Government and other actors, a bargaining position from which to protect the local unofficial, grey and black economies they run.²¹ The shooting of influential gang leader and informal political player 'Chornij' Aibek Mirsidikov on the night of 6 June indicated that criminal networks are also being restructured.²²

'Sportsmen' and their sponsors are a well known feature of this region and the changing dynamics of their power plays must also be considered.²³ We can also look to the rise and assassination of Osh strongman and parliamentarian in 2005, Bayaman Erkinbaev,²⁴ to improve our understanding.

¹⁸ E.g. are they being set up on an ethnic basis? There was a meeting of elders mid-May where it was decided that self-defence groups should be multi-ethnic. The survival of such a pact or its earlier implementation should be examined.

¹⁹ The former Minister of Interior Omurbek Suvanaliev, part of this clique, heads the Ata-Jurt party based in the south. Miroslav Niyazov, head of the El Armany Party, left his position in 2006, <http://origin.rferl.org/content/article/1143732.html>, called for a strong president with six months to restore stability: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=kyrgyzstans-referendum-discomforts-kremlin-2010-06-29>.

²⁰ <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2630> "Another 'street' conflict between the criminals and entrepreneurs could turn into ethnic conflict."

²¹ See Abilabek Asankanov, "Ethnic conflict in the Osh region in summer 1990: Reasons and lessons", in R. Kumar and V. Tishkov (eds.), *Ethnicity and power in the contemporary world*, The United Nations University, 2006 accessed at <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu12ee/uu12ee0d.htm>: "As President Akaev put it, in the South social and property differentiation was taking place between poor and rich, those who had power and those who did not. When the situation erupted into violence, the corrupt leaders had no control."

²² Article on Fergana.ru website entitled: *Kyrgyz South and Uzbek issue*: "The mafia bosses continue to play important role, providing services to various political forces. Therefore, the political figures have to "pay bills" on time." <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2638>

²³ Neatly described in Marat, Erica (2006) *The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia* and Anara Tabyshaliev, 'Political Violence on the Rise in Kyrgyzstan', CACI. "In the post-Soviet setting, the rise of criminal groups constitutes a serious security threat to the government, especially in small states like Kyrgyzstan where security forces were practically unable to stop the growth of organized crime in the last fifteen years. Criminal groups have recruited many unemployed sportsmen in their patronage networks since the sports industry inherited from Soviet times declined rapidly." <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3691>

²⁴ Article: "Kyrgyz Parliamentarian Bayaman Erkinbaev Assassinated", <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3441>



Restructuring of Allegiances, Power Struggles and Political Settlements

The National Security Ministry has officially accused former-President Bakiyev of instigating and fuelling the destabilisation of the region, in which he has networks of dependents and clients,²⁵ creating a situation that the Interim Government could not control. Kyrgyzstan is accustomed to this interdependence of politics and 'business' for survival amongst the elite.²⁶ 'Doing business' generally requires one to be on the side of those in power, thus many might be regarded as being 'pro-Bakiyev' who will be seeking to re-align themselves, whilst others may not see a viable place for themselves in a new transparent system. What were the deals and informal agreements with Bakiyev's government that some now fear would not materialise? What are they doing to ensure that they command political clout in the right places in order to continue their holds on their businesses and privileges of access?²⁷

On the other hand, to what extent will local positions remain in the same hands regardless of parliamentary and constitutional changes - especially those positions which endow informal powers and resources such as the ability to show blind eye to trade at borders, channel state funding to certain schools or projects? Certain shifts in local government have already taken place, with claims and counter-claims for individuals to be removed or reinstated in their positions. The resilience of the Mayor of Osh Melis Myrzakmatov in a powerful lynchpin role has been particularly apparent and he has not been shy in his opposition to President Otunbaeva and more vocally to the OSCE Police Advisory Group.²⁸

Alongside this, critical for the key issue of reconciliation, one should consider where Uzbek leaders might bestow their allegiances or seek protection in the emerging new order.

Democratisation and Risks to the International Community

Whilst expectations of democracy to not seem particularly high they do exist amongst the intelligentsia and civil society. Ineffective reform programmes can lead to popular disappointment and rejection of the promise of democratisation. In turn, this can have repercussions for legitimacy and stability of the

²⁵ It is worth remembering how he came to power in the first place: "in Kyrgyzstan the key role of several influential criminals and drugs barons in organizing and financing anti-Akaev demonstrations is apparent", article by Aleander Kupadze, "Political-criminal-business nexus in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan: Comparative Analysis", at http://src.auca.kg/images/stories/files/Report_Aleko_Kupatadze_eng_19June.pdf. "The Kyrgyz Parliament consisted of cronies of former President Askar Akayev and local potentates who simply bought themselves seats and were linked to illegal business and organized crime. The new political elite opposed the idea of dissolving the parliament comprised predominantly of pro-Akayev figures. Dissolving the parliament formed during Akayev's time would result in a rapid deterioration in domestic security due to some of the lawmakers' connections with the criminal world."

²⁶ For instance, taped conversations between political elites plotting and discussing sums of money were quickly accepted by the population as realistic.

²⁷ For instance, over the last year a lot of investment plans were made for Osh: what were the deals/informal agreements that they now fear will not materialise?

²⁸ E.g. Open opposition to the OSCE police advisory mission.



government due in October 2010 but also for trust in democratisation processes in the wider region and the entrenchment of support for the region's autocrats. Moreover, support by international actors even at a local level can have repercussions for the delivery of democracy and services, depending on which civil society implementing partners they chose to support, for instance.²⁹ Uninformed policies can prove counterproductive to stabilisation.³⁰ Despair for the future that can lead to violence as people feel they have nothing to lose, must be avoided.

To support reform successfully, the system of governance in place - one whose shifting power bases are largely obscure - must first be unpicked. This requires some understanding of the dynamics of competition for power, resources and privileges on the ground and the real implications of 'democratisation' as a peace-building model. It is doubtful whether the rural poor in Kyrgyzstan believe in democratisation; they have suffered the effects of economic liberalisation and privatisation, resulting in inequalities and economic dependencies - sometimes on criminally-linked networks.³¹ Their dislike of Bakiyev was rather for not providing them services and livelihoods than for lack of democracy. It would be misleading to consider that ideological preferences will simply play out in Parliamentary debates, between political parties or in 'safe spaces' in the media, NGO roundtables or public consultations. It must be recognised that political preferences in Kyrgyzstan are not purely based on ideology, values, principles or policies; nor purely along ethnic/regional lines.³² Simply throwing instruments of democratic reform at the situation and expecting a free-willed process of democratisation has not thus far achieved stability. Political actors need to build allegiances based on providing real peace dividends that respond to the population's wants; however this alone may not guarantee their political survival.

The International Community will need to tread carefully if a stable political agreement is to emerge amongst all actors, including those with interests formerly or currently invested in Bakiyev. His own capacity to mobilise through his former clients, patrons and other ties, even through direct funding, can only be diminished if those ties are integrated sustainably and legitimately into the new environment. The new government leadership, for its part, will have to 'manage' competition for state resources and key positions of power as well as elites' capture of informal resources and economies. This will have to be balanced with the new commitments to transparency and accountability. Attention will also have to be paid to provide the awaited dividends to the

²⁹ The current situation has put a number of significant strains on NGOs, especially in the south, including pressure from local executive bodies, from other 'influence' actors who see humanitarian-intended NGOs as competition and from those enraged and recently polarised by the violence.

³⁰ This is well acknowledged in the policy literature on conflict interventions, however, such notions that are 'taken as read' often remain as elephants in the room. E.g. see: www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/political-economy-analysis/political-economy-analysis-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states

³¹ Nevertheless, there appears to have been general support for the ousting of Bakiyev and for holding the Referendum.

³² Wolters, Alexander, *Group Identities and Political Conflict in Kyrgyzstan: Findings from the Field*, 2006 <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=cab359a3-9328-19cc-a1d2-8023e646b22c&lng=en&id=34035>



population. Could these processes bring government and parliamentary actors into conflict with the aims and methods of democratisation and their cooperation with the international community? Or could the pressure to resist corruption potentially lead to further instability, as individual politicians risk losing financial support and 'protection' of powerful 'businessmen'? Could a vigorous anti-corruption and clean-up campaign (if possible), leave some parliamentarians vulnerable to more unscrupulous power seekers? If individuals who represent the mainstays of hope for the democratisation agenda (either because they are in charge of particularly important fields such as the police, or because they are the least resistant to democratisation) are thus weakened, this could have a counterproductive impact on the reform project of the international community. Ultimately, what will be the emerging settlements between the range of independent actors within the current government, with Bakiyev's financial empire and his backers?³³

There is a risk that the paradigms of democratic participation, representation³⁴ and ethnic conflict sometimes obscure the broader reality of the close knit relationships between politics and the informal economy, as was seen in many of the earlier representations of the conflict. Only after the most recent and horrific set of events was it publicly recognised by the UN that the incidents that triggered large-scale violence were planned and organised. This simple statement of fact must be drawn out into the analysis of how to plan for reconstruction and development, as discussed above. How it will be included into the investigations, and how this will be presented to the public, is another matter that needs to be determined. Acknowledging the provocations in a sufficiently substantial fashion could ease paths to reconciliation, however, must not indicate exoneration of those who committed criminal acts; this is a delicate balance to strike in order to achieve the buy-in of the entire population.³⁶

³³ Southern vs northern 'clans' and power bases are one element of the picture. The attempted seizures and unrest ('counter-revolutions') in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken appear more to have been managed by local actors (and certainly not ethnic-based conflicts – the 18 May clashes involved mixed Uzbek, Kyrgyz families on the one side, and on the other only young armed men); it has also been suggested that they were using the 'seizure' of Bishkek to justify 'seizure' elsewhere (This reference to the 'land-grabbers' or 'land squatters' has been extended and generalised beyond its context) or simply opportunistic factions taking advantage whilst the control of the country was in flux.

³⁴ <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2010/05/17/11583.html>. "[Political] Parties – is a key element in establishment of right on pluralism in the country", OSCE PA Special Representative for Central Asia and Vice-President Kimmo Kiljunen said. "They represent possible discord in the country - as ideological as regional, perhaps social, religious and ethnic. That is the reason for parties to become a tool of opinion in the parliament and reflect people's views." Increase political pluralism. Also: <http://www.monocle.com/monocolumn/2010/05/17/going-to-the-polls/> and <http://eng.24.kg/community/2010/05/24/11695.html> in which ethno-nationalism is blamed for conflict. Uzbekistan's position regarding Osh as an 'Uzbek city' and of certain proponents of 'autonomy' overshadowing those for 'minority rights' such as Uzbek as an official state language are also complex issues which require national policy frameworks to be developed.

³⁶ One example of the relationship between the investigation and reconciliation processes is South Africa, where reference to a 'Third Force' was made in the final report of the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation. Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 2003, http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/trc/4_3ap.pdf. "The 'third force' label was first used by ANC leadership figures in the wake of a wave of seemingly random attacks on the Witwatersrand and Vaal areas in August and September 1990. As the attacks continued, allegations were made that a 'hidden hand', or 'Third Force,' was involved in orchestrating and fomenting violence – to derail the negotiation process and/or to undermine the ANC's efforts to consolidate its political presence. These attacks were believed to involve covert units of the security forces acting in concert with individuals or groupings, such as the IFP and certain right-wing paramilitary organisations." However, questions continue to be asked how far the government could have been ignorant of these activities in the circumstances.



Competing Models of Development and State Building

Looking towards future political reform, some international actors may be cautious or even sceptical about the democratic credentials of the new government elite, especially those with chastening experience of the past five years. Western officials seeking to preserve the Manas airbase in the Northern Distribution Network will be paying particular attention to the new dynamics from a less altruistic perspective. Nevertheless, the western international community's interventions are reliant on the tools and methodology of democratisation, institution and state building³⁹ and on democratisation's continued positive image and desirability.

Democratisation and ethnic-tolerance paradigms contrast with the Russian approach to managing conflict. This contrast is likely to come home to the government when dealing with actors that are more powerful and less obvious than a political party or an ethnic group and that seek to compete with government actors by more opaque methods.⁴⁰

The western international community (DFID, EU, the Banks, OSCE etc) may see itself located entirely outside the sphere of 'new great game' geopolitics supposedly played by the US State Department and the Kremlin. Indeed the true picture is rarely as crass, especially on the ground level, as often reported. But 'democratic' international donors need to face up to the fact that they are actors with strategic aims - even if these are technocratic, concerning service delivery or financial management. They are implementing their aims through use of a model which has competition on the ground from other, more flexible, nuanced, pragmatic and relationship-based actors such as Russia, China and even Kazakhstan. One of the aforementioned 'siloviki', retired general and Head of the El Armany Party, called for a strong leader with vertical power and responsibility to bring order to the country within six months. Undeniably this call resonates with the fears and demands of many in the south.

It is clearly not in Russia's or Kazakhstan's interests to have a successful model of multi-party parliamentary democracy.⁴² Voicing his displeasure, President Medvedev opined that Kyrgyzstan risked becoming another Afghanistan. "Will this not make it possible for forces with extremist views to take power?" he

³⁹ According to internationally agreed UN principles and values: <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>

⁴⁰ See "Russia: Supporting Non-Democratic Tendencies in the Post-Soviet Space?" by Antje Kästner, German Development Institute. [http://www.die-gdi.de/CMS-Homepage/openwebcms3_e.nsf/%28ynDK_contentByKey%29/ANES-7ZWGYP/\\$FILE/BP%202.2010.pdf](http://www.die-gdi.de/CMS-Homepage/openwebcms3_e.nsf/%28ynDK_contentByKey%29/ANES-7ZWGYP/$FILE/BP%202.2010.pdf)

⁴² Many are certain this is the reason why Russia refused the request by Otunbaeva for peacekeeping assistance - which was publicly reasoned due to 'Kyrgyzstan did not meet our conditions' - those conditions being cancelling the plans for a parliamentary democracy. Further on this geopolitical note, Russia is playing an active role in Kyrgyzstan and cementing certain strategic relationships. It promised increased and immediate aid and appointed a Special Envoy - Vladimir Rushaylo, former Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Some Russian observers have noted the Special Envoy and played with the idea of 'taking over' Kyrgyzstan as a 'protectorate', only desisting due to being committed to financial investments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The media reported Russia's unsolicited reassurances of its good intentions as: "Rushaylo has insisted that he 'does not intend' to interfere in Kyrgyz affairs". This is a classic example of Russian tactical communications, that powerfully indicates that Russia has Kyrgyzstan under *its* wing and the capacity and authority to do even more. Another 'hint' (some would call it 'threat') was a statement that the CSTO would not be fielding CSTO peacekeepers.



asked rhetorically whilst at the G20 Summit in Canada.⁴³ With Otunbaeva's direct request for its intervention, Russia has already proved that it is 'needed' by regional governments, giving its involvement there greater legitimacy than in Georgia. However, Russia's direct, pragmatic and clear-eyed view of the situation and skills in the management of powerful interests will no doubt be of more practical use to government and state actors than basing its survival purely on votes or other sources of legitimacy provided by democracy. In keeping its reign on the government Russia would remind it (as it surely has been doing recently) that democracy is weaker than organised crime and that 'democracy' does not provide the tools to 'manage' issues such as local corruption and smuggling, or even extremist groups. It remains to be seen the ways in which Medvedev's warning in Canada will resonate in future.

Whilst donors may not be consciously competing for influence with a putative Russian 'model', certainly what is at stake amongst international actors in Kyrgyzstan is the viability of their proposition of democratic models of stability, legitimacy and support against those proposed by others.

Conclusion

There are misconceptions to overcome. One is that without a budget one cannot be influential. It is hoped that the considerations above indicate that careful political engagement and steering is not necessarily expensive. It does, however, require foreign ministries to increase their interest in and prioritisation of Kyrgyzstan's peace-building. Kyrgyzstan is not a major source of hydro-carbon resources and is not the major crisis and investment focus that is Afghanistan; Bishkek hosts only two European embassies. However, this conflict must be as high up the agenda as is the combating of drugs - for Osh's role as a major historical hub is set to increase and is inextricable with the fate of Afghanistan. Similarly, the sensitivity of the West (including the UN) to involvement in Russia's traditional region begs a flexible, nuanced and realistic approach.

The international community cannot avoid a number of challenges and risks posed by the socio-political environment, as discussed above. To mitigate them requires maintaining awareness of the underlying ties between politics and the informal economy, and competing approaches to solving issues that may be more direct and have greater appeal than the democratic process. A comprehensive security and conflict assessment and deeper understanding of the political-economies fuelling the situation are vital. Whilst any proper planning process requires iterative assessment and analysis, these are often sidelined or superficial in urgent situations which are far away. This small

⁴³ Quote from <http://rt.com/Politics/2010-06-28/medvedev-kyrgyzstan-parliamentary-republic.html> "I have a hard time imagining that a parliamentary republic could work in Kyrgyzstan. Will this not turn into a succession of endless problems, reshuffles in parliament, the rise to power of these or those political forces, an uncontrolled transfer of authority from one hand to another, and, finally, will this not facilitate the arrival to power of the forces with extremist views?" as reported by <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=kyrgyzstans-referendum-discomforts-kremlin-2010-06-29>.

investment, however, can achieve a great deal in the current circumstance and make realistic the development of a functioning parliamentary democracy.