

# Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan

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Editors

## **DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16**

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Department of International and Comparative Politics,  
American University – Central Asia

September 2003  
[www.demstar.dk](http://www.demstar.dk)



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## **Editors' Preface**

The series of papers published under the heading 'Understanding Politics' in the DEMSTAR Research Report series was created to provide a forum for presenting the political characteristics that are specific to each transitional country. The focus is particularly on those country aspects of the political systems that today increasingly structure political processes and empower or constrain political actors. While all post-communist systems share a number of common features, the country studies focus on how historically formed traditions and institutions influence local political processes. Renowned political scientists specializing in particular countries have written the individual country case studies. The editors hope that these studies can assist the general reader to differentiate between countries that are all too often seen as uniform relicts of incumbent communist systems. We also hope that the studies will inspire general comparativists dealing with various aspects of those countries to consider the impact of historically formed traditions and institutions.

The authors and the editors are fully aware that we are dealing with rapidly changing societies, and that short essays can never capture all important aspects of a polity. We therefore hope to update these country cases at regular intervals. In this context comments from our readers will be an important contribution to the improvement of subsequent editions. Please mail comments to the editors at [johannsen@ps.au.dk](mailto:johannsen@ps.au.dk) or [on@ps.au.dk](mailto:on@ps.au.dk).

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## I. Introduction

### 1. A Political Summary

The essential first point in understanding politics in Kyrgyzstan is to recognize, despite seventy years of Soviet rule, the persistence of pre-modern forms of governance. In fact, the tenacity of regional, clan and tribal loyalties, as well as personalistic patron-client relationships, was often strengthened rather than diminished by Soviet rule and Soviet ethnic and nationality policies.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, to be sure, Soviet-fostered urbanization altered the social dynamic of the clan system creating an urban Kyrgyz with more superficial clan affiliations.<sup>2</sup> The post-Soviet governing elite is, thus, faced with contradictory choices and policies. On the one hand, the new state class feels itself required, in the process of state-building in the post-communist era, to create and emphasize an entirely new *national identity*; albeit an identity based upon a magically conjured, almost entirely artificial pre-Soviet Kyrgyz “nation” that never existed.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand their very mode of governance, dependent as it is on personal, regional and clan loyalties, militates against the creation of such a genuine *national identity* and, in fact, serves to strengthen and reinforce the various local identities and personalistic political loyalties the state class ostensibly desires to dissolve.

By 2003 there was a growing awareness in Kyrgyzstan that two major events in the previous eighteen months – one external and the other internal – had had an irrevocable effect on Kyrgyzstani politics and would shape significantly the future trajectory of the country. The first of these events was the attack upon and destruction of the World Trade Center in New York and the simultaneous attack upon the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense outside Washington, DC. The attacks, apparently at the instigation of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaida network, based in and under the patronage of the Taliban government in nearby Afghanistan, placed the previously obscure Kyrgyzstan at the virtual epicenter of global geopolitics. Since that time a major American military base, named after Peter J. Ganci, the New York City Fire Chief killed in the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11, has been established at Manas International Airport, located about thirty-five kilometers north of the capital city of Bishkek. That Kyrgyzstan – or at least its territory – has been drawn into and become a key element in America’s “War on Terror” is attested to in part by the virtually constant stream of very high ranking (and many more lesser ranking) American officials who have visited Bishkek in the aftermath of September 11: a trip by Secretary of State Colin Powell was canceled the day before

because of weather although Powell visited several other Central Asian states. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has paid several visits, then Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill has visited as has Senate Majority leader Tom Daschle and even General Tommy Franks, Commander of the U.S. military's Central Command as well as military chief of the American invasion of Iraq. Secretary O'Neill went so far as to claim that, "The whole world owes a debt of gratitude to the President (Askar Akayev) and his team..."<sup>4</sup> However, quite apart from the War on Terror, it has become clear that a permanent American presence in Central Asia allows the United States an important strategic foothold in a vitally important area from which it had previously been largely excluded. Although earlier there was much talk that the base was only a temporary installation necessary to prosecute the Afghan war, this policy, if it were ever true, seems to have changed as the Americans have leased land and are in the process of constructing permanent facilities. A sizable military presence in Kyrgyzstan will allow the United States to project its military (and, therefore, its political and economic) power toward Russia, China, Western and South Asia. America's influence over Central Asian petro-pipeline politics will be significantly enhanced. It is clear that the Russians, the Chinese and the Iranians are less than happy at the prospect of a permanent American military presence virtually next door.<sup>5</sup>

The second major event to affect Kyrgyzstani<sup>6</sup> politics between September 2001 and mid-2002 is what has become known as the "Beknazarov Affair". Five Kyrgyzstani citizens were killed and between 50-100 wounded by police on March 17, 2002 in the Aksy locality (Jalal-Abad province) while taking part in anti-government demonstrations demanding the release of Azimbek Beknazarov, an imprisoned member of the *Jogorku Kenesh* (the Kyrgyzstani parliament) from the southern Jalal-Abad region.

The defining political faultline in Kyrgyzstan, other than that between the *nouveau riche* identified primarily with the state class and the mass of the poor, a division that in earlier, less "post-Marxist" times might be said to be based on class, is that between North (specifically Chui [Bishkek] and Talas provinces) and South.<sup>7</sup> In Kyrgyzstani politics the "South" refers to the three provinces (Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken) that border the fertile Ferghana Valley. Most of the Ferghana Valley is located in Uzbekistan; some in Tajikistan and the rest in Kyrgystan. A major Ferghana city, however, is Osh and that city is the "southern capital" of Kyrgyzstan. This north-south divide also encompasses a variety of clan and tribal divisions; divisions that could be said to be taking on a "class" aspect in the sense that the state political class comes primarily from the North and thus controls far greater resources

than the South. In general the people of south Kyrgyzstan are far poorer than their northern cousins.

In the post Soviet era there has been a more or less constant attempt to make mutually acceptable border delimitations for all Central Asian states. The borders were drawn by Soviet (largely Russian) ethnographers located in faraway Moscow institutes, and then changed several times over the years for both political and economic reasons. Consequently, as a mid-2003 European Union task force has written, "...most of them (the borders) are completely artificial" and the source of significant conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, they had a different significance when the Central Asian republics were all part of one Soviet Union. According to one Kyrgyz government official Kyrgyzstan has 170 border disputes with Uzbekistan and seventy more with Tajikistan.<sup>9</sup> Even the borders with non-Soviet countries (China) have been sources of dispute and recrimination. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan has been engaged in regular negotiations with its neighbors as to their permanent and mutually acceptable borders. Early in 2001 the Kyrgyzstani government reached several agreements with the Chinese that would cede to China remote and politically unimportant (virtually no one lives there; the economic and strategic implications of the cessions are unclear) mountainous areas in the far east-south of the country; i.e., those regions bordering China. The announcement of these agreements was met with strident criticism from mainly southern members of the *Jogorku Kenesh* led by Beknazarov.

The international media have often interpreted the criticisms of the government of President Askar Akayev with regard to these border agreements, territorial cessions and the subsequent political troubles as having to do with the giving away of Kyrgyzstani territory as such. Such is a distortion of a broader underlying reality. Southern legislators and members of a variety of opposition groups saw the territorial cessions as an issue and seized upon it. They were, admittedly, on strong constitutional grounds in that the national legislature is required to approve any border changes. The ceded territories are nearly 500 kms – the opposite side of the country – from the centers of opposition activity and no southern kinsmen are involved. All the ceded territories would be regarded as part of the "northern" provinces". In fact, they are virtually unpopulated. Thus, the disputes are not primarily about territorial cessions to China but about various clan and regional disputes.<sup>10</sup> However, it should also be pointed out that, given the number of border disputes with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan involving the Ferghana, southerners were certainly uncomfortable with the idea that the Administration could so cavalierly violate constitutional procedures and cede

national territory by executive decision. If they could do it with China could they not do it with territory in Jalal-Abad, Osh or Batken with citizens waking up one morning to find that a secret executive decision had made them residents and citizens of another country?

Beknazarov's increasingly strident criticism of the government eventually led to his arrest in February 2002 on charges of abusing official power in an earlier period when he was a regional prosecutor. The charges against the member-of-parliament were seen by virtually everyone as a blatant political attempt to silence his criticism. The charge of past corruption or abuse of power is commonly used against enemies of the regime, as it is in all Central Asian states. Prior to Beknazarov's emergence as a key opposition figure, there was the case of Feliks Kulov, a fellow northerner, vice-president, cabinet minister, mayor of Bishkek and one time close political ally of the President who fell afoul of the elite and has been in prison for several years now on corruption charges. The fact that the corruption or abuse of power charges have a certain validity does not detract from their political use. Nearly everyone who has ever held any public position whatsoever, beginning with the lowliest policeman, is vulnerable to such charges as the entire system is so riddled with corruption that there is virtually no one who has not engaged in it and is, thus, a potential subject of politicized prosecution.

However, with the arrest of Beknazarov, the government significantly overplayed its hand. Immediately there were protest demonstrations organized by Beknazarov's regional allies and fellow clan members. On March 17, 2002 in the small town of Aksy in Jalal-Abad province the police opened fire on a protest march demanding Beknazarov's release, killing five people and wounding between 50-100. There was immediate and widespread internal and international criticism and Akayev's relatively liberal image tumbled even further. Internally there were massive daily protests around Jalal-Abad, in the politically volatile southern city of Osh and even in the capital of Bishkek with demonstrators gathering daily in front of the *Jogorku Kenesh* building. Initially the government tried to blame the demonstrators themselves for the violence. The state controlled media daily broadcast the government's version of events with derisory comments, further enraging the people of Aksy and surrounding areas.<sup>11</sup> Then videotaped versions of the shooting began appearing showing that it was the police who initiated the violence. Gradually the government backed away from its original position and began looking for scapegoats with a State Investigating Commission. Several people at the top levels of government, including the head of the Presidential Administration, Amanbek Karypkulov, were then accused of negligence and dismissed from office to placate the opposition. However, as

indicative of the incestuous nature of the dominant political class, the disgraced Karypkulov, who had without complaint fallen on his sword for his leader, was, just two months after being sacked, appointed ambassador to Turkey in July 2002.<sup>12</sup> This move served the dual purpose of getting him out of the country where he would be beyond the reach of opposition scrutiny as well as, if the past is any indication as to the future, to provide him with a sinecure until he is completely rehabilitated.

In the meantime Beknazarov was released from prison with the order that he not attempt to leave the country until the appeal of his conviction was heard. He was not removed from his parliamentary mandate as had been suggested. Finally an appellate court removed all the charges. Contrary to indicating an independent judiciary, the appellate court decision showed just the opposite. The decision to drop the charges was as politically motivated as were the initial charges that set off the crisis. The latter was the action of a beleaguered political class that had looked into the abyss of what the new Prime Minister, Nikolai Tanayev, referred to as a looming civil war and pulled back in dread.<sup>13</sup> However, to a significant degree the battle lines had been drawn and the security of the current political class severely weakened.

## *2. Kyrgyzstan Profile*

Kyrgyzstan is a relatively thinly populated country of five million people set in a sometimes stark but strikingly beautiful terrain. The country is dominated by the Tian Shan and related mountain ranges. Traditionally the Kyrgyz, a Turkic-speaking people, were sheep, cattle and horse breeding nomads moving back and forth with their herds between high pastures and the lower valleys according to seasonal dictates. Although current official state building propaganda asserts a claim to the existence of a "Kyrgyz nation" first being mentioned in Chinese documents as long ago as 201 BCE, identities broader than that of localized clans in remote valleys were tenuous to say the least and certainly would not have constituted a "nation" in the contemporary sense of the term. To a significant degree the "Kyrgyz nation" was invented by Soviet (mainly Russian) ethnographers in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

Of the total mass of nearly 200,000 square kilometers only about seven percent of the land is arable; the rest mountains, high pastures and woodlands. Kyrgyzstan shares borders of slightly over 1,000 kms each with both Kazakhstan to the north and Uzbekistan to the West and of between 850-900 kms each with both Tajikistan and China to the south and east. In the extreme southwest of the country there are three separate "foreign" enclaves totally surrounded by Kyrgyz territory; all the consequence of the genius of

Moscow-based ethnographers and cartographers. Two are part of Uzbekistan and the third Tajikistan.

The nation's ethnic composition is actually quite diverse with more than one hundred different ethno-national groups of which twelve have populations of over 20,000.<sup>15</sup> The degree to which old habits die hard is indicated by the fact that the independent Kyrgyz Republic's passport, like its Soviet predecessor, designates its bearer's ethno-nationality. (Kyrgyzstan has also maintained the Soviet *propiska* in which each person has a designated address that determines – and restricts – a vast spectrum of things from voting to employment to marriage.) Exact figures as to ethnic composition are difficult to come by, in part for political reasons. For obvious reasons the government tends to emphasize the percentage it says are ethnic Kyrgyz: up to 65% as determined by the 1999 census. According to the US Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook* (the corresponding Kyrgyzstani government census figures are in parentheses) only 52.4% (64.9) of the population is ethnic Kyrgyz, another 20.5% (13.5) is Slavic (mainly Russian [12.5], but also Ukrainian [1.0]), Uzbek 13% (13.8), German 2.4% (0.4) and others around 12% (8.0). Both the German and the Jewish population (at independence the latter was around 2.5%) have virtually disappeared with the former immigrating to Germany and the latter to both Israel and Germany. While nearly a quarter of the population was Slavic at the time of independence and over thirty percent a decade earlier, there have been several large waves of Russian emigration to Russia over the last few years and it is a phenomenon that is continuing for a combination of economic, political and cultural reasons. Thus, the CIA figures on the Russian population would appear to be overstated.<sup>16</sup>

The elevation of the Russian language in 2001 to an official status almost equal to Kyrgyz was one belated attempt to stem Russian emigration. Another was the appointment of Nikolai Tanayev, an ethnic Russian, from Deputy Prime Minister to Prime Minister in June 2002 in the aftermath of a cabinet re-shuffle that was part of the political fallout from the Beknazarov Affair. The position as Deputy PM has generally been seen as a token "Russian" position to placate the ethnic Russian community, but to illustrate how tenuous the long term status of the Russian population is felt to be, Tanayev's ethnic Russian predecessor as Deputy PM, Boris Silayev, abruptly resigned his position in 2001 to become Deputy Mayor of Moscow. Despite the efforts (half-hearted or not), there has been little slowing of ethnic Russian emigration and even this slowing is not attributed to the fact that the Russians want to stay, but to the fact that they are finding it increasingly difficult to leave.<sup>17</sup> Of course, it would be unfair not to point out that the

emigration of ethnic Kyrgyz is also quite significant. This is primarily for economic reasons and many of these ethnic Kyrgyz are also emigrating to the Russian Federation in search of jobs and other opportunities. Newspaper reports would indicate that the second largest ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan now is Uzbek. Predictably, given the fetishization of nationalisms in post-Soviet society, this news precipitated the renewal of a demand that the Uzbek language be elevated to the status of Kyrgyz and Russian, as the entire region delves deeper in the Pandoran box of ethno-identity. Nevertheless, the Russian language remains the language of everyday usage, particularly in the capital region where about twenty-five percent of the country's population lives. Many ethnic Kyrgyz, including most of the political class, are far more comfortable in Russian than in Kyrgyz. In fact, many ethnic Kyrgyz have little more than a fleeting knowledge of the titular language. This can also be a political issue.

The northern population, particularly in the Chui, Talas and Issyk-Kul regions, is far more Russified, both linguistically and culturally, than that of the south.<sup>18</sup> In fact, one of the subtextual political accusations used by southerners against the northern clans is that it was several of them whose collaboration with the Russian Empire in the mid-nineteenth century allowed the Russians a foothold in the first place. The level of linguistic and cultural Russification in the north has led to the claim that the Russified northerners are no longer "real" Kyrgyz.

According to recent statistics ninety-seven percent of the population over the age of fifteen is literate.<sup>19</sup> This, of course, is far higher than some other "Third World" countries to which Kyrgyzstan has been compared and is a consequence of the legacy of the Soviet policy of universal free public education. However, the quality of the elementary and secondary educational system – particularly in the rural areas – has deteriorated markedly in recent years. Two factors are to blame for this decline. First is the lack of resources directed into the school system. This has led, among other things, to extremely low pay for elementary and secondary school teachers and a complete lack of prestige attached to the teaching profession. The result is that teaching in primary and secondary schools is seen by most university graduates as something that is, at best, a temporary stopgap, until a better, more prestigious position can be found and, at worst, a job that only the desperate would take. The second factor leads directly from the first – corruption. With such low pay and status public school teachers are forced to extract bribes from students and parents to supplement their meager incomes. Under these conditions marks become more an indicator of how much parents are willing to pay rather than a measure of academic accomplishments.

In economic terms the condition of Kyrgyzstan, particularly industrial production, has declined precipitously since independence. In part this has to do with the principle that “privatization” in and of itself be elevated to the level of a religious doctrine; a shortsighted attitude encouraged by Western development organizations. As in most other post-Soviet states this privatization was carried out in such a way as to encourage corruption and unscrupulous asset stripping.<sup>20</sup> Those who were privileged figures under the *ancien regime* and were socialized into a system that condemned the very idea of private property were quick to shed their previous beliefs and take advantage of access to formerly state property that their political positions gave them. Often, in fact, these enterprises were transferred directly to those who had been their managers during the Soviet period. Frequently the new owners proceeded to strip the assets and pocket the profits.

Kyrgyzstan is primarily an agricultural country (fifty-five percent of the labor force) with production concentrated in tobacco, cotton, potatoes, various fruits and vegetables, sheep, goats, cattle and wool. Kyrgyzstan also exports some minerals and hydropower, but the latter is a very underdeveloped potential. Water is the one natural resource that Kyrgyzstan has in abundance and the development of its hydropower sector could free it from its dependence on imported energy. It could also serve as an export product. Industrial production (a mere fifteen percent of the labor force) is concentrated in textiles, food processing, cement, shoes, small machinery suitable for consumer durables and other low value added sectors.

The unemployment rate is estimated<sup>21</sup> as being at six percent, but local anecdotal figures would place it much higher; estimates range well over thirty percent.<sup>22</sup> Before September 11 Kyrgyzstan lived significantly on what can only be referred to as international charity. There is no question that significant spending by the so-called anti-terrorist coalition (particularly the Americans) has the potential to lead to significant economic change, but it is too soon to elaborate as to what exactly the shape of that will be. Being located “next door to” one of America’s wars over the last fifty years has, on several occasions, contributed to the emergence of a middle class in those countries by injecting huge amounts of resources: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are examples. There is the possibility that the same sort of stimulus might come to Kyrgyzstan. By the summer of 2003 there is too little evidence as yet so as to what economic effect the growing American presence might have.

However, defined here for the sake of convenience as primarily those who have received post-secondary education but are not part of the elite or its families, the Kyrgyzstani middle class is still rather small. In general this

class sees its opportunities in the private sector as being limited by the very fact of that sector's underdevelopment. Consequently, opportunities in the second (public) and third (non-profit) sectors are where university graduates are most likely to look for opportunities. After state employment (itself subsidized by international organizations like the World Bank and the IMF) the largest employer of this middle class are international non-profit organizations (INGOs). Except for those university graduates who intend to move abroad upon the completion of their studies (and there are many), employment in the "third" or the state sectors would appear to be a major career destination.<sup>23</sup>

The backward state of Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure is widely seen as being a major obstacle to economic development. Its telephone system, for example, is distinctly Soviet and technologically backward (many ancient analogue lines). Most cellular phone connection is limited to the capital region and is a province of the rich and the upper middle class. Rail service (both freight and passenger) is virtually non-existent and available only in small parts of the north. Paved roads are equally decrepit and confined mostly to urban areas. In the winter (snow) or spring (rains) many of the highways into the interior are virtually impassable, hardly conducive to the creation of a national economy or, for that matter, identity. The high mountain lakes – the well known Issyk-Kul is only one – and the mountains themselves could be the basis for a significant tourist industry, but the combination of pitiful infrastructure and endemic corruption relegates tourism to a "potential". Many Kyrgyzstanis refer to their country as the "Switzerland of Central Asia". If they were ever able to witness how Switzerland actually works they would see how incorrect such an appellation is. The two countries have little in common other than towering, snow covered peaks and a relatively small size. Even in the capital the streets, except for those few used by the political elite in their chauffeured Mercedes with blackened windows and a police escort, are riddled with potholes and difficult to negotiate. Air transport is spotty. There is regular but scanty international service provided by British Airways, Turkish Airlines, Aeroflot, Uzbekistan Air and Kyrgyzstan Airlines. The internal service is problematic and mainly to Osh in the south. Many flights are simply canceled often stranding the unlucky passenger with no way to return home. The negative effect on investment of backward to non-existent infrastructure is exacerbated by the corruption factor. Investors, unable to assure profit repatriation and faced with sudden, arbitrary demands by the tax authorities and the police that often appear confiscatory, are reluctant to invest.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, there are minimal local mechanisms for enforcing contracts. Whether or not a debt is paid, or a contractual

commitment honored, is often dependent upon whose friend or relative is making the decision or to whom a bribe has been paid.

### 3. An Historical Overview

As suggested above, post-Soviet historical revisionism regarding the origins of the Kyrgyz nation has made some dubious claims as to the existence of a Kyrgyz state in antiquity. Recently, with the passage of a UN General Assembly Resolution naming 2003 “The Year of Kyrgyz Statehood” these claims have become an emphatic national policy.<sup>25</sup> It is customary, even in official Soviet historiography, to hear references to Chinese documents from the second century BCE referring to the “Kyrgyz” and from this alleged mention is extrapolated a Kyrgyz nation, extending back to antiquity, that was once mighty and glorious but either “went to sleep” somewhere along its historical route or was overrun by evil outsiders or both. Now the new nation must recover its historical memory and fashion a new “golden age”.<sup>26</sup> The metaphor of sleep, re-awakening and primordial attachments is, of course, standard fare in nationalist discourse from Central Asia to Europe to Africa. The modern nation, it is argued, has, along with its national “sentiment”, always existed even though it might have failed to have had a self-conscious awareness of that sentiment for a millennium or more.

It is probably safe to say that the precise origins of the Kyrgyz will never be known. However, “Kyrgyz” seems to be one name given to a group of Turkic speaking, primarily nomadic, tribes whose origins lie in southern Siberia, near the source of the Yenisey River. According to Karl H. Menges, long time Professor of Altaic Philology at Columbia University, the original tribes to whom the name “Kyrgyz” was attached, and references to whom appear in Chinese sources, were neither linguistically Turkic nor ethnically Asian. Rather they were (either) Yeniseyans or Samoyeds in linguistic terms and what Menges calls, “...fair-skinned, green-eyed, and red-haired with Europoid features...”<sup>27</sup> In one stream of Kyrgyz nationalist discourse there is a resonance of Menges’ argument. It is not unusual to hear the claim from a Kyrgyz that “We were once white people.” Under this theory, admittedly a minority view, the “true” ancestors of the Kyrgyz were Europeans and the only reason they look “Asian” today is due to “non-Kyrgyz” elements. This claim probably has more to do with the general Kyrgyz desire to assert what they feel they are *not*; i.e., *not* descended from the Chinese.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, Menges argues, the Yenisey Kyrgyz became “Turkified” linguistically; that is to say mixing with and being overrun by westward migrating Turkic-speaking tribes brought about a language shift. After their invasion to the south in the mid-ninth century, in which

was created a short-lived Yenisey-based nomad empire that controlled parts of modern Mongolia and modern Xinchiang, this process of linguistic transformation was completed.<sup>28</sup> During this entire period some Kyrgyz tribes began migrating southwestward into modern Central Asia and some into the mountainous regions that constitute modern Kyrgyzstan. It was during the Mongol invasions and their aftermath, however, that the Kyrgyz, incorporated into the vast empire of Chinghiz and his successors, migrated in significant numbers into the area that is modern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>29</sup> Over the centuries they mingled with/were absorbed by the already existing inhabitants of these regions and also experienced constant invasions by Chinese, Mongol, Uighur, Turkic and other groups who added to the ethnic mix that was to evolve into the modern Kyrgyz.<sup>30</sup> The idea that the Kyrgyz are some sort of pristine *ethnie* that has maintained its “purity” for more than two millennia is the fodder of nationalism. It is also absurd, as it would be for any other ethno-national group anywhere in the world who made such a claim.

Several independent Kyrgyz khanates (principalities) appeared after the decline of Mongolian imperial power although it can hardly be argued that these states represented, or saw themselves as representing, a “Kyrgyz nation” as it is understood today. There might well have been a certain extremely loose sense of collective identity based on occasional contacts via a grand council and various sporting events. Typical of modern nationalism, however, is the tendency to project back upon the past state forms that only came into existence over the previous two or three centuries. In the eighteenth century there was a period of Chinese dominance to be succeeded in the early nineteenth century by the large, imperial Kokand Khanate centered in the southern part of the Ferghana Valley in what is modern eastern Uzbekistan.<sup>31</sup> It was during the Kokand period that Islam became the dominant religious form for all the Kyrgyz clans. Even so, particularly among the nomadic, mountain peoples, it was mixed with heavy portions of the pre-Islamic belief systems.<sup>32</sup>

Russian contacts with the Kyrgyz began at least as far back as Peter the Great and various Russian travelers, adventurers and intellectuals came to the area in the eighteenth century, but it was midway through the nineteenth century, when contacts began to become significant. In part northern Kyrgyz notables wanted the Russian Empire to help them stave off the influence of Kokand as well as China. At mid-century several northern clans decided to cooperate with the Tsarist regime and helped the Imperial Army defeat a Kokand military garrison at Pishpek (after which Frunze, now Bishkek).<sup>33</sup>

The initial Russian colonial rule in most of Central Asia was very similar to the concept of “indirect rule” pursued by Lugard in Britain’s African possessions in the late nineteenth century. In this policy the colonial power allowed local elites (chiefs) at least the appearance and illusion of a continuation of their traditional prerogatives under the overall control of imperial rule. When suitably compliant chiefs could not be located the colonial authority would create their own “traditional” chiefs.<sup>34</sup> Inevitably, the influx of Russians – either workers or peasants – was bound to disrupt the economic and social rhythm of Central Asian life. Between 1896 and 1916 more than a million Russian peasants were settled in areas of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Sedentary agriculture, with its completely different notions of land use, has always been incompatible with herding societies.<sup>35</sup> The implantation of sedentary Russian peasants on nomad lands, backed by the military power of the colonial state, destroyed a socio-economic system and impoverished the people. Inevitably there was resistance and revolt that was crushed by the superior military power of the Russians.<sup>36</sup>

The establishment of Soviet power in Kyrgyzstan was fraught with difficulties from the beginning. The previous year (1916) attempts to conscript Kyrgyz into the Imperial Army during World War I led to a series of draft riots throughout Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, as the resistance movement spread, many Russian settlers used the revolt as an excuse to seize more Kyrgyz land unleashing anti-Russian violence. This was met with extreme repression and a scorched earth policy on the part of the Army, resulting in at least 100,000 Kyrgyz dead and an estimated one-third of the Kyrgyz population fleeing to China leaving an enduring legacy of bitterness.<sup>37</sup> Incorporated into the Turkestan Autonomous SSR in 1918, the Kyrgyz (known then as Kara-Kyrgyz) were seen as a distinct part of the Kazak (known then as Kyrgyz) nation.<sup>38</sup>

A variety of approaches to demarcating and classifying Kyrgyzstan and all of Central Asia was used until 1936, when Kyrgyzstan became a full member of the Soviet Union as the Kyrgyz SSR. During the Stalinist period the Kyrgyz SSR underwent the same experience as did much of the rest of the Soviet Union, including the terror and purges. Simultaneously, the country underwent a significant degree of industrialization and modernization. It might well be that the relatively liberal, de-centralized nomadic traditions of the Kyrgyz have something to do with the fact that Kyrgyzstan was spared many of the more egregious excesses of Stalinism.

After World War II there was a conscious effort to increase the indigenous (Kyrgyz) representation within the Republic’s Communist Party and within the administrative apparatus.<sup>39</sup> However, as ethnic Kyrgyz began to

assert themselves within the Party and at the level of local and regional government, and the extreme forms of Stalinist centralization began to break down, so did the networks of personal patronage associated with clan and region begin to re-group and grow. In general, as long as the local elites obeyed Moscow's overall dictates and presented no serious political challenge, the "Center" was willing to tolerate the corruption, favoritism and clientelism based on pre-revolutionary personal and clan networks that re-asserted themselves locally. Simultaneous with the increased "Kyrgyzization" of the Party and of the heightened role of the ethnic Kyrgyz in politics came the increased "Russification" of linguistic and cultural life in general. For many Kyrgyz, particularly the urban population and those who were part of the Soviet "middle class", Russian had become their mother tongue. Though they never came to see themselves as Russian, many began to see themselves at Soviet and the linguistic medium of "Sovietness" was Russian.<sup>40</sup>

## II. Political Culture in Kyrgyzstan: Nationalism and Clan Politics

### 4. *Theories of Nationalism and Ethnicity*

Most nationalists themselves are what is referred to in the literature on nationalism as "primordialists". From the "primordialist" point of view the nation – whichever nation it may be: Kyrgyz, Kazak, German, Serbian, Greek, Yoruban, Zulu, Jewish, Russian, – has always existed, from the mists of antiquity to the present. Furthermore, it will exist permanently into the future, but only so long as its members pay appropriate attention to the safeguarding of its singular, special (implicitly superior) and exclusive characteristics. In this view individuals may come and go, but the national character is immutable and everlasting; the totality of our collective past, present and future.

There are numerous approaches to and typologies of nationalism in the scholarly literature on the topic, but for our purposes here three main concepts will be highlighted. The first can be called *modernist*; nationalism is essentially a modern phenomenon. In fact, it is the consequence of modernity itself.<sup>41</sup> Modernity here is understood as embodying the rational, the scientific and the secular, the rise of capitalism, industrialization and urbanization, the emergence of individualism and liberty in Europe from no earlier than the sixteenth century, but more specifically in the wake of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.<sup>42</sup>

The nationalist argument is a political doctrine built upon three assertions: there exists a nation with an explicit and singular character; its

interests and values take priority over all others; it must be as independent as possible, usually requiring political sovereignty.<sup>43</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger suggest that both nations and nationalism are results of “invented traditions”; not historical practices that have survived into the present, but “invented” in modern times through repetition and strictly administered rules. These invented traditions become links to the past that serve the purpose of enforcing social cohesion and legitimizing state institutions. According to Hobsbawm, the nation “is a very recent newcomer in human history, and the product of particular, and inevitably localized or regional, historical conjunctures...”<sup>44</sup>

Another aspect of the “modernist” approach emphasizes the importance of socio-cultural transformation and is particularly associated with Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson.<sup>45</sup> Gellner stresses the role of culture and education in the emergence of nationalism. He identifies the *high* cultures of the ruling elites and *low* cultures of the general population in pre-modern societies and argues that nationalism is a result of modernization which forced the “imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases the totality of the population.”<sup>46</sup> Anderson argues that the nation is “an imagined community” because its members will never know (let alone meet) each other personally. He also emphasizes the emergence of what he calls “print-capitalism” which initiated mass literacy and the creation of a common mass vernacular. According to its critics, the modernist approach fails to give sufficient attention to the role of pre-modern traditions, values and symbols; i.e., the psychological aspects of nationalism. At the same time it exaggerates the role of modern economic, political, social and cultural developments as well as the role of elites in shaping national identities.

Others, known as *primordialists*, have focused on the role of ethnicity and culture in the formations of modern nations. The common denominator of the primordialists is their conviction of the antiquity and naturalness of nations. This approach is not monolithic and includes what Anthony Smith has called “perennialist”, “sociobiologist” and “culturalist”.

Perennialists argue that nations have existed since time immemorial, and that modern nations are direct descendants of their medieval ancestors.<sup>47</sup> The socio-biological approach of Pierre van den Berghe applies the findings of the field of sociobiology to the study of ethnicity. In this view ethnic groups and nations are forms of extended kin groups and both, along with “races” (sic), are the consequence of what he calls “inclusive fitness”.<sup>48</sup> Cultural primordialists focus on the perceptions and beliefs of the individuals as the main factors causing nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

Objections to the primordialist approach are many and convincing. Many recent studies have argued that ethnicity is “a socially constructed, variable definition of self and other, whose existence and meaning is continuously negotiated, revised and revitalized.”<sup>50</sup> Anthony Smith argues that ethnic ties, like other social bonds, are subject to economic, social and political forces, and therefore fluctuate and change according to circumstances and John Breuilly suggests that the use of ethnic cultures by nationalists transforms their meanings.<sup>51</sup>

The third approach has been called *ethno-symbolism* and is seen as a compromise between modernist and primordialist approaches. John Armstrong and Anthony Smith argue that the emergence of today’s nations cannot be understood properly without taking into account their pre-modern socio-cultural antecedents. Ethno-symbolists reject the primordialist contention of eternity and continuity of nations and identities, but they also reject the claims that nations are completely modern entities. They contend that there is a greater continuity between pre-modern and modern (agrarian and industrial) societies than people such as Gellner and Hobsbawm have been prepared to consider.<sup>52</sup>

It would seem that much of the so-called “ethno-symbolist” argument avoids the point. Neither Gellner nor Hobsbawm, for example, have denied the existence of what Gellner has referred to as the “...need [for] some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on...”<sup>53</sup> The ethno-symbolist approach would seem to underemphasize the differences between modern nations and earlier ethnic communities as well as the selectivity with which the modern nation chooses and uses the cultural material from the past. It also seems to overestimate the durability of ethnic identities over the long term, paying insufficient attention to the fact that ethnic identities shift, form and re-form.

However, the force of the practitioner-primordialist in terms of the political mobilization of nationalism should not be underestimated. Nations may be modern social constructs, but as long as people *believe* them to originate in antiquity and be the ultimate source of identity and loyalty they remain potent. Many modern nations have rich historical and cultural heritages, which evoke strong emotional feelings among peoples who believe themselves related by “blood” and ethnicity. As such, they provide an effective means of political and social mobilization and an important basis state for construction in the modern world.

### 5. *The Legacy of Soviet Nationality Policy in Kyrgyzstan*

In theory, one of the primary aims of Soviet rule was the creation a “new man” whose identity would be based on class solidarity rather than national sentiments. Socialist society was supposed to be rational and homogeneous with neither ethnic nor class contradictions. Nationalism is an ideology based on exclusivity and particularity; it emphasizes differences rather than inclusiveness. Instead the Soviet rulers pursued a dual and often contradictory policy that, on the one hand, facilitated ethnic Russian domination of the indigenous peoples through a policy of divide and rule while, on the other, strengthening “traditional” pre-Soviet ethnic identities and often even inventing new ones. Consequently, new borders were drawn, histories rewritten (or invented), “new traditions”, cultures (and even languages) were encouraged by Moscow and supported by loyal local elites. This process was overlaid by simultaneous cultural and linguistic Russification.<sup>54</sup> Central Asia served as a laboratory for the implementation of Soviet nationality policy, which culminated in the so-called “national-territorial delimitation” and the resultant creation of “ethno-national” republics where any modern national consciousness was at best extremely underdeveloped.<sup>55</sup>

The Soviet legacy in Kyrgyzstan extends beyond political geography and culture to the very ethnic and linguistic makeup of the country. During the Soviet period large numbers of Europeans, primarily Slavs and Germans, but joined by Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Georgians and other ethnic groups, either migrated or were exiled to Kyrgyzstan, joining an already ethnically diverse group of indigenous Central Asian peoples, including Uzbek, Uighurs, Dungans (Hui), and Tajiks. By the end of Soviet era, Slavs accounted for almost a quarter of the republic’s population, overwhelmingly in the urban areas, occupying the most privileged positions in industry and other sectors.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, it was the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) aimed at the creation of a class of native elites through preferential treatment of the titular nationalities, while bringing them into key positions in government and in other important institutions, that greatly contributed to the formation of a Kyrgyz intellectual and political elite. If in the 1920s ethnic Kyrgyz accounted for only 10.8 percent of the 2,950 regional and local administrative personnel in Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region (now the Kyrgyz Republic), by the 1970s the Kyrgyz had managed to form the majority of the local political and administrative elite. Nevertheless ethnic Russians still controlled much of the central administration of the republic. Furthermore, if in the early 1920s there was not a single ethnic Kyrgyz with a higher education and at best 20,000 (less than five percent) were literate and Russians accounted for over half of all

teachers, doctors and lawyers and nearly seventy percent of all scientists and artists, by 1989 the number of ethnic Kyrgyz with higher education was 1.5 times greater than among Russians.<sup>57</sup>

The Soviet Union long claimed that its reality was the “triumph of Leninist nationality policy” and the first real example in the history of humankind of having solved the nationality question. On the contrary, Soviet policy actually exacerbated this question. Rather than having solved it, it in fact led to the emergence of several new nationalisms and national questions that had not existed previously. Ronald Suny points out that Soviet nationality policy had a stimulating effect on ethnic identity, rather than obliterating it. Instead of “a melting pot” the Soviet Union became the “incubator of new nations”.<sup>58</sup> According to Jack Snyder it was “...the institutional legacy of the Soviet period [which] has helped to create a stalemate, perhaps unstable and temporary, among cross-cutting incentives to adopt ethno-national, democratic and imperial political forms.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, ethnic and other conflicts in the post-Soviet sphere are not primordial in nature, but the consequence of imperial collapse. Soviet nationality policies were instrumental in constructing national identities and gave an explicitly political significance to this social division. The concepts underlying Soviet nationality policy, as it has been traditionally theorized and implemented, provided the “thought framework” within which Central Asian nationalism was developed.<sup>60</sup>

The residual effect of Soviet nationality policy in the post-Soviet era is that multi-ethnic states were created that were simultaneously designated as being the property of a particular group and the consequent privileging of that group. For example, a presidential candidate in Kyrgyzstan must have a fluent Kyrgyz language (Article 43, Kyrgyz Constitution). This is measured by a test administered by a state commission. Since not even half the ethnic Kyrgyz population speaks Kyrgyz fluently and the non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups are almost completely unlikely to speak the language, the effective consequence is that a large majority of the population is excluded based on ethno-linguistic criteria, despite the fact that the most widely spoken language by far is Russian. Ethno-linguistic criteria are not applicable merely to the top position in the country, but to a wide variety of others. Precise figures on the civil service are not available because of their political sensitivity, but anecdotal and observational experience would suggest that over eighty percent is ethnic Kyrgyz. With regard to the national parliament ethnic Kyrgyz occupy eighty-six of the total of 105 seats. The assumption for Kyrgyzstan, therefore, is, while it may be “our common home” (an oft-repeated slogan meant to emphasize the multi-ethnic character of the country), that one group (those identified as Kyrgyz) receives more attention

than others. Effectively this means that state policy is seen, by both Kyrgyz and non-Kyrgyz alike, to favor the titular nationality. Naturally this creates resentment and is always a potential source of conflict.

These nationalist concepts – more properly, perhaps, flights of fancy – have a concrete political content and purpose in that they help construct the political culture within which current Kyrgyz politics is played out. Furthermore, they tend to provide support for the current state class. President Akayev's claims to 2,200 years of political continuity are supported by a pseudo-academic veneer, a perfect example of which is Rachat Achylova. Professor Achylova, a historian at the Kyrgyz National University, who appears regularly in the media, has gone so far as to claim (this in a book edited by well known American scholars, who should have known better, and published by a major American academic publishing house) mention of the "Kyrgyz and their state" in Chinese sources-from the third millennium BCE; i.e., more than 4,000 years ago.<sup>61</sup> As Ernest Gellner has sardonically suggested, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist..."<sup>62</sup> Gellner does acknowledge that most nationalisms are based on aspects of pre-existing cultures, but on very selective and self-serving choices from those cultures as to what shall be used and what shall be ignored. However, the political utility of a "re-awakening to national self-consciousness" for the dominant post-Soviet political class is evident as it allows the present rulers to claim a direct affinity with and legitimation by a past golden age. The same Professor Achylova goes on to make precisely this point: "The political mentality of Kyrgyzstan (sic)," she writes, "as its more than two thousand year history shows, has always been expressed in a constant striving for independence and autonomy vis-à-vis its powerful neighbors." (Endnote # 61 speculates as to the discrepancy between four millenia and two millennia.) Having established a glorious past in which great difficulties for two millennia have been constantly overcome due to its unique national character, she writes of the present-post-Soviet leadership, "...and in this respect, Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev is a worthy successor to those political traditions of Kyrgyz diplomacy." She follows this with a quote from Aristotle and, in so doing, somehow manages to merge the current leadership with the wisdom of Aristotle and the last two (or four) thousand year existence of the Kyrgyz nation.<sup>63</sup>

Nationalist flights of fancy, once unleashed, seem to know no bounds. Approving articles have appeared in the press detailing the research of one Sapar Narkeyev, identified as a philologist. Narkeyev claims that Kyrgyz is the oldest language on the planet, the same as that spoken by the ancient

Shumers (Summerians). From this completely preposterous assertion he extrapolates an even more preposterous one: that the Biblical Garden of Eden was actually located on the shores of Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul.<sup>64</sup> It is easy to ridicule these preposterous claims. One can even speculate as to whether the authors themselves believe what they have written. However, the claims themselves are presented as the products of serious scholarly research and are presented to the public as being parts of a serious discourse.

#### *6. Regionalism and Clan Politics in Kyrgyzstan*

Scholars have long noticed the importance of the role of what is called "informal" politics in the Muslim world.<sup>65</sup> This mainly refers to the Middle East. Although there is still a lack of scholarly work and data on the role of such relationships in Central Asia, there is much practical evidence to support claims regarding the "centrality of "groupism", that is to say, "informal networks." Gregory Gleason has pointed out that, "Central Asian politics is the outcome of a highly complex and variegated process in which groups are continually contesting for power, frequently competing for advantage, and sometimes cooperating for mutual advancement."<sup>66</sup>

Historically the people of the region have shown little respect for *formal* rules and institutions, primarily because they have been ineffective. Consequently, people prefer to resolve their problems not through courts, laws and the like, but through *informal* channels of communication (contacts). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, clan affiliations are a legacy of a centuries long nomadic lifestyle that continued until the Soviet campaigns of compulsory settlement in the twenties and thirties. Clan affiliations tend to correlate with the regional division of the country, which is a historical legacy of the fragmentation of Turkistan by the Soviets shortly after the October Revolution. From this fragmentation resulted the creation of Soviet Kyrgyzstan from several diverse regions that were grouped into 'Northern' and 'Southern' clusters, primarily in accordance with their geographical location.

As stated earlier one of the most important, if not *the* most important, fault lines marking politics in Kyrgyzstan is that of region; specifically the hostility and tension between what is referred to in Kyrgyzstan as "north" and "south". This nomenclature is slightly misleading in that what is really meant by "north" is the capital, Bishkek, and the surrounding Chui region. This is augmented by the province immediately to the West, Talas. The "south" refers to the area around the cities of Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken (and the provinces that bear their names) and the Ferghana Valley. Actually the "south" refers to the west and southwest of the country. In terms of resources and the consequent relative poverty, it is the northern region that

controls the capital and, consequently, the state and state power. Clan differences tend to correlate with this regional division.

However, a simplistic rich north/poor south dichotomy should be avoided. The mountainous and stunningly beautiful Naryn province is considered “northern” although, bordering China, much of it is actually south of Jalal-Abad province. At the same time the rural poverty and lack of access to resources controlled by the state make it one of the poorest and most isolated parts of Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, “north” though it may be, it is as completely shut out of the political power equation as any “southern” province. Neither as isolated nor as poor as Naryn, Issyk-Kul province, occupying the far east of the country and considered a “northern” area, is also not part of the power equation that dominates the capital and the state.

It would be equally inaccurate to view Chui and Talas provinces as being particularly well off. The capital, Bishkek, contains most of the people in the country who have money and, therefore, gives the impression of being relatively well off. Perhaps it is, but there is also immense and grinding urban poverty. Beggars are ubiquitous. Many are the elderly and children and the problem of homelessness in the capital is obvious. The country was effectively de-industrialized in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union as privatization, managed by corrupt elites, stripped assets and pocketed the profits.<sup>67</sup> Although the Kyrgyzstani industrial base that had been built up during the Soviet period has virtually disappeared, what is left of it is in Bishkek and the surrounding area.<sup>68</sup>

Although the rhetoric of regionalism is what dominates political discourse in Kyrgyzstan, it would be far more accurate to say that what is at the core of the post-Aksy political crisis that engulfed the country is a dispute between elites. It must be emphasized, however, that this crisis had been brewing for quite a number of years and was only brought to a head by the killings at Aksy. Kyrgyzstan has suffered through a decade of mis-government and corruption. However, this also has a clan-based aspect. The Bishkek-based elites that control the state and, consequently, the resources accruing thereto, are from northern clans. The Osh and Jalal-Abad elites have been excluded from this bounty: “The lack of representation of the southern elite in the political pyramid has led to dissatisfaction among all its representatives of whatever political persuasion.”<sup>69</sup>

There is a symbiotic interrelationship between clan, region, elite and class. The clan system, in its pre-Soviet, Soviet and, so far, in the post-Soviet period, should be seen as a complex of “...vast patronage networks that are related to ethnic and geographic factors.”<sup>70</sup> In Kyrgyzstan there are the broad clan groupings, referred to as “wings”. The northern wing contains seven

clans of which two are the Buguu and the Sarybagysh. The former dominated early Soviet Kyrgyzstan, but its power declined and it was replaced by the Sarybagysh from which Akayev and many in the state class come.<sup>71</sup> In most cases clan loyalties trump other kinds of identities. A clan identity tends to correspond to a region of the country as that particular region is the traditional home of the clan, and a multiplicity of sub-clans, even though its members may have migrated far afield. For example, a second or third generation southerner born in Bishkek (the north) would still identify with his grandfather's or great grandfather's clan and sub-clan in a mountain region of the south. Of course, given a variety of contingent variables (marriage, place of abode, education, opportunity to travel) these identities are strengthened or weakened. As suggested above, the major political cleavage is between elites. Southern elites have been, by and large, circumvented when it comes to access to state power. Since access to the state tends to determine access to resources, there is resentment.

### III. Political Liberalization in Kyrgyzstan: Achievements and Failures

#### 7. Political Development Since 1991

In 1985 the world witnessed the emergence of a new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, whose name soon became closely associated with liberal reforms that came to be associated with the terms *perestroika* (reorganization and decentralization; *glasnost* (openness, transparency, debate) and *samoupravlenie* (active participation) in nearly all spheres of the Soviet society. Gorbachev's policy of liberalization had a significant impact on politics in all Union republics, including Kyrgyzstan. The result was a thorough shake-out of the local leadership, renewed interest in the history and cultural heritage of Kyrgyz and rising demands for greater Kyrgyzstani autonomy.<sup>72</sup>

The primary result of *perestroika* in Kyrgyzstan (1985-1991) was changes in the republic's leadership. In November 1985 Turdukhan Usabaliev, who had continuously ruled the republic as First Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party since the sixties, was replaced by Absamat Masaliev, who in turn was replaced as the Republic's dominant political figure by Askar Akayev, who in October 1990 became the first president of Kyrgyzstan. Simultaneously there was a rise in nationalist feelings among various ethnic groups; mainly Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek. These resulted in bloody inter-ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh region in the summer of 1990. These clashes sparked an exodus of Russians and other non-titular ethnic groups and the emergence of inter-ethnic tensions. Also, as a result of freedom of speech and the newly independent mass media, there began a re-

evaluation of Kyrgyz history and a the resurgence of interest in Kyrgyz culture; a rise in political participation and the beginnings of contested politics. Finally, there came the creation of political parties and movements, economic reforms and the emergence of a private sector.

As everywhere else in the USSR, the Gorbachev experiment threatened the entire basis of the entrenched political system that grew out of Leninist theory, practice and tradition. This was particularly true insofar as it tried to root out local corruption and create a more or less Weberian meritocratic, politico-administrative system. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and its entirely unexpected and mostly unwanted independence was the consequence.

The abortive military-communist coup in Moscow from August 19-21, 1991 not only ended Gorbachev's experiment, but also the very existence of the Soviet Union. It also marked a watershed in the history of Kyrgyzstan. Askar Akayev was the only Central Asian president who strongly opposed the coup and took measures to prevent local hard-line communists from staging a coup of their own. On the first day of the coup, while other Central Asian leaders remained silent waiting for the outcome in Moscow, Akayev attacked the putschists and threw his weight behind Boris Yeltsin, the Russian leader, as well as other Russian democrats. Right after the coup collapsed, the Kyrgyzstani government banned the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, the local branch of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and declared Kyrgyzstan's independence.<sup>73</sup>

These decisive actions during the August coup earned Akayev great respect from the general public and a deserved image as a liberal, intelligent and charismatic leader who had only been peripherally associated with the Communist Party *nomenklatura* and the political *apparat*. Using his popularity, as well the initial political vacuum that remained after the collapse of the old regime, Akayev's activities encouraged further liberalization in Kyrgyzstan, despite the failure of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. As a result, Kyrgyzstan became a leader in post-Soviet Central Asia in carrying out liberal political and socio-economic reforms. Indeed, till the mid nineties, Kyrgyzstan could be proud of having the freest political atmosphere, contested elections and mass media in the region. Akayev became the only regional president to be elected fairly to a second term in a contested election. All this caused Western observers to label Kyrgyzstan "an island of democracy" in Central Asia.<sup>74</sup>

Among other factors that contributed to creation of the liberal political regime in Kyrgyzstan in comparison to the other Central Asia states is a cultural one. In the opinion of John Anderson there were aspects of a "tribal democracy" – such as political equality of its members, the selection of a tribal

leader through relatively competitive elections, tribal mobility and, accordingly, the lack of effective and institutionalized mechanisms for coercive power. These characteristics, which sustained a degree of debate and consultation in a tribe, would have been unthinkable in the settled oases to the west of modern Kyrgyzstan and have been embedded in the nomadic tribal culture for many centuries. All these factors contributed to the more open and democratic nature of Kyrgyz politics during the nineties.<sup>75</sup>

There are also economic and international reasons for Kyrgyzstan becoming the most liberal state in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan was one of the poorest regions of the Soviet Union. Its unexpected independence left the country virtually helpless and in desperate need of attracting significant economic assistance and international support; primarily from the West. The government quickly realized that the primary means for getting financial aid was to move in the direction of openness, economic restructuring and democracy. Such policies would satisfy the expectations of major Western donor states. In so doing, Kyrgyzstan quickly became a “favorite child” of the international donor community, managing to get strong support from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan received substantial political and economic support from the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Japan and Turkey. As a result, Kyrgyzstan became one of the leading states for liberal political and economic reforms not just in Central Asia, but also in the entire CIS.

However, by the mid 1990s Kyrgyzstan had witnessed the gradual stagnation of political reforms. Since that time the positive image of Kyrgyzstan as “an island of democracy” has faded. Statements about the end of “the romantic period of democracy” and consolidation of an authoritarian regime in Kyrgyzstan became usual also among local observers.<sup>76</sup> There are several factors, which might be helpful in understanding the de-liberalization processes in Kyrgyzstan.

Firstly, it can be explained by the re-consolidation of conservative forces that had been left in disarray by the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, in time they have managed to place obstacles in the path of the initial impetus towards liberal reforms. Secondly, there was the unfavorable regional environment caused by instability in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. This was compounded by authoritarian regimes in Uzbekistan (a police state) and Kazakhstan and is true of China as well. Finally, there are the inconsistent policies of Western governments regarding democracy in the region. This has allowed the Kyrgyz state class to come to the conclusion that in reality democracy is not a major concern of the West; and especially of the United

States. The United States seems far more interested in issues of stability, security and the protection of its narrow political, economic and military interests than in democracy *per se*. In fact, Kyrgyzstan, as well its more authoritarian neighbors, continued receiving both political and economic support from Western countries in spite of their violations of human rights and democratic governance.<sup>77</sup> The most apparent signs of the move towards authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan over last years have become the strengthening of presidential power through constitutional amendments, a crack-down on the independent press and the persecution of opposition leaders.

However, to be fair, one must place the deterioration of the latter part of the nineties in some sort of context. There is no question that the heady progress of the immediate post-independence period toward democratic governance has slowed and, unfortunately, often been reversed. In addition virtually all aspects of governance, and nearly everything else, are riddled with corruption and venality. Having said that, one must also acknowledge that Akayev and the dominant state class have not created a bizarre personality cult such as that of Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan. Neither have they created police states replete with torture such as is Karimov's Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan may not be a democracy, but neither is it the authoritarian dictatorship that is Nazarbaev's Kazakstan or Rakhmonov's violence prone Tajikistan. Akayev's visage is not plastered on every wall in the country. Criticism of the government is widespread, at least at the verbal level. While it is the case that organized opposition will be more or less quickly curtailed, it is also true that a great deal of critical opinion is vented publicly. One of the authors of this essay appeared regularly on television and in other public fora last February in the lead up to the national referendum on the government's proposed constitutional amendments to criticize the proposals (see below).

Both authors teach at the American University – Central Asia (AUCA); arguably the most liberal institution in the entire region and a venue in which criticism of the government and its officials in classrooms as well as other public meetings is common. President Akayev regularly turns up at University events where he praises AUCA, its faculty and students and is known to have made rueful comments as to the hard time he gets from them. On more than one occasion, including a speech last year in the United States and at AUCA's June 2003 graduation ceremonies, he has proudly referred to AUCA as "the Harvard of Central Asia." A year ago, at a large University function to which his grown daughter had been sent as his representative, she was heckled by the students. The point here is that, while

far from being a liberal and open democracy, Kyrgyzstan is unquestionably the least authoritarian, the least illiberal state in post-Soviet Central Asia.

#### *8. Constitutional Amendments*

There is no question that the 1993 Constitution was more liberal and provided better conditions for the formation of a democratic society than did its Soviet predecessor. It divided the government into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. It created some checks and balances on presidential power and emphasized basic human rights. At the same time, the Constitution gave the president broad political powers which created the conditions for domination of the political system by the executive. For example, he received power to appoint the prime minister, determine the structure of the government, appoint various key political figures at the national level, as well as the heads of the regional administrations. These officials are the most powerful representatives of the president and his administration at the regional and local levels. Appointed by the President and serving at his pleasure, they control the regional budgets and are easily able to secure the compliance of local representative bodies. Also, the President enjoys the right to veto legislation passed by Parliament and, in some cases, to dissolve the legislature. This has gradually diminished the political role of parliament.

As a result of constitutional amendments approved in manipulated national referenda in 1996, 1998 and 2000, the scope of presidential power substantially increased while simultaneously limiting the power of the parliament. The amendments transferred to the President the right of Parliament to approve the appointment of cabinet ministers chosen by the Prime Minister. The Parliament also lost to the President the right to determine the main issues of domestic and foreign policy. These had been granted to the legislature by the 1993 Constitution. These amendments also led to the creation of a new two-chamber parliament, which replaced the previous politically stronger one. The earlier structure was unicameral with the same number of deputies in total (105). These amendments were justified on the grounds that only in this way can effective reforms be pushed through against the resistance of vested interests.<sup>78</sup> In reality this led to the concentration of power in the hands of executive and the marginalization of the legislature.

Another sign of presidential authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan was the fact that Akayev ran for a third term in 2000. It became possible after manipulating an interpretation the Constitutions of 1978 (Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic) and 1993 (Kyrgyz Republic). Thus, according to the official

explanations, Akayev had the right to run again because his first presidential term started in 1990 according to provisions of the Constitution of 1978 when he was chosen by Parliament. This changed with the adoption of the Constitution of 1993. The argument the government made was that his election in 1995 actually became his first term, allowing him to run again in 2000 for what he claimed was a second but everyone else saw as a third term. These arguments were clearly terminological manipulations. In fact, Akayev, was elected to a third term: 1990, 1995 and 2000 and, thus violated Article 43 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In the 2000 presidential elections, challenged by five other candidates, Akayev won by a landslide with nearly seventy-five percent of votes.<sup>79</sup> Official declarations claimed that the elections were held in accordance with democratic electoral standards. 2090 polling stations were opened around the country and more than 250 foreign observers (one of the authors was such an observer and he personally witnessed wholesale violations of Kyrgyzstan's own electoral law) were monitoring the elections. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the main election observer, announced the election had failed to meet international standards and published a long list of serious violations before and during polling and during the count.<sup>80</sup>

The latest Constitutional changes were approved in a nation-wide referendum on 2 February 2003. This time the changes were initiated by the political crisis that followed the abovementioned clashes between police and marchers in Aksy in March of 2002. This events caused the first serious political crisis in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan and resulted in the resignation of the government and some concessions from Akayev. These included the dismissal of some of his more odious high-ranking officials, an invitation for opposition leaders to join the new government and, most importantly, the promise to give up some of his enormous powers and share authority with Parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers.

However, in reality the constitutional amendments did exactly the opposite. They resulted in strengthening the current regime; i.e., presidential authority. The most important of these amendments are: (1) immunity of the president and his family members from prosecution upon his retirement; (2) replacement of the bi-cameral parliament with a unicameral one having seventy-five deputies, and (3) abolition of party-list voting for parliament, destroying proportional representation in favor of a single member majoritarian runoff system. One might question why a president, preparing to leave office, might need an immunity law for himself and his entire family. Would this not be an admission of malfeasance? Can one imagine, say, Tony

Blair, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder or George Bush asking their respective legislatures to pass immunity laws to protect them upon leaving office? Of course, such a law is not totally unprecedented as Boris Yeltsin requested and received the same when he left office as Russian president. Many might argue that democracy is served by such a law if it is necessary to do so in order to have President Akayev leave office peacefully and voluntarily.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, having begun almost as parliamentary republic according to the norms of the 1993 Constitution, Kyrgyzstan is becoming a presidential republic, confirming Juan Linz's warnings that "presidentialism" is not be a guarantor of effective governance and, moreover, can increase the probability for a non-democratic regime outcome during transitional periods.<sup>82</sup>

### 9. Crackdown on the Independent Press

Although the President of Kyrgyzstan is still the only head of state in post-Soviet Central Asia who has not been labelled an "enemy of the press" by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, over the last few years the position of independent media in Kyrgyzstan has clearly worsened.<sup>83</sup> Using a variety of methods, the government constantly harasses opposition newspapers, which cross the "red-lines", using various methods. For example, the chief editor of *Res Publica* (issued both in Russian and Kyrgyz) was once imprisoned for articles about the President. Periodically, issues of the newspaper do not get published. An independent Russian language newspaper, *Delo No*, was especially subjected to pressure prior to and during the presidential elections of 2000. *Delo No* was accused by the Ministry of National Security of exposing national secrets in one of its issues. The most popular Kyrgyz language newspaper, *Asaba*, was shut down in March 2001 because it was unable to pay the large fine levied by a compliant court on a spurious slander charge.

In June 2003, the chief editor of *Moya Stolitsa* announced the closing of his paper because of large court ordered fines. Judges delivered verdicts on thirty-one appeals, according to which the newspaper had to pay KS (Kyrgyz Soms) 4 million in fines (about US\$40,000, an impossible amount of money for the newspaper) as a compensation for "moral damage" or "insulting the dignity" of a public official. KS one million was awarded to the Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev (as of July 2002 US\$1.00 = 43 KS). Tanayev claimed that the paper had "insulted his dignity". Another KS 500,000 went to the American company *Merlyside*, which has close connections to the son-in-law of President Akayev, and supplies a variety of materials to the US base in Bishkek. Another KS 100,000 was awarded to the Ministry of Internal

Affairs. In all these cases there had been an article in the paper that had offended one or another important figure. That official then goes to a compliant court (all the courts are compliant) and files a suit seeking damages for one or another charge of slander. They are duly awarded these damages and the offending publication is put out of business. It is widely believed that all persecutions of the newspapers are politically motivated. This system, having been perfected by the state class in Kyrgyzstan, allows the government to claim it does not practice censorship; i.e., it is the “independent judiciary” and it cannot in conscience interfere with the judicial process.<sup>84</sup>

#### *10. The persecution of Opposition Leaders*

In the last few years political life in Kyrgyzstan has been characterized by the persecution of opposition leaders. The most notable cases, of course, involve the most prominent opposition leaders. Topchubek Turgunaliev, the former leader of the nationalist party *Erkin Kyrgyzstan* (Free Kyrgyzstan), Feliks Kulov, the leader of the opposition political party *Ar-Namys* (Dignity) and Azimbek Beknazarov, head of the Committee on Judicial and Legal Reforms, a member of the opposition group in the parliament, who was a strong critic of the government’s decision to concede large portions of disputed Kyrgyz territory to China, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Turgunaliev was convicted of charges connected with an alleged plot to assassinate President Akayev and was sentenced by a district court on September 1, 2000 to sixteen years imprisonment. Later the Bishkek city court reduced his term to six years.<sup>85</sup> He was unexpectedly released from jail by special presidential decree in August 2001.

In January 2001 a court martial sentenced Felix Kulov to seven years in prison, including property confiscation and loss of his military rank of ‘general-lieutenant.’ Kulov was accused of forgery, abuse of power and complicity in a crime committed, according to the accusation, while he was Minister of National Security in 1997-1998.<sup>86</sup> His relatives have been fired from their work and had to leave Kyrgyzstan.<sup>87</sup> Even his home village of Baitik has been harassed and kept under constant surveillance due to the prominence of its native son and Kyrgyzstan’s most famous political prisoner.<sup>88</sup> It is widely accepted that all these verdicts were politically biased, rather than juridically determined. As noted by local observers, these cases prove that the judicial system of the country still remains weak and strongly dependent on the government.<sup>89</sup> Some local observers talk about the Kulov case as a turning point in the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. The European Union and the United States, along with various human rights organizations, have denounced the Kulov verdict.<sup>90</sup>

Azimbek Beknazarov and his committee in parliament rejected two Chinese-Kyrgyz agreements signed in 1996 and 1999 respectively that called on Kyrgyzstan to transfer about 125,000 hectares of territory to China in order to settle a territorial dispute. As a result, in January 2002 the Government accused him of inappropriate handling of a murder case in 1995 when he was a district prosecutor in the Jalal-Abad region. The attempt to prosecute Beknazarov caused riots with tragic consequences in his constituency, Aksy district, in the Jalal-Abad region in March 2002. The authorities released him during the Aksy crisis, hoping to avoid further violence.

### *11. Political and Administrative Institutions*

Although the Constitution calls for a government with a classic separation of powers, the reality is that the executive remains by far the most powerful political and administrative institution of the state and has great and significant influence on decisions made by Parliament, by the official government, supposedly led by the Prime Minister, and even the Courts. Here a distinction is being made between the government – that is to say, the Cabinet made up of heads of ministries and headed by the Prime Minister – and the “Presidential Administration”. The President and his Office – the so-called *Administratzia* – has a strategic role as well as the necessary tools to formulate and implement public policy. The Constitution provides the President of Kyrgyzstan with broad functions such as “defining the fundamental directions and external policy of the state” (Article 42) and monitoring the work of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (Article 72). The President has the ability to implement important policies or constitutional amendments through carefully designed and palpably flawed national referenda.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, the main feature of the existing system of policy making in Kyrgyzstan is the dominance of the President and his *Administratzia*, which, according to its own regulations, should have only auxiliary functions. There is a virtually complete duplication of the assumed Cabinet-Ministerial functions and those of the Presidential *Administratzia*.

Formally, that is, according to the Constitution, it is the Government – the Prime Minister, his Secretariat, the ministers and other state units – which is nominally entrusted with the formulation and the implementation of public policies in Kyrgyzstan. For example, according to the Constitution, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic is “the highest executive body of the state power in the Kyrgyz Republic” (Article 70). In reality, however, it is the presidential *Administratzia* which is the major center where policies are formulated and initiated. In these circumstances, the (official) Government is

merely charged with implementing the policies and take responsibility for them as they were designed by the Presidential Administration.

Nominally, that is, according to the Constitution, apart from its usual legislative functions, the Kyrgyzstani parliament has the right to determine the directions of both domestic and foreign policies. However, this is far from the way it “actually” works. In practice this function is exercised mainly by the Presidential *Administratzia* and sometimes by the Government. Overall, parliament plays not much more than a marginal role in the policy-making process. The latest Constitutional referendum held in February 2003, further limited the parliamentary role in national decision-making processes.

As mentioned earlier, the Governors of the regional administrations are appointed by the President according to proposals by the Prime Minister and with the formal consent of the corresponding regional legislative body (*Kenesh*). These governors (*Akims*) of the district (*rayon*) level administrations and cities are also appointed and dismissed by the President. Nominally this is done with the consent of the Prime Minister, the related *Akim* and the district *Kenesh*. Consequently, it is no accident that the local administrations have become very powerful and effective institutions for channeling decisions made by the President rather than those of the Prime Minister. Nominally, local administrations are part of the government (Cabinet of Ministers) and therefore supposed to be subordinate to the Prime Minister. In these circumstances, local administrations are the supreme executive body for the region and responsible merely for implementing the “Center’s” policies.

The judicial branch includes local courts and three high courts: the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the Court of Higher Arbitration.<sup>92</sup> The President appoints the members of the high courts subject to Parliamentary approval, which he usually gets. He also appoints judges at the local level as well as the military tribunals of the Kyrgyz Republic. He also has the authority to dismiss them for causes provided for in the Constitution and legislation.

It is hence no accident that the major role of the courts in the policy making process has become the pursuit of the specific interests of the state class and associated groups rather than the common public interest. Courts in Kyrgyzstan are deeply corrupted, distrusted by the general public and dependent on the government. For example, the courts are often used to suppress the independent mass media and the opposition, ruling on cases in favor of powerful persons and institutions.

Finally, with regard to the public bureaucracy, it is a far distance from what may be described as the Weberian ideal-type; understood here as meritocratic, transparent, professional, neutral, accountable and competent

in which the public and private interest are strictly separated. Despite all attempts to reform the civil service, along with support from UNDP and TACIS, Kyrgyzstan has failed to form a professional civil service based on these principles. In general, a flawed and degraded version of the Soviet era style of management is still the case in Kyrgyzstan. The following features of Soviet administration are still extant in the current public administration of Kyrgyzstan:

1. A high degree of centralization and state involvement in regulations of nearly all processes in society;
2. The accumulation and concentration of power in the hands of the President and state bureaucracy;
3. A limited parliament and weak judiciary system;
4. Underdeveloped and weak local government;
5. A command-type, top-to-bottom style of management;
6. The absence of a professional civil service system based on internationally recognized standards.

Three appendices follow the conclusion of the text. Appendix 1 is a graphic describing the formal governmental structure of the Kyrgyz Republic; that is to say, how the central government is constitutionally supposed to function. Appendix 2 illustrates the structure of the government when the Kyrgyz SSR was part of the USSR. Appendix 3 is a diagram of the “actual” politico-administrative system in present-day in Kyrgyzstan. The similarities between Appendices 2 and 3 (the former Communist Party structure and actual structure in place in post-communist Kyrgyzstan) are striking. Old habits die hard.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It should be clear from the above account that Kyrgyzstan is a state in a more or less permanent political and economic crisis. The bright promise of democracy, independence, development and freedom in a post-Soviet world has dimmed markedly in the face of increasing political authoritarianism and economic decline exacerbated by massive misgovernment. Large numbers of people now look back on the Soviet period with nostalgic glances; longing for the political and economic stability provided of those years. The current regime has presided over significant de-industrialization, loss of jobs, increases in poverty and homelessness, and significant declines in educational and health care standards, all exacerbated by massive, endemic corruption.

The current state class understands very well that its hold on state power and, thus, its access to the material rewards and political prerogatives attached thereto, is becoming increasingly tenuous. The undoubted legitimacy that the current administration rightly had at the dawn of independence, when it immediately and forthrightly opposed the military-communist coup in 1991, has largely been dissipated through gross malfeasance and strings of abuses. So far it has managed to stay in power through a mixture of various techniques: the exploitation of nationalist symbolism combined with political authoritarianism, the playing off of clan loyalties, the calculated distribution of rewards, often made possible through foreign donors, as well as the manipulation of the threat of Islamic radicalism.

There has been much mention over the last few years of the “failed state” syndrome. Often mentioned in this regard are Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Kyrgyzstan has by no means achieved that status yet, but it would seem to be moving in that direction. The threat of a politically radical Islam is grossly exaggerated by the political authorities for their own purposes; both for the purposes of internal control and as an excuse for authoritarian methods, as well as impressing Western donor countries that they are the only bulwark against a resurgent Islam. The Western press often is complicit in exaggerating this threat. However, there clearly is the possibility that political Islam could well grow into a potent political force. Paradoxically the secular governments of the region that claim to be the best hope for staving off radical Islam are, in fact, the primary reasons for its growth. More and more there are formal and informal systems of social services, particularly in the south, that are often associated with unofficial mosques and Islam in general. These systems are growing in the wake of the secular state’s inability to maintain even minimum standards of welfare. Inevitably, if conditions continue to deteriorate, this “social” version of Islam will seem to many to offer a political alternative as well.<sup>93</sup>

Rather than a “failed state” it would be more accurate to characterize Kyrgyzstan as a “predator state”; that is to say, a system in which the state class uses its monopoly of political, economic and coercive power to prey upon the hapless and helpless general population. Greed, venality and corruption have created a kleptocracy in which the powerful use virtually any means at their disposal to enrich themselves; a system in which the supposed distinction between what is properly the public interest and the purely private interest is nearly obliterated. It often seems they are replicating that famous dictum attributed to Louis XIV: “*Après moi le déluge.*” It is worth pointing out also in this regard that most “failed states” were “predator states” themselves before the deluge.

## Notes

1. The authors wish to thank Thomas Wood, a former colleague at AUCA and presently Director, North American Office, Civic Education Project, for many helpful comments he made on earlier drafts.
2. Soviet nationality policies, at least as applied to Central Asia, were an inconsistent, ever changing hodge-podge and constantly subject to Kremlin whim and political dictates. The one consistent thread was the need to keep the peoples of Central Asia divided so as to contain the possibility of the emergence of either a "Muslim" consciousness or a "Central Asian/Turkic" consciousness that might stand as a counterpoint to Soviet power. For a more extensive discussion see John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, Macmillan (London: 1999) especially p. 49; Alexander Bennigsen, 'Several Nations or One People? Ethnic Consciousness among Soviet Central Asians', *Survey*, Vol. 24 # 3, 1979, pp. 51-64; Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, New York University Press (New York: 2000); Steven Sabol, 'The Creation of Soviet Central Asia: the 1924 National Delimitation', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14 # 2, 1995, pp. 225-241; Ronald Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press (Palo Alto: 1993).
3. See various speeches of President Askar Akayev, other major government figures and academics and "public intellectuals" of various sorts. See also a variety of academic conferences, television programs, etc. All spin one or another version of the antiquity of the Kyrgyz Nation and allude to some past "Golden Age", which present Kyrgyz society is on the verge of re-creating as long as "unity" is maintained. Unity is defined as support of the current authorities. All of these historical references are backed up with an academic gloss of very disputable validity. See, for example, Askar Akayev, *Kyrgyzstan on the Way to Progress and Democracy*, Ahmet Yesevi Foundation-Turkey (Bishkek: 1995), esp. pp 138-141; Abylabek Asankanov, *Kyrgyzy: rost natsional'nogo samosoznania*, Muras (Bishkek:1997), esp. pp 86-107; *Kyrgyz Republic: Human Development Report 1995* (Bishkek: 1995), pp. 8, 9. See also the various textbooks on the history of Kyrgyzstan used in high schools and universities.
4. Glen Somerville, "O'Neill Urges Kyrgyz Power Development Push", *Reuters.com*, July 15, 2002.
5. A variety of media sources have carried reports of, variously, Russian, Chinese and Iranian disquiet at the idea of a permanent American military presence in Central Asia. One response has been the announcement of the re-activation of an old Soviet military base at Kant, east of Bishkek. The base will be used by CIS forces (read Russian) and is clearly an expression of Russian anxiety. See Kubat Otorbaev, "Kyrgyzstan Concerns over New CIS Base", *Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IPWR): Reporting Central Asia*, # 129, 12 July 2002. Also RFE/RL *Central Asia Report*, Vol. 3, #26, 3 August 2003. There is also a considerable amount of

Kyrgyz opinion that sees the Russian presence as an attempt by the government to buttress its own increasingly shaky political position. See Justin Burke, "Russian Deployment in Kyrgyzstan could prompt Growing Domestic Turmoil", Eurasia Insight, 12 December 2002. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

6. Ethnic terminology in Kyrgyzstan has its Byzantine aspects. The official name of the country is The Kyrgyz Republic. However, the term "Kyrgyz" is reserved for those who are defined as being ethnic Kyrgyz. The commonly used name of the country is Kyrgyzstan (place or land of the Kyrgyz). In Kyrgyzstan people are defined by their "nationality" which is itself legally defined in the citizen's passport. Thus, one can be both a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan) and not Kyrgyz, but Russian, Uzbek, Tatar, Korean, Uighur, etc. This is so, for example, even if the person in question has never been to the "titular" nation to whose nationality one has been assigned. The primary identification of the citizen has to do with his/her ascribed "nationality", not citizenship. In this context "Kyrgyzstani" refers technically to all citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and is the only available inclusive adjective. However, its adjectival use in normal conversation implies a citizen who is not an ethnic Kyrgyz.

7. Issyk-Kul and Naryn provinces are also considered to be "northern" but elites from these two are mainly peripheral to the "north-south" conflict.

8. Central Asia Border Management: Report on the EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission, June 2003. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/cpcm/rrm/cabm.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cpcm/rrm/cabm.htm).

9. At a Forum including both government and opposition figures organized by the IPWR and another NGO known as Civil Society Against Corruption held on 13 July 2002, a Kyrgyzstani government official observed that Kyrgyzstan was engaged in 140 different border disputes with Uzbekistan and another 70 with Tajikistan. He then went on to suggest that the recent troubles surrounding the Beknazarov Affair had to do with neighboring states organizing trouble inside Kyrgyzstan. See Sultan Jumagulov and Kubat Otorbaev, "Kyrgyzstan: Dialogue Breakthrough", Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IPWR), #2, July 19, 2002. The accuracy of this official's statement regarding the actual number of border disputes or their effect upon internal stability is not the point as much as the fact that it underscores the disputed nature of all the borders in the region.

10. Alisher Khamidov, "Kyrgyzstan's Unrest Linked to Clan Rivalries", Eurasia Insight, 5 June 2002. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

11. International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 137, Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy, Osh/Brussels, 20 August 2002, p. 15.

12. RFE/RL Newslines, 17 July 2002.

13. Somerville, op.cit.

14. Until 1925 the people now called Kazakh were called Kyrgyz and the people now referred to as Kyrgyz were the Kara-Kyrgyz.

15. Kyrgyzstan Census: Main Results of the First National Population Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 1999, National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek 2000), p. 29.
16. For the CIA figures see CIA World Factbook, 2002 – Kyrgyzstan, [www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/geos/kg](http://www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/geos/kg). Official Kyrgyzstani figures are in the Kyrgyzstan Census, *ibid.*, p. 26. For unexplained reasons the CIA's figures appear to ignore the findings of the 1999 Kyrgyz Census. At least the ethnic percentages they use for 2002 are very close to those of 1989 which would seem to ignore any ethno-demographic change for the last thirteen years; i.e., since prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is clear that there has been a substantial emigration of all "Europeans", particularly Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and Germans.
17. Approximately 20-25,000 Russian speakers (read ethnic Slavs) leave Kyrgyzstan annually, mainly for Russia, but also the United States, Canada, Germany and Israel. Two factors are said to be responsible for the slowing rate of emigration: (1) Russia has made it very difficult to get residency and citizenship and (2) the cost of re-settling in Russia is beyond the means of most of those who remain in Kyrgyzstan. See Alla Pyatibratova, "Emigration Issue Looms Large in Kyrgyzstan", *Eurasia Insight*, 23 Jan 2003. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).
18. John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?*, Harwood Academic Publishers (Amsterdam: 1999), pp. 4-21.
19. CIA-World Factbook – Kyrgyzstan, *op. cit.* See also Kyrgyzstan Census 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-44.
20. Richard A. Slaughter, "Poor Kyrgyzstan", *The National Interest*, Summer 2002, pp. 55-65.
21. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*
22. A recent joint report by the World Bank and the Kyrgyz National Statistical Committee estimates that 2.8 million Kyrgyzstani residents (more than 50% of the population) lives below the poverty level. See RFE/RL, 22 December 2002.
23. That these are pervasive attitudes is constantly confirmed by conversations with students as to their post-educational plans. Both authors teach at the American University – Central Asia in Bishkek, the region's most prestigious institution. Most students consistently speak of and look for "Third Sector" employment.
24. See Slaughter, "Poor Kyrgyzstan", *op. cit.*, *passim*. Richard Slaughter was a World Bank economist in Kyrgyzstan for several years.
25. In September 2002 President Akayev addressed the UN General Assembly and called for such a resolution naming 2003 as The Year of Kyrgyz Statehood and referring to the Kyrgyz state as being at least 2,200 years old. As it routinely does in cases like this the General Assembly did as requested in December 2002. What was completely unnoticed in the rest of the world was turned into a major event in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, the very fact of the UN's designation has been cited as proof of the historical validity of the claim.

26. Askar Akayev, *op. cit. passim*.
27. Karl. H. Menges, "People, Languages, and Migrations" in Edward Allworth (ed), *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Domination*, 3rd ed., Duke University Press (Durham: 1994), pp. 88, 89.
28. *ibid.*, p. 89. See also Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia*, CUP (Cambridge: 2000), pp. 81, 82. Soucek does not mention a (linguistically) pre-Turkic period for the Kyrgyz but is emphatic that they were "Turks" at the time of their mid-ninth century invasions.
29. Soucek, *ibid.* pp. 81, 82, 159, 160.
30. J. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 2. We would point out that the eponyms used here – Kyrgyz, Chinese, Mongol, Uighur, Turkic – are modern terms and not necessarily the terms that were used by the people(s) involved 1,000-1,500 years ago.
31. Soucek, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-193.
32. J. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
33. *ibid.*, p. 4.
34. Helene Carrere d'Encausse, "Organizing and Colonizing the Conquered Territories" in Allworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-157. For a brief description of "indirect rule" in Africa see Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, 2nd ed, Macmillan (London: 1998), pp. 118-122.
35. The very first human conflict listed in the Bible (Genesis 4:1-8)), that between Cain, the farmer, and Abel, the herdsman, bespeaks this historical tension.
36. Carrere d'Encausse, *op. cit.* pp 160-171, Soucek, *op. cit.*, pp. 203, 4. Anderson, *op. cit.* p. 5.
37. Carrere d'Encausse, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-213.
38. J. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
39. *ibid.*, p. 15.
40. At the run up to the Kyrgyz presidential elections in October 2000, five ethnic Kyrgyz and one ethnic Uzbek were disallowed as candidates by a state linguistic vetting commission on the grounds that they did not speak "appropriate" Kyrgyz. One of the excluded ethnic Kyrgyz is the son of the last Soviet period General Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party. A sixth ethnic Kyrgyz, Feliks Kulov, the main opposition leader refused to take the test on the grounds that he would be failed by the commission anyway. It is worth pointing out that the same Kulov's language limitations did not prevent him from serving as the country's vice-president in an earlier period when he was still part of the ruling clique. This regulation effectively excludes all non-Kyrgyz and many who are members of the titular nationality despite the fact that Article 5 of the Constitution which states that no citizen should be denied his/her rights "based upon a lack of knowledge or command of the state language." It is well known that the current president, Askar Akayev, who spent most of his adult life in Russia, had to take lessons in his so-called native language when he returned to Kyrgyzstan and decided to embark on

a political career. See Matt Curtis, "Language Testing in the Run-up to Kyrgyzstan's Elections", *Eurasia Insight*, September 26, 2000. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org).

41. The study of nationalism is replete with scholars who make this argument: Tom Nairn, Eric Hobsbawm, John Breuilly, Benedict Anderson, among many others. Perhaps the best known is Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Blackwell (Oxford: 1983).

42. Anthony J. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, Polity Press (Cambridge: 1995) p. 29.

43. John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press (Manchester: 1993) p. 2.

44. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, CUP (Cambridge: 1983, p. 9 and Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, CUP (Cambridge: 1992) p. 5.

45. Gellner, *op. cit.* and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso (London: 1991).

46. Gellner, *ibid.*, p. 57.

47. Joseph Llobera, *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*, Berg Publishers (Oxford: 1994) and Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, CUP (Cambridge: 1997).

48. Pierre Van den Berghe, 'Does Race Matter?' in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 1 No. 3, 1995, pp 357-368 and 'Race and Ethnicity: A Sociobiological Perspective' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1978, pp. 401-411.

49. Edward Shils, 'Primordial, Personal, sacred and Civic Ties' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1957.

50. Jack Eller and Reed Coughlin, 'The Poverty of Primordialism: The Demystification of Ethnic Attachments' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1998, pp. 183-201.

51. Anthony J. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, *op. cit.* and John Breuilly, *ibid.*, p. 200.

52. John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill: 1982) and Anthony J. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell (Oxford: 1986).

53. Gellner in Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 62.

54. For a discussion of Soviet nationality policy in Central Asia see Roy and Suny in endnote #2 above.

55. Sabol in *ibid.*

56. Eugene Huskey, 'Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization' in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, eds., *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, CUP (Cambridge: 1997a) and Annette Bohr and Simon Crisp,

'Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz' in Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in Post-Soviet States*, Longman (London: 1996).

57. Eugene Huskey, 'Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration' in Jan Bremer and Ray Taras, eds. *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, CUP (Cambridge: 1997b), p.657. It is often customary to make facile comparisons between the Soviet presence in Central Asia and British and French colonialism in Africa. While there were some similarities – these were far more applicable to the earlier Russian imperial period – there were also significant differences. Whatever its overall inadequacies, there was not only a conscious policy of the "Moscow Center" to create an indigenous, Sovietized (read Russified) elite in Central Asia, but also to introduce mass literacy and modern development. The fact that these policies were often compromised by contradictory and more immediate Moscow political dictates, does not detract from the fact they existed.

58. Ronald Suny, *ibid.*, p. 87.

59. Jack Snyder in Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder, eds., *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-Building*, Routledge (London: 1998) p. 84.

60. Yaacov Ro'i (1991). "The Soviet and Russian context of the development of nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 123-142. Robert Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism and the USSR*, Princeton University Press (Princeton: 1994).

61. Rakhat Achylova, "Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Kyrgyzstan" in Vladimir Tismaneanu (ed), *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, M.E. Sharp (Armonk, NY: 1995), p. 319. This volume is part of a larger series edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot. Achylova's exact words are: "The first references to the Kyrgyz and their state can be found in Chinese sources of the third millennium B.C." The third millennium B.C. would be consonant with the Middle and Old Kingdoms of Pharaonic Egypt. It is possible that this assertion is merely the consequence of careless writing and editing, as the standard nationalist reference to the "Kyrgyz nation" appearing in Chinese records is to the "third century" BCE, not the "third millennium".

62. Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism and Modernization" in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds) *Nationalism*, OUP (Oxford: 1994), p. 62. The cited extract by Gellner is from an earlier book, *Thought and Change*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson (London: 1964).

63. Achylova, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

64. Yury Razgulyayev, "Did Adam and Eve speak the Kyrgyz Language?", 2 September 2002. [www.pravda.ru](http://www.pravda.ru).

65. Roger Owen. *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge (2000) esp. pp. 221-225, 229-238.

66. Quoted in John Anderson. *The International Politics of Central Asia*, 1997a, p. 87.

67. Slaughter, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-65.
68. *ibid.*
69. International Crisis Group Report # 137, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
70. Khamidov, "Unrest Linked to Clan Rivalries", *op. cit.*
71. *ibid.*
72. Borh and Crisp, *op. cit.*, p. 389.
73. Kyrgyzstan's independence was announced on August 31, 1991.
74. Strobe Talbott, 1992 and quoted in Liam Anderson and Michael Beck, 'US Political Activism in Central Asia: The case of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in Gary Bertsch, et al, eds., *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Routledge (London: 2000) p. 81.
75. J. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.
76. *Times of Central Asia*, 25 January 2001.
77. Interview with Murat Imanaleiv, former Kyrgyzstani Foreign Minister, March 2003 in Bishkek.
78. J. Anderson, 'Constitutional Development in Central Asia', in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1997b, pp. 313-316.
79. *Times of Central Asia*, 2 November 2000.
80. *ibid.*
81. Leila Saralaeva, 'Kyrgyz President Gets Lifelong Immunity', *Institute of War and Peace Reporting: RCA # 214*, 4 July 2003. The authors are not unaware that former US President Richard Nixon was almost certainly promised a presidential pardon by his successor, Gerald Ford when he resigned the presidency in 1973.
82. Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore: 1994).
83. *Times of Central Asia*, 8 March 2001.
84. For an extensive discussion of the persecution (and prosecution) of Kyrgyzstan's independent press see Ulugbek Babakulov and Asel Sagynbaeva, 'Sued and Stifled: Kyrgyzstan's Media', *Institute of War and Peace Reporting: RCA # 215*, 9 July 2003.
85. *Times of Central Asia*, 24 March 2001.
86. *ibid.*, 31 March 2001.
87. *Asaba*, 2 February 2001.
88. Sultan Jumagulov and Asel Sagynbaeva, 'Kyrgyzstan: Punished by Association', *Institute of War and Peace Reporting: RCA # 210*, 11 June 2003.
89. *Times of Central Asia*, 25 March 2001.
90. *ibid.*, 1 February 2001.
91. Since independence, in total four referenda have been held in Kyrgyzstan. The last constitutional referendum in Kyrgyzstan, held in February 2003, further increased the role of President at the expense of the legislative body. For some basic

facts about the referendum please refer to CNN's World Election Watch – Kyrgyzstan at: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/election.watch/asiapcf/kyrgyzstan4.html>.

92. According to the latest Constitutional amendments, taking effect from 2005, the Arbitration Courts will be merged with the Supreme Court.

93. For an excellent overview of “political Islam” in Central Asia see Central Asia: Islam and the State, ICG Asia Report #59, International Crisis Group, Brussels and Osh, 109 July 2003.

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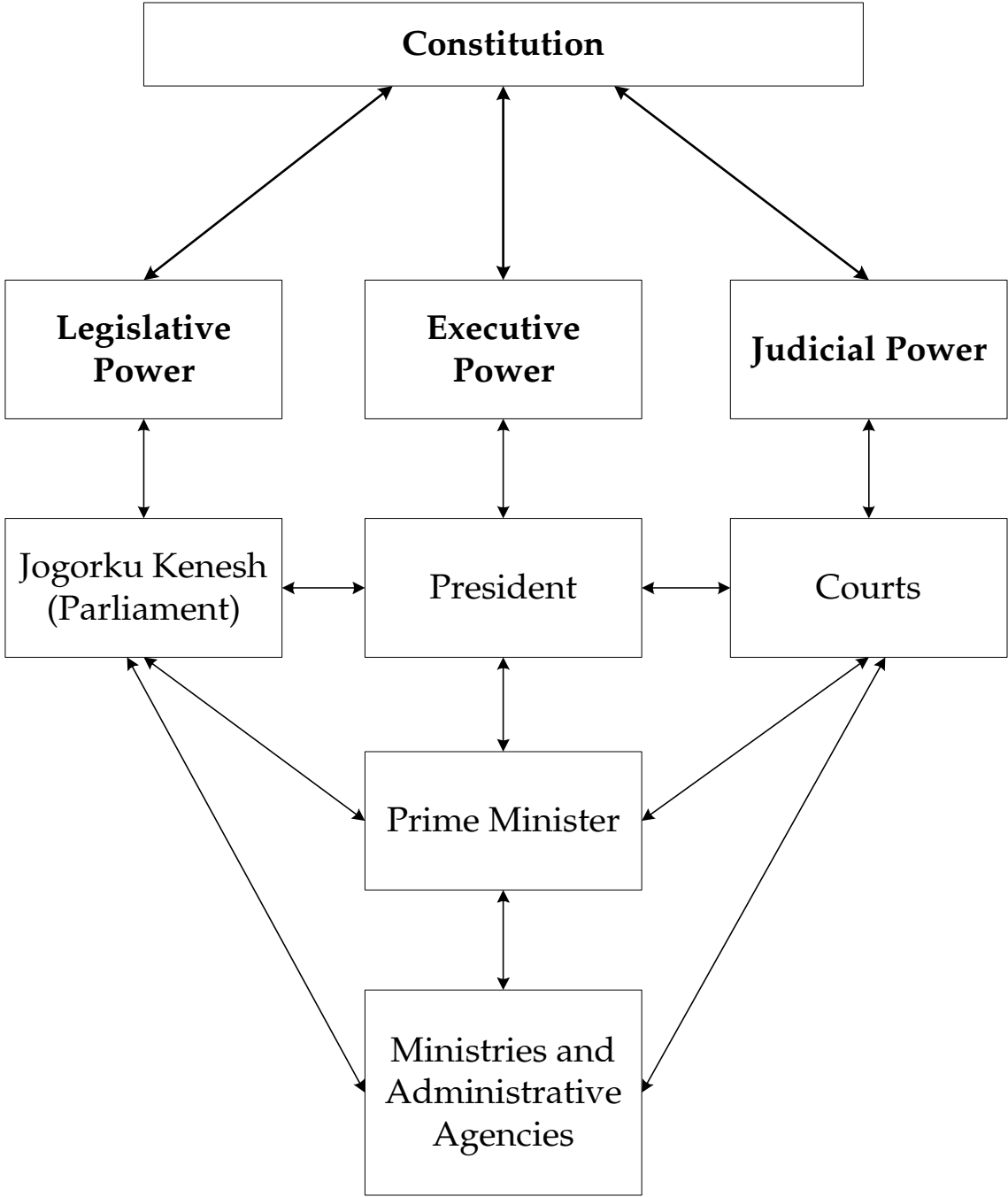
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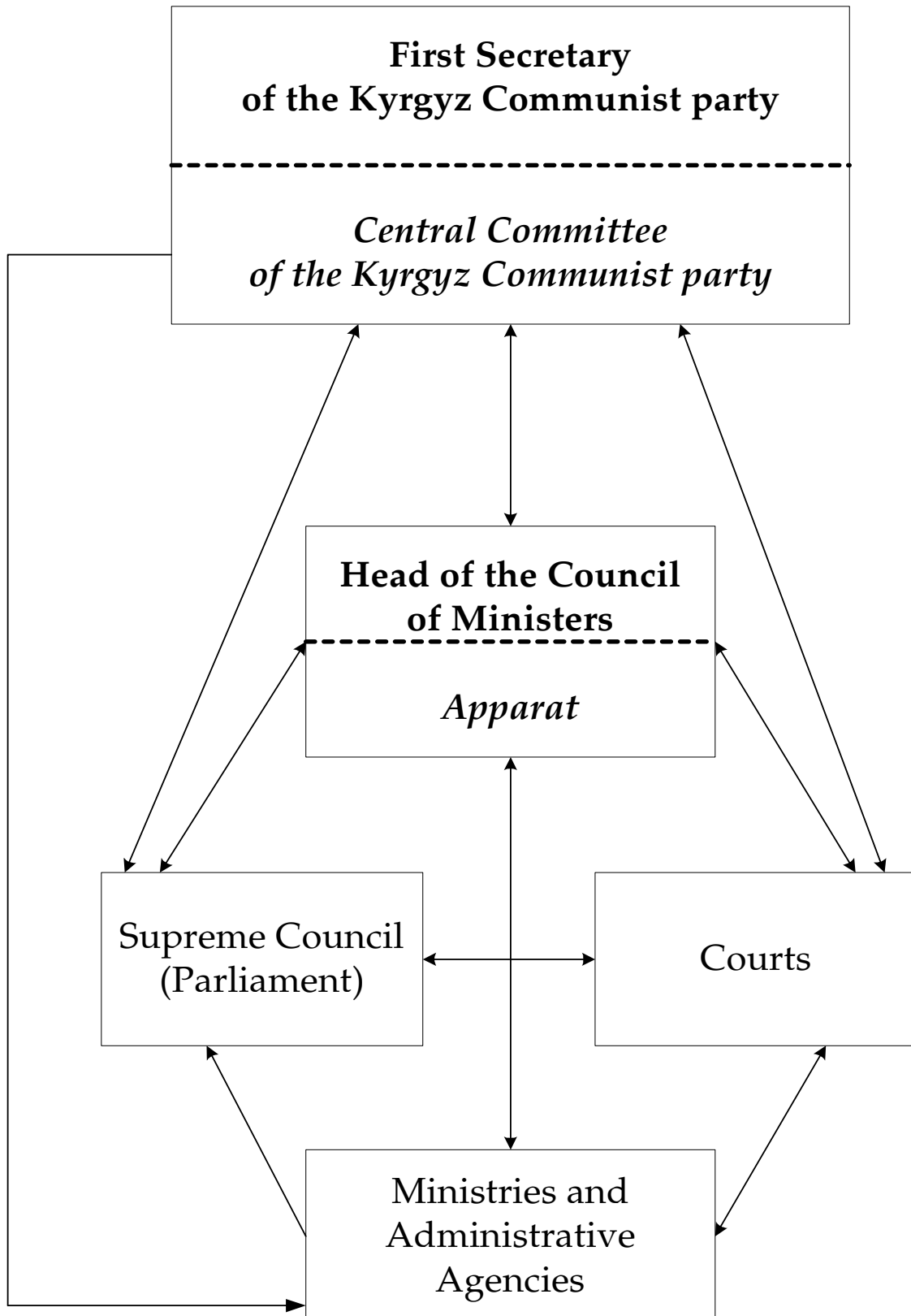
**Appendix 1**

The structure of the Politico-Administrative system in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan according to the constitution (Central level).



## Appendix 2

The structure of the Politico-Administrative system in Kyrgyzstan during the soviet era.



**Appendix 3**

THE structure of the Politico-Administrative system IN POST-SOVIET KYRGYZSTAN IN REALITY.

