
Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev

Yaşar SARI*

Abstract

There is a clear link between a state's domestic situation - where policy is formulated and made (called foreign policy making), and its external environment, in which policy is implemented (called foreign policy behavior). In post-Soviet states in Central Asia, such as Kyrgyzstan, the states are operating their foreign policies in conditions of enormous structural change, uncertainty and lack of experience, stemming from the fact of having only recently established their own independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Changes in the international system and regional subsystems have also pushed them toward limited choices and certain idiosyncratic foreign policy behaviors. Furthermore, these states have entered into new alliances following the September 11 events, played roles in new conflicts (in Afghanistan and Iraq - the War on Terror), and sought assistance and protection from global and regional powers that had previously been inaccessible. This paper attempts to explain the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan from 1991 to 2010. Robert Putnam's model of the "two-level game" approach is used to explain Kyrgyz foreign policy, based on the relationships between the

international system and subsystems, and foreign policy and domestic politics.

Key Words

Foreign Policy Analysis, Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Multi-Vector Foreign Policy, Two-Level Game.

Introduction

An effective way of understanding the foreign policy process is to identify the levels of analysis. These levels refer to general areas from which certain foreign policy behaviors are generated within a state, and at which foreign policy relations occur between states. With the recognition that foreign policy behavior occurs both at state and interstate levels, we can differentiate between two distinct approaches to explain the foreign policy process of a state: 1) the role of certain internal factors and actors; and 2) the role of external factors and actors. Such approaches are required to identify the sources of its foreign policy.

* Yasar Sari is Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations, Abant Izzet Baysal University, Bolu. Currently he is a visiting Assistant Professor at the Department of International Relations in Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University.

When a state decides to respond to a set of factors (location, military capability, economic power, natural resource, etc.), its leaders and ruling elites as actors take certain actions. This occurs especially when a state is initiating a foreign policy action, as well as when responding to the actions of other states. One needs first to conceptualize a mechanism for how to initiate foreign policy action and how to respond to another state's action, and then conduct inquiries into the internal and external sources of foreign policy decision-making.¹

Therefore, there are primarily two distinct sources of foreign policy: internal and external sources - actors and factors. Internal sources refer to domestic factors and actors that are helpful in generating a foreign policy approach. Among the internal actors are the individual leaders, the ruling elites, and the ethnic minorities. The external actors that influence the foreign policy making processes of the Central Asian states have evolved differently from that of powerful states such as Russia and the United States. These contribute to the articulation and the adoption of a specific foreign policy approach. Internal factors are: political instability; weak

state institutions; power struggles among different political groups to control the state; and the economic condition of the Central Asian states. External factors refer to areas that arise beyond state boundaries, such as the regional political settings and the international system. They also lead to specific foreign policy choices. Such factors have shaped the orientation and implications of Central Asian states' foreign policies in the last twenty years.

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the central government had escalated into bloody clashes and two political regime changes. These internal threats also shaped its foreign policy approach. In addition to these, changes in the international system have created new regional environments, such as the War on Terror in Afghanistan. In doing so, the increased level of international involvement in the region created new opportunities and restrictions to the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan.

Theoretical Framework

Robert Putnam's renowned article that formulated the "two-level games" portrayed leaders as being positioned between the "two tables" of international negotiation and the pressures of domestic political forces such as its bureaucracies.² In his article Putnam underlined the importance of considering foreign policy making and actions as not only part of foreign politics itself but also of domestic politics.

One of the models for connecting the foreign policy making process to domestic politics is the bureaucratic-organizational model.³ However, bureaucracy and the bureaucratic structure are likely to be less prominent in the foreign policies of new states, because bureaucracy is still weak and small compared to that of powerful states such as the United States, China, and Russia. In other words, the roles of large departments/ministries and the routines of administrative procedures are closely interlinked in the foreign policies of major powers, but less so in new and small states. Thus, it is clear that the insights of bureaucratic and organizational models to the foreign policy making of new small states are limited. One of the reasons is that these states do not have the stability to establish and/or manage stable bureaucratic institutions. Moreover, existing institutions in these states do not develop complex organizational

routines and bargaining processes with each other. Thus, because of the lack of strong bureaucratic traditions in newly established small states, the bureaucratic-organizational model is considered to be of little relevance in explaining their foreign policies. In addition, because the state itself cannot be assumed to be a unitary actor, responding primarily to external threats and opportunities, the behaviors of decision-makers become one of the most important variables in understanding foreign policy actions of small states.

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The main argument in this paper is that the scope of a small weak state's foreign policy actions depends on the type of threats, the level of external commitment, and the characteristics of its leadership. A two-stage analysis can address some critical questions, since international threats and opportunities are often ambiguous, and domestic processes are crucial to explaining the foreign policy of small weak states. This model is based on the traditional understanding of the limited resources and power possessed by small weak states.

It is true that the security of small weak states does 'suffer' from greater sensitivity, vulnerability⁴ and dependence from both the immediate regional and wider international environments. This makes it ever more important for small weak states to have a well thought through foreign policy, using all instruments at their disposal to ensure that their security and interests are best served. Due to their position within the system, weaker states will take their positions and roles in the international system for granted because their presence is insignificant in regards to international outcomes. Furthermore, because major states will not focus their attention on potential threats from small weak states that are likely to pose little threat, the latter may face fewer external constraints.⁵ Thus, this two-step analysis requires scholars to understand foreign policy sources and decision-making processes.⁶

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Miriam Elman suggests that internal factors - domestic politics and domestic institutional choices - are more important than external factors - international and regional systems - in explaining

the foreign policy of a weak state.⁷ Domestic institutions play important roles because they shape and provide possible options, which the government implements. Thus, the weaker the state, the more likely it is to respond to external challenges and attempt to balance against rising hegemony. Because of their diminished capabilities relative to others, weak states lack a margin of error; they must be closely integrated and linked to the external environment because if they isolate themselves their survival will be at stake, and the costs of being exploited are high - as was true of Islam Kerimov's Uzbekistan in 2001. Therefore, because of the nature of the threat, governments of weak states experiencing internal threats will have different foreign policy behaviors to end internal threats.⁸

Another factor that explains foreign policy behavior is the beliefs and interests of its leaders. Leaders can easily exploit the link between their own security and that of the state in order to increase their leverage over domestic politics. For instance, Askar Akayev became the leader of Kyrgyzstan after the political crisis and the Osh-Uzgen clash between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks in 1990. He accumulated power and authority and became the sole authority in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, by undertaking to deal with threats leaders can increase their own powers and make use of these powers against their domestic opponents.⁹

Therefore, in newly independent small states, identity (of the state or the leader), power (the state strength) and interests (threats to the state/leadership) must be brought together at the domestic level, as well as at the international level, to fulfill Putnam's theory to explain the foreign policy of a newly established weak state, such as Kyrgyzstan. The foreign policy of a small weak state may be shaped more directly by domestic threats or may sacrifice national interests to that of its leadership. An understanding of the foreign policy behaviors of a small state, therefore, requires the analysis of how state strength affects its foreign policy and the decision-making process.

Kyrgyz Foreign Policy in General

By 1992, as with all newly independent Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan formed its own foreign policy structures, which were similar to that of Russia. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for the realization of foreign policy, everyday foreign policy activities and the management of diplomatic missions abroad. In addition to the Ministry, under the Presidential Administration, a separate foreign policy body called the 'International Department of the Presidential Administration' was established. From the outset these two major institutions were actively

competing for influence in the foreign policy formation, and in most cases were mutually responsible for the formulations of foreign policies, although ultimately the President decided the foreign policy direction of the country.¹⁰

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Other institutions, groups and agencies with an interest in the foreign policy formation include: Ministries of Defence and Security; the Parliament (Jogorku Kenesh); and political parties and private businesses. However, in the Kyrgyz case, their participation in the foreign policy making process was neither clearly defined nor institutionalized. This is despite the fact that the Parliament has the constitutional power to "define major directions of internal and external policies", while ministers, including the foreign minister, generally require their position to be confirmed by the parliament.¹¹

Therefore, decisions, concerning not only foreign policy, are generally made in accordance with two important

institutional constraints. First of all, the president makes decisions on major foreign policies of Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, government, primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implements these decisions. For example, in Kyrgyzstan the constitution and the “Law on the Diplomatic Service” state the legal role of state institutions in the foreign policy making and implementing processes.¹²

The existence of articles in its constitution and the law, however, offers only a partial understanding of the foreign policy directions of Kyrgyzstan. In addition to the legal designs, there are also unwritten rules that go beyond legal documentations. These are politically complex organizational routines, and bargaining processes among different bureaucratic institutions, traditions and customs. As for Kyrgyzstan, as with other Central Asian states, these traditions and customs have yet to come in existence. Therefore, institutional designs for their foreign policies are missing. These gaps are filled by their powerful presidents and their entourages.

Central Asian states have the overwhelming political superiority of leaders who control the state mechanism over any other organized source of power within the political system. For this reason, decision-making processes were totally controlled by their leaders.¹³ In other words, within Central Asian states,

the domain of foreign policy is normally reserved for a few trusted individuals, and in some cases effective decisions are made solely by one leader. Such practices have become increasingly common within the region. For instance, Akayev and Bakiyev obviously exercised considerable personal authority in the making of foreign policy decisions without any significant degree of institutional, political, or popular control over their decisions and actions.¹⁴

Kyrgyz ruling elites implemented different foreign policies to reach the same goal, i.e., to use foreign policy in order to maintain internal political order and possess critical external support for their domestic positions. Indeed, many external relationships established by the Kyrgyzstan government have constituted, above all, access to a source of balancing power to contain internal challenges and threats. In other words, the Kyrgyz foreign policy frequently rises out of a need to strengthen the domestic political order as well as the personal needs of the president.

Furthermore, since independence, Kyrgyzstan has been burdened by the very same problems that other transitional states have faced, i.e., political disorder, defining a new identity, economic shocks, and ethnic or economic minorities who do not accept the sovereignty of the central state. Another factor is that both the administrative

structure and the borders of Kyrgyzstan were determined in the Stalinist era. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan's national boundaries and ethnic composition lacked correspondence with its titular nationalities, which caused potential or real threats to the country's sovereignty and internal and external policies.

However, foreign policy issues in Kyrgyzstan have never been determined solely by domestic factors. Once at the crossroads of empires and conquering peoples, Kyrgyzstan remains at a geographic point of competition between major powers and potential turmoil. In short, external factors are also critical to any analysis of Kyrgyz foreign policies. For example, after the September 11, 2001 incident, Kyrgyzstan became the focus of competing interests of major powers; this development provided opportunities for self-interested leaders, for example, Akayev, to bring the United States into the equation to balance Russian influence in the region. In these circumstances, when the Central Asian region assumed more significance in global terms, the foreign policy behavior of Kyrgyzstan has been linked primarily to external politics.¹⁵ Likewise, the opposite is also true. When the region assumed a lesser significance in the international arena, the foreign policy behavior of Kyrgyzstan has been linked primarily to domestic politics.

Kyrgyz Foreign Policy under President Askar Akayev

Kyrgyzstan, like other post-Soviet states, has faced many political, economic and social problems, from the necessity of state/nation-building to the urgency of economic reforms. Being an independent state meant taking responsibilities as a sovereign state in the international community, as well as being responsible to its own citizens. In order to be part of the international system and its community, Kyrgyzstan had to develop certain relationships with other states and international organizations. In other words, it had to have a foreign policy.

It was a very difficult task at the beginning because the geopolitical and geo-economic situation of Kyrgyzstan complicated the development of an independent foreign policy. Therefore, Kyrgyzstan introduced a multi-vector foreign policy. The Kyrgyz authorities accepted this policy not only because they wanted to, but also because the realities dictated it. Akayev and his advisors understood that both international and regional systems provide opportunities for Kyrgyzstan. Akayev also realized that as a small and newly independent state, Kyrgyzstan required friendly relations with major regional and global players.

Furthermore, Akayev was known as a very gentle, polite and tactful person. His

efforts in establishing friendly relations with other states were successful, due in large part to his personal relations with other state leaders. Therefore, the personality of Akayev, as well as of different Ministers of Foreign Affairs, affected the formation and evolution of Kyrgyz foreign policy.¹⁶

“Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy has been controlled by two considerations first, that the country is too small and too poor to be economically viable without considerable outside assistance, and second, that it lies in a volatile corner of the globe, vulnerable to a number of unpleasant possibilities. These two considerations have substantially influenced the foreign relations of Kyrgyzstan, especially toward major powers and its immediate neighbors”.¹⁷ However, this policy was criticized by the foreign policy experts in the country. For instance, former two-time Minister of Foreign Affairs, Muratbek Imanaliev said that Kyrgyzstan is a small country and cannot have a multi-vector foreign policy. Instead, the Kyrgyz government should determine a few strong partners with whom Kyrgyzstan builds strong ally relations.¹⁸

The Kyrgyz foreign policy under Askar Akayev can be divided into two different periods to form a better understanding of it.

First, in the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was among the few post-Soviet states

that chose to undertake radical economic and political reforms. Economically: it issued its own currency - som - in 1993, and became a member of World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998. Politically: it showed its commitment to moving towards a democratic transformation. It was even called “an island of democracy” in Central Asia.¹⁹ These policies also affected its foreign relations with other countries. In the first decade, Kyrgyz leaders had traveled around the world to establish diplomatic relations with other states. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan signed multilateral treaties and became a member of many international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as joining some regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the fall of 1998 Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state that was accepted into the WTO. It is still the only Central Asian state that is a member of that organization.²⁰ Furthermore, in 1994 Kyrgyzstan began cooperation with the NATO program Partnership for Peace. The practicality of this cooperation was in educating Kyrgyz military cadres in NATO countries, for example in Turkey. Therefore, major goals of the Kyrgyz

foreign policy in this period were the consolidation of independence and sovereignty, securing national interests by political and diplomatic methods, and the creation of favorable conditions for political and economic reforms within the country.

Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s had started developing relations with Western countries, especially with the United States, in order to receive financial assistance from these countries and many other international financial institutions. Most of the assistance in the early 1990s provided by the Western countries was directed to the support of democratic and radical reforms. At the same time Kyrgyzstan was trying to keep friendly relations with Russia, because the Kyrgyz economy was heavily dependent on Russia. The fact that Kyrgyzstan and Russia were part of a single country with a shared legacy from the past was another reason for the development of close Kyrgyz-Russian relations. Most Kyrgyz political elites were either educated in major Russian cities, such as Moscow or Saint Petersburg, or had worked in Russia at some point. Akayev had both been educated and had worked in Russia for a long time. However, despite these attempts by the Kyrgyz political elites in the 1990s, Russian leadership was not paying much attention, instead focusing on its domestic problems, or promoting a Western oriented foreign policy, when

Andrey Kozyrev was the foreign minister of Russia.

Along with this balancing of foreign policy towards Russia and the United States, Kyrgyzstan has taken certain steps toward another major power, its neighbor China, which has a great influence on Kyrgyzstan. China became the largest non-CIS trade partner of Kyrgyzstan and strengthened economic and military ties with Kyrgyzstan.

Worsening security and economic conditions within the state led it to look for external assistance. Kyrgyzstan would not be able to protect its borders even in the case of a small-scale conflict. This was proven in August 1999, when a group of 150-200 armed militants (supposedly religious extremist members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) crossed the Kyrgyz border, took several local inhabitants and policemen as hostages and occupied several villages in the Batken region. For several months the Kyrgyz army tried in vain to dislodge these militants from the territory, and succeeded only after external assistance was provided.²¹ Therefore, the Batken campaign during 1999-2000 indicated the inability of Kyrgyzstan itself, and other Central Asian states, to provide appropriate resistance to international terrorist groups, and indicated the necessity to unite and form common forces to prevent further terrorist attacks. These incidents pushed Kyrgyzstan not only to cooperate closely

with neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan, but also to value being a part of regional security organizations such as SCO and CSTO.

This multi-vector policy of Akayev worked successfully till Kyrgyzstan, as well as the whole of the Central Asian region, had gained new status. The events of September 11, 2001 were critical for the Central Asian region, and of course had significant influence on the foreign policies of the states in this region, including Kyrgyzstan. The deployment of American and Russian airbases had a great influence on Kyrgyzstan's external direction. Kyrgyzstan became very important geopolitically, and its strategic position had increased its importance for the major states. Thus, the next period for the Kyrgyz foreign policy emerged following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

When the United States announced a war against international terrorism and founded the anti-terror coalition, Kyrgyzstan was considered a good strategic and logistical location for an American-led coalition airbase to supply materials to the coalition (mainly American) forces in Afghanistan.²² The Kyrgyz government quickly responded to this international change and utilized it as an opportunity to develop new priorities for its external relations. The fact was that the United States started to increase its activities as the global superpower, and, as well as providing economic

assistance, provided alternatives to the Central Asian countries for balancing the Russian influence. In other words, The Kyrgyz government established ties with the United States, while maintaining its close relations with Russia. Such ties help Kyrgyzstan balance Russia by avoiding heavy reliance on it and thus securing Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty.²³ It is also economically beneficial for Kyrgyzstan, because being an ally with the United States provided a chance for new investments in the Kyrgyz economy, and the airbase became an important source of revenue for the Kyrgyz government. Additionally, the terrorist groups who entered the Batken oblast in 1999 and 2000 were members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) closely connected to the Taliban movement; thus, for both the Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments, the American forces aided in dealing with these groups.

Kyrgyzstan offered its civilian airport-Manas International Airport - for a significant number of American military planes. Of course, an American-led coalition airbase in such close proximity made Russian and Chinese authorities very nervous, though they had hoped that this was only temporary. Russia did not want to lose its influence in the region, including Kyrgyzstan, whereas China considered the presence of an American airbase near its borders a threat to its national security. Later, Russia reopened an old Soviet airbase in Kant - in which

Hosni Mubarek of Egypt and Hafez El Esad of Syria were trained as military pilots in the 1960s - only 50 kilometers away from the American one. Russian and American military bases were never this close anywhere in the world. Each of these countries had its own reasons to have military bases in the Central Asian region. "The basic aim of the US in the region is not to allow Central Asia to become a source of such threats as drug trafficking, the growth of Islamic extremism and multi-ethnic conflicts. Another important aim is its energy security. The US, as the world's largest energy consumer, is trying to diversify its sources of energy supplies. Accessing the reserves of the Caspian area significantly diversifies the US energy resources."²⁴ These two aims of the US in Central Asia were the main interests of Washington.

Furthermore, the American airbase in Kyrgyzstan has great importance, due to the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the possible military attack against Iran in the future. However, the opening of the Russian military base in Kant in 2003 with the CSTO program indicates the tendencies of the Kyrgyz foreign policy. Kyrgyzstan tried to maintain a balance between Russia and the United States. The Kyrgyz president, Akayev, clearly understood Russia to be the dominant power in the region, so he tried to satisfy the Russian leadership by providing a military base.

A couple of months prior to being overthrown by the opposition in 2005, Akayev was pushing for further cooperation with Russia and China, whereas the Kyrgyz-American relations showed signs of breaking up. After the first round of parliamentary elections in February 2005, the United States Ambassador Stephen Young openly criticized Akayev; and when Akayev was overthrown in March 2005 most experts on Kyrgyzstan believed that it was done with the assistance of the United States. At that point many experts claimed that subsequently the foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan would be oriented towards the development of Kyrgyz-US relations. However, the reality was different.²⁵

Kyrgyz Foreign Policy under President Kurmanbek Bakiyev

In 25 March 2005, when Kurmanbek Bakiyev assumed power in Kyrgyzstan, he desired a new conception for its foreign policy. However, his policies were not very different from the previous ones. Bakiyev himself as Prime Minister during 2000 – 2002, and his first Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva, took the same position as Akayev. Moreover, Bakiyev and his colleagues who came to power were from the Soviet trained and educated elite, and their adherence to Russia was a very important factor in the future foreign policy direction. Many

experts talked about the significant change that might happen in Kyrgyz foreign policy. However, under Bakiyev's leadership, the new Kyrgyz authority chose to leave the foreign policy as it was and focus on domestic issues. Kyrgyz authorities announced that there would be no significant change in its external policy. The first statement concerning Kyrgyz foreign policy was made by the acting foreign minister, Roza Otunbayeva, who said that: "not only will there be no fundamental change in foreign policy, there will be no change at all in foreign policy."²⁶ In other words, Kyrgyz leaders announced that Kyrgyzstan would keep on conducting a multi-vector foreign policy. Therefore, Kyrgyz foreign policy remained based on the principles of strengthening its development of relations and cooperation with the great powers, such as Russia, China, and the United States. At the same time it emphasized the importance of its neighbors. Kyrgyzstan had also paid great attention to strengthening ties with the EU and Asian countries, especially Japan and Korea.

Despite these claims of multi-vector foreign policy, the new Kyrgyz leadership had chosen Russia as a priority in the direction of its foreign policy. It viewed SCO and CSTO as the main regional organizations.²⁷ Russia and China started using this opportunity to get rid of the American airbase in Kyrgyzstan. In July 2005 in Astana, at the summit

of SCO, the declaration calling for the United States to close the airbase and withdraw from Kyrgyz territory was accepted. However, following the visit of United States Defense Minister Donald Rumsfeld in the end of July 2005, the Kyrgyz leadership's opinion on the terms of the airbase withdrawal changed.²⁸

The fact that Kyrgyzstan and Russia were part of a single country with a shared legacy from the past was another reason for the development of close Kyrgyz-Russian relations.

During the same period, Bakiyev made his first presidential visit to Russia and signed an agreement with his Russian counterpart Putin to increase military cooperation, which showed the tendencies of Kyrgyz foreign policy. Thus, Bakiyev granted Russia priority in the country's foreign policy. The Kyrgyz ruling elites started emphasizing the great importance of Kyrgyz-Russian relations, supporting Bakiyev's statements on their historical and cultural commonalities, the economic dependence of Kyrgyzstan, and the great potential of future developments of bilateral relations and cooperation. Kyrgyzstan inclined towards more cooperation with Russia in the early years of the Bakiyev's regime and actively participated in regional

organizations, such as SCO and CSTO. The Kyrgyz government emphasized the value of being a member of these regional organizations. This is an indication of the attitude of Kyrgyz foreign policy towards its closest neighbors and major powers in the region - Russia and China.²⁹ Especially considering the volatile domestic conditions, Bakiyev gave priority to the development of close relations with Russia because the United States is far away, but Russia is very close. Russia could help Bakiyev to stay in power if the domestic condition worsened.³⁰

In February 2006, Bakiyev demanded an increase in the rent payments for the American airbase from 2 million to 200 million dollars. On 19 April 2006, several days before Bakiyev's official visit to Moscow, the Kyrgyz leader made a sensational statement that had a significant impact on Kyrgyz-American relations. Bakiyev threatened: "If a new agreement on the conditions of Bishkek has not been signed by 1 June 2006, Kyrgyzstan will end its bilateral agreement with the US on the deployment of the American airbase Ganci."³¹ Furthermore, during his Moscow trip in 2006, Bakiyev stated that Russia is the eternal friend of Kyrgyzstan and the United States is a partner. He refused to take part in the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program led by the World Bank and IMF, instead accepted Russian loans and credits. After a long negotiation, the

airbase rent increased from 2 million dollars to 17 million dollars with low-interest loans, and the contract was extended.³²

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Three years later, when Bakiyev visited Moscow in February 2009, he signed a Russian financial assistance package, which included Russian debt-forgiveness, \$300 million in low-interest credit loans and \$ 1.7 billion for completing a hydroelectric power station. Furthermore, he declared that the American military base will close, and asked the American military personnel to leave the country before the July 2009 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan. Such moves suggested Russia was enjoying unprecedented stature in the Kyrgyz leader's eyes. At the same time Russia and Kyrgyzstan were taking concrete steps in the name of bilateral cooperation. The Kyrgyz authorities' statement on recognizing Russia as a main strategic partner was considered proof of their pro-Russian orientation. Agreements on the creation of joint plants, loans, and building hydro-energy stations on

Kyrgyz territory are all important steps on the way to building close ties between Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Therefore, one can identify this period as constituting the high point in bilateral relations between Kyrgyzstan and Russia.³³

However, following the July presidential election, Kyrgyz foreign policy shifted its attention to developing close relations with the United States. Bakiyev signed a new agreement with the United States to keep the military base in the airport under a different status, and, of course, with more payment of rent. He took a risky step by extending the American use of Gansi military base, which Russia opposed. Bakiyev's attitude indicated a change in the Kyrgyz approach to the military base. There are two reasons. Firstly, while previously the Kyrgyz government was concerned with the base's strategic value, the Bakiyev government's new attitude was based on the economic value of the base, both for (Bakiyev's) personal and national reasons. The second reason was that Bakiyev thought that he had consolidated his domestic power and did not require any external support, such as from Russia, to stay in power. Thus, Bakiyev signed a new agreement to keep the American transit base in Bishkek.³⁴

The new agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the United States on the military base, and transferring Russian loans to Bakiyev's son Maxim Bakiyev's bank, Asia Universal Bank, angered the

Russian government, especially Prime Minister Putin. When Putin met with his Kyrgyz counterpart Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, he accused Bakiyev and his government of not keeping their promises.³⁵ Russian TV stations, which are popular in Kyrgyzstan, openly criticized Bakiyev and his family, and broadcast programs on the corruption of his family. The Russian government, previously refusing to talk with Kyrgyz opposition leaders, invited them to Moscow.³⁶ On 1 April 2010, the Russian government terminated the preferred customs taxes that Kyrgyzstan had been enjoying. Prices of some products, especially oil and other products imported from Russia, increased and created an upheaval in the country.

It can be said that for such a small country as Kyrgyzstan, designating a certain country as a priority in foreign policy will not bring benefits. As Chairman of the Foundation of Political Research and former State Secretary Ambassador Ishenbay Abdrazakov said: "Foreign policy is to satisfy the requirements of our country and contribute to the solution of our internal problems. Since we do have a lot of problems, then our foreign policy has to be very flexible. If we will act in such a way to give priority to certain states among many states, we will lose our face, then our foreign policy, I think, will not achieve the needed goals."³⁷

Conclusion

Russian foreign policy in the early 1990s was different to that of post 1994. In the early 1990s, Russia's main priorities were to develop close relations with Western countries and organizations. That way Russia could expect to become an important member of the Western club. However, following the December 1993 election and, furthermore, following Putin coming to power in 2000, the Russian foreign policy direction turned to the former Soviet countries, including the Central Asian ones. This was precisely what Russian policymakers pushed onto the agenda. They claimed that Russia was and is the political center and a historic magnet for the Central Asian states.³⁸ This created an image of center-periphery relations, again reminiscent of a Moscow-centric past, which did not attract Kyrgyz policymakers. Especially in the second half of the 1990s, the image of Russia as the hegemon power in the region was seen with trepidation at first, and attracted diminishing enthusiasm thereafter among the Kyrgyz leaders. Kyrgyz leaders were looking for an actor who could balance Russian dominance in the region.

When the new order and rules of the post September 11 world were pronounced by the United States President George W. Bush, the countries most affected were in Central Asia, including those studied in this paper,

namely Kyrgyzstan. The post September 11 environment had caused a profound change in the region, and Kyrgyzstan adapted itself to the new environment because of its proximity to Afghanistan, not only in geographical terms but also historically, and naturally it was greatly affected. Kyrgyz foreign policy makers found alternative sources. Although some shifts in the priorities of Kyrgyz foreign policy did happen, Kyrgyzstan never experienced any strict radical change in its foreign policy.

Although some shifts in the priorities of Kyrgyz foreign policy did happen, Kyrgyzstan never experienced any strict radical change in its foreign policy.

After spring 2005, Kyrgyzstan was transformed from a security-creating environment to a security-consuming region, which seemingly stretched from the Caucasus to western China. The post Spring 2005 environment has allowed Russia to play the role of the regional hegemon power, and nowhere has this been more prevalent than in her relationship with Kyrgyzstan where its effects and impacts have ranged from the internal politics to the attempt to close the American military base in Kyrgyzstan.

Being a newly independent state, Kyrgyzstan desired multiple channels of communication with the outside world. Therefore, first of all, Kyrgyzstan has cooperated closely with Russia, China, the United States, the European Union, Turkey, et al. Secondly, Kyrgyzstan has never had any strict radical line in its foreign policy. Kyrgyz governments have generally tried to stay away from being a place of competition for other states. However, implementing the notion of a multi-vector foreign policy is also difficult for a country that has totally dependency on international and regional powers. For this reason, it is difficult for Kyrgyzstan to remain neutral in case of conflicts between two or more of its partners, and to refrain from taking a harsh stance against one of the partners involved.

The tentative closing words one can offer in this brief investigation of Kyrgyz foreign policy consist of the obvious: there are many instances of rhetoric and only some evidence of the actual realization of the state's common personal

and national goals. Furthermore, the geography that Kyrgyzstan finds itself located in puts an inordinate amount of pressure on the country. In addition to that, in terms of domestic politics, the lack of an experienced foreign policy elite, as well as the authoritarian system of governance under Akayev and Bakiyev, hindered systematic thinking in the realm of Kyrgyz foreign policy.

Finally, both interests and fears of Akayev and Bakiyev as leaders of Kyrgyzstan, and changes in the international system and the regional subsystems have pushed Kyrgyzstan towards restricted

choices and certain indeterminate foreign policy behaviors. As a conclusion, it can be said that Kyrgyz foreign policy in the last twenty years has developed in a relatively orderly manner; of course, except when international and regional systems have been shaken and changed, such as following the September 11 attacks in 2001, and when internal political changes happened in 2005 and 2010.

Implementing the notion of a multi-vector foreign policy is also difficult for a country that has totally dependency on international and regional powers.

Endnotes

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