

**Central Asian States in the International System: Sovereignty as a Power**  
**The Case of Kyrgyzstan**

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## **Abstract**

After the dissolution of USSR, Kyrgyz Republic gained its independence in 1991. Kyrgyzstan found itself as politically alone and economically poor actor. Thus, Kyrgyzstan followed the democratic path of development and moved towards free market based system. This allowed Kyrgyzstan to not only attract foreign investment but also to become active player for outside powers such as U.S., Russia, and China. However, Kyrgyzstan experienced difficulties in addressing security issues, political and economic upheavals. More importantly, different great powers pose different challenges to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty. Besides, Kyrgyzstan's internal and inefficient governance increases external dependence. Consequently, this dissertation aims to explore why Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty is declining and how the interaction between Kyrgyzstan and foreign powers affect the concept of sovereignty.

## Introduction

Generally, the study of small states was considerably ignored whereas the role of big powers was carefully studied. However, now small states are widely accepted to be active players and their role in contemporary world has increased. Moreover, the international system was affected by globalization process which brought not only positive changes but also negatives ones. Now, it can be said that the notion of sovereignty is not protected against the movements of capital, labor and information.<sup>1</sup> Thus, states become interdependent and try to combat issues such as security, drug trafficking, illegal immigration collectively. These changes in the international system put the concept of sovereignty under pressure.<sup>2</sup> However, states cannot neither stop nor oppose globalization which means that states have to adapt to the new order of international relations. Especially, politically alone and economically weak small states need substantial support from external actors to fight with abovementioned concerns. Besides, it is worth to note that small states are not necessarily weak states, so there are different types of small states including vulnerable small states, developing small states, and successful small actors. But at the same time, every small state tries to maintain its sovereignty. Historically, the notion of sovereignty was important and there were many wars and conflicts caused by the desire of states to become independent. Today, as was mentioned earlier, the world does not suggest the domination of particular actors but rather experiences multi-polar system where every actor is believed to be an important actor. Therefore, it can be said that the importance of the role of small states and their interaction with great powers is rising. For example, during the Soviet Union, Central Asia was

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Ku and John Yoo, "Globalization and Sovereignty," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 31, (2013): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Julian Ku and John Yoo, "Globalization and Sovereignty," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 31, (2013): 2.

considered as Russia's sphere of influence; however, the collapse of USSR allowed a number of states to enter the world scene. Different states chose different paths of political and economic development. As far as Kyrgyzstan is concerned, it moved towards democracy and privatized economy. Thus, Kyrgyzstan has become attractive not only to Russia and China but also to U.S., since Kyrgyzstan emerged as a part of international system, it encountered several challenges both at domestic and international levels. As was stated above, states have become interdependent where small states' participation has increased. However, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, independence appears to be challenge rather than opportunity. Kyrgyzstan experienced two revolutions which presented Kyrgyzstan as a fragile actor with internal political problems. So, Kyrgyzstan's vulnerability increases external dependency, which, in return, undermines its sovereignty. Thus, this dissertation is motivated by two questions: Why is Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty threatened? How can a small and vulnerable actor like Kyrgyzstan maintain its sovereignty? To examine these questions, this dissertation argues that inefficient internal governance increases Kyrgyzstan's external dependence.

## Literature Review

The concept of sovereignty was previously researched and discussed. Generally, the following sources complement each other but differ in highlighting the main points. To illustrate, *Great Games, Local Rules* written by Alexander Cooley and published by Oxford University discusses emergence of the new great power contest in Central Asia. This book also examines the interaction of great powers such as Russia, China, and U.S. with Central Asian states. Alexander Cooley claims that those foreign powers attempts to influence Central Asian actors were not easy task because Central Asian states emerged as critical agents with their own local rules. More importantly, A. Cooley notes that those local rules helped hosting states to play the great powers off one another. Furthermore, this book outlines Central Asian actors significantly benefited from the rivalry of three big powers both politically and economically. For example, A. Cooley shows how a weak country like Kyrgyzstan benefited from the contest of foreign powers. Specifically, external competition allowed Kyrgyzstan to receive huge financial assistance which is important for developing and poor country. Moreover, this book investigates certain interests which explain increased attention towards Central Asia. For example, China strives for natural resources; Russia wants Central Asia to be in its sphere of influence, and U.S. wants to promote democracy and human rights. Lastly, A. Cooley investigates the internal nature of Central Asian states describing their politics as patrimonial. He also explores that nation states are highly concerned of regime survival and each of them learned to benefit from great powers for their personal gain.

In contrast to A. Cooley's book, *Great Games, Local Rules*, Kubangazy Bugubae, the author of the academic journal, *Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations*, disagrees with A.Cooley and states that Russian influence is greatly increasing. In

detail, he claims that Kyrgyzstan heavily depends on Russia in terms of energy, security, military and material assistance. Thus, his article opposes the views of A. Cooley's book which mainly discussed a new contest in Central Asia. K. Bugubaev's ideas reveal that a contest lasted very short time and generally, Kyrgyzstan has the closest ties with Russia rather than with other foreign powers. He believes that Russian interests in Kyrgyzstan include not only security concerns but also geopolitical considerations. Finally, this article aims to say that comparing to U.S. and China, Russia has a number of advantages in interaction with Central Asian actors such as common history, similar language and culture which makes Russia the winner of any contest in this region.

Similarly to both *Great Games, Local Rules* and *Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations*, P. Stobdan in his academic journal, *Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan*, investigates the role of great powers in Central Asia generally, and in Kyrgyzstan particularly. In contrast to A. Cooley and K. Bugubaev, P. Stobdan does not propose certain ideas but rather identifies new dynamics between Central Asia and foreign powers. Although it may be true that Russia's influence is significantly growing, P. Stobdan claims that China and U.S. are still influential powers. To illustrate, the author disagrees with K. Bugubaev and states that China is also strong power who is believed to be the factor of stability. As such, Russia cannot easily eliminate China's role in Central Asia. In his work, he also realizes that Central Asia experiences different trends including regional conflicts, radical Islam, and internal disputes which make external powers' activities essential. As far as contest in Central Asia is concerned, P. Stobdan says that apart from Russia, U.S., and China, there is India as well. The author claims that India set several economic goals which are related to upcoming Custom Union.



The next, Jim Nichol, a specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs, assesses recent developments and U.S. interests in Central Asia. In his article, *Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments and U.S. interests*, J. Nichol observes U.S. activities in Kyrgyzstan. Particularly, he outlines how NGOs criticized the lack of judicial impartiality and law enforcement system claiming that Kyrgyzstan's internal inefficient governance led foreign investment to decline in 2012. J. Nichol brings the case with "Kumtor" which clearly demonstrates political shortcomings of Kyrgyzstan. Similarly to A. Cooley, J. Nichol believes that U.S. provided immense investment in Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, U.S. influenced big international financial organizations such as IMF to help Kyrgyzstan during June events and manage the impact of global economic downturn. More importantly, J. Nichol investigates the role of Afghanistan in the context of Kyrgyz-U.S. relations.

Based on what has been discussed above, I safely arrive at the conclusion that these sources are useful and reliable. Most important, the abovementioned sources provide different insights to analyze interaction between Kyrgyzstan and outside powers. Although the concept of sovereignty was previously researched, there are still gaps such as investigating the correlation between internal governance and maintaining sovereignty. Therefore, this desperation aims to explore the role of internal governance and examine its impact on sovereignty.

## **Methodology**

This dissertation used qualitative analysis to analyze both secondary and primary data. Secondary data includes books, academic journals and analytical reviews on Kyrgyz relations with foreign powers. The primary sources include the speeches and statements of scholars and experts on Central Asia and International Relations. In addition, interviews were conducted with International and Republic Institute (IRI) experts as well as with independent political scientists.

Structurally, the dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter one discusses the concept of small states and deals with the concept of sovereignty. Furthermore, this part provides a historical background of Kyrgyzstan's political and economic relations with great powers. Chapter two explores the foreign policy of small states in general, and Kyrgyzstan's in particular. More importantly, this chapter focuses on areas where internal weak governance of Kyrgyzstan presented challenges to its sovereignty. The important part of this chapter explores why good governance plays a significant role in maintaining sovereignty by evaluating the success stories of Singapore and Switzerland. Additionally, chapter two investigates the relationship between globalization and economic sovereignty. Lastly, Chapter three assesses the impact of each big power on Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty. Particularly, this chapter evaluates the areas where foreign powers pose different challenges including political, economic and civil, to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty.

## Chapter 1: “Small States need Big Friends”

### 1.2 Small State and Issue of Sovereignty

Generally speaking, there are several ways to characterize small states. One should note that there is “no universal definition of small states; the qualitative definition encompasses the basic physical, geographical characteristics, degree of insularity, and vulnerability.”<sup>3</sup> However, in terms of the quantitative definitions, it includes land area, the population size, the GNP (Gross National Product), the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and the per capita income.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, in this sense, small states should be understood in terms of power rather than size, specifically, smallness should be associated with capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Besides, it is worth to mention that small states vary in terms of types. In detail, there are successful small states, developing small states and vulnerable small states.<sup>6</sup> There are small states that are quite rich in natural resources such as Turkmenistan while one can see successful small state such as Singapore which is economically very strong country. Surely, there are developing and vulnerable small states and prominent example of this category can be viewed in Kyrgyzstan’s case. Besides, a vulnerable small state with scarce natural resources may also turn into a successful state if it manages to achieve **good governance**.

Meanwhile, almost all small states strive for maintaining its sovereignty. So, firstly, sovereignty should be defined and there are three main aspects of sovereignty which can be listed as follows. These are international legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, and domestic sovereignty. The fundamental principle of international legal sovereignty is that judicially independent territorial entities merit recognition

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<sup>3</sup> Idris Demir, “National Securities of Small States in the International System.” (2008): 4

<sup>4</sup> Idris Demir, “National Securities of Small States in the International System.” (2008): 6

<sup>5</sup> Niriam Fendus Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in its Own Backyard,” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.25, no.2 (April 1995): 171

<sup>6</sup> Idris Demir, “National Securities of Small States in the International System.” (2008): 6

and with it such rights and privileges as membership in international organizations, access to the resources of international organizations if it is needed, the ability to sign treaties and contracts with other legal actors, and surely a diplomatic immunity for their representatives<sup>7</sup>. The main notion of Westphalian sovereignty is that each actor possesses the right to determine its own authority structures, which implies that in this context, actors should avoid intervening in each other's internal affairs. In other words, a state has a monopoly over authoritative decision-making which internationally refers to the rule of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of others.<sup>8</sup> Finally, domestic sovereignty does not mean a rule but rather authority structures within available state and more about actual capacity.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, domestic sovereignty refers to the ability of authority structures to efficiently regulate behavior within a state. However, the classic theorists of sovereignty, Bodin and Hobbes were concerned with domestic sovereignty. They brought an example of religious wars in Europe that were destroying the stability of their own societies.<sup>10</sup> Building on this, small states try to develop their foreign policies that simultaneously maintain sovereignty and develop **internal governance**.

Generally, "the defining characteristic of any international system is anarchy, the absence of any legitimate hierarchical sources of authority. However, anarchical systems may also vary with regard to the specific substance of rules and institutions."<sup>11</sup> Aside from this, the political scientists, Alexander Wendt, suggests that

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):232

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):232

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Krasner, "The Case For Shared Sovereignty." *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 1 (January 2005):70

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):231

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):229.

there are three different anarchical cultures. For example, in Hobbesian world, other actors are regarded as enemies who have no inherent right to exist. Conversely, in a Lockean world states perceive each other as rivals but recognize a mutual right to exist. Lastly, in Kantian world states see each other as friends and expect disputes to be solved without violence.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, if one goes back to history and looks at the classic Sinocentric system which was hierarchical and it had only single center-China with an emperor who ruled by virtue of the Mandate of Heaven.<sup>13</sup> Other political entities were tributary states that had no options but to follow, to acknowledge the primacy of Beijing.<sup>14</sup> This is to say that any system can be changed by certain factors. Thus, relationships among states, as well as the role of sovereign actors, may lose or acquire new aspects. Once, a political scientist and former professor of international relations, Hedley Bull said that “System of states exists when there are states that are in regular interactions with each other”<sup>15</sup> So, regardless of changes, states continue to cooperate with each other on various issues and security concerns encourage them to work collectively.

## **1.2. Security Issues of Small States**

Thus, the contemporary environment has changed its nature and number of transnational non-governmental organizations has grown dramatically as well as international organizations have become much more prominent.<sup>16</sup> So, whether the system is hierarchical or anarchical, it will exist if there is systematic interaction

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Krasner, “Abiding Sovereignty.” *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):230

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Krasner, “Abiding Sovereignty.” *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):230

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Krasner, “Abiding Sovereignty.” *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):229

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 230

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Krasner, “Abiding Sovereignty.” *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):230

among actors. After learning that there were various systems and where the concept of authority and sovereignty were different, one may safely look at contemporary international system which has its own rules and actors.<sup>17</sup> Although, sovereign states are still regarded as the main blocks and the key players for the modern world, it can be claimed that in the contemporary period the sovereign actors encounter extraordinary pressure, particularly from newly emerged challenges posed by globalization, which to some extent, eroded the notion of sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, one of the major challenges for states in this modern era is to how establish the development of well-functioning **governance** that provides social services, economic opportunities for citizens and more importantly, security.<sup>19</sup> This fact makes it impossible for small states to completely isolate themselves from the external world.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, small states are willing to use their sovereignty as a tool to benefit from powerful actors in terms of political support and economic assistance. In this sense, political support can be viewed as a help for small states to provide their security.

As it was mentioned earlier, international relations can be defined to be in a state of anarchy because of the absence of an above authority. Nation states are trying to provide peace and security for their citizens in this anarchic environment. Big and powerful states are usually influential in directing the international system in promoting their interests and maintaining their sovereignty. In contrast to big actors, small states have a different scenario and more complicated attitude towards the

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):230

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):231

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Krasner, "The Case For Shared Sovereignty." *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 1 (January 2005):70

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):229

international system. They have to develop certain strategies to provide security to their citizens and at the same time maintain their sovereignty which they sometimes are unable to manage on their own.<sup>21</sup> Thus, small states have to establish strong connections with a powerful actor or become a member of an organization which consists of at least one big power. This helps small states to be under protection and focus on their political and economic development where political development means providing internal stability and **establishing accountable, inclusive and efficient government.**<sup>22</sup> But first, it is reasonable to outline possible threats that encourage small actors to ally with stronger states. So, external threat is more about geographical location which means that a country's location may create vulnerability. The reasons are that strong powers are likely to take over a small actor not because of economic incentives but because of geographical advantages that weaker state's location offers. There is no point for big power to hijack a small state for economic purposes because the smaller the state, the smaller the market. However, geographically and strategically, small states are quite attractive.<sup>23</sup> As far as internal threats are concerned, these are the risks which are far more difficult to prevent. For example, economic levers of big regional power transformed into political ones can be regarded as a source of internal threat. The problem is that the national authority cannot act against the wishes of a powerful actor because of those levers which can easily destabilize domestic affairs of the small state.<sup>24</sup> Building on this, it is safe to claim that security concept plays a key role in any state's domestic and foreign policy but not every actor can afford this. As a result, developing countries face an opportunity cost theory where an actor has to give up on one option, to achieve

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<sup>21</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 1

<sup>22</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 1

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Alford, "Security of Small States." *The World Today*, (Aug.-Sep., 1984): 363

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Alford, "Security of Small States." *The World Today*, (Aug.-Sep., 1984): 364

another, but the value of that cost for small states might be the decline of sovereignty. As realists believe, states are rational and selfish actors whose actions and decisions are driven by certain interests. In other words, a powerful state has particular goals or objectives behind its actions. Therefore, small state may sacrifice its sovereignty partially or entirely to provide its citizens with security. Today, the concept of security has become important because international system is getting globalized. As an illustration, one may go back to history where bipolar system existed. Specifically, there were two main actors such as Soviet Union and U.S., there was solid enemy and surely, it was easy to recognize who is your enemy what type of policies should be implemented. But now with the emergence of terrorism and multipolar system, it is quite problematic to cope with security matters, notably; small states have to look for foreign assistance in order to combat both external and internal threats. Besides, it should also be noted that the end of the Cold War created new relationships, new strategies, and new national political identities. The increasing process of globalization also has placed additional pressure on the ability of small states to manage their economic, political and security relationships.<sup>25</sup> Now, “goods, capital, people, ideas, criminality and disease move easily and quickly across borders.”<sup>26</sup> However, states, especially small states, cannot regulate trans-border movements; therefore, cooperation appears to be mutually beneficial option. The problem is that small actors face huge difficulties in conducting effective monetary policy due to international capital flows; they cannot control knowledge because of well-informed Internet; states cannot guarantee public health because individuals can move so

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<sup>25</sup> Idris Demir, “National Securities of Small States in the International System.” (2008): 6

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Krasner, “Abiding Sovereignty.” *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):231



quickly across the globe.<sup>27</sup> This is to claim that the nature of security has changed and has become even more complex. Moreover, new security threats can be easily transformed from national into international threats; so, the issue here is not one of authority but rather of control. Consequently, the right of sovereign actors to manage their borders is not undermined but security matters posed by contemporary international system challenged their ability to fight them individually.<sup>28</sup> In this case, small states are much more vulnerable comparing to powerful actors, therefore, logically, small actors find it attractive to become ally with stronger state so it can provide assistance in terms of security issues.

Now it is necessary to find answers to key questions. How much security is needed for a developing state in order to focus on economic and political affairs and what means and at what cost security should be achieved?<sup>29</sup> And again, loss of sovereignty can be seen as cost which allows a small state to find a place under umbrella of a stronger actor. Secondly, means can be regarded as building relations with nearest great power, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, one of the most prominent candidates can be Russia.<sup>30</sup> Last but not least, all these ideas are connected to the main point which is sovereignty. Cooperation and interaction between states has significantly increased which are indicators of the decline of the notion of sovereignty and the emergence of a regional order.<sup>31</sup> Based on what has been said above, one may easily reach a conclusion that both external and internal threats negatively impact the notion of sovereignty and small actors' lacks of options because there is security that

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Krasner, "Abiding Sovereignty." *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (July 2001):231

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 7

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

developing states cannot maintain on their own, therefore, looking for an appropriate partner appears to be an adequate decision of the rational actor.

In Kyrgyz Republic's case, it has maintained strong economic ties with Russia since gaining its independence. Their common history, similar infrastructure, and comparable transitional challenges allowed the two countries to build strong economic relations during the first ten year after the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> These historical ties give Russia a comparative advantage over markets such as the United States, Europe, and even China.<sup>33</sup> As Askar Akayev once said "Small States need Big Friends", Kyrgyzstan wished for more attention and support from Moscow rather than other Central Asian actors. Unlike Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan who are self-sufficient, Kyrgyzstan has welcomed any help from outside. So, Kyrgyzstan and Russia had become original signatories of the 1996 Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Since, Kyrgyzstan was weak not only in terms of military but also politically and economically, its aim was to get as much as it can from cooperation with Russia. Given the fact that both countries shared common historical ties, it was no surprise that Russia was Kyrgyzstan's principal trading partner in the second half of the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> Particularly, Kyrgyzstan heavily relies on Russian petroleum, it imports petroleum since it has very little of its own reserves.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Russia continued to be Kyrgyzstan's principal trading partner in 2005. In the post-9/11 push toward greater cooperation by Presidents Akayev and Putin, both leaders highlighted the growing trade bonds between the two countries. President Putin, in an address during a Kyrgyz-Russian summit, highlighted the 49% increase in trade between 2001 and

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<sup>32</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :3

<sup>33</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :3

<sup>34</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :3

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

2002, emphasizing agriculture, power, and waste management.<sup>36</sup> However, some economic ties undermined the autonomy of Kyrgyzstan. Especially, energy sector which is oil was exploited as a lever of Moscow to pressure Kyrgyz government to act in accordance with Russian interests. This is related to internal threats of small actors which are usually unable to say “No” to regional power and has to follow its suggested or imposed policies.

Kyrgyzstan could not ignore security concerns and like other former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan realized that independence brought several challenges with it, including territorial security and national defense. Initially, Akayev planned to make Kyrgyz Republic into Central Asian “Switzerland” believing that in the new post-Soviet world of Central Asia no specific threat existed. However, this view did not succeed for two reasons. Firstly, Switzerland’s economy is one of the most stable economies in the world and it was reached due to long-term monetary security and political stability. On the contrary, Kyrgyzstan is transitional state and applying “neutrality” status of Switzerland is not enough. Secondly, not every state can afford neutrality; particularly Kyrgyzstan, who lacks natural resources, often struggles with political instability, and has **inefficient internal governance**<sup>37</sup> As a result, Kyrgyzstan had to change its foreign policy and supported the establishment of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) under CIS in 1992.<sup>38</sup> Although the main idea of CST was that an aggression on one state would constitute aggression on all members, small states like Kyrgyzstan were just benefiting from this alliance. The point is that it was much cheaper to become a member of CST rather than creating independent military.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, Russians funded most of the equipment and provided

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, “Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations.” *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :4

<sup>38</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, “Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations.” *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :4

<sup>39</sup> ibid

training for Kyrgyz troops in the process. Precisely, Kyrgyzstan clearly understands that there are external threats such as expansion of international terrorism and religious extremism, increasing water and energy security in the region, and unresolved border disputes among Central Asian actors.<sup>40</sup> All these factors encourage Kyrgyzstan to have “Big Friend” and the closest one seems to be Russia. Undoubtedly, this strategy of seeking a place under the umbrella of strong actor appears to be a solution for a poor country like Kyrgyzstan. A striking example of foreign power’s assistance can be demonstrated in between 1999 and 2000 when Kyrgyzstan was unable to address the extremist and terrorist threat. Logically, Kyrgyz government needed moral and physical support in its fight against those forces. Of course, Russia was the best option to rely on like no other country.<sup>41</sup> As one can see, this is an evidence of how small states behave when it comes to security related issues. Now, Kyrgyzstan’s military equipment is mostly Russian. Also, Russia can easily modernize certain aspects of the Kyrgyz military when it is in the best interest.<sup>42</sup> Building on this, one may safely arrive at the conclusion that Kyrgyzstan’s relationship with Russia is determined to be strongly weighted by both economic and security dimensions<sup>43</sup> where weak actor tries to provide its security and strong actor get an opportunity to take away some sovereignty of small state by using its economic and political levers.

### **1.3 Economic Sovereignty**

Generally speaking, globalization is usually believed to be a counterpoint to national sovereignty. As was discussed before, small states face enormous challenges

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<sup>40</sup> P. Stobdan, “Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan,” *Pentagon Press* (2014): 106

<sup>41</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, “Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations.” *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :5

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

in fighting internal and external threats posed by globalization. Undeniably, states have become interdependent not only politically but also economically. Specifically, economic interdependence is viewed to be the reason for other types of interdependence. Before proceeding, it is useful to look at the definition of globalization developed by leading member of Law in Context Movement, William Twining. He claims that “In Economics, globalization refers to economic internationalization and the spread of capitalist market relations.” He gives examples of CocaColonization and McDonaldization<sup>44</sup> to say that world economy is getting globalized where sovereign actors cannot deviate from neoliberal economic policies such as privatization, deregulation, and reduction in public expenditure.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Kyrgyzstan, it is worth to observe democratization process and analyze reforms which led Kyrgyzstan to free-market based system. In addition, it is useful to mention that globalization undermined the concept of border sovereignty which means “the capacity and willingness of particular state to control flows of people, goods, and capital into and out of country.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, a loss of border sovereignty simply means a loss of domestic economic sovereignty.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it is important to notice that Kyrgyzstan does not practice economic sovereignty. Precisely, Kyrgyzstan’s economic sovereignty is defined as attracting foreign powers and benefiting from their material aid. Thus, after the collapse of Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan appeared to be different from other Central Asian states for its commitment to democratic reforms.<sup>48</sup> The democratic path of development was useful for Kyrgyzstan for several reasons, which go as following. Firstly, Kyrgyzstan found itself as a politically alone and

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<sup>44</sup> Arnar Sigmarsson, “Globalization vs. State Sovereignty: Constitutional Rights in a Crisis?” *University of Akureyri* (2008): 3

<sup>45</sup> John Quiggin, “Globalization and Economic Sovereignty,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2001): 56

<sup>46</sup> John Quiggin, “Globalization and Economic Sovereignty,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2001):57

<sup>47</sup> John Quiggin, “Globalization and Economic Sovereignty,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2001):57

<sup>48</sup> Dinara Murzaeva, “Transition to Democracy in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Leaders, Citizens and Perceptions on Political Legitimacy,” (June2011): 2

economically poor actor whose aim was to attract as much resources from outside as possible. This helped to bring investments which are always valuable for an economically weak state like Kyrgyzstan. Apart from this, Kyrgyzstan had already built fruitful relations with Russia and joined CSTO, which, to some extent, provided military support. However, economically, Kyrgyzstan was still struggling so idea of voicing Kyrgyzstan as “Island for Democracy” appeared to be a good option for attracting foreign actors. Thus, Askar Akayev pursued multidirectional foreign policy in order to bring investments. Certainly, democracy was a beautiful label to invite actors from western world and benefit from their investments. Therefore, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has been interested in helping Kyrgyzstan enhance its sovereignty and territorial integrity, improve its economy and strengthen development reforms.<sup>49</sup> The interest of U.S. in promoting democratic values was beneficial for Kyrgyzstan because it perceived emerging NGOs as a tool to extract more money. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan was the first of the successor states of the Soviet Union to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998.<sup>50</sup> This turned Kyrgyzstan into reform leader in Central Asia.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, there was China who had its own interests and used its economic power to approach Central Asia in general, and Kyrgyzstan in particular. For China, Kyrgyzstan like other Central Asian countries is essential for maintaining its security, trade expansion, source of natural resources, and ethnic stability.<sup>52</sup> Most importantly, China’s primary security goal is its western province, Xinjiang, which is viewed as a threat to its territorial integrity and

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<sup>49</sup> Jim Nichol, “Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests,” *Congressional Research Service* (August 2013):1

<sup>50</sup> Richard Promfert, “Lesson from Kyrgyzstan’s WTO Experience for Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.” (June 2007):1

<sup>51</sup> Richard Promfert, “Lesson from Kyrgyzstan’s WTO Experience for Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.” (June 2007):1

<sup>52</sup> P. Stobdan, “Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan,” *Pentagon Press* (2014): 182.

economic development seems to be a significant key for ensuring future political stability.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, China has upgraded the surrounding region's infrastructure to increase regional economic activities.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, Kyrgyzstan was not worried about China's security concerns but taking into consideration China's economy, Kyrgyzstan was glad to find another source for receiving financial support from. In other words, diversifying economic patrons was useful for Kyrgyzstan because it strengthened Kyrgyzstan's position. Firstly, it built stable economic relations with Russia, claiming that both countries share common history and Russia is the closest friend like no other country. Kyrgyzstan managed to attract rich western world stating that "Kyrgyzstan is Central Asian's island of Democracy", which allowed to benefit from foreign aid through NGOs. Besides, Kyrgyzstan established warm bilateral relations with China and it seems to be long-term relations due to China's security interests. Secondly, this interaction of three big actors such as Russia, U.S. and China has empowered Kyrgyzstan's position.<sup>55</sup> Briefly, Kyrgyzstan avoids being fully dependent on one particular actor, and thus, maintains its economic sovereignty.

## **Chapter 2: Foreign Policy of Small State and Building Its Own Position**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War allowed a number of small states to enter into the world scene. While International Relations (IR) theorists have highlighted the foreign policies of great powers, they have ignored the study of small states.<sup>56</sup> Particularly, one should look at the small state's position

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<sup>53</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012),7.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*,7.

<sup>55</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*,7.

<sup>56</sup> Niriam Fendus Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in its Own Backyard," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.25, no.2 (April 1995):172

in the international system and its interaction with great powers.<sup>57</sup> “Given the fact that domestic politics matters in explaining foreign policy outcomes, it is safe to claim that small actor’s foreign policy demonstrates its domestic affairs.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, neorealism suggests that international constraints influence state behavior. In general, “international pressures are able to override domestic interests, internal political struggles, and the characteristics of particular states in foreign-policy making.”<sup>59</sup> In this case, small states, especially, developing economically poor actors like Kyrgyzstan are likely to use their sovereignty as a power to achieve their objectives such as maintaining sovereignty, improving economy, and building strong identity. In this sense, identity is an essential element that can be achieved through establishing good governance. This seems to be rational strategy because Central Asia as a region has become attractive to U.S. since 9/11, to Russia who wants the region to be in its sphere of influence, and finally to resource-hungry China.<sup>60</sup> Based on this, an increased interest for the region has both advantages and disadvantages for the small actor like Kyrgyzstan.

There are small states which have proved that sovereignty can be perceived not only as a power but also as a gift because one can see a number of actors who are partially recognized and fight for independence such as Republic of Kosovo, Scotland and many others. As examples of those states that could get most out of their independence can serve the Republic of Singapore and Switzerland

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<sup>57</sup> Niriam Fendus Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in its Own Backyard,” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.25, no.2 (April 1995):172

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012),1.



## 2.1 Singapore and Switzerland as Exemplary Small States

“Singapore is one of Asia’s great success stories, transforming itself from a developing country to a modern industrial economy in one generation.”<sup>61</sup> More interestingly, it is a relatively small state bordering with big countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. However, Singapore managed not only to maintain its sovereignty but also greatly improve its internal affairs. These aspects of Singapore make it exemplary state for Kyrgyzstan because there are several similarities between two countries. For example, both Singapore and Kyrgyzstan are comparatively small states, both of them have scarce natural resources, encounter similar threats including religious ones and have environmental disputes with their neighbors. Precisely, Kyrgyzstan, being an upstream country, has water disputes with Uzbekistan. Whereas, in 2007 Singapore-Indonesia relations experienced strains due to disputes over sand and granite bans. Singapore’s extensive import of sand from its largest neighbor caused a reduction in Indonesia’s geographical size.<sup>62</sup> This is to say that Singapore suits best to Kyrgyzstan’s case and may provide clear insight to existing problems. So, analyzing Singapore’s story of success may help to say where Kyrgyzstan failed, what steps should be taken for a small state to develop and how it needs to behave to be strong both politically and economically. In addition to this, Switzerland is another distinctive example of successful small state. “History has shown that important international banking centers can develop in small countries as well as large ones and Switzerland is an excellent case in this point. During the course of the 20th century, the banking center in this country became one of the world leaders in wealth

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<sup>61</sup> “Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 159.

<sup>62</sup> Bilveer Singh, “Singapore: Success at Home, Challenges from Abroad,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2008):320

management. With the associated creation of value and employment, the banking industry was transformed into a cornerstone of the Swiss economy.”<sup>63</sup>

One may ask how “a comparatively small state like Switzerland could create a banking center with such a wide international reach. Reasons for this success may include political, legal, and economic stability which end up with reliable banks.”<sup>64</sup>

To return to an earlier point, there are several reasons for Singapore’s success. But before proceeding, one should note that “when Singapore became independent in 1965, it was a poor, small, tropical island with little natural resources, little fresh water, rapid population growth, substandard housing and recurring conflict among the ethnic and religious groups that made up its population.”<sup>65</sup> But government of Singapore made certain reforms at the right time and at the right place which resulted in “transformation “from third world to first” in one generation.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, **good governance** can be viewed as an important reason of Singapore’s success.

Firstly, Singapore followed the idea of adapting to current situation and achieved high levels of efficiency by maximizing the use of scarce resources through moving from heavy manufacturing to the promotion of services such as finance, retail, and tourism. Secondly, it created business environment to attract foreign investors, this environment implied clean, efficient, and corruption free place.<sup>67</sup> Thirdly, lack of natural resources made Singapore pay close attention to human resources which were and still are seen as the island republic’s most precious asset. Logically, education was seen, from the beginning, as central to building both the economy and the

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas J. Jordan, “Swiss banking center-a great past and a successful future?” *Swiss International Finance Forum*, (May 2004):1.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas J. Jordan, “Swiss banking center-a great past and a successful future?” *Swiss International Finance Forum*, (May 2004) :3.

<sup>65</sup> “Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 160.

<sup>66</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 160.

<sup>67</sup> Bilveer Singh, “Singapore: Success at Home, Challenges from Abroad,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2008): 315-316

nation.<sup>68</sup> As once former Prime Minister said, Lee Kuan Yew, said, the main aim of Singaporean education was to “produce a good man and a useful citizen.”<sup>69</sup> Last but not least, “at independence, Singapore had multiple religious groups (Buddhist, Muslim, Taoist, Hindu and Christian); multiple ethnic groups (Singapore’s population is about 74% Chinese, 13% Malay, 9% Indian and 3% other); and no common language.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, this fact appeared to be dangerous for the unity of Singapore because conflicts on the grounds of religion are easy to start but are very difficult to stop. In addition to this, it was mentioned that at the beginning, Singapore was economically poor and politically weak state, so it was highly vulnerable to any type of conflicts. In other words, these threats demanded urgent responses which Lee Kuan Yew successfully implemented. Initially, “Lee Kuan Yew set out two major goals: to build a modern economy and to create a sense of Singaporean national identity.”<sup>71</sup> Later on, he voiced the importance of ideology and developed a concept of “One united people regardless of race, language, and religion.”<sup>72</sup> The point is that a combination of healthy economy and strong ideology is one of the most effective tools to prevent a conflict. Specifically, the idea of bringing different ethnic groups together was very successful and it greatly contributed to the creation of common Singaporean identity. To illustrate, two years of compulsory national service allowed to unite different ethnic groups, as well as the policy of mixing each group within the government-built housing helped to avoid the racial and ethnic segregation that is present in many countries, ultimately, these policies successfully developed one united community of Singapore.<sup>73</sup> Once Martin Luther King Jr. stated: “People fail to

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<sup>68</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 161.

<sup>69</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 161.

<sup>70</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 161.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*:160

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*:161

<sup>73</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 161.

get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other.” It seems that his thoughts were found in Singapore's policy targeted to eliminate any type of segregation and form a strong and effective community. These abovementioned two policies had to function hand in hand because political instability might have undermined economic development. Today, Singapore is a well-developed state and a center of trade, finance and transportation.<sup>74</sup> Finally, “Singapore emerged as a free market, business-friendly and globally-oriented economy, shaped by an active and interventionist government.”<sup>75</sup> Briefly, one may safely say that **good governance** of Singapore became the main reasons for successful implementation of abovementioned reforms.

## **2.2 From “Small State” To “Small Power”**

### **2.2.1 “A Small State with Big Voice”**

Taking current situation of Kyrgyzstan and its relation with great powers such as Russia, U.S., and China into account, one may believe that Kyrgyzstan can learn valuable lessons from the incredible journey of Singapore. Even if Kyrgyzstan does not become the second Singapore, comparing the success of Singapore to Kyrgyzstan's current situation will reflect the shortcomings. For instance, attracting foreign investment was one of the key factors of success story of Singapore which helped it to maintain its sovereignty and emerge as an active player. However, current situation of Kyrgyzstan does not allow implementing certain reforms as Singapore did. There are several reasons for this statement. Firstly, Kyrgyzstan is still struggling with corruption which exists almost in all sectors of the economy and at all levels.

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<sup>74</sup> Singapore: Rapid Improvement Followed by Strong Performance,” *OECD* (2010): 160.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*:160

Singapore emphasized the financial system and education as central policies for the development, but Kyrgyzstan cannot follow the same strategy because of non-transparent system. In other words, as long as Kyrgyzstan has **corruption**, it is likely to remain a weak actor and attracting foreign investment seems to be difficult. Building on this, one may say that corruption, which is tightly related to **poor governance**, undermines Kyrgyzstan's position because it makes it internally weak. To illustrate, Kyrgyz government spends financial resources on fighting **corruption** which could be spent on strengthening other important sectors such as education, tourism, and so on.

Singapore was a little dot among giants such as China, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, but it managed to keep its position because Singapore developed its own political and economic system which brought not only flow of money but also international recognition. Singapore has become a necessary and active actor and this aspect increased its role in interaction with great powers. As a result, Singapore turned into a model for other small states to follow in this regard.<sup>76</sup> As far as Switzerland is concerned, it possesses great issue-specific power, which means that it has a substantial influence in the financial services sector of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in oil sector.<sup>77</sup> This aspect made Switzerland attractive, necessary, and active player. Briefly, both Singapore and Switzerland possess these specific-issue powers which give them stronger "voice". Subsequently, these states successfully maintain their sovereignty.

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<sup>76</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstohl, "Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?" *Centre for Small States Studies* (May 2004): 5.

<sup>77</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstohl, "Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?" *Centre for Small States Studies* (May 2004): 5.

### 2.2.2 Good Governance and Internal Capacity

Secondly, in contrast to Singapore and Switzerland, Kyrgyzstan is regarded as one of the weakest actors among Central Asian states. Obviously, there are explicit reasons why Kyrgyzstan is such an actor. One of the reasons is that Kyrgyzstan is weak internally which implies not only **corruption** but also **domestic governance**. As it was already mentioned, Singapore accented the notion of “A good man and useful citizen” and it managed to realize this idea and turned from a “small state” to “small power”.<sup>78</sup> This proves that **good governance** plays an important role in becoming internally strong, which, in return, helps to survive externally. Even if, Kyrgyzstan cannot transform into a country which is rich in natural resources, **it can efficiently use what it currently has in accordance with good governance**. In this case, good means accountable, inclusive, and transparent government.

Coming back to Switzerland’s case, it has suggested the best banking system which ensured its position in global economy. Switzerland has built strong capacity which considerably assists in maintaining its sovereignty. Based on this, **effective internal governance** can be viewed as essential tool for Kyrgyzstan in order to strengthen its position.

### 2.3 “Crowded Room”

One of the important ideas was revealed in Alexander Cooley’s book, “Great Games, Local Rules,” which highlights that new competition for Central Asia has begun.<sup>79</sup> Explicitly, “each Central Asian actor is pursuing significant goals which are basic rights for the U.S., access to natural resources for Chinese, and increased

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<sup>78</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstohl, “Lilliputians in Gulliver’s World?” *Centre for Small States Studies* (May 2004): 3.

<sup>79</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*, 1.

political influence for Russia.”<sup>80</sup> Precisely, Alexander Cooley claims that “foreign powers were challenged by Central Asian actors because those national governments have demonstrated themselves as critical agents in their own right by establishing their own “local rules” for external powers activities. As a result, the interaction of local rules and external competition has reinforced the sovereign authority of individual Central Asian governments.”<sup>81</sup> As one of those critical agents, Kyrgyzstan used “local rules” to maneuver foreign powers and benefit from their involvement. However, currently, there is no much space to maneuver for Kyrgyzstan and reasons for this statement go as following. Firstly, U.S. does not possess the influence that it used to have before withdrawal from Afghanistan. Secondly, Russian influence significantly increased and Kyrgyzstan is entering Customs Union. CU can be viewed as a counter strategy against the economic expansion posed by China.<sup>82</sup> It means that Russia is now influential not only politically, but also economically. Last but not least, “the Soviet Union had such a strong influence on Kyrgyz culture that today many of Kyrgyzstan’s elites look to Russia as Kyrgyzstan’s leading partner and friend in the world.”<sup>83</sup> Obviously, this is what Russia wants to have. The problem is that Russian propaganda has become more intense and it impacts both political and economic activities of Kyrgyzstan. Paradoxically, Russia gains Kyrgyzstan’s trust despite the history, where Kyrgyzstan was fully controlled by Soviet Union. Thus, one may acknowledge that Kyrgyzstan does not see that increased Russian influence decreases Kyrgyzstan’s sovereignty. On the contrary, one may assume that Kyrgyzstan is willing to trade its sovereignty for security which was discussed earlier.

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<sup>80</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*,1.

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*,1.

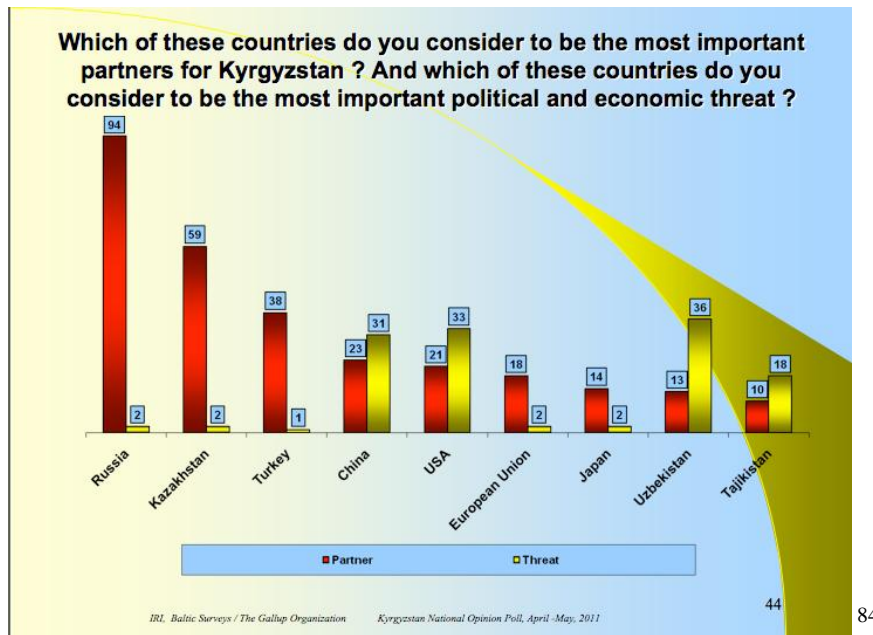
<sup>82</sup> P. Stobdan, “Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan,” *Pentagon Press* (2014): 106

<sup>83</sup> Samuel C. Ide, “Kyrgyzstan and China: Kyrgyz Views on a Giant Neighbor,” *Northwestern University*, (2011): 6.

Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan is a vulnerable state because it is not economically strong and politically stable; therefore, its sovereignty is always under threat. Consequently, increasing dependence on one particular foreign power may eventually lead to the decreased the autonomy and sovereignty of that state. So, Kyrgyzstan, being one of the weakest actors of the region, cannot resist to foreign powers' wishes. To illustrate, Russia may intensively impose its demands on Kyrgyzstan because it clearly understands that a subordinate actor such Kyrgyzstan experiences lack of options and has to follow Russia's demands. But surprisingly, Kyrgyz views on Russia are positive. To illustrate, one may look at International Republic Institute (IRI) poll results. This survey demonstrates that Russia's attempts to increase its influence were not in vain and Kyrgyzstan perceives Russia as a reliable ally rather than potential threat. One may believe that Russia's success is based on common history as well as political and economic influence on Kyrgyzstan. Energy sector in particular, including gas and oil, is mainly provided by Russia, and can be one of the reasons to treat Russia as a close friend.

(Table 1)





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Before, a contest among the U.S., Russia and China for power and influence in Central Asia was beneficial for Central Asian actors, specifically for Kyrgyzstan, because strong powers' external competition allowed Kyrgyzstan to behave independently and benefit from their financial support. Kyrgyzstan could play with big powers and keep them at favorable distance. One should know that involvement of foreign powers is not new for Central Asia. Historically, Central Asia has been viewed as an arena of geopolitical contest, while its location at the crossroads of several empires has subjected it to a rich array of pressures, influences, and cultures.<sup>85</sup> But in contrast to original Great Game where expanding empires were attempting to physically conquer and control the region's territory from local rulers, today's world consists of sovereign states which are trying to influence other sovereign actors but with different means.<sup>86</sup> Thus, subordinate states of Central Asia and particularly Kyrgyzstan used their sovereignty as a power to interact with foreign actors. Central Asian governments can be compared to "chameleons" which are well-known for their

<sup>84</sup> [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4

<sup>86</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5

abilities to change the color of their skin. However, as it was noted earlier, current situation is different, and today Kyrgyzstan lacks options. Lastly, one may look at the period when Kyrgyzstan was able to maneuver and this can be seen through U.S. involvement after 9/11.

### **2.3.1 Manas Air Base as a Sign of Contest**

The prominent example of how a small state, Kyrgyzstan, made foreign powers play one another can be seen in the situation with the Manas Air base. After the September 9/11 event, the United States established status of agreements (SOFA) with several Central Asian states in order to conduct the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the SOFA agreements between U.S. and Kyrgyzstan resulted in establishing an airbase at the Manas International Airport on December 11, 2001.<sup>88</sup> Together with U.S., several coalition countries also signed agreements with Kyrgyzstan and deployed their troops and aircraft.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Kyrgyzstan could improve its reputation in front of international community and receive significant material assistance from U.S. Particularly, for A. Akayev, the OEF campaign came at a favorable moment, because Akayev was famous for his liberalizing reforms in an effort to turn Kyrgyzstan into “Switzerland” of the region.<sup>90</sup> It is worth to note that Kyrgyzstan did not plan to build strong security partnership relations with U.S., but promises of potential economic benefit motivated it to host U.S. air base.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Jim Nichol, “Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the U.S. Manas Airbase: Context and Implications,” *Congressional Research Service*, (July 2007): 2.

<sup>88</sup> Jim Nichol, “Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the U.S. Manas Airbase: Context and Implications,” *Congressional Research Service*, (July 2007): 2

<sup>89</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>90</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

Later on, “by May 2002, the base hosted 2,000 troops from 9 coalition countries and was being used to conduct refueling operations, staging flights, and cargo transit.”<sup>92</sup> In return, U.S. significantly invested in Kyrgyzstan by providing \$40 million annually to the Kyrgyz economy and directly employing nearly 500 Kyrgyz nationals. By, 2009, the annual economic assistance reached \$100 million dollars, with over 700 Kyrgyz nationals employed.<sup>93</sup> But since Central Asian politics are accompanied with corruption, informal networks, which became a standard form of political reward and exchange, most of economic gains would flow not to the Kyrgyz government but to the Kyrgyz president, his family and his close circle.<sup>94</sup> This demonstrates that “local rules” of Central Asian states are also used as intermediaries between their internal constituencies and external patrons.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, in 2003, Kyrgyzstan agreed to also host a small Russian airbase at Kant, east of Bishkek, as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) which made Kyrgyzstan the only country of the region to host both U.S. and Russian bases. Definitely, this fact played an important role in shaping relations with respective actors.<sup>96</sup> But interestingly, having bases of two rival actors was favorable for Kyrgyzstan because it used Manas air base as leverage to confront Russia’s wishes, even though; it was a short term luxury. This was a prominent example of how small and poor state managed to benefit from great powers and maintain its autonomy.

To conclude, it is better to depend on several big powers than on a single one because this considerably strengthens the capacity and authority of Central Asian

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<sup>92</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*, 35.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*, 35.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Cooley. *Great Games, Local Rules*, 35.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27.

<sup>96</sup> Angira Sen Sarma, “Base Politics in Kyrgyzstan intensifies,” *Indian Council of World Affairs*, (May 2012):1.

regimes.<sup>97</sup> But now, as Russian influence is significantly growing, Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty is being threatened. Specifically, Kyrgyzstan may lose its autonomy because its major power, sovereignty, is disappearing.

### **Chapter 3: The Three Headed-Dragon and Kyrgyzstan's Sovereignty**

Today, foreign powers are posing different challenges to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty. Precisely, those challenges can be divided into categories. For example, political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan is challenged by Russia, who is greatly increasing its influence in Central Asia. There is a threat to Kyrgyzstan's economic sovereignty posed by China. Last but not least, there is a western world which is also challenging in terms of imposing its values and political views on Kyrgyzstan. In other words, Russia is believed to be an anti-western actor and it has tense relations with Europe. So, Kyrgyzstan may become a victim when competition between Russia and western actors turns into rivalry. In detail, U.S. plans to increase influence may no longer meet with Kyrgyzstan's interests. Particularly, U.S., who regards Kyrgyzstan as a democratic island, will continue to invest in democratization of Kyrgyzstan. In this case, Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty is threatened because it has no capacity to oppose external pressure. Thus, this chapter will elaborate on potential threats posed by big powers and analyze how those challenges influence Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty. Apart from this, it is important to explore which foreign actor is the most powerful and examine the possible options for Kyrgyzstan to protect its sovereignty. In addition, this chapter investigates the effects of changes in international system which influenced the interaction between Kyrgyzstan and three foreign powers; Russia, China, and U.S.

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<sup>97</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24.

### 3.1 Sino-Kyrgyz Relations and Economic Sovereignty

Generally, China does not strive for total dominance and it prefers to be an active actor. “For China, neighboring countries do not have to be under China influence; however, they have to show their loyalty to the regime existing in China, and not to undertake any hostile actions against China.”<sup>98</sup> Aside from this, it is necessary to point out that China is described as a reasonable great power because its approach towards other actors is accompanied by non-interference in domestic affairs of other state. In contrast to western powers such as U.S., China respects other countries’ sovereignty.<sup>99</sup> Thus, according to this assumption, China does not represent a threat to political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and “claims that China has hidden motives in Central Asia and is pursuing a grand geopolitical strategy aimed at ultimate control and dominance of the region are excessive and exaggerated.”<sup>100</sup> For China, Kyrgyzstan as well as other Central Asian countries, is needed to provide peace and security in the region. Precisely, China is concerned about its northwestern province, Xingjian, which comprises 48% of Uighurs who are Muslims. Apart from this, Xinjiang is one of the poorest provinces of China which poses a threat to Chinese territorial integrity because in 2009, Uighurs organized riots and called for independence which, according to unofficial reports, resulted in 156 people dead and more than 1000 injured.<sup>101</sup> In this case, China believes that economic development will significantly build stability in this problematic province. The idea is that no one will be silent with an empty stomach, so improving economic conditions by investing in Central Asia infrastructure, constructing roads and pipelines and connecting it to Xinjiang is likely to reduce the existing pressure. This is to say that China has its own

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<sup>98</sup> “On the Concept of Relationships between Kyrgyzstan and China”: 3.

<sup>99</sup> Bernardo Mariani, “China’s Role and Interests in Central Asia,” *Safeworld*, ( October 2013):3.

<sup>100</sup> Bernardo Mariani, “China’s Role and Interests in Central Asia,” *Safeworld*, ( October 2013):4.

<sup>101</sup> Samuel C. Ide, “Kyrgyzstan and China: Kyrgyz Views on a Giant Neighbor,” *Northwestern University*, (2011): 6.

motives for maintaining good trade with Central Asia in general and with Kyrgyzstan in particular.

Thus, despite of prominent differences in population size, history of existence and economic performance of respected states, there are common issues such as separatism, religious extremism, and drug trafficking which unite both countries.<sup>102</sup> However, in this situation, Kyrgyzstan, being a small and poor state, pursues quite different goals. Specifically, Kyrgyzstan thinks more about economic opportunities rather than security issues. On the other hand, China is concerned about security and stability, which was mentioned earlier.

As a result, “China has become Kyrgyzstan’s largest trade partner. In 2008, trade with China had reached to \$9 billion officially but the unofficial figure was stated to be much more.” One of the most distinctive parts of Sino-Kyrgyz relations was that Kyrgyz traders were able to import cheap goods from China at low tariffs, and then re-export them to the neighboring states at higher prices which reflected the their non-WTO status.<sup>103</sup> But as known to all, Kyrgyzstan is entering Custom Union which will affect negatively on trade relations with China. The idea is that Kyrgyzstan’ location and its WTO membership were beneficial both for China and Kyrgyzstan. To illustrate, Kyrgyzstan’s WTO status allowed China to use it as a transit zone to access CIS market. Similarly, as it was mentioned earlier, Kyrgyz traders used to benefit from re-exporting Chinese goods not only to Central Asian states, but also to Russia. Subsequently, the re-export business is massive part of the Kyrgyz economy which impacts both consumers and sellers.<sup>104</sup> This fact explains why

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<sup>102</sup> “On the Concept of Relationships between Kyrgyzstan and China”: 3.

<sup>103</sup> Samuel C. Ide, “Kyrgyzstan and China: Kyrgyz Views on a Giant Neighbor,” *Northwestern University*, (2011): 6.

<sup>104</sup> Samuel C. Ide, “Kyrgyzstan and China: Kyrgyz Views on a Giant Neighbor,” *Northwestern University*, (2011): 4.

Kyrgyzstan's decision to enter CU was delayed several times.<sup>105</sup> To return to an earlier point, "according to Chinese statistics, the trade between Kyrgyzstan and China amounted to \$4.2 billion in 2011. But other sources indicated that the trade turnover was \$10 billion in 2011, which means that a Chinese-Kyrgyz economic relation is the second highest bilateral trade with CIS countries after Russia. According to former Kyrgyz vice Vice-Minister for Economy and Investment, Joomart Otorbaev, China exports to Kyrgyzstan amounted to \$10 billion."<sup>106</sup> However, in reality, this bilateral relation can be said to be one-sided because Kyrgyzstan does not export goods to China. This is to say that economic sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan greatly depends on China's activities. Besides, China has been providing a considerable credits and financial assistance. According to the last few years, more than \$150 million was extended. Aside from this, China Development Bank (CDB) assured another \$136 million credit to Kyrgyzstan.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, China was working on big projects such as upgrading transport connectivity and a building a high-speed railway corridor through Central Asia to Europe but progress was very slow because of internal political instability and changed political environment which means Kyrgyzstan and CU.<sup>108</sup> However, China's close engagement with Kyrgyzstan presents not only opportunities but also challenges.

Precisely, despite of considerable China's financial assistance, Kyrgyzstan is not in the "win-win situation because, again, **inefficient and weak internal governance** makes Kyrgyzstan vulnerable actor. As it was mentioned earlier, corruption is one of the main indicators of poor government. The problem is that

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<sup>105</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 187.

<sup>106</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 183.

<sup>107</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 184.

<sup>108</sup> P. Stobdan, *ibid*: 184.

corruption exists in all sectors of economy and at all levels of state apparatus. It appears in different forms, including political corruption, nepotism and abuse of power.<sup>109</sup> Thus, corruption undermines business environment, which, in return, presents challenges for foreigners to do business in Kyrgyzstan. To illustrate, one can see disputes over “Kumtor Operating Company” where Kyrgyz government infamously tries to change terms for foreign investors.<sup>110</sup> Regular meetings regarding “Kumtor” is simply undermining the Kyrgyz image and discouraging foreigners to do business activities. This comes to the problem of governance. There is a fundamental principle of civil and international law known as “Pacta Sun Servanda” which means that treaties should be kept. More importantly, it says that a party to the treaty cannot refer to its domestic affairs as a justification to change or cancel existing agreement. In this case, Kyrgyzstan referred the old regimes as justification to change terms of the treaty which damages the reputation of Kyrgyzstan. This is the sign of **poor internal governance**, because foreign investors are not guilty for Kyrgyzstan’s internal political instabilities. Equally important, “according to Transparency International Corruption perceptions index 2011, the Kyrgyz Republic is ranked as 164<sup>th</sup> among 183 countries. This demonstrates that the country is highly corrupted and, it has spread in all spheres of the country’s life.”<sup>111</sup> This is to say that low level of **good governance** and high level of corruption decrease foreign investment which plays important role for developing and poor actor like Kyrgyzstan.

As a result, China is viewed as an actor that exploits this situation and increases its economic influence. In other words, Kyrgyzstan’s inefficient internal

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<sup>109</sup> Maira Martini, “Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption in Kyrgyzstan,” *Transparency International*, (January 2013): 2.

<sup>110</sup> Rickleton, Chris. "Kyrgyzstan: Is Chinese Investment Really Win-Win?" *EurasiaNet.org*. July 23, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2015. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67287>.

<sup>111</sup> Erkin Zakirov, “Corruption in Government Organs of the Kyrgyz Republic and Ways of Decreasing its Levels By using International Experiences.” *Ristumeikan Asia Pacific University*, (September 2012): 7.



governance favors China's position. The less attractive Kyrgyzstan, the less foreign investments it receives. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan cannot prevent itself from maintaining economic relations with China because Kyrgyzstan still needs economic growth. One of the major concerns is that Kyrgyzstan's debt to China is significantly increasing. For instance, recent report shows that Kyrgyzstan's loans from China reached \$1 billion.<sup>112</sup> Whereas, in 2010, Kyrgyzstan's foreign debt to China's Export-Import Bank (EXIM) was \$760 million.<sup>113</sup> But interestingly, in contrast to western actors, China does not put strict conditions and it does not carefully monitor how this money is spent. This is what attracts Kyrgyzstan because as it was noted earlier, corruption is a part of Kyrgyz economy both inside and outside of government.

However, in this case, China's loans are tying up Kyrgyzstan's hands. Providing this amount of loans and financial assistance unconditionally looks suspicious and one day Kyrgyzstan may find itself in the situation when it has to pay back all its debt. In other words, China gives more but demands less, which appears to be attractive for an actor like Kyrgyzstan, but this can be dangerous for its economic sovereignty. As an example, one may look at "KyrgyzGaz" case, Russian's top natural gas producer, "Gazprom" bought "KyrgyzGaz" for a nominal price of 1\$.<sup>114</sup> Apart from this, "Gazprom will have access to the Mailuu-Suu and Kugart Gas Deposits in southern Kyrgyzstan."<sup>115</sup> This case demonstrates that there is a risk of having the same scenario with China, but in an even larger scale. There is also a book called "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man", whose author John Perkins was one of

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<sup>112</sup> Rickleton, Chris. "Are Chinese Investors Ditching Kyrgyzstan for Tajikistan?" *EurasiaNet.org*. January 20, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2015. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71696>.

<sup>113</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 184.

<sup>114</sup> "Gazprom Buys KyrgyzGaz for \$1 plus Debt," *The Moscow Times*, April 10, 2014, Business Section. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/gazprom-buys-kyrgyzgaz-for-1-plus-debt/497858.html>

<sup>115</sup> Daria Chernysheva, "KyrgyzGaz sold to Gazprom for \$1," *The Bricspost*, May 27, 2013. <http://thebricspost.com/kyrgyzgas-sold-to-gazprom-for-1/#.VSvcltysVqU>

the world's top economists. He used to work with the heads of the World Bank, IMF, and other global financial institutions. So, J. Perkins reveals the strategy of giving loans to worsen the situation in a particular country. Specifically, his job was to persuade certain countries to accept billions of dollars in loan which those states definitely could not afford. Later on, these loans were targeted for implementing important projects such as construction of telecommunication systems or improving infrastructure. Finally, these projects were carried out by U.S. companies such as Bechtel, Halliburton and other companies.<sup>116</sup> As a result, U.S. could kill two birds with one stone. Firstly, U.S. gets leverage towards lending state, and secondly, it receives its money back. This is not to say that China pursues the same approach towards Central Asia generally, and to Kyrgyzstan particularly but there are some similarities. For example, Bishkek-Torugart road project is built with Chinese credit by Chinese company Sinzyan-Basin.<sup>117</sup> Thus, one may notice that China wins twice as U.S. loans did. Furthermore, as a loaning actor, Kyrgyzstan becomes considerably indebted.

Taking everything into consideration, one may reach a conclusion that relation with China has both advantages and disadvantages. Undoubtedly, Kyrgyzstan is an economically weak actor and China's financial assistance is important, but at the same poses challenges to economic sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan. Namely, Chinese huge loans may eventually make Kyrgyzstan sacrifice its economic sovereignty, at least, partially. It is noticeable that Kyrgyzstan takes loans which it cannot afford and this endangers its economic sovereignty. As a final point, **inefficient internal governance** should be viewed as central reason of being too indebted because loans are used

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<sup>116</sup> John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004), 50-65.

<sup>117</sup> Business&Human Rights Resources, <http://business-humanrights.org/en/kyrgyzstan-bishkek-torugart-road-builders-employed-by-chinese-company-sinzyan-basin-ltd-protest-against-discrimination-and-abuses-of-their-labour-rights>

inefficiently which makes Kyrgyzstan to ask for more financial assistance.

Consequently, China can be seen as a long-term threat.

### **3.2 Russia as a Threat to Political Sovereignty**

In contrast to China, Russia perceives Central Asian actors differently because Russia's objectives are more complex than China's ones because if China is more focused on economic perspectives, Russia strive for both political and economic influence. As far as Kyrgyzstan is concerned, "Kyrgyzstan has been consistent in its efforts to show itself as a reliable strategic ally and friend of Russia in Central Asia."<sup>118</sup> Although Kyrgyzstan followed an independent and a relatively more democratic political path, Russia continued to pose considerable influence in Kyrgyzstan, both through bilateral cooperation as well as through CIS and CSTO.<sup>119</sup> Historically, Russia was a dominant actor in the region and it is not surprise that Kyrgyzstan perceives Russia as a close ally. Additionally, Russia is seen as the most advantageous foreign power because of historical ties. "The two countries have signed nearly 100 bilateral agreements for cooperation, including security and military areas, on economic and industrial cooperation, cooperation in the fields of science and technology, education and cultural cooperation. Trade turnover between the two countries was \$ 1.8 billion in 2008. In 2010, it fell to \$ 1.4 billion. Russia's exports accounted for \$1.2 billion, and imports for about \$300 million."<sup>120</sup> Despite of WTO membership status, Kyrgyzstan's economy is highly dependent on Russia.<sup>121</sup>

Apart from this, Kyrgyzstan is a beneficiary state and Russia substantially assists in almost all areas including military, energy (oil, gas, hydropower), and by providing

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<sup>118</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 137.

<sup>119</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 137.

<sup>120</sup> P. Stobdan: 138.

<sup>121</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :6.

credits. Thus, bilateral relation of Kyrgyzstan and Russia can be described as stable and reliable. However, Russia poses the biggest threat to political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and reasons for this claim can be listed as follows.

Firstly, Russia has explicit economic levers which can be used as political tools. One may assume that these levers have become stronger because of Kyrgyzstan **inefficient internal governance** which gives Russia an opportunity to increase its influence. For example, Russia and Kyrgyzstan experienced tense relations during the Kurmanbek Bakiyev rule because of his dual politics. As a result, Russia became reluctant to build planned constructions. Today, Almazbek Atambayev regained Russia's trust but this resulted in increased Russian influence. Precisely, in Kyrgyzstan, investments by Russian energy companies are represented mainly by Gazprom which actually became monopoly of the oil product market.<sup>122</sup> To illustrate, Gazprom has bought "KyrgyzGaz" which enables Russia to fully control the gas sector. This aspect hugely increases dependence on Russia because Russia's increased role in energy area can be definitely seen as leverage. In addition to that, Kyrgyzstan has no rich hydrocarbon resources, even though, it has abundant hydropower potentials.<sup>123</sup> Thus, Russia significantly assists in building hydropower stations. "On July 30, 2012, the agreement on the construction of Kambar-Ata I was reached. Under the new term, Russia agreed to the construction of Kambar-Ata 1 hydroelectric power station and Verkhnenaryn chain of hydroelectric stations. Russia will fund the hydro projects on 100 per cent loan basis. Under the new agreements, Kyrgyzstan will obtain 50 per cent shares in two projects. Kyrgyzstan agreed to put its 25 per cent shares under fiduciary management arrangement with Russia in order to generate

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<sup>122</sup> Craig Oliphant, "FPC Briefing: Assessing Russia's role in Central Asia." *The Foreign Policy Center*, (September 2013):3.

<sup>123</sup> Kubangazy Bugubaev, "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *Strategic Outlook* (May 2013) :8.

faster returns. However, the property will be owned fifty-fifty and dividends will be shared by the same scheme. The construction of the Kambar-Ata-1 was to cost around \$2.5 billion and Russia will invest about \$455-500 million into other hydro projects on the upper Naryn River.”<sup>124</sup>

Not to mention “RusHydro, a Russian state-owned energy company, which began construction on a number of hydroelectric dams in Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>125</sup>

Energy sector plays an important role in every country but currently, Kyrgyzstan’s energy sector greatly depends on Russia. Consequently, Russia can use this situation to impose its wishes which Kyrgyzstan has to follow. All in all, Kyrgyzstan’s poor governance constantly increases its dependence on Russia.

Briefly, political instabilities and two revolutions can be regarded as evidences of **inefficient governance**, which, then, empowers Russia’s role in Kyrgyzstan.

Secondly, similarly to China, Russia uses Kyrgyz debt as a lever to influence. Kyrgyzstan owes two big debts to Russia; first debt is approximately \$189 million as of September 5, 2005 and second external debt is \$ 300 million as of February 3, 2009.<sup>126</sup> Thus, Kyrgyzstan debt accounts for \$489 million which is another problem for Kyrgyzstan because it has already great big debt to China. However, in contrast to China, who poses a long-term threat, debt to Russia seems to be more threatening because Russia exploits those debts to influence internally and immediately. To illustrate, Russia uses Kyrgyzstan’s debt to extend its military presence. Specifically, it was agreed that Russian military facilities in Kant will stay for another 15 years. In return, Russia promised to write off substantial Kyrgyz debts.<sup>127</sup> The strategy of

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<sup>124</sup> P. Stobdan, “Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan,” *Pentagon Press* (2014): 113.

<sup>125</sup> Stephanie Ott, “Russia tightens control over Kyrgyzstan.” *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/russia-tightens-control-over-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>126</sup> P. Stobdan: 174.

<sup>127</sup> Craig Oliphant, “Russia’s role and interests in Central Asia.” *SafeWorld*, (October 2013):9.

Russia who provides loans and then barter for military extension is dangerous for Kyrgyzstan's political sovereignty. Accordingly, Kyrgyzstan continues to fall under Russia's sphere of influence and loses its political sovereignty. Finally, it is worth to note that problem is again related to Kyrgyzstan's **poor governance** and absence of political will. It seems that Kyrgyzstan tries to avoid any attempts to become internally strong but rather prefers to follow Russia's policies. Apart from debt, Russia has another explicit leverage which increases Kyrgyzstan's dependence. As it was noted earlier, Kyrgyzstan and Russia share many ethnic and cultural similarities which encouraged a number of Kyrgyz workers to travel to Russia in search of better job opportunities. As a result, according to the World Bank, those workers' remittances make up 30% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP.<sup>128</sup> It means that Russia may use this leverage to increase its influence because if those workers return to their homeland, it will affect not only GDP but also will create unemployment.

Last but not least, Russian propaganda plays a key role in forming public opinion. Precisely, propaganda is used as a soft power which is a strong tool to influence particular actor. To illustrate, the former U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan claimed that most of Kyrgyz population get their news from Russian media which was clearly shown not only in the case of Ukraine crisis, but also in creating Anti-American attitude.<sup>129</sup> To illustrate, Kyrgyz mercenary who participated in hostilities in Ukraine's Donbas can be a prominent example of Russian propaganda. He says that Russian propaganda greatly misinforms people and the stories of violent nationalists and Nazis in Ukraine spread by Russian media, do not correspond with reality. He adds that "It was what made me change my mind. I thought that fascists were there,

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<sup>128</sup> Stephanie Ott, "Russia tightens control over Kyrgyzstan." *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/russia-tightens-control-over-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>129</sup> Mirlan Toktaliev, "U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Warns of Russian influence," *Radio Free Europe*, last modified April 21, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-united-states-russia-spratlen/26667847.html>.

but I did not see them. We fought against regular Ukrainian army.”<sup>130</sup> This is to say that Russian propaganda is powerful enough to make people disillusioned.

Additionally, it is important to note that propaganda is widely accepted to be an effective instrument to destabilize particular state. In this case, Kyrgyzstan becomes a vulnerable actor which does not have political culture. Specifically, if there is a huge gap between citizens and government, it leads people to seek other sources to fill that gap; thus, internally efficient government is not only about inclusive, efficient and transparent institutions, but also about providing a close engagement with its citizens.

Once, American political scientist, Joseph Nye said that “It is not necessarily better to twist minds than to twist arms” Joseph Nye defines soft power as “the ability to get others to want the outcomes that you want.”<sup>131</sup> This is clearly reflecting Kyrgyzstan’s case because the Russian media is so influential that it affects everyone regardless of age and sex. The point is that Russian channels include not only news, but also entertainment. For example, Russian channel “Perviy Kanal” is a quite famous source which provides different TV shows watched by most of the population. Aside from this, Kyrgyz government has recently announced that now, Kyrgyz Public Radio and Television Corporation (KTRK) is obliged to broadcast Russia’s “Perviy Kanal” programs.<sup>132</sup> This order was highly criticized because KTRK used to broadcast Kyrgyz TV programs but now its content will include programs of “Perviy Kanal.” For example, a member of the Supervisory Board of the Broadcasting Corporation, Tynchtybek Chorotegin, stated that “we see that Russian channels provide one-sided information. Why should KTRK broadcast Russian programs?”

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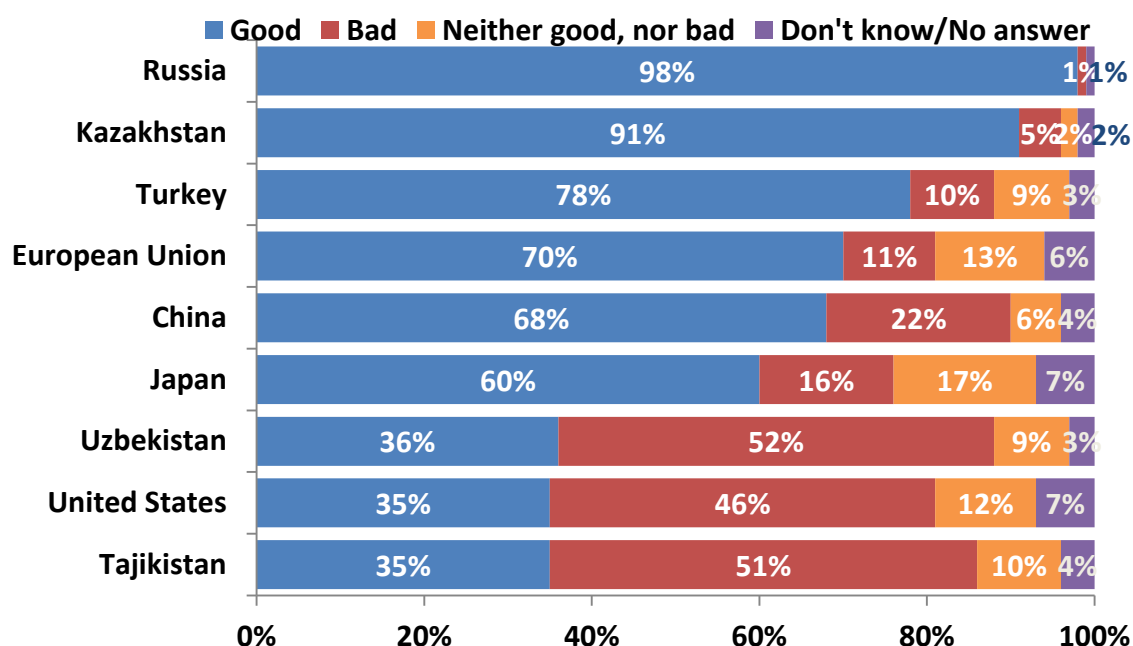
<sup>130</sup> “Disillusioned Kyrgyzstan Fighter says Russian army leading fight in east Ukraine,” *Ukraine Today*, last modified March 18, 2015, <http://uatoday.tv/politics/disillusioned-kyrgyzstan-fighter-says-russian-army-leading-fight-in-east-ukraine-416201.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Maxime Gomichon, “Joseph Nye on Soft Power,” *E-International Relations Students*, last modified March 8, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/08/joseph-nye-on-soft-power/>.

<sup>132</sup> Eleonora Beishenbek kyzy, “Will KTRK become a copy of “Perviy kanal?” *Radio Azzatyk*, last modified April 26, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.org/content/article/26973740.html>.

Now, it undermines freedom of choice to get information.”<sup>133</sup> This aspect surely makes Kyrgyzstan closer to Russia both culturally and politically. Today, Russian propaganda divides Kyrgyzstan into two camps where first camp is pro-Russian and the other one is not against western world. The problem is that this division sometimes becomes aggressive which may result in socio-political unrest of the country. For example, one may observe the effect of Russian propaganda in relation to Moscow-led Custom Union. Precisely, propaganda for joining CU is so strong that most of Kyrgyz population is for joining, but they do not know why exactly Kyrgyzstan should join. To illustrate, one may look at (IRI) poll results. Precisely, the question was **“How do you assess current relations between Kyrgyzstan and other countries?”**<sup>134</sup>

(Table 2)



As one can see, Kyrgyz population strongly believes that relation with Russia is important. Moreover, 98% out 100% positively evaluate current relation with Russia.

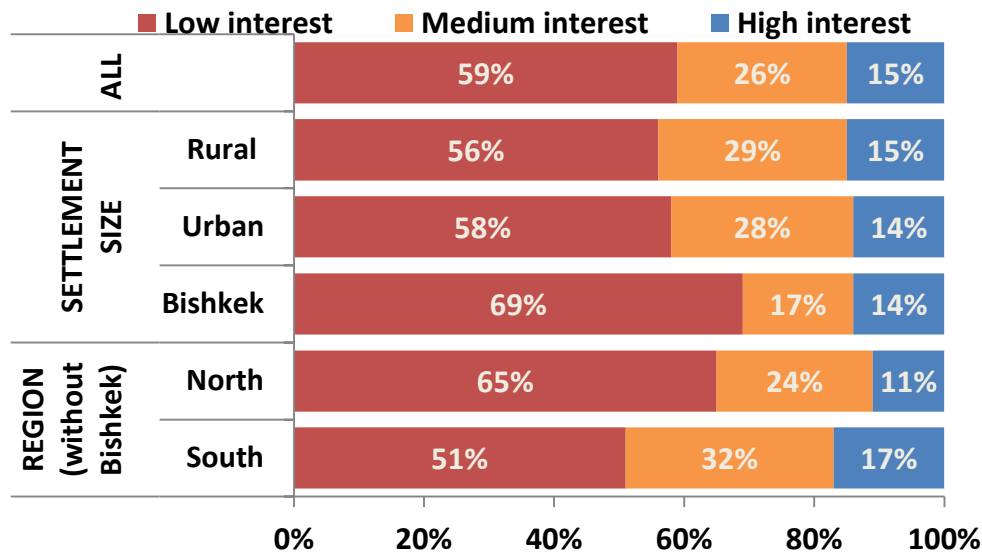
<sup>133</sup> Eleonora Beishenbek kyzy, “Will KTRK become a copy of “Perviy kanal?” *Radio Azzatyk*, last modified April 26, 2015, <http://rus.azattyk.org/content/article/26973740.html>.

<sup>134</sup> www.iri.org



However, interestingly, when respondents were asked “**How much interest do you have in politics?**”<sup>135</sup>, the results were different. To illustrate,

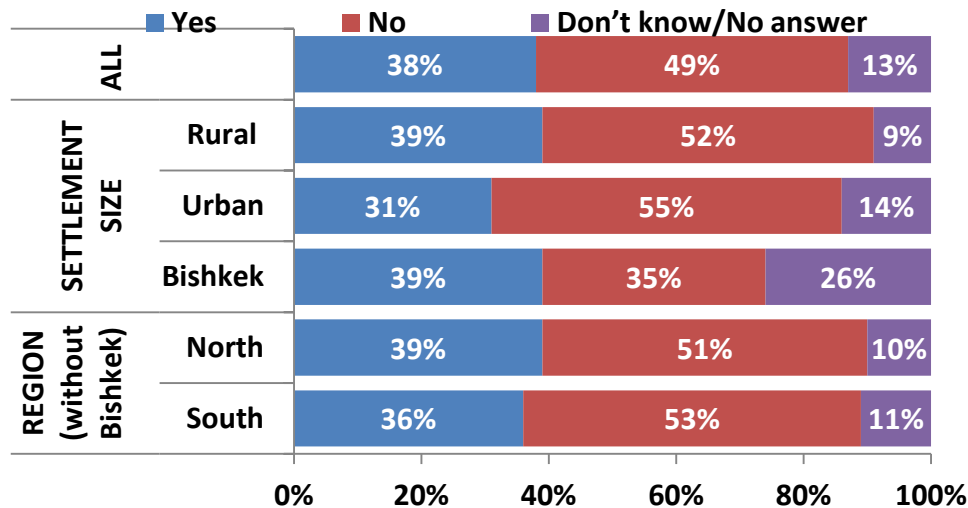
(Table 3)



As known to all, assessing Kyrgyzstan’s relations with other countries definitely relates to politics. But surprisingly, most of the population claims that they have low interests in politics, then, evaluating Kyrgyz-Russian relations as 98% positive remains questionable. In this case, one may believe that this positive image was achieved due to strong Russian propaganda. As a result, people support Kyrgyzstan’s plans to join CU, but they do not have sufficient information in order to justify their claims. For example, one may look at the table 4, which reveals that majority lacks of information whether Kyrgyzstan should join CU or not. Bu still, they believe that entering CU is the right direction for Kyrgyzstan.

(Table 4) “**Do you think that you have sufficient information in order to make a decision on whether Kyrgyzstan should become a member of the CU?**”

<sup>135</sup> [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)



Aside from this, Russia’s influence is demonstrated through the legislative process. In other words, Kyrgyz parliament explicitly suggests and tries to adopt laws similar to Russia’s. For example, recently, Kyrgyz parliament has voiced the importance of introducing punishments for propagating homosexual relations. The new bill is designed to impose certain fines and even imprisonment for promoting untraditional sexual relations. In fact, this bill emulates a similar law in Russia.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Kyrgyzstan, being the sole parliamentary state in Central Asia, contradicts to its own political system. It outlines Kyrgyzstan’s vulnerability and increased influence of Russia. If a sovereign state follows the wishes of another actor, particularly, in one of the most important branches such as parliament, then its political sovereignty is undoubtedly threatened. Second example of how Kyrgyzstan is copying Russia’s laws is a bill targeted at NGOs. Today, Kyrgyzstan is debating on the law that will label foreign-funded activists as foreign agents. “According to the draft law, non-commercial organizations that engage in “political activities” and receive financial support from foreign governments, international and foreign organizations or other

<sup>136</sup> Olga Dzyubenko, “Kyrgyzstan considers ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law Similar to Russia’s,” *Huffpost Gay Voices*, last modified December 13, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/13/kyrgyzstan-gay-propaganda- n\\_5975264.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/13/kyrgyzstan-gay-propaganda- n_5975264.html).

foreign sources would be required to register as foreign agents.”<sup>137</sup> The point is that many provisions of law are identical to those of Russian law which was adopted in 2012.<sup>138</sup> This means that government can conduct unscheduled inspections on the basis of vague information indicating that such organizations have violated the law.<sup>139</sup> Whereas, non-governmental organizations will have to regularly provide reports of their activities. “In Russia, enforcement of the “foreign agents” law adopted in July 2012 has had a seriously chilling impact on civil society and has served to reinforce negative attitudes against NGOs.” But in contrast to Russia, Kyrgyzstan more or less depends on NGOs, because Kyrgyzstan is a poor country that needs constant assistance and international organizations not only implement different programs, but also help financially. Thus, NGOs play a significant role in developing countries like Kyrgyzstan, because NGOs strengthen civil society and implement reforms in important fields such as human rights, which are one of the key elements of democracy. In addition, NGOs help to build bridge between government and citizens. Briefly, NGOs have greatly contributed to the country’s development. However, upcoming law may undermine these activities because non-profit organizations will not function smoothly as they do now. Similarly, Russian propaganda affects Kyrgyz nationalists who compliment Russia. To illustrate, on June 2014, a small protest took place in Bishkek, expressing support for the foreign agents’ bill. Particularly, the leader of “Kalys” nationalist movement stated that “this is just beginning of a campaign against foreign agents”. In February, 2014, the same person organized anti-gay protests outside the U.S. Embassy, where protestors burned a portrait of local

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<sup>137</sup> “Kyrgyzstan: Russia-style NGO law poses a threat to human rights and democratization,” *Civic Solidarity*, (August 2013): 1.

<sup>138</sup> “Kyrgyzstan: Russia-style NGO law poses a threat to human rights and democratization,” *Civic Solidarity*, (August 2013): 1.

<sup>139</sup> “Kyrgyzstan: Russia-style NGO law poses a threat to human rights and democratization,” *Civic Solidarity*, (August 2013): 2.

blogger Ilya Lukash, who they believed to be a gay activist. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned earlier, these people were inspired by Russian propaganda and they do not clearly understand why this law is important.<sup>140</sup> These legislative developments caused widespread criticism among civil society activists and international organizations because it is quite noticeable that Russia poses threat to political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan, but Kyrgyz government keeps silent. To sum up, there is no smoke without fire and Russian propaganda clearly threatens political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan not only through media but also through legislative developments. The law of this nature significantly impedes the process of democratization and highlights Russia's influence. To support this point, one may look at political economist's words, Mirsuljan Namazaaly, who said that "I would not say that Kyrgyzstan is politically independent from Russia, as many laws are just copying the laws from Russia, president and MPs always look at Russia, do what Russia can approve."<sup>141</sup> He also pointed out that Russian increased influence is welcomed by Kyrgyz population who favors Russian presence and support in the country.<sup>142</sup> This can be viewed as a clear result of Russian propaganda. As a final point, one may realize that if Kyrgyzstan allows these types of pressure, it means that **it has poor governance** which is not able to resist Russia's wishes. Consequently, one may observe how Kyrgyzstan's political sovereignty is threatened.

Based on what has been discussed above, one may conclude that Russia poses different challenges to Kyrgyzstan's political sovereignty. More importantly, Russia can be viewed as the most dangerous foreign power because it has a number of

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<sup>140</sup> Asel Kalybekova, "Kyrgyzstan: Nationalists Again Pushing Foreign Agents Bill," *Eurasianet.org*, June 17, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68631>.

<sup>141</sup> Stephanie Ott, "Russia tightens control over Kyrgyzstan." *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/russia-tightens-control-over-kyrgyzstan>

<sup>142</sup> Stephanie Ott, "Russia tightens control over Kyrgyzstan." *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/russia-tightens-control-over-kyrgyzstan>

leverages to influence Kyrgyzstan both politically and economically. It seems that Kyrgyz government entirely trusts Russia and instead of improving **internal governance**, it follows Russian model of development. Moreover, Russian influences Kyrgyz public opinion which makes Kyrgyzstan perceive other actors except Russia as threats to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty.

### 3.3 U.S. as a Threat to Civil Sovereignty

After the breakup of Soviet Union, U.S. has been interested in assisting to enhance its sovereignty, protect its territorial integrity, and promote democracy. More importantly, U.S. paid a close attention to bolstering civil society, which still appears to be one of the most challenging political environments in Central Asia generally, and in Kyrgyzstan particularly.<sup>143</sup> In fact, civil society is one of the important sectors of society as well as government and business. Moreover, "civil society has been widely recognized as an essential 'third' sector. Its strength can have a positive influence on the state and the market. Civil society is therefore seen as an increasingly important agent for promoting **good governance** like transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability."<sup>144</sup> So, generally, civil society means separation from the state and market; cooperation of people who share common interests and values.<sup>145</sup> Specifically, Kyrgyzstan needed to develop civil society, because it labeled itself as a democracy of Central Asia. Thus, Kyrgyzstan continues to be one of the biggest recipients of international aid and loans in the region.<sup>146</sup> Since Kyrgyzstan openly stated its democratic path of development, western world responded by financial assistance. Subsequently, in 1996, Kyrgyzstan received the

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<sup>143</sup> Jim Nichol, "Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests," *Congressional Research Service* (August 2013):1

<sup>144</sup> Aisha Ghaus-Pasha, "Role of Civil Society Organizations in Governance," (December 2004): 6.

<sup>145</sup> Aisha Ghaus-Pasha, "Role of Civil Society Organizations in Governance," (December 2004): 4.

<sup>146</sup> Joyce Connery, "Caught Between a Dictatorship and a Democracy: Civil Society, Religion, and Development," *The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies*, (2000): 1.

most USAID money per capita compared to any other Central Asian countries, totaling over \$142 million.<sup>147</sup> Next, in 1998, U.S. provided \$36 million of aid to Kyrgyzstan. In return, Kyrgyzstan tried to maintain its reputation of being the most open and democratic society in Central Asia, not only to keep aid, but also to attract foreign investment.<sup>148</sup> Generally speaking, Kyrgyzstan's democratic claims encouraged U.S. to pay attention to investing into promoting democracy, thus, the total material assistance from 1992 to 2008 was \$ 953.5 million.<sup>149</sup> Apart from this, "U.S. influenced international financial institutions such as IMF and WB to extend assistance in Kyrgyzstan."<sup>150</sup> In other words, Kyrgyzstan loud words successfully attracted U.S. and allowed Kyrgyzstan to benefit in terms of receiving financial support.

To return to an earlier point, U.S. delivered active support to the development of NGOs which are supposed to serve as a bridge between government and citizens. Subsequently, the explicit activities of NGOs operating in Kyrgyzstan were introduced during the early 1900s. Later on, in 2006, the number of NGOs reached 8000 while 10 years ago this number was less than 800. One can see how progressively NGOs developed in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>151</sup> However, Kyrgyzstan's **poor governance** turns presence of NGOs into threat. The problem is that the concept of NGOs was absolutely new for Kyrgyzstan after the disintegration of Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan could not afford its own NGOs not only because of financial resources but also because of **inefficient governance**. Ideally, NGOs are viewed as partners who

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<sup>147</sup> Joyce Connery, "Caught Between a Dictatorship and a Democracy: Civil Society, Religion, and Development," *The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies*, (2000): 5.

<sup>148</sup> Joyce Connery, 6.

<sup>149</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 162.

<sup>150</sup> P. Stobdan, "Central Asia: Democracy, Instability and Strategic Game in Kyrgyzstan," *Pentagon Press* (2014): 162.

<sup>151</sup> Kanykey Jailobaeva, "NGOs in Kyrgyzstan," *Social research Center*, : 1.

want to build strong civil society. However, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, NGOs are seen as a threat to power, so, government left the issue of civil society to third parties. Thus, U.S. got an opportunity to fill this empty vacuum which Kyrgyz government could not do on its own. Surely, these NGOs can apply their own perspectives in developing different sectors such as education, health, environment and politics. Therefore, one may believe that Kyrgyzstan allowed third power to operate the way it wants to. In return, it poses threat to civil sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan. Now, Kyrgyzstan is a country with the highest number of NGOs in Central Asia.<sup>152</sup> In other words, western NGOs can be used as a soft power because society is influenced by NGOs programs and activities. NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are measured not only by number but also by level of activity. For example, Freedom House, a non-profit organization who conducts researches and surveys, found out that Kyrgyzstan is the leading actor with the highest degree of civil and political freedoms. Kyrgyzstan received 4.5 points out of 7 whereas neighboring states did not get more than 2.5.<sup>153</sup> However, there is a gap between NGOs and government; there are no clear mechanisms in terms of development objectives, implementation, and evaluation of policy programs.<sup>154</sup> It means that NGOs and government work differently. In this case, U.S. founded NGOs such as International Republic Institute (IRI) can impose their own views and implement certain projects because Kyrgyz government allows operating in this way due to **inefficient governance**. Particularly, Kyrgyz government perceives NGOs as competitors because both of them depend on external resources. Then, this competition creates space for NGOs because government is unwilling to interact. In return, NGOs develop their own approaches to build civil society for

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<sup>152</sup> Kanykey Jailobaeva, "NGOs in Kyrgyzstan," *Social research Center*, : 1.

<sup>153</sup> Elmira Shishkaraeva, "Review of the History of Establishment and Development of the NGO Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Civil Society Programme*, (2006): 8.

<sup>154</sup> Elmira Shishkaraeva, "Review of the History of Establishment and Development of the NGO Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Civil Society Programme*, (2006): 8.

Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, high number of NGOs demonstrates the weak governance of Kyrgyzstan.

### **Conclusion:**

Taking everything into account, one may reach a conclusion that the world of new order and the changes in the international system were at first considered to bring peace and stability.<sup>155</sup> However, the collapse of Soviet Union and emergence of new independent states created additional security challenges. The research conducted in the dissertation shows that particularly, small states were greatly impacted by changes in international system. These small actors encountered difficulties in addressing the security concerns due to the lack of resources and economic conditions. Therefore, small states had to look for alliances with big powers. Thus, one of the explicit changes of new international order includes the role of globalization which accelerated the movement of goods, capital, ideas, and people. As a result, states cannot regulate and control all activities within its territory and international cooperation has increased. More importantly, the study conducted demonstrates that globalization has undermined the central definition of sovereignty.<sup>156</sup> Big and powerful actors have their own approaches in influencing international system and maintaining their sovereignty.<sup>157</sup> However, small states have to develop certain strategies in order to provide security, political stability, and economic conditions to their citizens which they sometimes cannot afford individually.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, small states are likely to form alliances with foreign powers to get as much resources as possible. However, the research conducted in this dissertation shows that interaction with great external powers may present different challenges to small state's

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<sup>155</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 12.

<sup>156</sup> Julian Ku and John Yoo, "Gloiaizatio and Sovereignty," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 31, (2013): 234.

<sup>157</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 2.

<sup>158</sup> Idris Demir, "National Securities of Small States in the International System." (2008): 2.



sovereignty. The thesis examined the case of Kyrgyzstan which became independent in 1991, after the demise of Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan was different from its neighboring states because of democratic path of development. Although it might be true that Kyrgyzstan's label "Switzerland of Central Asia" attracted western world and helped Kyrgyzstan to benefit financially, the country experienced two revolutions which clearly demonstrated its internal poor governance and political instability. Equally important, the study demonstrated that geographical location of small states is an important aspect in their interaction with great powers. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, it has attracted powerful actors such as Russia, U.S., and China who had their own interests. Even if the contest of great powers in the region strengthened the position of Kyrgyzstan, foreign powers continued to present threats to sovereignty. Specifically, the research conducted reveals that Russia poses threat to political sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan. As far as China is concerned, it presents threat to economic sovereignty. Lastly, U.S. challenges civil sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan. Most importantly, the research investigated the impact of internal governance on external dependence. Precisely, the thesis investigated the successes stories of Switzerland and Singapore as exemplary states whose effective internal governance helped them to maintain their sovereignty. Based on what has been discussed above, the research conducted in this dissertation showed that Kyrgyzstan's internal inefficient governance is the key reason of its increasing external dependence. Finally, it reveals that importance of good governance in maintain of sovereignty.

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