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LANGUAGE AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE KYRGYZ EXPERIENCE

By

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Introduction

When I decided to learn Russian through studying abroad, I did not initially consider studying in Central Asia; I automatically figured that Russia was the place for Russian. During the 2014-2015 academic year, however, I ended up spending my time living in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. I originally intended to spend a semester in Kyrgyzstan after a semester of intensive Russian language study in Russia. Then, I received a scholarship that dictated that I spend the entire year in Russia. Shortly before my departure, however, changes in government policy meant that my scholarship would no longer fund study in Russia, and thus I ended up in Bishkek for the entire year. Much to my surprise, Russian was pervasive throughout Bishkek, and I likely learned more Russian that I would have in St. Petersburg or Moscow, where Westernization is prevalent and English speakers are common. Kyrgyzstan has zero U.S. establishments, including no McDonalds, and very few English-speakers. Why is Russian still so important in Kyrgyzstan even though there is only a 9% ethnic Russian minority in the country? Why did my host siblings, who were three and five years old and ethnically Kyrgyz, only speak Russian? Why was it that only two times during my nine months in Bishkek was I spoken to in Kyrgyz? Why do many ethnic Kyrgyz know Russian better than Kyrgyz and, even more interestingly, why is the culture in Bishkek such that the ethnic Russians have no need or use to learn Kyrgyz beyond the most elementary of levels, if at all?

Before going to Kyrgyzstan, I knew very little about the country. Two years ago, I did a brief research paper on a Chinese truck ban that Kyrgyzstan had enacted, so I knew that it was a geopolitically intriguing region, but the culture was relatively unknown to

me. I had heard that Russian was still the language of business, and that there would be ample opportunity to practice Russian. I really was not expecting the extent of Russian that pervades everyday society. Even the Kyrgyz language itself has been penetrated by Russian words: *mashina* is car in Russian and now is accepted as the Kyrgyz word for car, and *bukhgalter*, although originally a Russian loanword from German, is now a loanword for accountant from Russian to Kyrgyz.

In the upcoming chapters, I will look at the continued presence of Russian within Kyrgyzstan and how it is linked to Kyrgyz foreign policy and Kyrgyzstan's international political agenda. This question arises from my time in Kyrgyzstan. When I visited other Former Soviet Republics within Central Asia and Europe, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, I could get by with Russian, but it was neither expected nor necessarily appreciated (excluding, perhaps, in Kazakhstan). More than once, especially by those who were sixty years old or older, I was told that they knew Russian but they would not speak it. Instead, they would mime or speak with me in extremely broken English or German. Why is this refusal to use Russian the case in so many places, when the Russian language is so normalized in Kyrgyzstan? Is popular opinion on language use related to demographics, history, geopolitics, or a combination thereof? Only four countries have Russian as an official or state language (Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), but what led to the normalization of Russian in some states of the former Soviet bloc while other states have restricted Russian's presence altogether?

Chapter One will investigate the history of language policy in Kyrgyzstan, specifically between 1920 and 1991. It will also delineate the formation and

implementation of different language schools and language learning methods pre-1991, the year the Soviet Union broke up and Kyrgyzstan became an independent country. I will discuss the usage and presence of various languages in Kyrgyzstan at the collapse of the Soviet Union and also how Kyrgyzstan and the current 'Kyrgyz' ethnic identity was formed.

Chapter Two will look at the Russian and Kyrgyz languages and their influence in Kyrgyzstan, specifically within the government since 1991 (both in domestic and foreign affairs). In addition to the official and state languages, this chapter will also discuss the presence (or lack thereof) of other languages in the region, with particular reference to Uzbek.

Chapter Three will consider the political implications of 'state' or 'official' languages and what this could mean for the future of Kyrgyz foreign policy. Specifically, I will discuss Kyrgyzstan's continual and likely future ties with Russia as its benefactor, perhaps working against the possibility of Central Asia one day creating a pan-Turkic state. I will explore how Kyrgyzstan's choices in regards to non-titular language acceptance, specifically Russian, and subsequent political alignment are linked to Kyrgyzstan's overall policy goals.

According to Temple University linguist, Aneta Pavlenko, four factors guide long-term language retention, as is occurring in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. These four factors are: 1) ethnic or linguistic makeup of the population 2) linguistic and ideological factors that shape attitudes towards languages 3) education and employment policies and opportunities for the languages 4) country's political, economic, social, cultural, and

religious orientation.¹ Chapters One and Two will discuss the first three factors which guide language retention in regards to Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek. Chapter three will focus primarily on the fourth factor, with specific reference to the importance of Kyrgyzstan's political and economic orientation.

Kyrgyzstan is a country located in a geopolitically strategic area, but is widely unknown. Within the state live an interesting mix of ethnicities, from Kyrgyz to Uzbeks to Russians to Germans. William Fierman, L.A. Grenoble, and other scholars have extensively explored Soviet language policy in Central Asia, but little research has been done in regards to how the current positioning of Russian in Kyrgyzstan is linked to Kyrgyz foreign policy. This senior thesis will, I hope, help address the questions raised by my year abroad about how the official status of Russian is important to long-term Kyrgyz foreign policy.

Chapter One: The Russian and Soviet Presence in Kyrgyzstan in Regards to Language Development Until 1991

Kyrgyzstan is a small country located in Central Asia, surrounded by China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This mountainous country of about five million residents is primarily composed of ethnic Kyrgyz, but also has large Uzbek and Russian minorities, in addition to other smaller German and Tajik minorities. Kyrgyzstan gained its independence in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, and has since been a modestly democratic republic in a region filled with autocracies.

¹ Pavlenko, Aneta. "Russian in Post-Soviet Countries." *Russian Linguistics* 32, no. 1 (2008): 59-80. JSTOR.

The Kyrgyz people were largely nomadic and did not settle in Central Asia until the mid-seventeenth century. In 1876, Russian forces conquered the Khanate of Kokand. This was the beginning of Russian rule in what is now modern-day Kyrgyzstan. From 1876 until 1921, there was minimal Russian influence on the traditional nomadic culture and language of Kyrgyzstan. During the early 1920s after the formation of the Soviet Union, the centralized government began imposing land and educational reforms, completely altering the previous nomadic livestock-herding way of life. Collective farms and a focus on a more urban lifestyle were promoted.

In 1921, the area that comprises modern-day Kyrgyzstan became part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Russian Soviet Federalist Socialist Republic. Three years later, in 1924, the central government delineated borders throughout Central Asia, mostly along ethnic lines, and formed the Kirgiz Autonomous Region. This was the first time that there were borders that formally delineated the territory that is now Kyrgyzstan. In 1926, the Kirgiz Autonomous Region became its own ASSR and, in 1936, officially became the Kirgiz Soviet Social Republic, or Kirgizia, a constituent republic within the USSR. Finally, in 1991 Kyrgyzstan acquired its current name and gained status as a sovereign nation. Since that point, Kyrgyzstan has had four democratically elected presidents and has maintained its independent status.²

The Beginning of Soviet Policy: the 1920s

Soviet policy towards titular and non-titular languages in Central Asia shifted several times throughout the seventy years the region was under Soviet control. At the

² “Kyrgyzstan Profile – Timeline – BBC News.” *BBC News*. February 24, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16185772>.

beginning of the 1920s, literacy rates were extremely low, and though to be as minimal as 1%. There was no standard written form of the Kyrgyz language and, as the culture was so nomadic, literacy was not important to the majority of society. By the collapse of the Soviet Union, 85%-90% of the population reported as being literate in Russian, Kyrgyz, or both.³

In the 1920s, there was a focus on creating a standardized system of writing for Kyrgyz, including making the vocabulary and dialects across Kyrgyzstan mutually understandable, and modernizing the language based on new technology and ideas. Many words, especially related to government and new technologies, were added to the language, usually with a Russian root. Kyrgyz was traditionally written in the Arabic alphabet, and for the first years of the Soviet Union, there were generalized attempts to increase literacy embracing the current Arabic alphabet. From 1926-1930, the government in Moscow decided that the republics should be more internationalized and Westernized, and subsequently shifted Kyrgyz to the Latin alphabet. This shift was not too difficult because of the low literacy rates. It is much easier to standardize the use of a new alphabet to an illiterate society than a highly literate one.

During this same period, the borders in the region were delineated and the different Central Asian languages (Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek and Turkmen, specifically), were first accepted as belonging to different territories and ethnic groups. Languages are often regarded as one of the most nationalistic aspects of a country as they tie directly into ethnic identity, and by standardizing several languages throughout the region and

³ Abdykadyr Orusbaev, Arto Mustajoki & Ekaterina Protassova " Multilingualism, Russian Language and Education in Kyrgyzstan", *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11:3-4, 476-500. 2008.

promoting them above Russian, the Moscow government was hoping to avoid a pan-Turkic movement with a single common Turkic language at the foundation.⁴ Especially during the 1920s, the centralized Soviet government supported the use of titular languages in all official capacities. By differentiating the different languages and essentially creating ethnic groups based on language, instead of the previous tribal identity the peoples previously had where language use was localized instead of standardized, the government in Moscow hoped to prevent the different peoples of the region from coming together and banding against the centralized government under the idea of a shared Turkish or Islam-based heritage.

Improving the literacy rate during the early years of the Soviet Union was a difficult task that was successful only over the span of many years. In the case of the Soviet Union in the Kyrgyz SSR, the implemented language policy can be looked at as a macro political process. Essentially, the central government based in Moscow provided the basis for what language policy should look like and expected these orders to be followed out by the local governments within Kyrgyzstan⁵. One of the most efficient ways that a government can promote higher literacy rates and language policy is through education. Lenin, in particular, believed that education should be in the vernacular and that higher education should be available in the titular language. The ethnic Russians in

⁴Fierman, William. *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1991.

⁵ Landau, Jacob, and Barbara Kellner-Heinkele. "Language Politics in Contemporary Central Asia: National and Ethnic Identity and the Soviet Legacy." *Choice Reviews Online* 49, no. 12 (2012).

Central Asia were expected to learn the local language but, for a variety of reasons, they almost never bothered to learn more than a basic amount of Kyrgyz.⁶

One reason that the early support of Kyrgyz as the official and most important language of the Kyrgyz SSR was less effective than it could have been is a lack of funding. Schools in particular lacked books, teachers, and other materials in Kyrgyz. Additionally, Russian quickly became the language used in public domains, including government and high-paying jobs. In 1940, the alphabet shifted once more and Kyrgyz began to be written in the Cyrillic alphabet. This shift brought the language even closer to Russian and further from other Western European and Turkic language. Particularly in technological and scientific fields, Russian words were brought into the Kyrgyz language and became direct cognates.

1930s-1990

Even before the shift to the Cyrillic alphabet, which formally signaled the end of the attempts by the centralized government to support the Kyrgyz language, the 1930s herded in a period of lesser cultural development and an emphasis on uniformity. Stalin's government was detrimental to the limited number of Kyrgyz intellectuals, and most were killed by the end of the 1930s. The command from the Moscow government was that there should be greater uniformity; preserving the religion and cultural identity of the Kyrgyz ceased to be a priority and instead Soviet ideals were to be promoted over all others.

⁶ Kirkwood, Michael. "Glasnost' 'the National Question' and Soviet Language Policy." *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 1 (1991): 61-81.

From the mid-1930s onwards, there was a dramatic increase in asymmetrical bilingualism. While, up to this point, ethnic Russians living in Kyrgyzstan were encouraged (but not required) to learn Kyrgyz, it no longer became necessary or mandated in order for the ethnic Russians to succeed. This asymmetrical bilingualism essentially means that ethnic Russians only need to know Russian to be successful whereas their Central Asian counterparts were expected to be fluent in both Russian and their titular language. By the 1950s, only approximate 1% of ethnic Russians living in Kyrgyzstan were fluent in Kyrgyz while, by 1989, 54% of the ethnic Kyrgyz population claimed fluency in Russian as a second language.⁷ Until 1956, Kyrgyz was technically mandated in schools, but the number of hours spent on Kyrgyz language instruction were minimal. Only the students who truly cared to learn the language actually needed to and did. In order to receive and maintain a top well-paying job (whether a top position in a factory or a government position), a citizen had to have command of Russian. Many government documents or requests written in Kyrgyz were thrown out instead of filled because there was a dearth of translators and citizens who were bilingual in Russian and Kyrgyz. After 1938, Russian became a mandatory subject in all schools in the USSR. The asymmetrical bilingualism in this situation is clear; the ethnic Kyrgyz had to learn Russian to succeed, but the ethnic Russians had no compelling reason to learn the titular language. While ethnic Russians theoretically had to learn Kyrgyz in school, non-ethnic Kyrgyz rarely had a competent grasp on the language. The central Moscow government attempted to not devalue the importance of local languages, but this devaluation still

⁷ Luong, Pauline Jones. *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

occurred as Russian gradually became more necessary for success, especially in urban centers.⁸

The reasons why ethnic Russians did not want to learn Kyrgyz are varied. First, starting during Stalin's era, the ethnic Russians already had the ability to work in better jobs without learning the local language. The process of nativization, or putting ethnic Kyrgyz into official positions over ethnic Russians, was at an end. Additionally, Kyrgyz was often viewed as a lesser language, and it was devaluing to have to speak it. Russian was also widely viewed as the language of interethnic communication and the most 'elite' of all languages prevalent in the region. There was a sense among Russian speakers, especially with the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, that Russian was superior, more modern and far more urban. The ethnic Russians viewed the Kyrgyz culture as backwards and, as such, did not want to assimilate to the cultural differences.⁹

After this point, asymmetrical bilingualism became even more prevalent as, in the 1950s, there was no longer any mandatory titular language study in schools. The ethnic Russians were holding high level positions in the government and in businesses, and the Russian language was necessary to be highly successful. Ethnic Kyrgyz in urban areas, specifically the region of Bishkek City, began to send their children to Russian-language or dual-language schools. The Russian schools were seen as the easy way to make sure that a child was successful in the future. Higher education was conducted in Russian and Kyrgyz, but the Kyrgyz universities often lacked the resources to be effective learning

⁸ Fierman, William. "Identity, Symbolism, and the Politics of Language in Central Asia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1207-228.

⁹ Bahry, Stephen A. "2. Language Ecology: Understanding Central Asian Multilingualism." *Language Change in Central Asia*, eds. E.S. Ahn and J. Smagulova, 11-32. Berlin: DeGruyter Mouton, 2015.

institutions. The schools often lacked simple things like textbooks. Almost all technology-based and scientific resources were in Russian. Professors did not know Kyrgyz well enough to teach certain courses in Kyrgyz and subsequently taught them in Russian, even in the Kyrgyz language universities. This is because qualified professors in almost every field other than the Kyrgyz language lacked the fluency in Kyrgyz needed to teach at a high level.¹⁰

The asymmetrical bilingualism and increasing importance of Russian grew from the 1950s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Between 1970 and 1979, the percentage of Central Asians who spoke Russian as a second language rose from 19.1% to 29.3%. At the same time, while 29.5% of ethnic Kyrgyz spoke Russian as a first or second language, only 3.5% of all ethnic Russians in Central Asia knew another Soviet language.¹¹ In multinational states, bilingualism often naturally happens, but only when the titular language is secure and dominant in public. The central government must also be sensitive to the issues faced by those who were not bilingual. Especially after the early 1930s, the Soviet central government was not sensitive to the titular language, though no attempts were made to prevent it from being used.¹²

By the 1960s, especially in academia and government, Russian was almost exclusively used. Russian was viewed as the way to succeed internationally as well as in Kyrgyzstan. There was a large Russian minority (up to 21.5% of the population) by 1990,

¹⁰ Fierman, William. *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1991.

¹¹ Kirkwood, Michael. "Glasnost' 'the National Question' and Soviet Language Policy." *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 1 (1991): 61-81.

¹² Esman, Milton J. "The State and Language Policy." *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale De Science Politique* 13 (4) (1993): 381-96.

and Russian was used almost exclusively within urban areas. Government was often conducted in Russian due to a lack of understanding of the titular language by government officials. The rural Kyrgyz, or even the urban Kyrgyz, who had a less than perfect grasp of the Russian language or spoke it with an accent, were oftentimes looked down upon and seen as backwards. The centralized government still theoretically promoted the titular language, and Kyrgyz maintained its official status, but, especially in urban areas, Kyrgyz was not understood on the streets nor used in day-to-day life. At the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were several sizable minorities in Kyrgyzstan including Russians, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. Only approximately 52% of the population was ethnically Kyrgyz, spread across the country. Ethnic Russians tended to live in Bishkek and other northern areas that predominately spoke Russian. Ethnic Uzbeks tended to live in southern Kyrgyzstan near and in the cities of Osh and Jalalabad.¹³ Russian had become the public language of the people and Kyrgyz and other minority languages had become the private languages.

By the end of the 1980s, only three of Bishkek's sixty-nine schools were taught in Kyrgyz, and only 17% of higher education was conducted in a language other than Russian. A study of Kyrgyz literary language was conducted and, by 1980, 80% of the literary language used was either directly from Russian (so a Russian cognate) or from indirectly through Russian but with a different Western European language as the root word.¹⁴ Additionally, the national library only had 4% of its books in Kyrgyz and only

¹³ USA. Department of Justice. INS Research Information Center. *Alert Series: Kyrgyzstan. Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Area*. Washington DC, 1993.

¹⁴ Fierman, William. "Identity, Symbolism, and the Politics of Language in Central Asia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1207-228.

9% of the state film and media was dubbed into or subtitled in Kyrgyz. The majority of literature and media were produced solely in Russian. In 1989, there were attempts to adopt a language law in Kyrgyzstan that would put Kyrgyz on a higher level than Russian in Kyrgyzstan; this caused much dissension, especially in the capital, where only approximately 20% of the population spoke Kyrgyz. While Kyrgyz did become the official language in 1989, Russian maintained its status of the language of interethnic communication. Due to the political turmoil of the time and the new language laws, between 1989 and 1992, 10% of all ethnic Russians left Kyrgyzstan, and the outflow of Russians continued over the next few years. Regardless of this, however, Russian continued to be widely used, partially because there was no budget for training new teachers and creating new Kyrgyz language textbooks. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan has kept close ties with Russian, and the international benefits of Russian make it continually useful in both urban and political arenas in Kyrgyzstan.

Altogether, during the first years of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyz was actually supported to a large extent and, as a result, there were much higher rates of education and literacy among the Kyrgyz people by 1991 than before the 1920s. While Kyrgyz never lost its status as the national language, by the mid-1930s and, especially by the 1950s, Russian had taken its hold and was more valuable than Kyrgyz, specifically in urban areas. Russian was for public use; other languages were only for private use. Additionally, in education, government, and academia, Russian was used almost exclusively. Due to the spread of the ethnic Kyrgyz throughout the country, primarily in small villages in the mountains (while Uzbeks centered in the south and Russians in the north), Kyrgyz was one of the least promoted or accepted languages of the Soviet Union.

This is because there was little access between the different villages, and so the Kyrgyz language was more isolated than Russian or Uzbek, where the language was widely understood across an entire region. There was a lack of standardization and promotion of Kyrgyz since the speakers were spread across such a wide expanse and had few to no opportunities to travel to one another and use the Kyrgyz language to communicate. The wide variety of ethnic groups within Kyrgyzstan led to Russian also being the language of interethnic cooperation and the common language between the various peoples. Russian was considered to be one mutually understandable language for all. Finally, knowledge of Russian was viewed as being integral to success.

This being said, at the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were a few movements to help Kyrgyz regain its status, though they had limited success, especially in the northern half of the country. These movements will be discussed in the following chapter discussing Russian, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek in contemporary society (since the weakening and subsequent collapse of the USSR). Particularly due to financial constraints, Russian maintained its role in the government and public life as a large minority residing within Kyrgyzstan, and some ethnic Kyrgyz, still had no understanding of Kyrgyz, and the government did not have the money nor means to translate all official government documents from Russian into Kyrgyz. The Soviet Union did not have as stringent a language policy as other authoritarian regimes over time have had. Instead, at least at first, the titular languages were codified, and there were distinct efforts to promote literacy in the Kyrgyz language. Due to a wide variety of reasons, including a tightening of policies under Stalin and thereafter, Russian became the most important language in

regards to academia, government, and in public life, especially in the more literate urban regions of Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵

Chapter 2: The Development of Languages in Kyrgyzstan from 1991 – present

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet Republics gained their independence. Some republics, like Kyrgyzstan, had never had sovereign statehood. Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has had to make new policy decisions about every conceivable topic, including language rights. This chapter will discuss the development of language rights and the treatment of various languages in Kyrgyzstan from 1991 to present.

Kyrgyzstan gained its independence from the USSR on August 31, 1991, and was the first of the Central Asian Republics to do so. Kyrgyzstan democratically elected its first president, Askar Akayev, in 1990, and the foundation of a democratic multiparty system that currently exists was, for the most part, already in place. Kyrgyz had been an official language of Kyrgyzstan since 1989, when it was still officially a republic of the USSR, but a constitution for the new republic was not adopted until 1993, several years after its independence. New language laws at first gave Kyrgyz the same status as Russian. With the adoption of the new 1993 constitution, Kyrgyz was declared as the only official language of Kyrgyzstan. The adoption of a new constitution led to a major outmigration of Russian nationals as they felt that their language rights were being eliminated.¹⁶ Without these language rights, many monolingual Russian speakers felt that

¹⁵ Huskey, Eugene. "The Politics of Language in Kyrgyzstan." August 1, 1995. *The National Council for Soviet and East European Research*, 1755 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC.

¹⁶ USA. Department of Justice. INS Research Information Center. *Alert Series: Kyrgyzstan. Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Area*. Washington DC, 1993.

their opportunities for success were limited and, rather than facing the new regulations, many Russians and other ethnic European minorities left the country.¹⁷

From 1989 to 1999, the percentage of ethnic Russians that comprised the population of Kyrgyzstan dropped dramatically, partially due to the economic collapse and partially due to the restriction of language rights. Between 1989 and 1996 alone, around 600,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan left the country. By the last census of the Soviet Union in 1989, ethnic Russians composed 21.5% of the population and by 1996 composed only 15.7%. In 1994, Russian was granted more rights by the government in order to help stem the outflow of ethnic Russians. In June of 1994, President Akayev decreed that Russian had official language status and could be used in the workforce in predominantly Russian-speaking regions of Kyrgyzstan, although Russian was not presidentially granted official status until 1996. Additionally, higher education began to be legally permitted in Russian, although Russian language higher education had continued to exist after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and formal Russian language universities, such as a state Slavonic university in Bishkek, began to open. There were also attempts to grant ethnic Russians more jobs in the Kyrgyz government in order to help stem the outmigration of these Russian nationals.¹⁸ Granting ethnic Russians more job opportunities, especially within the government, did effectively lessen the rate of out-

¹⁷ USA. Department of Justice. INS Research Information Center. *Alert Series: Kyrgyzstan. Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Area*. Washington DC, 1993.

¹⁸ Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan*, 2004, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b01e.html>.

migration.¹⁹ By 1999, Russians composed approximately 12% of the population, and as of 2009 the Russian minority composed approximately 9% of the population.²⁰

At the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Uzbeks comprised approximately 13.4% of the population in Kyrgyzstan.²¹ Unlike the Russian minority, however, there was no major outflow of Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan after Soviet collapse. Uzbeks now comprise approximately 15% of the population, making Uzbeks the largest minority group in Kyrgyzstan. Despite this, however, the Uzbek language has no official status within Kyrgyzstan and, in many cases, its role in society is limited. The anti-Uzbek sentiment and restrictions on the use of the language has increased in recent years, especially in the southern provinces of Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken, where the majority of ethnic Uzbeks reside.²² Beyond the underfunded and limited number of Uzbek-medium schools, there has been no governmental acceptance or support of the Uzbek language. The use of the language in public spheres was looked down on, and there were no movements to promote Uzbek media or education as there were for the Russian language. Subsequently, as Uzbek is not accepted in public spheres, it is difficult for ethnic Uzbeks to take part in the government and to be elected, leading to chronic underrepresentation. As a result of this underrepresentation, there is Uzbek resentment

¹⁹ The percentage of ethnic Russians elected into the government remained low, but opportunities for careers in general, education, and Russian-language media did expand. (Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan*, 2004, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b01e.html>).

²⁰ Kyrgyzstan. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "Kyrgyz Republic: Ethnic Minorities Issue." *OSCE Centre in Bishkek*. <http://www.osce.org/bishkek>.

²¹ Fumagalli, Matteo. "Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (June 2007): 567-90. JSTOR.

²² Minority Rights Group International. "Uzbeks - Minority Rights." *Minority Rights*. 2011. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/uzbeks-2/>.

that the Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan have a monopoly on government institutions, even in regions where there is a substantial Uzbek minority.²³

Constitutional Rights

The current constitution of Kyrgyzstan, passed by Parliament in 2010, declares that the state language of Kyrgyzstan is Kyrgyz while the official language is Russian. The state language is typically considered by the international community at large the language representative of a country's ethnicity and culture and is protected and promoted under the law.²⁴ An official language is typically the language used by the government. Overall, there is very little difference between the constitutional rights granted to the state language, Kyrgyz, and official language, Russian.²⁵ Interestingly, the Kyrgyz constitution was actually first written in Russian and then translated into Kyrgyz as high-level specialists, especially in policy, have a better command of Russian. Section ten of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic guarantees that every ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan has the right to protect and use their language and to create conditions necessary for its study and development. Section sixteen of the document also discusses language rights. This section guarantees that Kyrgyzstan should respect and protect all of its citizens and those living within its borders without discrimination regardless of gender, race, language, ethnicity, handicap, age, political views, education, etc. Section 45 clarifies that the state apparatus will provide services for the study of any state,

²³ Minority Rights Group International. "Uzbeks - Minority Rights." *Minority Rights*. 2011.. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/uzbeks-2/>.

²⁴ Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2016. "Ethnologue: Languages of the World", Nineteenth edition. Dallas, Texas: *SIL International*. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

²⁵ Lecomte, Lucie. Library of Parliament. "Official Languages or National Languages? Canada's Decision." *Parliamentary Information and Research Service*. 2014-81-E. Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 2014.

official, and other international language through all levels of standard education, although in practice this is not always the case. An international language is a language used widely between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and for the development of international policy.²⁶ Finally, section 62 relates to the requirements to be president. The president is required to speak the state language, Kyrgyz, but no other member of the government is constitutionally required to know Kyrgyz.²⁷

The ideals laid out in the constitution are not always followed, however. In regards to Kyrgyz, the language's importance has markedly increased since 1989. There has been a push in some parts of the government and country to decrease the importance and prevalence of Russian and other languages while increasing the presence and importance of Kyrgyz in all facets of society. In 2013, there were suggestions by the deputy of the "Republic" faction, Urmat Amanbaeva, and other pro-nationalist actors to amend the constitution to make Kyrgyz a requirement to work in most government positions including, but not limited to, ministers, deputies, secretary of state, and mayors and their deputies. The amendment would implement a fine for any government officials who conducted business in Russian. President Atambayev said he would veto any such amendment, and a fine has not been enacted up to this point.²⁸

According to the 2009 census, there were over 3.8 million people in Kyrgyzstan who listed Kyrgyz as their first language, with over 4.1 million people citing Kyrgyz as a

²⁶ Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fenning (eds.). 2016. "Ethnologue: Languages of the World", Nineteenth edition. Dallas, Texas; *SIL International*. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>

²⁷ Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Конституцияе Кыргызской Республики." *World Intellectual Property Organization*. June 27, 2010.

²⁸ Осмонгазиева, Толгонай. "Власти Кыргызстана взялись развивать государственный язык." *Вечерний Бишкек*, June 09, 2013.

first or second language. There are technically more native Uzbek speakers than Russian speakers, but Russian is far more widely known as a second language. Almost 2.6 million residents of Kyrgyzstan reported speaking Russian as a first or second language, while only a little over 870,000 residents spoke Uzbek as a first or second language. Russian is viewed as being far more useful internationally, and is often the second language of both ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks.²⁹

In 2015, the National Commission of Government Language, currently led by Egemberdy Ermatov, made statements about amending the constitution so as to enforce Kyrgyz language rights. This commission was founded in January 1998 and its primary purpose is to promote the development of the state language.³⁰ Ermatov declared that many government officials do not purposefully use Russian instead of Kyrgyz in official capacities, such as during meetings, but that is what often occurs because of Russian's continued pervasive presence in Kyrgyz society. As long as Russian is allowed by the constitution, Ermatov continues, there will be little change in the widespread usage of Russian instead of Kyrgyz at a governmental level.³¹ Further attempts in recent years to ensure all official documents are in Kyrgyz and to promote only Kyrgyz media have been widely ineffective due to lack of follow-through, lack of a desire by the majority of Kyrgyz citizens and government members to curtail Russian, and a lack of funding to translate previously written documents. Demand for Russian-language schools is greater

²⁹ NSC of Kyrgyzstan. "Перепись населения и жилищного фонда Кыргызской Республики (Population and Housing Census of the Kyrgyz Republic), 2009." January 21, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130121143551/http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>

³⁰ "U.S. English Foundation Research: Kyrgyzstan." *U.S. English Foundation, Inc.* 2016. <http://usefoundation.org/view/784>

³¹ "В Кыргызстане предлагает лишить русский язык статус официального." *TengriNews*, March 23, 2015. <http://tengrinews.kz/sng/kyrgyzstane-predlagayut-lishit-russkiy-yazyik-statusa-272084/>.

than the number of schools functioning in Russian as more scientific and academic literature is written in Russian than Kyrgyz. Parents recognize that an education in Russian will lead to more opportunities of advancement for their children.³² Furthermore, many ethnic Kyrgyz government officials, especially within Bishkek, do not have complete control of Kyrgyz and therefore prefer conducting business in Russian, imposing more limits on the attempts to promote Kyrgyz.³³ Additionally, some policy makers fear that further curtailing Russian would lead to an increased ‘brain-drain’ where the highly educated members of society (oftentimes educated in Russian), would leave the country in order to find better careers and lives for themselves and their families.³⁴

Especially during the political upheaval of 2010, certain groups of Kyrgyz nationalists, including the Ata-Metken (or “Fatherland”) party, ran on a platform promoting Kyrgyz language to the detriment of Russian. Azimjan Ibrahimov, the head of the National Commission for the State Language in 2010, was one such promoter of the Kyrgyz language. He proposed implementing a policy that all members of the government down to the lowliest clerk must speak Kyrgyz. This test would further tip the already unequal balance of representatives in the government away from non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups including, but not limited to, Russians, Uzbeks, Uighurs and Tatars. Ibrahimov and other nationalists argue that Kyrgyz should be the only language of Kyrgyzstan, primarily due to their strong nationalistic sentiments. This limiting policy, however, would cause ethnic minorities to have fewer reasons to stay in Kyrgyzstan and

³² Open Society Institute. "Kyrgyzstan's Russian-Language Teaching Getting Squeezed Out." *EurasiaNet*. December 15, 2014. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71376>.

³³ Najibullah, Farangis. "Language a Sensitive Issue in Kyrgyzstan." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 25, 2011. http://www.rferl.org/content/language_a_sensitive_issue_in_kyrgyzstan/24246394.html.

³⁴ "Kyrgyzstan: Driving the Russian Language from Public Life." *EurasiaNet*, February 17, 2011. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62916>.

would also limit the ability of ethnic Kyrgyz to go to Russia or Kazakhstan to seek employment.³⁵

Despite the continued presence of Russian, especially in Bishkek, very few ethnic Russians hold jobs in government positions. Russian is especially pervasive in certain fields, however, and plays an invaluable role in many aspects of Kyrgyz society. First, Russian is the language of science and technology in Kyrgyzstan. Many of the scientific and technological words in Kyrgyz come directly from the Russian root. Russian also allows the Kyrgyz to compete internationally in science and technology, as well as do research and advanced study on most scientific and technological topics. There is a dearth of Kyrgyz-language materials (such as textbooks) and teachers who can teach the advanced material in Kyrgyz.

Russian literature is also far more diverse and prevalent in Kyrgyzstan than Kyrgyz literature, and will continue to have a huge influence on the youth of the country.³⁶ Furthermore, the Russian language allows for more international opportunities. Not only is it the language of interethnic communication, but it provides for opportunities for Kyrgyz to study at top universities both in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. Russian also allows for migrant workers to find jobs in the wealthier Russia so as to send remittances back to Kyrgyzstan.³⁷ In addition, the Russian language is prevalent in pop culture and media. Many major news outlets, including newspapers, radio shows, and TV channels

³⁵ Trilling, David. "Kyrgyz Language Moving to Nationalists' Center Stage." *EurasiaNet*. August 9, 2010. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61694>.

³⁶ Giles, Malika. "Kyrgyzstan Offers Unlikely Window into Slavic Culture." *The Moscow Times*, December 11, 2013. http://www.themoscowtimes.com/arts_n_ideas/article/kyrgyzstan-offers-an-unlikely-window-into-slavic-culture/491204.html.

³⁷ Турсунбай, Юсупханов. "Ситуация вокруг русского языка в Кыргызстане." *Время Востока*, April 18, 2013. <http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/situatsiya-vokrug-russkogo-yazyka-v-kyrgyzstane>.

are in Russian. Finally, because of Kyrgyzstan's economic ties with Russia, commerce is also primarily conducted in Russian. Kyrgyz is slowly beginning to appear in administration, documentation, and official meetings, but Russian retains importance in pop media, higher education, science, and technology.³⁸ Due to Kyrgyzstan's economic, military, and social reliance on Russia, it seems likely that Russian will retain its status as an official language and will have staying power in the foreseeable future, even against the rise of Kyrgyz and other international languages such as English.³⁹

Even while Russian has official status and is widely accepted, Uzbek has not had the same prosperity, partly due to the ethnic tensions that exist between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks. In spring 2010, there was political unrest and a revolution in the northern provinces of Kyrgyzstan, and President Bakieyev was formally ousted from power on April 7. Before the 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan, ethnic tension and unrest had already existed in the more unstable southern half of Kyrgyzstan (the provinces of Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken). The Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan primarily view Kyrgyzstan as their home and do not seem to express a real desire to unite the southern provinces with Uzbekistan or to migrate back to Uzbekistan.⁴⁰ The ethnic Kyrgyz in the region, however, distrust the Uzbeks and feel that they are attempting to wrest the fertile land in the Fergana Valley from Kyrgyz control.⁴¹ Ethnic Uzbeks have been consistently discontent with their lack of representation in governing bodies, even on a local level. Under the

³⁸ Pavlenko, Aneta. "Russian in Post-Soviet Countries." *Russian Linguistics* 32, no. 1 (2008): 59-80. JSTOR.

³⁹ Pike, John. "Kyrgyzstan-Russian Relations." *GlobalSecurity*. August 10, 2015. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/kyrgyz-forrel-ru.htm>.

⁴⁰ Schwirtz, Michael. "Ethnic Rioting Ravages Kyrgyzstan." *The New York Times*, June 14, 2010, New York ed., A1 sec. June 13, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14kyrgyz.html>.

⁴¹ IRIN. "Grief Not Justice for Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan." *IRIN - The Inside Story on Emergencies*. May 26, 2015. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/101541/grief-not-justice-uzbeks-kyrgyzstan>.

first president of Kyrgyzstan, President Akayev (1991-2000), and his successor President Bakieyev (2000-2010), the ethnic Uzbeks felt that their requests for better representation were not listened to nor respected.⁴² Immediately following the spring revolution, Pro-Bakieyev actors attempted to resist the new interim government led by ethnic Kyrgyz Roza Otunbayeva. The interim government was supported by the ethnic Uzbeks, however, who felt that the Bakieyev government was not listening to their concerns.

In June 2010, what began as a gang conflict sparked a broader ethnic conflict in the traditionally unstable South, which led to estimates of more than 200 dead and 40,000 ethnic Uzbek attempting to flee the country. Uzbek language rights had been limited before the revolution, and Uzbek language schools were slowly closing. After the region settled, the rate of Uzbek-language school closures began to increase and to quicken, likely due to increased ethnic tensions and a greater repression of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan.⁴³

Languages and Schools

Uzbek and other non-official and non-state languages have faced dramatic limitations in recent years, despite the Constitution's guarantee of equal rights for all languages. The easiest way to see the limits on Uzbek is through the school system. Most of the remaining Uzbek-language schools are located in the three southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan: Jalal-Abad, Osh, and Batken. In these regions, 36.5% of the population is ethnically Uzbek. While Uzbek-language schools were starved of funding by the national

⁴² Fumagalli, Matteo. "Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (June 2007): 567-90. JSTOR.

⁴³ "Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek-Language Schools Disappearing." *EurasiaNet*, March 6, 2013. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66647>.

government and many were closing before 2010, the ethnic conflict in Osh in that year accelerated school closures and increased discrimination, especially with regards to language rights and the jobs available to monolingual Uzbek-speakers.⁴⁴ Although there has been no outbreak of violence since 2010, tensions after the uprising are higher between the two ethnic groups.⁴⁵

In 2013, there were 2,205 schools in Kyrgyzstan. Of those, Kyrgyz was the sole language of instruction at 1,424, Russian at 203, Uzbek at 91, and Tajik at three. Additionally, 484 schools were dual-language, almost all of which were Kyrgyz-Russian.⁴⁶ Even in 2003, there were 141 Uzbek-language schools. Additionally, the state test required in order to study at a university level used to be offered in any language for which there was demand. Beginning in 2014, however, this mandatory test is only offered in Russian and Kyrgyz. Of the two universities in Kyrgyzstan which offered programs taught in Uzbek, one was closed in 2010 and one was converted to a Russian-Kyrgyz language university.⁴⁷

Uzbek-language schools are facing many difficulties which contribute to their continued closures. While the Kyrgyz government is promoting the idea that Uzbek parents are requesting the change, that is only part of the story.⁴⁸ Without any higher-level educational opportunities for Uzbek, many Uzbek parents feel that their children

⁴⁴ "Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek-Language Schools Disappearing." *EurasiaNet*, March 6, 2013.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66647>.

⁴⁵ "Q&A: Kyrgyzstan's Ethnic Violence." *BBC News*, June 24, 2010. <http://www.bbc.com/news/10313948>.

⁴⁶ Иващенко, Екатерина. "Кыргызстан: Кому нужно это образование на узбекском языке." *Фергана*, February 13, 2013. <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/7622>.

⁴⁷ Вальсамаки, Алиса. "Узбекский язык на юге Кыргызстана сокращается." *Радио Азаттык*, September 5, 2012. <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/uzbek-language-in-southern-kyrgyzstan/24729124.html>.

⁴⁸ Иващенко, Екатерина. "Кыргызстан: Кому нужно это образование на узбекском языке." *Фергана*, February 13, 2013. <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/7622>.

must learn Russian or Kyrgyz in order to succeed. Many Uzbek families choose to send their children to Russian-language schools because there are more career and educational opportunities in Russia than in Kyrgyzstan. The Russian government provides approximately 450 full scholarships for university-level study for citizens of Kyrgyzstan in Russia. Because of the access to better resources, including Russia-funded textbooks, as well as scientific and academic literature as a whole, Russian better allows for careers in medicine, law, and finance.⁴⁹ In addition, there is a shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach Uzbek, especially due to a lack of experience. That problem will only be exacerbated now that there are no Uzbek-language universities at which future teachers can learn how to teach complex material in Uzbek. Funding for teachers is limited in Kyrgyzstan, and especially so for Uzbek-language schools, so few to no Uzbeks wish to move to Kyrgyzstan to become a teacher. Likewise, ethnic Uzbeks who have a higher education in Uzbek have few opportunities for job advancement, so they do not wish to continue their education in Uzbekistan. Many parents feel that teaching their children practical skills is more important and helpful than having a higher education that does not guarantee a high-skilled and well-paying job.⁵⁰

There is also a lack of resources at the primary-school level, making the Uzbek-language schools that are still functioning both understaffed and undersupplied. There is little budget for these schools, meaning that there are not enough textbooks and the textbooks that do exist are outdated. Uzbek in Uzbekistan is primarily taught using the Latin alphabet, but Uzbek language teachers in Kyrgyzstan have not made the switch to

⁴⁹ Open Society Institute. "Kyrgyzstan's Russian-Language Teaching Getting Squeezed Out." *EurasiaNet*. December 15, 2014. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71376>.

⁵⁰ Open Society Institute. "Kyrgyzstan: Uzbeks Dropping out of School at Alarming Rate." *EurasiaNet*. January 2, 2014. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67908>.

the Latin alphabet, partially because both Kyrgyz and Russian use the Cyrillic script. This means that the Uzbek-language schools cannot simply order new or more textbooks from Uzbekistan. Instead, the textbooks would have to be provided through public or private means in Kyrgyzstan, which does not occur.⁵¹

Uzbek and other minority languages are not protected to the extent promised in the Kyrgyz constitution. While dual-language schools exist for Uzbek and Tajik, they are limited and lacking in funding. Additionally, while it is possible for ethnic Uzbeks to survive without knowing Russian or Kyrgyz, the use of minority languages is primarily limited to home life and to low-level service-oriented careers. Ethnic Uzbeks struggle to find well-paying jobs and are underrepresented in the elite workforce, especially on a governmental level. In addition to facing broader anti-Uzbek sentiment, the Uzbek language alone does not provide the skills and opportunities needed to be highly successful in society. These challenges also exist for other ethnic groups. Even the ethnic Russians are underrepresented in the government, despite the fact that many government meetings and operations are carried out in Russian. The ethnic tensions that exist between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks hint at the idea that Uzbek will never have majority-minority language rights in Kyrgyzstan, despite the size of the Uzbek minority.

At the same time, while the ethnic Russian population is dwindling (especially in terms of percentage as the birth rate of other ethnicities is higher than that of ethnic Russians), it seems unlikely that Russian will lose its status as an official language of Kyrgyzstan anytime in the near future. Despite the lack of representation of ethnic

⁵¹ Umetov, Chnghez. "Kyrgyzstan: Uzbeks in Southern Regions Wrestle with Cultural Dilemma." *EurasiaNet*, October 26, 2009. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav102709.shtml>.

Russians in the government, Russian has played and continues to play an important role in Kyrgyzstan. Russian is still the language of interethnic communication, but also is the language of business, science, and technology, while Kyrgyz does play an increasingly important role as a state language. Kyrgyz will remain the state language and it seems likely that its importance will grow as Kyrgyz nationalism expands, but Russian seems to have substantial staying power in the region.

In the upcoming chapter, I will discuss how Russian and Uzbek are considered and utilized in Kyrgyzstan in regards to Kyrgyz foreign policy. Domestically, the promotion of Kyrgyz by the government has been important rhetoric, but the importance of Russian on a broader scale, and why Uzbek is not so important, will be evaluated. The foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan will also be considered and used to investigate the hypothesis that the influence and pervasiveness of Russian in Kyrgyzstan will not be weakened in the upcoming years due to the importance of Russia as a bilateral partner both politically, economically, and socially.

Chapter 3: Kyrgyz Foreign Policy and its Relation to Language Rights

The past two chapters have considered Pavlenko's first three factors that guide language retention in specific regards to Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek. The three factors discussed are the ethnic or linguistic makeup of the population, the linguistic and ideological factors of a country, and the educational and employment policies and opportunities in the country. This chapter will investigate in depth the fourth factor, or how the political, economic, social, cultural and religious orientation of Kyrgyzstan will affect Kyrgyz language policies. There will be specific emphasis on the political and

economic factors that influence Kyrgyz language policy and subsequently are potentially representative of broader Kyrgyz foreign policy as a whole.⁵²

Since Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991, the government has, until recently, primarily promoted a policy of multi-vector foreign policy. Essentially this means that Kyrgyzstan has attempted to benefit from a wide variety of world actors simultaneously while not alienating any one actor.⁵³ Kyrgyzstan has had to simultaneously balance its own interests with the interests of foreign states. Due to the weak economy and lack of infrastructure, Kyrgyzstan is additionally largely reliant on outside aid. Kyrgyzstan has had to work with a wide range of countries, especially Russia, China, the U.S., and neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in order to maintain its status as an independent state.⁵⁴

First, the factors which relate to the structure of developing a foreign policy should be considered. In order to create an effective foreign policy, Kyrgyzstan must make decisions with the goal of improving its domestic prosperity. Both internal and external factors affect how and why foreign policy is implemented and determine the bilateral and multilateral foreign relations of a state. Internal factors that can affect foreign policy include political instability, weak state institutions, power struggles between political groups, and the economic condition of a state and its neighbors. In Kyrgyzstan, there has been some political instability, especially due to the revolutions in

⁵² Pavlenko, Aneta. "Russian in Post-Soviet Countries." *Russian Linguistics* 32, no. 1 (2008): 59-80. JSTOR.

⁵³ Gleason, Gregory. "Kyrgyzstan's Multivector Foreign Policy Unravels." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 11, 2011.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyzstans_Multivector_Foreign_Policy_Unravels/1491581.html.

⁵⁴ Glenn E. Curtis, ed. *Kyrgyzstan: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996.

both 2005 and 2010. Opposition groups and political parties can use foreign policy, as well as language policy, as a platform.⁵⁵ An example of this is the rise of Kalys, a nationalist movement which promotes the Kyrgyz ethnic group and, subsequently, the Kyrgyz language. Other non-democratic actors, such as ‘Russian World’ (Russkii Mir), are pro-Russian and support the actions of Russian President, Vladimir Putin, specifically in the context of Ukraine. Anti-Western groups, like Russian World, are often widespread throughout Central Asia and within Kyrgyzstan, and have seen an increase in numbers since Western criticism of Putin’s actions in Crimea began. While the Kyrgyz administration has criticized these extremist groups, the government has not been able to effectively handle or dismiss the groups. The civil groups pose little nation-wide threat to stability, but these actors can affect foreign policy decisions by affecting the political strength of the president and other high-level government officials.⁵⁶

Domestically, Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy structure is similar to that of Russia’s. The structure was developed in 1992, with the president the primary actor in foreign affairs. There is also a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an International Department of the Presidential Administration, both of which augment the president’s powers in foreign policy-making. The president has ultimate say in foreign policy decisions, and both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Department of the Presidential Administration are answerable to the president. Kyrgyz foreign policy is often used to strengthen domestic affairs. Foreign policy can consolidate the president’s power,

⁵⁵ Sari, Yasar. "Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev." *Perceptions* XVII, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 131-150. http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/yasar_sari.pdf.

⁵⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, „BTI 2016 — Kyrgyzstan Country Report.” Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016.

especially if the foreign policy action improves the economy in some manner. Due to the weak Kyrgyz economy, actions such as allowing Russian airbases in Kyrgyzstan in return for debt forgiveness can strengthen the president's grasp on power and limit the power of opposition groups. The government cannot actively support the more extremist groups that exist, as those can negatively affect Kyrgyz multi-vector foreign policy as a whole, but actions that lean slightly pro-Russian or pro-West and improve domestic stability help to lessen the impact and growth of the more extreme groups, whether they are pro-Russian or believe that Kyrgyzstan should solely be for the Kyrgyz.⁵⁷

External factors also can affect the development of foreign policy. Regional stability or, in this case, the stability of neighboring nations such as Uzbekistan, the Uighur Xinjiang region of China, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, is one such factor. International order as a whole is another determining factor. While Russia has been and is arguably the most important actor in regards to Kyrgyz foreign policy, other countries, including the United States from 9/11/01 until the U.S. airbase at the Manas Transit Center in Bishkek closed in July 2014, have also had an impact on regional affairs. The continued presence of the Russian language facilitates contact and communication between Kyrgyz and Russian governments, whereas other languages such as Chinese and English are not as prevalent or widely spoken. Only approximately 1% of the population speaks English fluently, and only 5.2% of the population identifies their primary

⁵⁷ Marat, Erica. "Kyrgyzstan's Chaotic Foreign Policy." *The Jamestown Foundation*. June 23, 2011. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1.

language as something other than Kyrgyz, Russian, or Uzbek.⁵⁸⁵⁹ China, Russia, and the U.S. are regarded as the three largest and most influential actors in Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan's reliance and continued use of Russian could show one way in which Kyrgyzstan, intentionally or not, feels itself closest to Russia of the three powerhouse countries in the region. The use of the Russian language could be a tool by which Kyrgyzstan attempts to not be overwhelmed by new Chinese interests and resources, especially economically.⁶⁰

Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has been striving to be an active part of many international organizations so as to diversify Kyrgyz bilateral and multilateral relationships. There are domestic arguments about whether this multi-vector foreign policy is more effective in promoting Kyrgyzstan's prosperity than closer bilateral relationships with a few strong partners. While the country has recently been shifting its focus towards stronger bilateral relationships with a few actors, especially Russia, Kyrgyzstan has not ended its multilateral relations, nor its engagement with international organizations. In 1993, Kyrgyzstan was the first former Soviet Republic in Central Asia to create its own currency: the Kyrgyz som. Shortly thereafter, it joined the World Bank where the country has retained its member status. Other key programs Kyrgyzstan still

⁵⁸ NSC of Kyrgyzstan. "Перепись населения и жилищного фонда Кыргызской Республики (Population and Housing Census of the Kyrgyz Republic), 2009." January 21, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130121143551/http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/node/23>

⁵⁹ *The World Factbook – Kyrgyzstan*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency. Continually updated. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

⁶⁰ Denyer, Simon. "In Central Asia, Chinese Inroads in Russia's Back Yard." *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2015. http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-39130037.html?refid=easy_hf.

participates in include the North Atlantic Treaty Organizations (NATO) Partnership for Peace program as well as the United Nations (UN).⁶¹

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was deeply impoverished and looked to Russia for assistance during the economic and political turmoil. Yeltsin's Russia, however, was more concerned with domestic issues than with the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. While multilateral organizations between Central Asian Republics and Russia were created, the bilateral relationship between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was weak and there was minimal concern for Kyrgyzstan on the Russian side. Due to the increase in Western organizations in Central Asia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were both created, and Kyrgyzstan was offered membership to these Moscow-based organizations in 1998. Security-wise, politically, and economically, these organizations were more beneficial to Kyrgyzstan than to Russia, and a large reason that they were created was to off-balance rising U.S. interests in the region, especially in regards to the NATO Partnership for Peace Program.⁶²

Kyrgyz-Russian Bilateral Relations

By 1999, Russia was showing deeper interest in Kyrgyzstan due to a desire for regional stability, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the increase of U.S. presence in its "near-abroad", or what Russia views as its sphere of influence. In both 1999 and 2000, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) moved into the southern regions of

⁶¹ Sari, Yasar. "Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev." *Perceptions* XVII, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 131-150. http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/yasar_sari.pdf.

⁶² Sari, Yasar. "Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev." *Perceptions* XVII, no. 3 (Autumn 2012): 131-150. http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/yasar_sari.pdf.

Kyrgyzstan, and, despite calls for aid, the Russians did not send assistance, worrying both the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks as the IMU had ties to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. While Russia did not get involved with the IMU situation, Russia began to recognize the Central Asian security concerns that influence Russia, and the Moscow government has slowly become more involved in the region due to these security risks. Some of the shared concerns include an increase in narcotics and drugs that make their way to Russia, as well as the fear the Islamic extremism could spread to Muslim portions of the Russian population, especially in Chechnya.⁶³

In the early 2000s, Russia promoted its regional organizations more heavily than during the 1990s, especially the CSTO. The CSTO allowed for joint military operations along borders and elsewhere. Due to Russia's military superiority, the CSTO is a way in which Russia's military presence can be felt throughout Central Asia. Additionally, the CSTO allowed Russian weapons to permeate the region, the military elite of the Central Asian states to be trained at Russian military academies, and allowed Russian access to Central Asian military bases.

Even while Russia was attempting to promote its regional organizations, after the terror attacks on 9/11/01 in the United States, the U.S. very quickly made agreements to use airbases in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The U.S. airbase stayed open and functional until 2014. The sudden U.S. military presence led to Russian fears of U.S. expansion and further attempts to continue its control and influence in the region. This

⁶³ Buszynski, Leszek. "Russia's New Role in Central Asia." *Asian Survey* 45, no. 4 (July/August 2005): 546-65. JSTOR.

further increased the presence of Russia in Central Asia as Russia did not want to lose influence over their near-abroad to the West.⁶⁴

In 2003, as Kyrgyzstan drew closer to NATO and the U.S. as the war on terrorism continued, Russia's President Putin visited Kyrgyzstan and announced that a new military base, Kant, would open just twenty kilometers from the U.S. base near Bishkek. Despite some discontent among Kyrgyz elite, former President Akayev nevertheless allowed the base to be opened, citing reasons of needing a strong regional ally (Russia). Additionally, Russia agreed to extend Kyrgyzstan's debt repayment another twenty years in return for the opening of the Kant base. As of 2003, Presidents Putin and Akayev signed a fifteen-year lease for the Kant Air Base.⁶⁵ Since that point, the lease for the Kant Air Base has been extended until at least 2032, displaying that the Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan will not be weakening anytime in the near future.⁶⁶ With the continued presence of Russian airbases, it is clear that Kyrgyzstan will continue to rely on Russia militarily, and these close military and overall bilateral ties will positively affect the continued status of Russian as an official language of Kyrgyzstan.

The U.S. airbase caused much tension within the domestic leadership of Kyrgyzstan but also between Kyrgyzstan and Russia. By 2009, Russia was demanding the closure of the U.S. airbase, and Kyrgyz President Bakieyev agreed. Instead of following through with this agreement, however, Kyrgyzstan double-crossed Russia and

⁶⁴ Stratfor. "Why Russia Will Send More Troops to Central Asia." *Stratfor*. April 11, 2015. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/why-russia-will-send-more-troops-central-asia>.

⁶⁵ Buszynski, Leszek. "Russia's New Role in Central Asia." *Asian Survey* 45, no. 4 (July/August 2005): 546-65. JSTOR.

⁶⁶ Gorenburg, Dmitry. "Central Asian Military Capabilities." *Russian Military Reform*. June 28, 2015. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/central-asian-military-capabilities/>.

allowed U.S. presence to remain until 2014 in return for increases in rent payment. There has been some speculation that Bakieyev's ousting in the following year was due to Russian intervention as a result of Kyrgyzstan reneging on its agreement to close the U.S. airbase in 2009. In 2014, after continued pressure from Russia and a lessening of interest in the region by the U.S., the airbase was shut down.⁶⁷

In 2011, current President Atambayev was democratically elected, and since that point, there has been a visible shift towards Russia in regards to foreign policy making and decisions. In 2014, the U.S. airbase at Manas Transit Center formally closed and U.S. troops left the area. The Russian airbases have remained open, however. After many years of discussion, Kyrgyzstan finally joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), whose membership is now comprised of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It is as of yet relatively unclear what economic benefits Kyrgyzstan will receive from joining the EEU, but by joining this union, Kyrgyzstan demonstrated its shift towards the Russian-speaking world and declared its intent to rely primarily on Russia and its allies. With a deepening relationship with Russia economically and politically, it seems likely that the Russian language will continue to exist and be important in Kyrgyz society.

Kyrgyzstan is small and lacking in resources (excluding hydropower). The populace is reliant on a variety of methods to ensure its economic survival. Virtually every Kyrgyz family has at least one family member working abroad to send remittances back to Kyrgyzstan. The majority of these migrant workers are in Russia. It is estimated

⁶⁷ Trenin, Dmitri. "Russia Reborn: Reimagining Moscow's Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 64-78. JSTOR.

that more than 33% of the annual GDP of Kyrgyzstan comes from remittances. The recent multi-year recession facing Russia is problematic for Kyrgyzstan. The exchange rate from the Russian ruble to the Kyrgyz som has become dramatically smaller as the value of the ruble dropped. Additionally, the citizens who took out loans against the U.S. dollar or Euro now are unable to repay them. The Kyrgyz government fears that the approximately one million migrant workers currently living and working in Russia will return to Kyrgyzstan, where they will likewise be unable to find work to support their families, creating greater macroeconomic instability. Kyrgyz citizens are able to work in Russia effectively, however, due to the fact that they are able to speak in Russian. The fact that the Kyrgyz government does not want the entire population of ethnic Kyrgyz at home due to the small size of the economy is another reason why Russian will likely remain an official language; remittances form an integral part of the Kyrgyz economy and without the Russian language, a large portion of the GDP would be non-existent.⁶⁸

In addition, another large fraction of the Kyrgyz GDP is dependent on an import-driven economy. Kyrgyzstan gains profits from reselling cheap Chinese goods to Russia and Kazakhstan. The new EEU, however, means that there will be tariffs in place on Chinese goods and, as of yet, it is unclear how much of a negative effect this will have on the Kyrgyz economy. The fact that the Kyrgyz government still agreed to join the EEU despite a potential economic downturn displays its desire to remain in the Russian sphere of influence instead of trying to separate itself and find other regional partners.

Kyrgyzstan's continued desire to rely primarily on Russia in terms of economic aid and

⁶⁸Trilling, David. "Remittances to Central Asia Fall Sharply, as Expected." *EurasiaNet*. April 21, 2015. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73061>.

support, as well as recent Kyrgyz actions to bind the state closer to Russia politically and socially, emphasizes the idea that the Russian language has substantial staying power in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, Kyrgyzstan has become increasingly dependent on Russian energy, including Gazprom and Rosneft, as Uzbekistan becomes a less reliable source of energy, which is another key factor relating to economic and political ties and, subsequently, language retention.⁶⁹

Kyrgyz-Uzbek Bilateral Relations

This latter point is part of a larger regional issue; Kyrgyzstan has been shifting towards Russia in its foreign policy partially due to the unstable relations between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments. The Kyrgyz-Uzbek border lies in the fertile Fergana Valley, which is often regarded as the breadbasket of Central Asia. There have been border issues existing since 1999. At that point, President Karimov of Uzbekistan declared that the border should be more closely monitored, and took unilateral action to control the border. Karimov claimed that the Kyrgyz near the border were coming over to the richer Uzbekistan to buy their bread and other goods, and that it was not his country's job to provide charity. Additionally, this move cemented Uzbekistan's role as a regional powerhouse and entrenched Karimov's political authority.

The actual results of stricter border control have led to the ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan feeling more isolated. Many ethnic Uzbeks have family across the border in Uzbekistan, but the border control is so strict that many cannot return to visit their families for events such as weddings or funerals. Since the 2010 ethnic conflict near

⁶⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "BTI 2016 — Kyrgyzstan Country Report." Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016.

the southern Kyrgyz border, tensions have risen even further, creating a greater mistrust of the ethnic Uzbek residing within Kyrgyzstan and a greater mistrust of Uzbek intentions towards the smaller, more impoverished Kyrgyzstan as a whole.⁷⁰

At the time of the 2010 ethnic conflict, during which several hundred ethnic Uzbeks were killed, Uzbek troops on the southern border of Kyrgyzstan were prepared to enter Kyrgyzstan to protect the Uzbek ethnic minority residing within Kyrgyzstan. Russia, however, has an airbase in the region, and was strongly opposed to Uzbek entry into Kyrgyzstan. The Russian government viewed this as a security threat, and the possibility of Russian reprisal likely prevented Uzbek military involvement in Kyrgyzstan.⁷¹

After Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan has the second strongest and best-equipped military in Central Asia. With a significantly larger population than Kyrgyzstan, the Uzbek army has approximately 40,000 members, whereas the Kyrgyz army has approximately 8,500. Uzbekistan forces focus more on the National Security Service, or maintaining domestic peace, than on international affairs. Nonetheless, Kyrgyzstan fears Uzbek hegemonic intentions and increasingly is relying on Russia for protection and military support. No military force in the region can compare to Russian military strengths. Although Russian presence is likely to increase in the two weaker countries of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan will all likely work on military reforms in the upcoming years. The upcoming reforms do not signal a complete

⁷⁰ Megoran, Nick. "On Researching 'Ethnic Conflict': Epistemology, Politics, and a Central Asian Boundary Dispute." *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 2 (March 2007): 253-77. JSTOR.

⁷¹ "Russia's Position in the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Dispute." *Stratfor*. January 23, 2013. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russias-position-kyrgyz-uzbek-border-dispute>.

decrease in Russian influence in the region, however; while Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan do not wish to rely on Russian military assistance, the Russian military presence will likely increase in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have limited military capabilities compared to their neighboring countries, and closer ties with Russia will help ensure their security against the other states of Central Asia.⁷² Kyrgyzstan will increasingly depend on Russian protection from their larger more powerful neighbor, Uzbekistan, further bolstering the Kyrgyz reliance on close bilateral Kyrgyz-Russian relations to maintain sovereignty and security. This reliance will further increase the importance of the Russian language as Kyrgyz-Russian bilateral relationships strengthen and Kyrgyzstan continues to shift away from Uzbek influence.

Uzbekistan as a whole has a foreign policy of constantly rebalancing and realigning so as to avoid Russian pressures. President Karimov prefers working along bilateral lines with other nations without Russian involvement. The Uzbek government is particularly worried about the Russian airbase in Osh, the largest city in southern Kyrgyzstan. While the Uzbek military is substantially stronger and better-equipped than the Kyrgyz military, Uzbekistan recognizes that it does not have the military strength to balance against Russia. The border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is mined, and there are still restrictions on cross-border trade and movement in general, as well as restricted water and energy flows. The water from Kyrgyzstan flows into Uzbekistan. Without enough water, the Uzbek cotton crop suffers. As a result, Uzbekistan has

⁷² Gorenburg, Dmitry. "Central Asian Military Capabilities." *Russian Military Reform*. June 28, 2015. <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/central-asian-military-capabilities/>.

regularly cut off the gas and energy flow into Kyrgyzstan as a measure to ensure that Kyrgyzstan does not restrict water flow.⁷³

In recent years there has been no relaxing of border tensions, despite meetings of high-level government officials from both the Kyrgyz and Uzbek sides since 2014. Uzbekistan continued to deny gas to Kyrgyzstan as of winter 2015, leading Kyrgyzstan to scramble to find alternate energy sources from Russia and Kazakhstan. President Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan said that Uzbekistan was trying to destroy Kyrgyz self-sufficiency in order to destabilize the country. President Atambayev has threatened to skip the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit forthcoming in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in June 2016 as a result of continued border tensions and overall lack of a positive bilateral relationship between the two nations. In the past year, there has been a flare-up of tensions, with Uzbek military forces seen near the southern Kyrgyz border. As part of the CSTO, Moscow has been notified but, so far, no actions have been taken by the Uzbek military or by Moscow. Unless tensions worsen, it is unlikely that Russia and other CSTO members will get directly involved. At the same time, however, it is unlikely that Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will develop stronger bilateral relations anytime in the near future. While Uzbekistan is stronger militarily and economically, Kyrgyzstan uses its stronger relationship with Russia to balance any potential Uzbek aggression.⁷⁴ It is clear that there are few strong economic, social, political, or cultural ties between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Unlike with Russia, there seems to be little place for the Uzbek language

⁷³ Pike, John. "Uzbekistan - Foreign Relations." *GlobalSecurity*. July 7, 2014. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/uzbek-forrel.htm>.

⁷⁴ Putz, Catherine. "Kyrgyz President Might Skip SCO Summit Over Border Tensions." *The Diplomat*. March 25, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/kyrgyz-president-might-skip-sco-summit-over-border-tensions/>.

to take on an official role in Kyrgyzstan. Despite the large Uzbek minority, there are few positive aspects of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek bilateral relationship and, especially due to the lack of political and economic ties between the nations, it seems unlikely that Uzbek will gain official status in Kyrgyzstan.

Politically, since President Atambayev came to power, it has been clear that while Kyrgyz foreign policy still has multi-vector aspects, it has been shifting slightly away from multi-vector foreign policy and towards a more Russian-centric policy. Kyrgyzstan is still a part of many multilateral organizations and has ties to the West, but it is evident through Kyrgyzstan's reliance on the CSTO and recent ascension to the EEU that Kyrgyzstan is increasingly relying on Russia both in terms of security and economic aid. Kyrgyzstan wishes to be considered the bridge to Asia and Europe and is unlikely to cut ties with neighboring amicable countries or end its involvement with the EU, NATO, or SCO, but it is slowly seeming more and more that Kyrgyzstan's priority in regards to foreign policy is Russia.⁷⁵ Even before Kyrgyzstan was an independent state, Russian played an influential role in Kyrgyz society. Since its independence, Kyrgyzstan has increasingly made choices which bind the country to Russia and, as a result, the Russian language. Overall, it is unlikely that Russian will lose its status as an official language because of the pervasive influence of Russia on the Kyrgyz culture as well as Kyrgyzstan's increasing reliance on Russia for security and economic stability.

⁷⁵ Fleischer, Martin. "Kyrgyz Republic: Democratic Reforms and Foreign Policy Priorities." *EastWest NGO*. April 7, 2015. <http://www.eastwest.ngo/idea/kyrgyz-republic-democratic-reforms-and-foreign-policy-priorities>.

In a direct comparison, Russian and Uzbek language rights correlate to all four of Pavlenko's ideas on the reasons behind language retention and staying power in Kyrgyzstan. In each case, Russia is closer to Kyrgyzstan and, as such, Russian plays a far more important role in Kyrgyz society. In regards to the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the population, Russian is more widely spoken, even if only as a second language, than Uzbek, despite the fact that the Uzbek minority is larger than the Russian minority. Uzbek, however, is viewed as being not very useful as it cannot be considered an international language, unlike Russian. Additionally, Uzbek is not viewed as a language necessary to learn in order to succeed in Kyrgyzstan or in Russia. There were and are also far more educational and work opportunities for those who speak Russian in Kyrgyzstan than those who speak Uzbek. There are opportunities for Russian-speakers to study in Russia as well as the ability to work abroad, as a large percentage of the population does.

The fourth point also seems to hold true when investigating language policies and usages in Kyrgyzstan, as well as Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy actions and recent shift towards Russia. Culturally, due to the former influence of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz people feel relatively close to the Russian culture; Bishkek in particular is viewed as a Russified city by Russians, Kyrgyz, and Westerners alike. The prevalence of the Russian language and culture are far more visible within the city where more ethnic Russians live and Russian economic support is more pronounced.⁷⁶ Before the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922, Kyrgyzstan was not a formal state, and so it was easier for the Soviet Union to influence the culture of the country.

⁷⁶ Abdrisaev, Baktybek. "The Russification of Kyrgyzstan. How Russia Pushed the U.S. Out of a Central Asian Stronghold." *Foreign Policy*, April 9, 2009. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/09/the-russification-of-kyrgyzstan/>

Additionally, Russia and Kyrgyzstan have had a long history of trade, and therefore Kyrgyzstan is used to relying on Russia as an economic partner. For the most part, Kyrgyzstan exports raw cotton, raw tobacco, copper, and other unfinished goods to Russia while Russia primarily exports refined petroleum to Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁷ Russia is viewed as a safe economic partner, and much of Kyrgyzstan's GDP relies on both trade with and remittances from Russia. Finally, politically, Kyrgyzstan is closely allied to the Russian government. Kyrgyzstan fears Uzbek hegemony and therefore ties itself closer to Russia in order to protect its sovereignty and interests.⁷⁸

Despite the large Uzbek minority, however, it seems highly unlikely that Uzbek will ever gain official status in Kyrgyzstan despite the discontent of the ethnic Uzbeks residing in Kyrgyzstan. These two countries do not share a history, excluding their shared experience with Soviet rule and, as such, there is little to no room for advancement with the Uzbek language. Kyrgyzstan does not align itself societally or economically with Uzbekistan. Instead, tensions between the two countries have increased, especially in regards to the border in southern Kyrgyzstan. None of the prerequisites as listed by Pavlenko are met, and therefore Uzbek will always be a secondary language of Kyrgyzstan, and not a primary or official one.

The status of Russian as one of Kyrgyzstan's official languages can be considered a part of broader Kyrgyz foreign policy goals. As a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Russian is integral to Kyrgyzstan's continued success and integration

⁷⁷ Simoes, Alexander. "Kyrgyzstan." *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*, 2014. <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/kgz/>

⁷⁸ Турсунбай, Юсупханов. "Ситуация вокруг русского языка в Кыргызстане." *Время Востока*, April 18, 2013. <http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/situatsiya-vokrug-russkogo-yazyka-v-kyrgyzstane>.

in the organization.⁷⁹ At the same time, the law on the state language of Kyrgyzstan, originally written in 2004, was revised in 2015 to say that while the state language (Kyrgyz) should be used for domestic affairs, in necessary circumstances, Russian can be used.⁸⁰ Domestically, the government is technically promoting Kyrgyz, but the law does clearly allow for the usage of Russian, and does not clarify the meaning of ‘necessary’. As such, while a law exists on language usage, it does not provide many real restrictions on the use of Russian. The continued implicit support of Russian can also display, to an extent, how Kyrgyz foreign policy will be developed in the upcoming years. Kyrgyzstan is continuously improving its bilateral relationship with Russia and indeed depends on Russia for many of its political and economic needs, although it maintains its presence in broader multilateral organizations. Russia provides a safety net needed to allow for the sustainability and sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and, as a result, the Russian language allows for the broader mobilization and success of its elite politicians who create and conduct foreign policy as well as the citizens who are merely educated at Russian institutions or who require Russian for job stability and success in high-level careers.

Conclusion

Overall, Kyrgyzstan has had a short history of statehood due to its traditional nomadic history. Starting in the 1860s, Tsarist Russia and all of its successor governments have played an important role in developing Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan. Due to its small size, lack of natural resources, limited economic development,

⁷⁹*Информационно-аналитического Департамента СНГ*. “Великий и могучий... Вопросы использования русского языка в странах СНГ”, 2016, <http://www.e-cis.info/page.php?id=18144>.

⁸⁰*Министерство Юстиции Кыргызской Республики*. “Закон Кыргызской Республики. О внесении изменений и дополнения в Закон Кыргызской Республики ‘О государственном языке Кыргызской Республики’”, 2015, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111178>.

traditionally nomadic culture, and fears of Chinese and Uzbek aggression, Kyrgyzstan has perhaps felt the influence of the Russian language and peoples more than any other nation in Central Asia, excluding Tajikistan.

While Kyrgyz is a Turkic language that has existed for centuries, it had no written form or standardization until the arrival of the Soviets. While at first the centralized Soviet government allowed for the study of Kyrgyz, soon it changed its policies and Russian became mandatory. The demographic make-up of the country also shifted as the Moscow government delineated borders in Central Asia and relocated ethnic Russians into the region. Border demarcations in southern Kyrgyzstan were drawn in such a manner that there is a large Uzbek minority in southern Kyrgyzstan. A smaller, yet still substantial, Russian minority also still resides in modern-day Kyrgyzstan, though primarily in the northern part of the country.

Despite the larger Uzbek minority, Russian has official language status and is in fact regularly used as the official language in government affairs. Additionally, Russian has equal or higher status than Kyrgyz when it comes to pop culture, higher education and, occasionally, business. This thesis was meant to address why Russian is still so pervasive in Kyrgyz society. In order to do so, I looked at recent Kyrgyz foreign policy and how language policy relates to political and economic ties between countries. These political and economic ties directly relate to language usage and presence and explain not only why Russian is so pervasive, but why Uzbek has such a low status in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan has a wide variety of ethnic groups that comprise its population. The size of the Uzbek minority might lead one to believe that Uzbek should hold primary status in Kyrgyzstan but, unlike Russian, other factors that lead to language retention fit

the Russian case far better than the Uzbek case. In terms of linguistic and ideological factors that shape attitudes towards language, the history of Kyrgyzstan has a great effect. During the time of the Soviet Union, those who did not speak Russian were looked down upon. Both Kyrgyz and Uzbek were viewed as unnecessary and not as ‘elite’ languages.

Russian, unlike Uzbek, also provided and still provides a substantial amount of education and employment opportunities not presented by Kyrgyz. By learning Russian, an ethnic Kyrgyz has access to a wide array of literature, scientific and academic, not available in either Kyrgyz or Uzbek. The Russian-language schools in Kyrgyzstan also allow for better career placement, both in Russia and in Kyrgyzstan. The Russian language allows for students to get a better education in top fields such as law, health, and financing.

Finally, and what I think is most important, is how Kyrgyzstan shapes their foreign policy based on economy, security, and political alignment. Due to the shared history of the Soviet Union, and the lack of written history before that point, the Kyrgyz society is remarkably ‘Russified’. Additionally, Kyrgyzstan is becoming increasingly reliant on Russia for economic help (whether through aid or remittances). Kyrgyzstan is also dependent on Russia for military-related security, especially in regards to its southern border with Kyrgyzstan. Tensions have been high between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, especially since the 2010 revolution, and Kyrgyzstan relies on Russian military presence in its country to keep its sovereignty and people safe.

Kyrgyzstan’s continued acceptance of Russian as an official language is representative of its broader foreign policy goals. In the past few years, Kyrgyzstan has been shifting closer to Russia and, as such, needs to maintain positive relationships with

its larger northern neighbor. One way in which Kyrgyzstan maintains close relationships is by having Russian as an official language. Not only does this publically show Kyrgyzstan's ties with Russia, but it also allows for the easier communication between the governments in Moscow and in Bishkek.

As Kyrgyz is the titular language, it will naturally retain its status as a state language. Due to the close economic, social, political and cultural ties between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, it seems unlikely that the Russian language will be restricted to a great extent, if at all. It is possible that Kyrgyz will slowly be used more, especially in domestic political affairs, but it is unlikely to completely eclipse Russian. It seems highly possible that Russian will retain dominance in pop media, higher education, science, and technology, unless stringent steps are taken against the Russian language at a federal level.

While the respective statuses of Russian and Kyrgyz are unlikely to change in Kyrgyzstan, further research could be done looking at other Central Asian states that have a more tumultuous relationship with Russia. This research could be useful in informing policy makers on the future of relations between Russia and the various Central Asian states in its 'near abroad'. Additionally, the rising influence of China could be investigated. It seems that the Kyrgyz are attempting to use Russia to balance the rising Chinese power and influence, but the Russian-Chinese bilateral relationship in regards to their political game in the region could also be investigated. Finally, this thesis focused primarily on the three main languages of Kyrgyzstan. Further research could look at the presence of other languages, or lack thereof, including, but not limited to, Uighur, English, Arabic, Tajik, and Chinese.

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