Russia and Eurasia Programme Seminar Summary

Discourses of Danger and Western Policy Towards Central Asia in Light of Recent Events

John Heathershaw

University of Exeter

Nick Megoran

University of Newcastle

Madeleine Reeves

University of Manchester

David Lewis

University of Bradford

13 September 2010

PANEL ONE: DISCOURSES OF DANGER AND WESTERN POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

Nick Megoran and John Heathershaw

Policy making towards Central Asia is obstructed by a populist notion of Central Asia as a region of danger characterized by terrorism and Islamism, where political conflict is ever ready to erupt. This is nothing new. In the 19th century the Great Game was similarly depicted in such provocative and loose terms. The titles of recent books, like 'Oil, Islam and Conflict: Central Asia Since 1945', 'Islam, Oil and Geopolitics: Central Asia after September 11' and 'Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia' are indicative of this. But this notion has also pervaded into popular culture where Central Asia is depicted in the same light. In the geopolitical discourse Central Asia is portrayed as obscure, oriental and fractious, and these three characteristics mutually reinforce a view of Central Asia as dangerous.

Central Asia as obscure

Central Asia has been widely depicted as obscure in popular culture. The critically acclaimed US TV series *The West Wing* provided three storylines involving the post-Soviet Central Asian states. One of these involved a major international armed conflict in Kazakhstan as an ongoing narrative. In addition to this, there are a few passing mentions to Central Asian states. Without exception these depictions are consistent with a general portrayal of Central Asia as obscure, uncertain and thus dangerous. No attempt is made by the writers to negotiate substantive issues, in stark contrast to the treatment of other regions of the world which *West Wing* writers explore. Human rights, humanitarianism, Islamism, and drugs are all explored in other regions in much more depth with the introduction of credible non-Western characters.

What these representations of the region show is that uncertainty and obscurity have specific ramifications for how we imagine policy-practice towards Central Asia. Post-Soviet Central Asia is consistently interpreted by journalists, commentators, travel writers and film-makers as 'lost', 'unexplained' or 'distant'.

Central Asia as oriental

This second feature of Central Asia in the geopolitical discourse invokes the writing of Edward Said on the Middle East. Will Myer, author of 'Islam and

Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Central Asia in 2002', has shown how Western Sovietological writing on Central Asia orientalised the region specifically in terms of a colonized people – albeit represented as fractious subjects rather than passive recipients of imperial largesse.

Today, the Asian-ness of Central Asia is understood internationally in terms of the maxims of the 'War on Terror'. The ongoing campaign in Afghanistan provides a political logic for the spatial representation of the region in terms of states in the south, in particular, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is done by exploring the writings of a Washington-based community of security analysts who are part of, or act as consultants for, US defence establishments. The international security discourse on these five post-Soviet states orientalises them as part of 'South and Central Asia' and therefore in need of Western-style statebuilding.

Central Asia's significance for international security is derived from spatial imagination and territorial reasoning where Central Asia is on the 'frontline' with Afghanistan, and indeed even part of the same region. By such accounts the region is an especially perilous and porous part of the world. With its link to the South, it is described by Professor Douglas C. Lovelace, head of the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, as a 'key theatre in the war on terror'. This coming together of South Asia and Central Asia is not merely a matter of military logistics but is also found in the region's geopolitical character. Researcher at the Strategic Studies Institute Elizabeth Wishnick, in keeping with the geopolitical analysis of influential commentators like Zbigniew Brzezinski and Frederick Starr, adds that it is part of the 'Great Game'.

The coupling of South Asia and Central Asia in US foreign policy is not simply a consequence of the Afghanistan intervention and the use of bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. A pre-existing conception of Central Asia as essentially Asiatic and anti-Soviet has combined with post-9/11 security operations and thinking to create a linkage between Central Asia and Afghanistan in the structure of American foreign and defence policy making. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Elizabeth Jones has said that 'since 9/11 US strategic interests in the region have focused on anti-terrorism, especially the elimination of terrorist and other destabilizing groups'. This led to a massive increase in the US strategic role following 9/11 and the establishment of the Ganci (Manas) and Kharshi-Khanabad military bases, and overflight rights across Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Fiona Hill Director of the Centre on the United States and Europe at Brookings, notes that 'the primary American interest is in security, in preventing the

"Afghanicization" of Central Asia and the spawning of more terrorist groups with transnational reach that can threaten the stability of the interlocking regions and strike the United States'.[1]

There are two aspects to the geopolitical discourse on the 'regionness' of Central Asia. The first is to locate it in terms of perceived cultural-historical affinities. There have been, for example, attempts to decouple it from Russia by locating the region in the 'Greater Middle East', a geographical definition that incorporates the Middle East, North Africa and parts of South Asia. The second aspect frames Central Asia in terms of the present security environment. Chris Seiple, Director of the Institute for Global Engagement, argues that there is a 'crescent of crisis that rises from North Africa to Central Asia before descending into Southeast Asia'.[2] For Michael Mayer of the Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, Central Asia is found at the 'very apex' of the 'arc of instability'.[3]

This type of thinking has resulted in a shift in Central Asia's location in US government institutions. In October 1999 Central Asia was moved from the Pentagon's Atlantic Command to its Central Command (CENTCOM); six years later the State Department executed an identical bureaucratic reorganization.

Understanding the five post-Soviet republics as a part of 'South and Central Asia' seemingly leads to hyperbolic analyses of their political dynamics and, in turn, inscribes them as 'weak' or 'failed' states which require consolidation and stability strategies. Tajikistan in particular – due to its extensive and so-called 'porous' border with Afghanistan and its 1990s civil war is particularly represented in these terms. Based on very limited understandings of Central Asian states and societies, external statebuilding is prescribed even in the face of evidence that imported models, based on faulty conceptions of both Central Asia and the state, have little scope for success. Michael Milhalka, a US Army War College professor, laments 'state weakness' and the lack of political will in Central Asia to introduce the necessary reforms 'to counter insurgency and terrorism'. There are few scholars of Central Asia who would seek to claim stability, economic opportunity, democracy, justice and the rule

---

[1] Fiona Hill, 'The United States and Russia in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran', Speech presented at The Aspen Institute Congressional Program, Brookings, August 2002. http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2002/0815russia_hill.aspx

[2] Chris Seiple, 'Uzbekistan: Civil Society in the Heartland', *Orbis*, Spring 2005 (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute) http://www.fpri.org/orbis/4902/seiple.uzbekistancivilsociety.pdf

[3] Michael Mayer, 'US grand strategy and Central Asia. Merging geopolitics and ideology', *Defence and Security Studies*, no. 2/2008, (Oslo: The Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies)

of law as achievements of the 20 years since *perestroika*. But in fusing Islamic extremism with post-Soviet authoritarianism, such discourse repeats an orientalising inscription of regional politics where Asiatic despots are challenged by hot-headed religious radicals. These, we suggest, are not images which would be acknowledged either by Central Asia's secular elite or by any of its varied religious communities. Underwriting such testimony is the assumption that 'they' ought to be more like 'us' – that is, more like who we imagine ourselves to be.

Central Asia as fractious

A third dimension of endangerment is the representation of Central Asia as fractious, and thus both dangerous to the West and in need of reconstruction.

Fear of 'ethnic conflict' in Central Asia is premised on the assumption that 'ethnicity' was a tangible force that overrode any other social process in mapping out the contours of possible futures. In the western geopolitical vision of Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley is a key example of a place where mutually reinforcing ethnic conflict and border disputes coalesce with a host of other threats to produce a dangerously fractious spatial imagery. One *Newsweek* article described the tensions on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border as a 'volatile cocktail of Islam, ethnic hatred, drugs and poverty that is ratcheting up tensions in the Ferghana Valley'.[4] This list was typical – though not exhaustive – of a genre that compiles the supposed threats the Valley faces, with the assumption that the existence of all these different in one area is evidence enough that some great conflagration is inevitable.

A 1999 report by the US Center for Preventative Action, *Calming the Ferghana Valley*, constituted an extreme version of this characterization of the valley. Supported by prestigious institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations and authored by distinguished scholars Barnett Rubin and Nancy Lubin, the report lists a series of threats present in the area. But the main evidence base is somewhat limited, connecting unconnected events like the 1990 Uzgen violence and the 1997 assassination of officials in Namangan. This report is indicative of the weakness of the academic policy genre that scripted Central Asia as dangerously fractious; this could only take form by ignoring other scholarship that did not reach the same conclusions.

---

[4] Christian Caryl, 'Declining Democracy; The Arrest of a Central Asian activist underscores growing repression in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan', *Newsweek*, 19 January 2001

British TV documentaries on Central Asia frequently portray the region as fractious. Two films were made between 2002 and 2003 on the region: *Holidays in the Danger Zone* and *Twenty First Century Unseen Wars*. The latter, by Sorious Samura, looked at 'new' types of warfare likely to be witnessed in the 21st Century. After he had investigated high-technology warfare, he looked at conflicts at the other end of the spectrum, which he said were 'baffling and vicious new wars' which are 'unseen and ignored by the outside world'. He thus established them as occurring in obscure ('unseen') places. Samura begins in Indonesia, reporting on violent Islamists, and ends in Mogadishu. These are obvious and well-known choices. More surprisingly, sandwiched between them, is a trip to Central Asia. The region is introduced as 'somewhere that may be drifting towards collapse and violence'. However, Samura's account makes no attempt to explain exactly how a particularly boundary or ethnic mix will lead to a war. Like the academic and policy literature, he simply asserts that violence is probable because some decontextualised conflicts occurred in the past, there are lots of dangers in the same place, and this place is like other fractious places where conflict occurred. In short, such accounts have no room for politics, for the role of ethnic entrepreneurs in inciting violence, or for local state and non-state authority mechanisms of defusing tension.

Conclusion

The argument here is not that Central Asia isn't a dangerous region, or that ethnic conflict isn't possible. Ethnic conflict is not improbable, but it can only be understood through studying the particular regional context. Islamism, border security and geopolitics are not the main sources of conflict. They are secondary to other issues like domestic – particularly local – politics and economics and the dynamics of organized crime. The discourse of danger influences how policy-makers talk about the region and this language of threats and danger impacts on policy towards the region. The dominant discourse is not only reductive and misleading; it may lead to harmful policy.

Question and Discussion Session

One participant asked whether the discourse of danger is more dominant amongst security and political analysts than anthropologists and geographers. It was argued that the question highlights the danger of academic disciplines. There is a need for more dialogue between academic disciplines, for example for more ethnographers to do more political work and to be aware of

government policy. It is certainly true that international relations researchers have tended to avoid the ethnographic research necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the local politics of the countries in question.

One specialist argued that ignorance in government and the media is a far broader problem. It is not limited to Central Asia. The European Neighbourhood Policy grouped under one rubric countries with a strong desire for European integration together with those displaying no interest in Europe. A lack of engagement with political and social complexity is, in part, a product of the tendency to equip people with general skills, but not specific regional knowledge. In response, the presenters argued that although this kind of ignorance occurs globally, there are particular ways in which regions are imagined. Central Asia is particularly prone to being characterised as obscure.

Another specialist wanted to know who the paper[5] is aimed at. To change the discourse, he said, researchers need to move beyond academia and try to influence policy-makers and other analysts. More than revealing a discourse of danger, researchers need to show how this discourse has led to bad policy. It was argued in response that the report does address how policy and the media have got it wrong. However this can only be done on a case-by-case basis in order to highlight errors and challenge certain elements. The recent events in Kyrgyzstan are a good example of a failure to understand what was going on. Similarly, many analysts misunderstood how the peace process in Tajikistan moved forward, and how the mechanism of legitimacy operated. This resulted in unwarranted predictions of imminent collapse. There are structural factors which are very difficult to change however, such as the 24-hour news cycle. Another analyst explained that the paper is primarily addressed to an academic audience. There has been a lot of poor quality academic work on Central Asia. Whilst many academics working in the field may acknowledge a discourse of danger, they may find it hard to escape from such discursive practices. In part, this is a product of the research funding system.

Another participant pointed out that there are plenty of journalists who deplore the reduction in resources and time which make in-depth reporting more difficult. There are also still many analysts who write considered and well-researched pieces on the region. Sweeping attacks on the quality of journalism risks alienating potential allies. The same criticism could be made

---

[5] John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran, 'Contesting danger: a new agenda for Central Asian studies', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Publication to be announced

about government officials, many of whom do have substantial knowledge about the region. It was also argued that the problem with Central Asia is not that people view it as dangerous, but that people are simply not interested in it at all. A discourse of irrelevance is more prevalent. Indeed, the discourse of danger is, in part, an attempt to overcome this irrelevance, and make the case for engaging seriously with the region.

One participant argued that the prevalence of the discourse of danger tends to obscure many positive aspects of the region. Central Asia is one very few parts of the world which has not had an inter-state conflict. The countries of the region overcame the economic crisis. Despite all its problems, the participant argued, Central Asia remains a cultural and educational hub with high levels of literacy. This is not to deny the main problems the region faces, but the full story is not being told. Several participants expressed interest in where discourses of danger had come from and why they were so prevalent. The discourse of danger shows the importance of *ideas* in the formulation of foreign policy, it was argued.

Another specialist provided an example of the negative impact of the discourse of danger in the EU Border Management Programme for Central Asia (BOMCA), which aimed to deploy integrated border management in Central Asia in order to prevent drug flows. To receive EU money, border authorities were required to stop more illegal traders, however the design and implementation of the programme meant that legitimate small-time traders were penalized, whilst the drug-smugglers continued unaffected. This is because border controls in Central Asia function through bribes, which the large scale traders can afford to pay. Tourism is a major source of potential growth for Central Asia, but it is unlikely to develop whilst the discourse of danger is so prevalent in the West.

A number of participants were interested in the geographical categorization of Central Asia and the implications of this for policy making. The presenters had highlighted the fact that the US had redrawn its regional divisions to group Central Asia with Afghanistan and Pakistan. This indicates how security imperatives influence how these countries are perceived. But one participant pointed out that had Central Asia been left in a grouping with Russia and the CIS, one could have accused analysts of being stuck in the past, attached to cold-war schemas and outmoded thinking. Any regional division is inevitably contingent and problematic.

It was argued that European knowledge about the region remains inadequate and Europeans are not willing to invest necessary sums into projects.

Government agencies in Central Asia are encouraged to apply 'European models' without considering whether they suit local conditions. It was suggested that there is a compartmentalization of EC funded projects, which ignores the interconnection of development issues facing Central Asia. Every assistance project should instead be closely linked with others. However, this is not possible under current EC organizational structures.

It was suggested that Central Asia is still considered to be in Russia's back yard and that this posed an obstacle to European and US involvement in the region. This problem is compounded by the fact that Central Asians themselves feel caught between the West and Russia. Outside observers often view the region in term of a 'Great Game', a discourse that removes the agency of Central Asian actors. But Central Asian states are not mere pawns in a power struggle between US, Russia and China; the region's governments often play larger powers off one another and manage their foreign relations skilfully.

Asked what, if anything, would lead the presenters to revise their argument and, they explained that the discourses of danger thesis is not a matter of relativity; it does not seek to address whether Central Asia is more or less dangerous than other regions. Rather, it examines how Central Asia is conceived as dangerous based on obscure and oriental preconceptions. The thesis is borne out by observers' repeated predictions of extremely disruptive events which do not actually occur. Were such events to occur, the thesis would be disproved. To avoid discourses of danger, when violence does occur, it is necessary to provide detailed analysis of why it happened. The argument is not that Central Asia is not dangerous. Central Asia is a very dangerous place to be if you are homosexual, or very poor, or belong to certain minorities. However, the dominant discourse implies that danger is essential to Central Asia, rather than the product of social and political contingency. It is this notion which has to be challenged.

SESSION TWO: RECENT EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Madeleine Reeves

The arguments made in the first session underline the importance of attending closely to domestic issues. The politics of Central Asia tend to be framed in the language of geopolitics which privileges endogenous factors. To understand the violence which occurred in June 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, one has to situate it within the context of the political transformations that have occurred since 2005 and before, as well as the political crisis of April 2010.

Researchers must take the issue of ethnicity seriously, without essentialising it or resorting to geographical or historical determinism, for example, by employing narratives that explain the conflict as products of Stalin's ethnic policies. Analysts should consider the factors which enabled a political conflict to become ethnically charged.

The events of June 2010 have to be understood within the context of April 2010 and the longer term undermining of the rule of law. The overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April this year was represented as a popular revolution which legitimized the politics of force if conducted in the name of the people. As in 2005, political seizure was immediately followed by land grabs and the seizure of local administrative buildings. There was a celebration of extra-legal violence which called the rule of law into question.

In addition, while Bakiyev was unpopular, the events of April 2010 caused great concern amongst mid-level functionaries and security service personnel who had established a *modus vivendi* under Bakiyev. The movement which toppled Bakiyev was united only by its animosity towards the regime, so from the start there were power struggles and conflict. Roza Otunbayeva has been frequently undermined by colleagues and other figures, including the mayor of Osh.

The April revolution also legitimized a language of ethnic nationalism. The revolution was seen as a Kyrgyz national revolution, articulated in ethnic terms. This can be seen in the subsequent debate over the new constitution, when requests by Uzbeks that discrimination on the basis of language be made illegal were ignored.

The revolution also led to a dramatic shift in the balance of power among the country's criminal groups. The collapse of central power led to a struggle between rival gangs in Osh for control of the car industry. This quickly acquired an ethnic aspect. The political and legal vacuum created an opening

for populist politicians to seize on the language of ethnicity. The response to the crisis has also been indicative – whilst Otunbayeva and other politicians have condemned the violence, they have also maintained the language of ethnicity, rather than trying to bring the conflicting parties together by playing up a shared regional or civic identity. Thus, Otunbayeva declared that this is now a conflict 'between two ethnicities' (между двумья этносами), which ignored the specific nature of the violence.

Looking at the broader context to the conflict, since 2005 there has been a gradual decline in outlets for peaceful expression of protest. Ethnic Uzbeks came to feel increasingly alienated and marginalized under Bakiyev. It was indicative that a speech by Bakiyev in the Kurultai – not long before his ouster – was delivered entirely in Kyrgyz.

Declining economic opportunities have led to impoverishment and mass migration to Russia. This has provoked resentment amongst ethnic Kyrgyz, who feel they are unable to live in their own country while Uzbeks appear to be better off. This perception is in part due to the fact that ethnic Uzbeks tend to spend their money in different and more conspicuous ways. Ethnicity has become progressively institutionalised in Kyrgyzstani society, along with a perception that wealth is unfairly distributed. Russian is declining as a common language. Whilst it is theoretically possible to make Kyrgyz a working state language, it would require a significant investment of resources to decouple the language from its ethnic associations. This has so far not happened.

It is important to distinguish between an ethnic conflict and an ethnicized conflict. In the latter case, ethnic difference is used by ethnic entrepreneurs as a means to mobilise people.

There has also been a long-term failure by foreign actors in conflict management. Approaches have often exaggerated and reified ethnic difference rather than proposing different models of identity which would avoid conflicts splitting down ethnic lines.

As in many instances of ethnic violence, a combination of precipitous factors came together and were then exploited by nationalist politicians and ethnic entrepreneurs at the point of the collapse of central authority. The role of rumour as a means of mobilising people is also important.

David Lewis

The recent wave of Kyrgyz nationalism should be seen in the context of much broader changes in the region. Much of the Soviet legacy is disappearing, a new elite is forming with different attitudes to the state. Although the Kyrgyz are the majority ethnic group, Kyrgyz nationalism manifests itself in a defensive form. This is a common post-imperial moment. The violence in Osh was represented as an act of self-defence from a perceived Uzbek threat.

Ethnic Kyrgyz nationalism is not only an elite project; it has also emerged out of mass resentment on a local level, often headed by criminal authority figures. The combination of rural Kyrgyz nationalism and conservative Islam has a powerful effect on people who do not feel part of the urban elite which has run the country for so long. The violence of June 2010 will have an impact on how the state will operate for several years. All the political ammunition is currently with the nationalists. This puts the ethnic Uzbek population in a difficult position. Many of those who were able to leave for Uzbekistan have done so, but this is not an option for everyone. The main threat now is not so much renewed violence as a mass exodus of Uzbeks; in effect, we are seeing aspects of ethnic cleansing.

International regional politics are increasingly important. Uzbekistan has played a cooperative role by showing rhetorical restraint and showing no indication of a desire to intervene. Clearly, however, the violence has had resonance for those living outside Kyrgyzstan. Uzbek President Islam Karimov has never considered himself a nationalist leader. He is a statist and has shown little interest in building a greater Uzbekistan.

Conversely, the localisation of politics and conflict is also significant. An understanding of the local politics of Naryn and Batken, for example, is essential to untangling the causes of events like those in June 2010. This is difficult since there is little reporting from these regions. Individual personalities can be very influential on a local level. Criminal groups and the mid-level elite play an important part in the political process at a local level, but they don't necessarily line up behind leaders.

At a national level, it appears that a new elite bargain may be agreed. None of the major players are in a position to control the country's main resources on their own, so some sort of corporate-oligarchic deal is essential. It is much harder to strike such a bargain at a local level. The balance of power between groups keeps shifting. In June the local bargain broke down horribly and quickly acquired an ethnic dimension. It is likely that battles over control of

drug routes lay at the heart of the conflict, which then took on an ethnic flavour.

On-going decentralisation in Kyrgyzstan has positive and negative aspects. When state capacity is low, a local leader can provide stability and service delivery in the absence of national institutions. However, decentralisation can also lead to a proliferation of groups violently competing for power.

There has been a concerted effort by the main actors in Bishkek to make the elections work. There is a strong feeling that they have to get this right in order to establish legitimacy. It would clearly be a positive step if the OSCE finds the elections to be free and fair; however, open elections may not facilitate a political deal. Some parties wrongly believe themselves to enjoy broad popular support. If they fail to cross the barrier for representation in parliament they may attempt to mobilise people to contest the election results. The most interesting battle will begin after the election observers have gone home, when the roles and responsibilities of Prime Minister and President will be decided.

29 parties have registered for the October 2010 elections. Given that a $2 million deposit is required to run, people clearly believe that it will be competitive and there is something to gain. The shadow economy has grown, and as a result it will be harder to track resource conflicts in the future. In some cases, the power struggle is localised, involving a battle for control of a specific factory for example. The question of property rights will be important for the new government. Control over remittances and the flow of foreign money into Kyrgyzstan will also be points of contention.

Russia and the CSTO appeared incapable of responding to the crisis in Kyrgyzstan for both political and technical reasons. Russia appears to lack the military capacity, and does not want to set a precedent for intervention. But Russia and China also seem to lack the political will to coordinate an elite bargain in Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE, too, has failed to achieve much on the ground. Whilst there was widespread agreement to dispatch a police mission, which would have provided at least a token international presence, the mayor of Osh appears to have been able to veto the proposal single-handedly.

Questions and Discussion

One participant argued that the proposed police mission was an inappropriate means of stabilising the region. Indeed, there is a danger that an under-resourced and badly prepared mission could exacerbate the situation by

appearing to support some institutions and not others. It was argued that one of the problems was that no one defined what the OSCE mission should achieve. When the local population objected to the mission, it was difficult politically for Otunbayeva to impose it. At present, however, stability in the region depends on a mono-ethnic police force imposing its will on the populace. This may bring peace but it also leaves ethnic Uzbeks feeling threatened.

One participant stated that the violence had been anticipated by a 2007 OSCE report. The interplay of crime, ethnicity and violence is not new – Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia etc. In response, it was argued that we should avoid narratives which assume conflict is inevitable. It is not necessarily the case that the risk of conflict increases with greater cultural diversity. Identity can become politicized for different reasons at different times. The Russian term *konfliktogennyi* is often applied to the Ferghana region. This is a specious term; it implies that conflict is inherent to the region as a result of territorial and ethnic divisions.

A question was raised about the role of 'outside forces' in provoking the violence in June 2010. In the absence of a substantial investigation nothing can be stated with certainty. There are assertions that aspects of the conflict were driven (and to an extent financed) from abroad, but it is unclear how the mechanisms to drive this operate. Anthropological approaches are useful when studying such events, as they can bring to light the role of affect in political life. Analysts need to take seriously the way in which emotion is harnessed by political actors. Whilst it is important to move away from essentialist interpretations of the ethnic violence, one cannot deny that the ethnic aspect was important. Most people involved were willing participants. The violence was not simply the result of a phone call from Bakiyev in Minsk.

One participant asked what, if anything, is holding Kyrgyzstan together? Given the level of corruption, how optimistic can we be about the future of the state? It was argued in response that many states manage to muddle along and maintain some basic level of security and service provision. This is what is likely to happen with Kyrgyzstan. Most families are being sustained by remittances from Russia, so one of the greatest risks for the country is another economic crisis which hits Russia hard, or a change in Russian policy on immigration. There is still a statist legacy from the Soviet period which helps to ensure certain services are delivered. The referendum was run in a reasonably coordinated and peaceful manner. Public transport in the main cities functions. The country is not on the verge of collapse. Another participant pointed out that we should avoid idealising the state. A weakening

of central control is not inherently undesirable. The localisation of politics may bring greater stability. Assuming that the state is the ideal solution to the challenges facing the region is exactly the argument that would be put forward in a discourse of danger.

The panel was asked to consider what lessons NGOs should draw from the violence. It was argued that foreign NGOs need to engage with the sources of grievance which have become articulated on ethnic lines, for example, false perceptions of disparities in wealth. NGOs have to consider why Kyrgzstani citizens feel let down by the international community. If the population feels isolated this will inflame the situation further. There is a negative view of NGOs and western ideas of state building which has to be reckoned with. International actors must also try to think through the consequences of well-meant approaches which misunderstand the politics and are counter-productive. Plans for the reconstruction of Osh, for example, may undermine possible sources of sociability between ethnic groups and create greater division. It is also important to understand the role of local conflict prevention mechanisms, which in some places did succeed in preventing bloodshed. One might have expected the violence to spread to Uzgen, another multi-ethnic town to the west of Osh. It seems that dialogue with elders succeeded in averting it. There are indigenous mechanisms for conflict prevention which need to be built on. Efforts must be directed to helping to strengthen the rule of law. Levels of criminality, and the fate of the state, depend on the establishment of a rule of law.

Asked about migration flows from Kyrgyzstan, one participant explained that the majority of migrants go to Russia, and sometimes on to Uzbekistan. At present, many people are waiting to see how the parliamentary elections play out before making a decision on whether to leave. Ethnic Kyrgyz are also leaving Kyrgyzstan. Often people take Russian citizenship, intending to stay temporarily and send remittances back home, but eventually settle permanently in Russia.

There are few reasons for optimism about the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Religion could play a positive role in effecting reconciliation between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. There are anecdotal reports that the underground Kyrgyz Church has been visiting people and making personal apologies for the violence. This has had a positive impact. Uzbekistan's response to the crisis, and Karimov's refusal to advance any territorial claims against Kyrgyzstan is a cause for optimism. The security of Uzbeks in Osh depends on the security of Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan.

A representative of the Embassy of Uzbekistan stated that the conflict was expected by his government. The government of Uzbekistan was aware that tensions were high and that provocation could lead to violence. This is one reason why Uzbekistan responded so quickly, setting up 47 camps for refugees. The Government of Uzbekistan believes provocations are still occurring near the border. The Uzbekistani Government is working hard to protect Kyrgyz villages in Uzbekistan, he said.

Another participant pointed out that Karimov's moderate language did not reflect the feelings of Uzbek society more broadly. Moderate official rhetoric is helpful, but it is also important to consider how Uzbek officials and border guards behave when they come into contact with ethnic Kyrgyz.