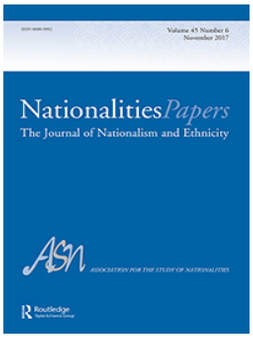

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Bottom-up peacekeeping in southern Kyrgyzstan: how local actors managed to prevent the spread of violence from Osh/Jalal-Abad to Aravan, June 2010

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In the aftermath of the June 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, much scholarly attention has focused on its causes. However, observers have taken little notice of the fact that while such urban areas as Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Bazar-Korgon were caught up in violence, some towns in southern Kyrgyzstan that were close to the conflict sites and had considerable conflict potential had managed to avoid the violence. Thus, while the question, "What were the causes of the June 2010 violence?" is important, we have few answers to the question, "Why did the conflict break out in some places but not others with similar conflict potential?" Located in the theoretical literature on "the local turn" within peacekeeping studies, this article is based on extensive empirical fieldwork to explore the local and micro-level dimensions of peacekeeping. It seeks to understand why and how local leaders and residents in some places in southern Kyrgyzstan managed to prevent the deadly clashes associated with Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Bazar-Korgon. The main focus of the project is on Aravan, a town with a mixed ethnic population where residents managed to avert interethnic clashes during the June 2010 unrest. The answers to the question of why violence *did not* occur can yield important lessons for conflict management not only for southern Kyrgyzstan, but also for the entire Central Asian region.

Keywords: ethnic violence; conflict management; social mobilization; nationalism; ethnic minorities; civil society; peacekeeping

Introduction

Why does ethnic violence occur in some places and not in other similar ones where it might be expected? This has emerged as an important question in what we call the "local turn" in peacekeeping and peacebuilding studies. This article contributes to this debate by offering a detailed analysis of how violence was averted in the Kyrgyzstani town of Aravan in June 2010.

On 19 May 2010, clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks erupted in Jalal-Abad, one of Kyrgyzstan's southern provinces, leaving at least two people dead and 71 injured. The Jalal-Abad confrontation was a prelude to a full-blown interethnic conflict that engulfed southern Kyrgyzstan in early June 2010. The conflict reportedly erupted following an altercation between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths in a small café on 10–11 June in Osh city. On 12 June, clashes broke out again in Jalal-Abad. As the violence spread in

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southern Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks appeared to be a minority group under siege. Unable to contain the violence, the provisional government appealed to the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for security assistance. The CSTO declined to intervene, citing restrictions in the mandate of the organization.

The violent conflict was a devastating blow to Kyrgyz authorities' efforts to stabilize the country two months after the April 2010 violent protests that had toppled a government. According to official estimates, more than 400 people died and thousands were injured during the weeklong unrest. According to UN data, 1749 buildings were destroyed. The monetary cost from the violence was estimated by Kyrgyz officials at $500 million. The interethnic clashes had also created a regional displacement crisis. The UN estimated that the conflict created close to 300,000, mostly Uzbek, internally displaced persons and 75,000 refugees. The region was also engulfed by a humanitarian disaster brought on by the disruption in the normal supply chains for food and other goods (Nichol 2005; Melvin 2011).

In the aftermath of the June 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, much scholarly attention has focused on the causes of the violence. Kyrgyz and Uzbek observers emphasized historical causes, pointing to the supposed centuries-old rivalry and ethnic hatred between the two groups.[1] Some Central Asia scholars argued that economic disparities among various identity groups played a far more important role than the historical hatred (*New York Times*, 14 June 2010). A third line of analysis, mainly by Western analytical agencies and human rights organizations, emphasized state weakness as the major factor that led to the violence (ICG 2010; Melvin 2011). The fourth set of observers claimed the violence was instigated by supporters of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and by opportunistic Uzbek community leaders bent on establishing Uzbek autonomy in the south (Myrzakmatov 2011). Finally, a group of scholars claimed that "the geopolitical interests of both Russia and the West, and the opportunities for corruption provided by Western financial offshoring arrangements, were important factors exacerbating the instability" (Megoran et al. 2014).

In the wake of the June 2010 violence, interpretations of the events varied markedly. The International Crisis Group claimed that the events were ethnically targeted pogroms committed with assistance of state structures. The 2011 report by the Organization for Security and Collaboration in Europe (OSCE's) Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission (KIC report 2011) claimed that given the scale of violence, it could be classified as "crimes against humanity." The Kyrgyz government rejected such a definition, claiming that the June 2010 events were an interethnic riot instigated by Uzbek separatists and the supporters of Bakiev.

Five years after the violence, interpretations of the events are still a source of contention. Uzbeks continue to assert that in the June 2010 events Kyrgyz crowds committed most of the violence and complain that they are excluded from political and economic life. They also lament they are still being mistreated by Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies – an allegation supported by international research, such as a June 2011 Human Rights Watch report detailing extensive torture and unfair trials pinning most of the blame on Uzbeks, even though Uzbeks suffered the majority of casualties. Many Kyrgyz, following increasingly nationalist rhetoric in parliament, reject claims that Uzbeks suffered disproportionately, accusing the Uzbek leaders of attempting to secede from Kyrgyzstan and thus triggering the unrest. In the wake of the violence, several Uzbek leaders fled the country and found refuge in Turkey and Western countries. In a latest controversial measure, the Kyrgyz Prosecutor's Office launched an inquiry into the details of the escape by Uzbek leaders from Kyrgyzstan (*EurasiaNet*, 16 September 2016).

Meanwhile, preoccupied with the causes of the violence, policymakers, analysts, and scholars have paid insufficient attention to the geographic variation in the extent of violence. In other words, observers took little notice of the fact that while such urban areas as Osh and Jalal-Abad were caught up in violence, some towns in southern Kyrgyzstan that are close to the conflict sites and had considerable conflict potential had managed to avoid the violence. Thus, while the question, "What were the causes of the June 2010 violence?" is important, we have few answers to the question, "Why did the conflict break out in some places but not in others with similar conflict potential?" With the exception of the emerging work of sociologist Joldon Kutmanaliev (2015), this question has not been explored by detailed fieldwork. This is a major shortcoming of the literature, because the answers to it may yield crucial lessons for conflict management not only for southern Kyrgyzstan, but also for the Central Asia region. Eyewitness reports indicate that Aravan (and other similar towns such as Uzgen) saw ethnically based mobilization in response to the events in Osh and Jalal-Abad. It was on the brink of potentially devastating violence. At the same time, eyewitness accounts show that locals had engaged in a series of conflict-prevention management measures that prevented ethnic conflict from spiraling into ethnic violence.

The article is structured as follows. First, we locate it within the "local turn" in the literature on peacekeeping studies. Second, we explain the methods we used to answer our research question. Third, we outline socioeconomic conditions in Osh and Aravan prior to the June 2010 events and explain how they differed. Fourth, the substantive section describes why the interethnic violence erupted in Osh but not in Aravan. In particular, it details the tools and mechanisms used by community leaders and residents in Osh and Aravan to avoid the violence. We demonstrate how, in Osh, several prominent Uzbek leaders and Kyrgyz law enforcement officials worked together to prevent major violence, and that when their peacebuilding work was disrupted, a major conflict erupted. In Aravan, in contrast, the section focuses on the crucial work of an ad hoc group, the Aravan Committee for Restoring Stability, which was formed in the midst of the crisis by leading representatives of both communities and assumed extraordinary powers of government during the emergency. The article concludes with reflections on the implications of our findings on the broader literature on peacebuilding in Central Asia.

This paper advances two arguments to explain why the leaders and the residents in Osh failed to stop the violence and why the local activists and residents of Aravan managed to avoid the violence associated with Osh. First, there were important structural differences between the two areas. Unlike large urban centers such as Osh and Jalal-Abad, Aravan did not witness massive in-migration of rural residents and a corresponding change in the demographic profile over the past two decades. Second, local activists in Aravan had stronger "horizontal" ties with one another than did their counterparts in Osh, and they could better coordinate among themselves because the Aravan area had fewer people than Osh. Whereas elites in Osh lacked "vertical" ties to the crowds of hooligans that attacked Osh neighborhoods, local elites in Aravan maintained direct personal ties with and control over people who mobilized in response to the outbreak of violence in Osh.

Why does violence *not* occur? The local turn in peacekeeping studies

Conceptually, this work is located within what might be described as "the local turn" within peacekeeping studies, a subdivision of the broader scholarly endeavor to understand the modern political process of "peacebuilding." A body of literature has been developed by political scientists, geographers, and others on what Séverine Autesserre (2014a) terms

"bottom-up peacekeeping." In contrast to the previous focus on peacekeeping as a technique of foreign intervention epitomized by the post-Cold War "liberal peace" (Richmond 2008), this work explores local and micro-level dimensions of peacekeeping and includes a wider range of actors in its analysis (Goetschel and Hagmann 2009).

The importance of "the local" (understood as subnational conflicts and dynamics) in statewide civil conflict has been demonstrated in the work of Kalyvas (2003, 2006). But the "local turn" within peacekeeping focuses rather on ways in which local/subnational actors manage to prevent, contain, or de-escalate violence that in other circumstances external peacekeepers might be called on to address.

Two major directions of research can be identified within this literature. The first is on local–international divergences, or how local actors resist, co-opt, transform, or adapt international practices. Research by Autesserre and Lisa Smirl focuses on how peacekeepers' assumptions, spaces, and practices insulate them from understandings of peace in the communities through which they move (Smirl 2011; Autesserre 2014b). Richmond draws attention to the frequent mismatch between local conceptions of peace and those held by international practitioners (Richmond 2008). In the cases of Tajikistan and Central Africa, John Heathershaw and Patricia Daley respectively have shown how local actors subvert international peacekeeping and peacebuilding norms and practices for their own ends (Heathershaw 2009; Daley 2014). Perhaps ironically, this scholarship remains conceptually within the terrain mapped out by liberal peacekeeping because it is primarily engaged in critiquing it. A more creative alternative is seen in the work of Sara Koopman's research on the San Jose peace community in Colombia (Koopman 2011, 2014). An ethnography of protective accompaniment, it explores how international pacifists collaborate with threatened local communities to make spaces for peace and security entirely outside of state military, paramilitary, and criminal forces.

The literature on the liberal peace has been critiqued for focusing primarily on what Lise Howard (2008) calls "the disastrous failures." Page Fortna (2008) argues that it is important to compare these against places where violence did not occur or was controlled. Studies of the factors behind successful peacekeeping operations have been conducted by Fortna, Howard, and others (Barron and Burke 2008). But these remain studies of places where violence did occur. An equally important question is why violence did *not* occur and thus why such interventions were not required.

The second major body of work within the "local turn" is on why violent conflict has not occurred in certain places where it might have been expected. In separate studies on the same two Bosnian towns, Adam Moore and Florian Bieber examine the reasons why postwar peacebuilding was more successful in Brčko than Mostar (Bieber 2005; Moore 2013). However, the most sustained research into this question has been in South Asia. The all-too-frequent descent of Indian cities into Muslim–Hindu violence has often followed a grimly identifiable pattern. A single incident (the theft of an idol or a supposed lock of a prophet's hair, the murder of a prominent individual, the desecration of a sacred site, etc.) provokes a response: "One reaction then leads to another, generating a chain, which if not immediately contained will lead to a major conflagration" (Brass 1997, 257). However, Paul Brass and others are particularly interested in why certain precipitating incidents *do not* lead to violence.

Philippa Williams provides a particularly good example from the city of Varanasi. In March 2006, suspected Muslim terrorists bombed a temple and other Hindu sites. In similar cases in India such attacks have led to communal retaliatory violence, but that did not occur here, in spite of both local and national precedents and the attempts of some extremists to make political capital from the attacks. Williams' fieldwork carefully

explores why not. She uncovers a story of the crucial role played by local Hindu and Muslim leaders, the decisive action of a central government building on a recent history of conciliatory moves to Muslims, a good tradition of communal relations, and associational ties in networks such as the silk industry that cut across communal divides (Williams 2007). Ashutosh Varshney (2001) argues that it is exactly such interethnic associational networks that play vital roles in preventing ethnic conflict (inevitable in mixed societies that are free to organize) from escalating into ethnic violence in India.

Plenty of studies critique the project of liberal peace in Central Asia (Bichsel 2009; Heathershaw 2009; Ismailbekova and Sultanaliev 2012; Megoran et al. 2014; Reeves 2014), but few explore alternative mechanisms of conflict management. David Lewis and Alisher Khamidov look at alternative "illiberal" conflict-prevention mechanisms used by strong central states in responding to the 2010 violence (Khamidov 2015; Lewis 2015). From a different perspective, Madina Akhmetshina (2012) considers women's domestic sheltering during the same events, and Aksana Ismailbekova (2013) identifies neighborhood strategies for avoiding conflict in their aftermath. But Joldon Kutmanaliev's (2015) emerging work is almost alone in providing a detailed interrogation of why violence occurred in some parts of Osh in 2010 yet not others, and why it did not occur in the neighboring small town of Uzgen, even though tensions were very high in a place that had been the epicenter of a similar tragedy two decades earlier (Tishkov 1995; Asankanov 1996). This article is a contribution to this much-needed literature on why interethnic conflict does *not* escalate into interethnic violence.

Methods

Research for this article was conducted in Aravan by the lead researcher (who comes from the town) in 2013 and 2015, which built on prior research in the same place in 2009. The researcher was in Aravan during the 2010 violence and was eyewitness to many of the events described herein. For reasons of impartiality and to conduct research amongst Kyrgyz actors, we employed a Kyrgyz research assistant. Originally from Batken oblast, the research assistant was educated at OSCE Academy-Bishkek, where he completed his master's thesis on religious leaders in southern Kyrgyzstan. Apart from being fluent in Kyrgyz and Uzbek, he demonstrated in-depth knowledge of qualitative research methods. Megoran, as co-author and research coordinator, worked on the Osh events at the same time, and has been researching social relations in rural Aravan since 1995.

We conducted 28 open-ended interviews in Aravan. Interviews were conducted with community leaders who played key roles in preventing the violence, local state officials who assisted the negotiation process, and ordinary community members who participated or witnessed negotiations/talks to bolster peace. We have sought to interview key actors from both Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities.

In particular, we interviewed the following key actors in Aravan: Paizulla Murzabaranov, head of the Aravan administration (2010–2011); Shamil Artykov, former head of the Aravan raion administration (2009–2010; 2011–2015); Iskander Gaipkulov, member of the Kyrgyzstani parliament (2005–2009) and head of the Accounts Chamber (2009–2010); Maharam Tillavoldieva, director of the local Mehr-Shavkat NGO, which focuses on community mobilization for poverty reduction; Jalolidin Hajji, chairman of Allya Anarov local government (2014–2015) and a businessman; and Omina Mamasaidova, former head of the Women's Association of Aravan and wife of Mukhamedjan Mamasaidov, a former member of the Kyrgyzstani parliament and the former rector of Kyrgyz-Uzbek University.

In conducting the analysis, we have also relied on several streams of data: (1) desk review of published material on the subject (reports on the June 2010 violence by journalists, scholars, and government officials); (2) interviews with civil society activists, community members, and social groups in Bishkek and Osh; (3) interviews with development specialists and conflict-prevention experts in Bishkek and Osh; (4) data obtained from the authors' fieldwork in southern Kyrgyzstan conducted over an extended period of time.

In interviews, we posed different questions to key actors and non-elites. To gain understanding of the timeline of the events, we asked broad questions: How did you find out about the gathering/mobilization of people? How many people did you see? How did people get to the place of mobilization? What did people demand? What did you do during the gathering?

These questions were useful because they helped distinguish among those who were directly engaged in the events, those who saw them, and those who heard about them. We sought to get the most information from the direct participants of the events. When the direct participants were unavailable, or they could not recollect information, or they provided conflicting accounts of the events, we relied on interviews with direct witnesses of the events (people who said they saw).

When interviewing key actors, we posed the following questions: What did local activists do to stop the violence in Osh/Aravan? Why did such efforts succeed/fail? Why did violence erupt in Osh but not in nearby towns such as Aravan?

The tale of two towns: socioeconomic differences between Osh and Aravan

In the introductory section, it was pointed out that important structural differences between Osh and Aravan accounted for different outcomes during the June 2010 violence. Unlike Osh, Aravan did not witness massive in-migration of rural residents and a corresponding change in the demographic profile over the past two decades. The purpose of this section is to detail the difference in the level of in-migration and the changes in the demographic profiles of the two towns.

At first glance, Osh and Aravan share some resemblances. Geographically, both are in Osh oblast close to the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan border. In terms of population, both are inhabited primarily by the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. But the differences between them are remarkable. With a population of 270,000, Osh is the second largest city in the country and an important regional trade center. Located 27 kilometers to the west of Osh and divided into two administrative districts (run by separate local governments) – Anarov and Yusupov – Aravan has 39,000 people.

Migration patterns also differed in the two areas. Amid the economic turmoil of the early 1990s, many rural residents from southern Kyrgyzstan (including Alai, Kara-Kulja, Chong Alai, and Batken raions) migrated en masse to Osh to find employment, swelling the population of Osh to 500,000 by 2015.[2] As Osh's population rose, competition among the residents for scarce resources such as arable land, water, and market stalls intensified. The population of Aravan has increased since 1991, but it was largely due to natural population growth. In 1989, the population of the Aravan raion (of which Aravan is part) was 71,214; in 1999, it reached 91,438; and in 2009, it stood at 106,134 people. Ethnic groups inhabiting the raion are Uzbeks (58%) and Kyrgyz (39%).

In the post-independence years, Osh also witnessed an informal division of sectors whereby the Uzbeks came to predominate in trade in the bazaars and the Kyrgyz established a dominant position in state administration and law enforcement. Interviews with Osh residents indicate that this informal division of sectors has not been conducive to creating

multiple and cross-cutting relationships between and among the residents. In Aravan, ties between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have been denser and more cross-cutting than in Osh. Under Soviet rule, Aravan's Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents were divided by the two *kolhozes* – Communism and Partsiezd, and the past relationships forged during collective work in the *kolhozes* lingered on into the post-Soviet period. Whereas the Osh state administration employs few ethnic Uzbeks, the two local governments in Aravan employ a mix of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. For example, the head of Aravan's Anarov district has a mixed background (his mother is Uzbek and his father is Kyrgyz). The head of the Yusupov district is ethnically Uzbek, but many of his subordinates come from Kyrgyz background. The Aravan police also employ several Uzbeks.

Osh and Aravan differ when it comes to stability of leadership and elites as well. Because Osh is larger and strategically more important, decision-makers in Bishkek have sought to control the city through appointing loyal figures. As a result, cadre reshuffles in the mayor's office and the state administration of Osh oblast are frequent. The changes in the leadership in Bishkek (as the consequence of the March 2005 and the April 2010 revolutions) contributed to instability of elites in Osh.

The cases of Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov and the head of Uzbek Cultural National Society, Jalaldin Salakhutdinov, are instructive. Appointed by former President Kurmanbek Bakiev in 2009, Myrzakmatov won popular support for his ability to efficiently address the city's problems such as pollution and worn-out infrastructure. But as Myrzakmatov's political independence from Bishkek grew in subsequent years, especially after the April 2010 events and the 2010 Osh violence, he became a threat to Bishkek. Myrzakmatov was charged with embezzlement in 2013 and was forced to flee the country in 2014. Salakhutdinov, who reportedly was Bakiev's friend, gained prominence in Osh for his ability to defend the interests of the city's Uzbek entrepreneurs relying on back-door channels to the president. When Bakiev was ousted in April 2010, Salakhutdinov's influence in Osh waned. In the wake of the June 2010 events there, he reportedly fled to Uzbekistan to avoid retribution from nationalistic groups.

Because Aravan lies on the fringes of Osh oblast, authorities in Bishkek rarely interfered with Aravan's local politics. The head of the raion administration had changed twice since 2010, but when it comes to local governments, cadre reshuffles have been rare. For example, the head of the Yusupov local government has been in office since 2005. And the head of the Anarov local government has kept his job since 2012.

The differences in the population size explain variations in the links between the officials and the residents. In a large city such as Osh, the mayors and their subordinates know the members of the Osh city council and the heads of the neighborhood committees. But as an Osh official admitted, it is impossible for them to know every resident in the city.[3] Because of Aravan's smaller size, the heads of the local governments have personal relations with many residents. As the head of Aravan's Anarov district boasted, he knows most of his district's residents.

Why did violence occur in Osh?

In the introductory section, we argued that the role played by local elites accounts for the differences in outcomes between Aravan on one hand and Osh on the other. This section demonstrates that local activists in Osh could not stop the violence because they were unable to coordinate among themselves and because they lacked "vertical" ties to the crowds of hooligans that attacked Osh neighborhoods. First, we present a brief chronology

of events in Osh, which will be followed by analysis of the role of Osh elites. As our research was in Aravan, this argument is based on a reading of the secondary literature and is used to provide a contrast to Aravan.

Events in Osh – a chronology

Between April and June 2010, as the provisional government struggled to restore order and gain legitimacy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan found itself in a state of semi-anarchy. Against this backdrop, interethnic tension was building up across southern Kyrgyzstan. A series of small brawls between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths were reported. For example, on 29 April, a brawl between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks erupted after a Kyrgyz criminal gang reportedly attempted to extort money from a group of Uzbek car traders near the Osh railway station (KIC report 2011).

These smaller incidents were a prelude to a major disaster that would erupt on the evening of 10 June. A standoff between a crowd of Uzbek youths and the police near Alai hotel in the central part of Osh had escalated into violence that night. The conflict reportedly erupted following an alteration between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth in a nearby café. As the size of angry crowds swelled to approximately 1500, the vastly outnumbered police called in reinforcements and detachments from the Osh military garrison. When hours of negotiations produced few results and the unruly crowds began throwing stones at the police and smashing the windows of nearby shops, the police and soldiers resorted to the use of live bullets, killing several men in the crowd and bystanders.

Although the use of lethal force allowed the Kyrgyz law enforcement forces to disperse the Uzbek crowds, the incident sent shockwaves across southern Kyrgyzstan, fueling various unsubstantiated rumors. One (false) rumor was that Uzbek men had perpetrated a mass rape of Kyrgyz students in a nearby dormitory. According to another rumor, hordes of Kyrgyz men were descending on Osh to wreak havoc and cause the mass exodus of the Uzbek community. Although these rumors were unsubstantiated, Uzbek residents began erecting barricades in their neighborhoods across the city of Osh.

Meanwhile, the rumor about the Uzbek mobilization and the mass raping of Kyrgyz students had quickly spread across the country and galvanized Kyrgyz residents, especially in the southern regions. The 2011 KIC report provides details of Kyrgyz mobilization:

> Large crowds of Kyrgyz began to gather, concentrated in two major areas [of Osh city]. In the western district, hundreds of local Kyrgyz assembled at the roundabout at the crossroads of Osmonova and Podgornaya streets. By midmorning on 11 June, their number had grown to about 5,000, supplemented by villagers from Leilek, Kadamjai, and Kyzylkiya regions in Batken Province and Nookat and Aravan regions in Osh Province. In the east, at the Furkhat roundabout at the entrance to Osh city, again local Kyrgyz numbering in the hundreds in the early hours of the morning were augmented by Kyrgyz villagers from outside, in particular from Mady, Gulcha, Chon-Alai, and KaraKulja. By mid-morning, according to some estimates, their numbers reached several thousand.

Emboldened by their swelling numbers, the Kyrgyz men attacked nearby police and military stations, seizing weapons, ammunition, and military vehicles.

Responding to the reports from the Osh police, the provisional government declared a state of emergency on 10 June, introduced a curfew in southern Kyrgyzstan, and dispatched a delegation of high-ranking authorities. But that did little to stop the violence. The Kyrgyz

crowds descended on Osh neighborhoods from several sides in the early hours of 11 June. When military vehicles, which unruly crowds seized from the Kyrgyz army, brought down the barricades hastily erected by the residents in Uzbek neighborhoods, extensive burning, looting, and killing ensued. The KIC report provides disturbing details of the atrocities:

> At 1.30pm, an APC, followed by armed men, penetrates the Cheremushki mahalla. Many Uzbeks are beaten or shot, women raped, and houses burnt. Near midday, an APC followed by a Kyrgyz crowd enters the mahalla [near the Al-Hakim hospital] near the clothing market. Houses are burned and many are killed.

Violence continued unabated the next day, 12 June. Military vehicles, which were driven by unruly men, broke into such Uzbek neighborhoods as Majrimtal, Cheremushki, and Furkhat. Later in the day, attackers descended on Onadyr district, Navoi Street, Teshiktash, and Shait Tebe neighborhoods. As the Uzbek barricades came down, "wholesale looting, murder, and arson took place" (KIC report 2011).

On 13 June, isolated cases of killing and looting continued, but large-scale violence began to subside as the blockade of the conflict zones by the police and military detachments had reduced the supply of food, and the rampaging crowds turned into hordes of looters and hostage-takers. On 14 June, Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies, reinforced by the arrival of police from Bishkek, began to regain control over the city. Deterred by the rising police and military presence, crowds of attackers slowly disappeared from the city streets. On 15 and 16 June, the police units assumed full control over the city and began patrolling Osh streets, enforcing the curfew, and removing the barricades in Uzbek neighborhoods (KIC report 2011).

Events in Osh – analysis

In late April and early May 2010, as reports of interethnic brawls increased, local authorities in Osh took steps to reduce tension and prevent a major clash. For example, on 2 May, the Osh mayor's office formed an advisory council consisting of representatives of the Osh police, NGOs, courts of the elderly (dispute adjudication groups), and neighborhood committees to ensure law and order in the city. The local authorities also requested neighborhood committee leaders to form community patrols groups, which would serve as early warning mechanisms for potential community violence. The authorities also reached out to owners of Osh's martial arts schools and athletic clubs to provide "muscle support" for community patrol groups (KIC report 2011). Osh Governor Sooronbai Jeenbekov, Osh Mayor Myrzakmatov, and the head of the Osh city council, Davlatbek Alimbekov, visited various Osh districts to meet with residents and to calm them. They were often accompanied by Osh police chief Kursan Asanov and Uzbek leaders such as Salakhutdinov, the Cultural Center chairman, and Inomjon Abdirasulov, a former member of parliament (KIC report 2011).

The trio of Asanov, Salakhutdinov, and Abdirasulov played instrumental roles in defusing the isolated brawls in Osh's districts (Ponomarev 2012) between April and mid-May 2010. For example, Salakhutdinov and Asanov were dispatched by the Osh city authorities to defuse tensions following the 29 April brawl near the railway station. Approximately 300 Uzbek young men gathered in a nearby school, demanding that the Osh police arrest the Kyrgyz men who attempted to extort money from Uzbek entrepreneurs. The Uzbek crowd dispersed after a meeting with Salakhutdinov and Asanov. Salakhutdinov and the Osh police chiefs assured the Uzbek crowd that they would find the individuals who engaged in racketeering.

Their ability to disperse crowds stemmed from several factors. First, each of them had a reputation as a strong leader with powerful ties in both Bishkek and Osh. A wealthy entrepreneur, Abdirasulov previously financed the construction of schools and mosques in various parts of the Osh province. Owing to his personal friendship with former President Bakiev and his wealth, Salakhutdinov was the most influential Uzbek leader prior to the April 2010 events. Although he lacked political influence and wealth, Asanov enjoyed a reputation as an honest and impartial police officer in Osh. As Ponomarev's (2012) report claimed,

> the analysis of the existing data indicated that despite the rise in interethnic tensions, the leaders of the Osh Uzbek diaspora engaged in active collaboration with law enforcement agencies, assisting in the stabilization of the situation and preventing potential escalation of street conflicts.

Two developments subsequently ended the collaboration between the Uzbek leaders and the Osh authorities. First, following the 19 May Kyrgyz–Uzbek clash in Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyz nationalists pressured the provisional authorities in Bishkek to arrest the leader of Jalal-Abad Uzbeks, Kadyrjan Batyrov, whom they accused of separatism. Because of their business and political ties to Batyrov, Abdirasulov and Salakhutdinov also became targets of harassment by Kyrgyz nationalist groups, and they were forced to keep low public profiles. Second, on 25 May, the provisional authorities in Bishkek relieved Asanov of his duties and transferred him to Bishkek. Authorities in Bishkek did not publicly explain the move, but presumably it was done because they needed Asanov to help maintain law and order in Bishkek. Bolot Nyshanov, former head of the Interpol bureau in Bishkek who replaced Asanov, lacked a nuanced understanding of a complex situation in the south (Ponomarev 2012). Moreover, he lacked crucial ties to the Osh Uzbek leaders.

When the Uzbek crowd of 1500 men confronted the Kyrgyz police on the night of 10 June near Alai hotel, Osh authorities were unprepared to deal with the crisis. In the absence of Salakhutdinov and Abdirasulov – they were in Tajikistan meeting with Batyrov – the leadership of Osh province and the city dispatched Osh oblast police chief Nyshanov, Shukhrat Sabirov, deputy mayor, and Shakir Zulimov, deputy head of Osh oblast police, to talk to the crowds (Ponomarev 2012). Zulimov recollected that he knew many Uzbek youth leaders in that neighborhood, but when he and his colleagues arrived at the site, he saw many men whom he could not recognize in the crowd. "There are many provocateurs among you, don't listen to them," he told the gathered men, but his warning was ignored (Ponomarev 2012). Attempts to convince the Uzbek crowd to disperse continued for several hours. As the negotiations stalled, some Uzbek men in the crowd became unruly and began throwing stones at the police and setting fire to nearby buildings. After a stone hit Zulimov's head, he was evacuated from the scene. In response to the escalation of violence, the Osh police detachments and the military reinforcements began to fire live weapons at the crowd.

The use of live bullets dispersed the Uzbek crowd, but rumors of Uzbek atrocities began to spread in southern Kyrgyzstan with lightning speed, galvanizing Kyrgyz communities in the eastern and western areas of Osh oblast. In subsequent hours, amid reports of a massive buildup of Kyrgyz crowds on the outskirts of Osh, local officials unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate with Kyrgyz crowd leaders. The heads of Kara-Kulja and Alai rayon appealed to crowd leaders to disperse, but their calls were ignored. The Osh mayor's appeal for calm, broadcast by local media, was also ignored by the unruly crowds.

A delegation from the provisional government assumed control over the city. But as General Ismail Isakov, the defense minister and special representative of the provisional government for southern Kyrgyzstan during the June events admitted, "nobody knew

what was going on" (KIC report 2011). Isakov also told the KIC that "not all the troops in Osh obeyed lawful commands. This included both the military stationed in Osh and two companies of troops flown from Bishkek to Osh on 11 June" (KIC report 2011). The Osh commandant, Bakhytbek Alymbekov, told the KIC he was powerless during the June events. As the KIC report (2011) indicates,

> he arrived in Osh as part of the Provisional Government delegation early on 11 June. He stated that the only troops he could control were the 50–70 strong riot police regiment flown from Bishkek. … Alymbekov stated that he was confused and did not know what to do.

Averting violence in Aravan

The previous section demonstrated that the ability of the elites in Osh to coordinate amongst themselves was impaired by a series of events. Moreover, Osh leaders lacked "vertical" ties to the crowds of hooligans that attacked Osh neighborhoods. Unlike Osh leaders, local activists in Aravan maintained direct personal ties with and control over people who mobilized in response to the outbreak of violence in Osh. This section details how they utilized both "horizontal" ties with one another and "vertical" connections with the crowds to prevent deadly interethnic clashes.

Events in Aravan – chronology and analysis

Between 9 a.m. and noon on 11 June, news about the violence escalating in Osh reached Aravan, causing confusion, disbelief, and panic.[4] Throughout the morning and afternoon, hundreds of Aravan (Uzbek) residents fled toward the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan border in the hope that they would find safety on the territory of Uzbekistan.[5]

At 1 p.m., amid much chaos and confusion about the events in Osh, approximately 150 young men gathered in Aravan's center (Ponomarev 2012).[6] Some in the crowd called for immediate armament of Uzbeks; others shouted that Uzbeks should head to Osh to aid ethnic Uzbeks there. Local officials attempted to calm the crowd and persuade them to disperse, but the youngsters appeared to pay little heed.[7]

As more people joined in (swelling their ranks to more than 500 people), the crowd became unruly (Ponomarev 2012). A group of youngsters broke away from the larger gathering and blocked the central road near the main government building. Another group attacked four police officers (all ethnic Kyrgyz) who were nearby to seize weapons from the police.[8] Chasing the fleeing police officers, the mob stormed into a government building, beat up the police officers, and set fire to two government vehicles.[9]

At around 5 p.m., emboldened by their success, the mob attacked the Aravan police station, which was being protected by a handful of ethnic Kyrgyz police officers.[10] Meanwhile, another crowd of Uzbek youngsters attacked the building of the Aravan Prokuratura (Prosecutor's Office).

Aravan's Uzbek leaders could not stop the unruly crowds, but they recognized that they needed to act fast to prevent interethnic clashes with the Kyrgyz residents of nearby villages. Maharam Tillavoldieva, the director of Mehr-Shavkat, a poverty-reduction NGO, reached out to Uzbek leaders such as Tursunbai Alimov, deputy head of the Aravan raion, Jalolidin Hajji, a prosperous businessman and a respected community leader, and Amina Mamasaidova, the wife of a former MP and rector of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University. The Uzbek leaders agreed that they needed to reach out to Kyrgyz leaders and coordinate with one another to stop violence from spreading.[11]

Developments in Aravan's Kyrgyz villages

Disturbed by the developments in Aravan and concerned for the safety of their villages, between 300 and 500 Kyrgyz men from such Kyrgyz villages as Mangyt, Kerme Too, and Tuya Moyu gathered in the Yetti-Ogayni district of Aravan on the afternoon of 11 June. Some called for marching toward Aravan and dispersing the Uzbek crowds, while others suggested sacking Uzbek neighborhoods. But the presence of Kyrgyz leaders such as Iskander Gaipkulov and Shamil Artykov, former head of the Aravan raion administration, had a powerful pacifying effect on the agitated crowd. Both Gaipkulov and Artykov called the gathered to remain calm and maintain discipline within their ranks.[12]

At 3 p.m. [11 June], Gaipkulov and his bodyguards drove in several cars to Aravan in an attempt to find and talk to Uzbek leaders, but he was forced to flee back to Yetti-Ogayni because a mob of Uzbek youngsters attacked their cars.[13] Shaken by the attacks on his entourage, Gaipkulov called some Uzbek leaders and accused them of "passivity."[14] Back in Yetti-Ogayni, Gaipkulov saw a large crowd of Kyrgyz men, some of whom had arrived from Osh to aid Aravan's Kyrgyz. The crowd grew agitated after hearing of the Kyrgyz police officers who were beaten up by ethnic Uzbeks.[15]

Relying on their pre-existing relationships with youth leaders and their authority as community leaders, Gaipkulov and Artykov threw the full weight of their influence to attempt to dissuade people in the crowds from undertaking unlawful acts. They informed the Kyrgyz crowd that they had called the authorities in Osh and requested that they send a military detachment to quell unrest in Aravan.[16]

According to Artykov, he and Gaipkulov took the following measures to calm the Kyrgyz crowd:

> We had 10–15 well-built and armed guys whom we told to keep an eye on *agents provocateurs* and to maintain the barricade that we built near the entrance to Aravan. The *agents provocateurs* who were there accused us of treachery, but we did not listen to them. To weaken the arguments of provocateurs, we told people the following: "Uzbeks have weapons, and if we will decide to descend on Uzbek villages, many innocent people will die. Do you want that?" … We also told the crowds that there was a possibility that Uzbekistan will move in its military forces to protect Uzbeks.

At around 6 p.m. on 11 June, the group of Uzbek community leaders identified in the previous section (Maharam Tillavoldieva, Amina Mamasaidova, and Jalolidin Hajji) arrived in Yetti-Ogayni for talks with Kyrgyz leaders.[17] This was arguably a risky move, given the potential for lethal violence. In interviews, Tillavoldieva said she and Mamasaidova initially had concerns about their safety if they went to Yetti-Ogayni for these talks.[18] But the fact that Shamil Artykov called her ahead of the meeting and gave her assurances that the Uzbek leaders would be safe convinced them to go. During the meeting, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek leaders agreed that they would work jointly to defuse the crisis and not allow the Uzbek and Kyrgyz crowds to attack each other.[19] Gaipkulov assured the Uzbeks that the Kyrgyz men who were controlled by him would serve as a buffer between Osh and Aravan to prevent the passage of rampaging crowds from Osh.

At 6:30 p.m., a detachment of 30 soldiers and an armored personnel carrier, which had been called in earlier by Gaipkulov, arrived from Osh[20] and dispersed the rampaging crowd of youngsters near the police station by firing shots in the air.[21] Later that night, Gaipkulov met with Artykov, Koshiev Asan (Aravan police chief), and Paizulla Myrzabaranov (head of the raion administration). During the meeting, Myrzabaranov agreed to temporarily relinquish his powers and Artykov would serve as the coordinator of the Aravan Committee for Restoring Stability, an informal structure that would play the role of government.[22]

Developments on 12 June

At 10 a.m. on 12 June, local officials from all the villages adjacent to Aravan, heads of the neighborhood committees, local NGO activists, elders, and ordinary community members came to the meeting organized by the Aravan Committee for Restoring Stability.[23] In addition to naming Artykov as the Committee's leader, participants agreed to set up a hotline to receive information about antisocial behavior, complaints, and grievances from community members. Local officials and neighborhood committee leaders assumed the task of working with the police to restore order and remove the barricades residents had constructed as protection against rampaging crowds. Finally, it was agreed that the central bazaar would open the next day to avert a potential food shortage.

In the afternoon, Artykov, Gaipkulov, and other members of the Aravan committee went to the town of Chekabad to meet with Uzbek residents who set up a camp near the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan border. As Gaipkulov recollects, "I told the Uzbek crowds that they were safe and that they can go back to their houses." Heeding Gaipkulov's call, the majority of Aravan residents who found refuge in Chekabad returned home. In the late afternoon (of 12 June), the Committee organized a communal feast of *plov* (rice and mutton) in one of Aravan's districts, an event that brought together Kyrgyz and Uzbek elders and local officials.

Subsequent developments

As violence subsided and order returned to southern Kyrgyzstan, community members across Aravan likewise began to disassemble the barricades on 13 and 14 June. The Aravan Committee for Restoring Stability continued to coordinate various community groups that were involved in bringing Aravan residents from Osh. Under the guidance of the Committee, the Aravan bazaar reopened and traders returned to their stalls. The Committee offered assistance to local farmers in delivering their produce to the market in Osh. Aravan residents also organized several shipments of humanitarian aid (mainly agricultural produce) to the neighborhoods of Osh that were hit hardest by the violence.

It is reasonable to claim that Aravan had a narrow escape from the type of destructive violence that devastated not only larger cities in southern Kyrgyzstan, but also towns of similar size to Aravan such as Bazar-Korgon. In recognition of the role played by key actors in averting the violence, on 14 June, acting Kyrgyzstani President Roza Otunbayeva visited Aravan and attended a gathering convened by the Aravan committee.[24] In her remarks about the violence in Osh, Otunbayeva laid the blame for the unrest on deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiev and commended Aravan residents for preserving stability. She also hailed Aravan as an example of interethnic harmony and collaboration.

On 15 June, the Committee dissolved itself, and the Aravan raion administration resumed its activities. Nevertheless, members of the Committee continued to provide support to the Aravan administration as advisers and volunteers.

Conclusion

On 9–10 June 2010, the interethnic violence sweeping southern Kyrgyzstan threatened to engulf Aravan, as angry crowds of rival young men gathered to fight what many on each side saw as an existential threat to their community. Yet five days later the interim president visited this out-of-the-way sleepy border town to praise it and its leaders as examples of interethnic harmony.

This paper has advanced two explanations of why the residents of Aravan managed to avoid the violence associated with Osh and Jalal-Abad. *Structural conditions* that facilitated the *role played by local elites* account for the differences in outcomes between Aravan on one hand and Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Bazar-Korgon on the other.

First, structural differences between urban centers and smaller towns matter. Unlike Osh and Jalal-Abad, Aravan has not witnessed extensive migration of ethnic Kyrgyz over the past two decades. Moreover, the settlement patterns of the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz did not change much since the early 1990s. The Uzbeks continue to inhabit the central part of Aravan, and the Kyrgyz continue to live in neighboring villages. As a result of this continuity of social forms, links between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Aravan have been denser and more cross-cutting than in Osh and Jalal-Abad. In Osh, much of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek interaction was limited to the Osh bazaar and between Uzbek vendors and Kyrgyz customers. Government agencies such the mayor's office, various municipal service providers, the prosecutor's office, courts, and even non-governmental organizations are predominantly staffed by ethnic Kyrgyz. In Aravan, meanwhile, interactions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz have taken place on multiple levels. The Uzbeks and Kyrgyz work together in government offices and non-governmental organizations. They also work in partnership in numerous farming associations. Moreover, there are kinship ties between the two communities as a result of centuries-long intermixing, which had not been seriously disrupted by migration and settlement patterns.

Second, these structural conditions allowed key actors with intergroup familiarity and intragroup authority to act swiftly to form the Aravan Committee for Restoring Stability and assume extraordinary emergency powers that enabled them to quell angry crowds and stand down the apparent provocations to violence from isolated outsiders challenging their authority.

This article has sought to fill in a gap in the study of the June 2010 violence. Students of the region have devoted considerable attention to the study of the causes of the violence, but they have paid insufficient attention to the spatial variation of violence and particularly to cases where violence did *not* occur. Such research is important in itself. But beyond that, as John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran observe, Central Asia has long been painted by international political, cultural, and academic practices as inherently prone to ethnic conflict and thus in need of external rescue from the dangers it poses to itself and others (Heathershaw and Megoran 2011). Research that uncovers internal mechanisms for preventing violence is thus of crucial value to correcting the "discourse of danger."

There are several avenues for further research. Grievances and narratives of injustice held by ethnic groups alone do not lead to violence; violent encounters are a result of coincidence of several factors and triggers through which a permissive environment facilitates the actual outbreak of conflict or violence. It is, therefore, important to look at cases of violence to understand actors, their incentives for violence, and mechanisms and triggers by which violence erupts and spreads. Unfortunately, little is known about groups of youngsters that attacked the urban neighborhoods and engaged in clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010.

In particular, two further considerations arise from returning to Séverine Autesserre's agenda for "emerging and future peacekeeping research." First, she warns against idealizing local practices and asks how their peacebuilding potential can be built on whilst avoiding their most unsavory aspects (Autesserre 2014b). The ability of key actors in the Committee to de-escalate conflict and avoid violence was predicated on their location in local, regional, and national patronage networks. Because of the weak rule of law, these networks are inherently vulnerable and unstable and are themselves conducive to the unconstitutional regime change that created the power vacuum that in turn precipitated the June violence.

This should warn us against understanding what happened in Aravan as a simple story of bad, violent young men and wise, pacific elders. Elites' ability to pacify a dangerous situation does not mean that elites are necessarily inherently agents of peace. Indeed, if the causes of peace turn out to be the same as the causes of violence, we are forced to reflect carefully on what we mean by peace and violence.

Second, Autesserre (2014b) urges scholars to explore how such "bottom-up initiatives" can "contribute to national and international peace." Here, we would sound a note of caution. Although we do think that structural socioeconomic factors that facilitated the role of key elites are a crucial element of the explanation, our data also point to the highly contingent nature of the outcomes in Aravan. Yes, we can tell a story of the skillful, timely, and brave interventions of key local actors apparently preventing a catastrophe. But a lot could have derailed the developments we identified. Gaipkulov's derogatory comments about Uzbeks could have prevented the formation of the Committee. Had Kyrgyz police officers in Aravan been lynched rather than escaped with a beating, the revenge lust might have been uncontrollable. If the angry Kyrgyz crowd or *agents provocateurs* had attacked, raped, or killed the Uzbek community representatives who arrived in Yetti-Ogayni to defuse the tension, then the Committee might never have been formed. And so on.

Returning to Paul Brass' work on intercommunal India riots, in the conclusion of his book he summarizes key variables such as the precipitating incident and whether it produces a reaction and counter-reaction, whether it is dramatized through other provocations, whether the authorities act decisively, and whether a widespread public reaction occurs spontaneously or can be generated by *agents provocateurs*. Surveying these, he concludes, "This circularity, which makes prediction difficult and all attempts at casual theorizing on such large-scale events ultimately futile, is inherent in the dynamics of riot" (Brass 2003). The ability of communities to manage conflict by preventing or de-escalating violence will always be contingent – and this is particularly the case in the unstable political context of Kyrgyzstan.

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Notes

1. Interviews with Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents of Osh, July 2015.
2. "V Oshe chislennost' naseleniia prevyshaet v dva raza ofitsial'nye dannye," *KirTAG news agency*, 31 October 2014. http://www.for.kg/news-293130-ru.html.
3. Interview with an Osh official, July 2015.
4. The author's personal observation on 11 June 2010.

5. Personal observation of one of the authors at the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan border near Chekabad, 11 June 2010.
6. Personal observation of one of the authors from the site of the gathering, Aravan, 11 June 2010.
7. Personal observation of one of the authors from the site of the gathering, Aravan, 11 June 2010.
8. Personal observation of one of the authors from the site of the gathering, Aravan, 11 June 2010.
9. Personal observation of one of the authors from the site of the gathering, Aravan, 11 June 2010.
10. Interview with Makash, an Aravan resident who observed disturbances, Aravan, April 2015.
11. Jalolidin Hajji told the authors, "I was reluctant to assume the task of coordinating meetings and people, but I had little choice. If we didn't move quickly, we would end up with a big disaster." Interview with Jalolidin Hajji, Aravan, April 2015.
12. Interview with Gaipkulov and Artykov.
13. Interview with Gaipkulov and Artykov.
14. Interview with Gaipkulov and Artykov.
15. Interview with Gaipkulov.
16. Interview with Gaipkulov and Artykov.
17. Interview with Otabek, a taxi driver who took the Uzbek leaders to the site where the Kyrgyz were gathered, Aravan, April 2015.
18. Interview with Maharam Tillavoldieva.
19. Interview with Gaipkulov, Artykov, and Tillavoldieva.
20. The military detachment was headed by Anvar Kadyrbekov, one of the commanders of the Osh military garrison. Kadyrbekov happened to be Gaipkulov's acquaintance. Interview with Gaipkulov.
21. While the soldiers attempted to subdue crowds, Artykov and Gaipkulov sought to identify and write down the names of rioting youth leaders to present this information to law enforcement authorities for subsequent investigation.
22. The meeting was held in an emotionally charged atmosphere. As Gaipkulov recollected, "I lost my temper, and I yelled and beat the *akim* [Paizulla Murzabaranov] because he lacked leadership and because he disappeared from the scene." Interview with Gaipkulov.
23. One of the authors personally attended the meeting, Aravan, 12 June 2010.
24. Authors' personal observation, Aravan, 14 June 2010.

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