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**FOREIGN POLICY INSTITUTE:
“CAN DEMOCRACY TAKE ROOT IN KYRGYZSTAN?”**

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JAMIE FLY: Okay, I think we're ready to get underway here. If everyone can take their seats. Okay, I'm Jamie Fly. I'm the executive director of the Foreign Policy Initiative. I want to welcome everyone to our event on "Can Democracy Take Root in Kyrgyzstan?" I want to thank Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for cosponsoring this event with us and their president, Jeff Gedmin, who I think is going to help conclude the event later.

The Foreign Policy Initiative is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization here in Washington. We conduct a wide range of activities. We hold regular, roughly monthly events similar to this for young professionals. We also have a Future Leaders Program which we're about to inaugurate. The deadline for applying to the program is actually tomorrow, end of day. So if you haven't applied and you're interested, you still have a little bit of time. I think more information about that is in the folders that you received.

The topic tonight, I think, is timely for a variety of reasons. The U.S. obviously has significant strategic interests in Kyrgyzstan – (audio break) – of Russian and U.S. interests. There also have been a number of recent events that have been very concerning, including human rights violations that a number of our panelists have actually been involved in helping to chronicle. So I think we'll have an interesting discussion.

I'm going to briefly introduce the moderator and the panelists and then turn it over to them. Our moderator tonight is Steve LeVine, here, immediately to my right. He's a contributing editor at Foreign Policy and the author of several books, including "The Oil and the Glory". He's also an adjunct professor at Georgetown School of Foreign Service, where he teaches energy and security in the security studies program.

Immediately to his right is James – it says James here, but I think it's Jamie Kirchick. He's a reporter, foreign correspondent, essayist and columnist. He's currently a writer at large for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and is based both in Prague and Washington. And he writes frequently for a variety of newspapers and magazines. And I think he has a piece coming out in The New Republic on Kyrgyzstan. I'm not sure if it's out already or if it's next week.

To his right is Erica Marat. She's a research fellow at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Roads Studies Program. She is a regular contributor at the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst and to the Eurasia Daily Monitor. To her right is Jeff Goldstein, who is a senior policy analyst for Eurasia at the Open Society Institute. He's based here in their D.C. office and prior to working at OSI, he was a senior program manager for Central Asia and the Caucasus at Freedom House.

So I am probably one of the least knowledgeable people about Kyrgyzstan in the room, so I will vacate the front here and turn it over to Steve to get us going.

STEVE LEVINE: Thanks. Thanks, Jamie. Thank you everyone for being here tonight. It's an incredible year, this year in Central Asia, and especially in Kyrgyzstan, what a year for news. And so this panel tonight is especially timely. I want to thank the Foreign Policy Institute and RFE/RL for putting this on. At a time of shrinking news, budgets, it's a huge benefit to all

of us who care about that region to have a news organization that is still throwing money, still robustly covering that region.

The panelists tonight each are going to speak for around five minutes and then we're going to open it up to a discussion. I hope we get something very vigorous going on the topic, "Can Democracy Take Root in Kyrgyzstan?" Some of the questions that I have are – does it matter that Kyrgyzstan is going to be a parliamentary democracy or is that just a fashionable thing right now?

What's going to happen between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks? Is there a way, somewhat, to repair what happened in June? What's going to happen to the Russian and the U.S. military bases in the region and the ostensibly non-existing rivalry between the two? And of course, what about the impact of Kyrgyzstan on Afghanistan?

So first, the first speaker is going to be Jamie Kirchick.

JAMIE KIRCHICK: Thank you, Steve. Well, I'm the least knowledgeable person about this region here on the panel. I'm more a reporter and I don't – not nearly as expert as my two copanelists. So I'm going to try to offer what I just saw, what I experienced, having visited Kyrgyzstan twice since April.

My first visit was immediately after the revolution which overthrew former President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. And it was a really heady time. People were talking about democracy. They were very invigorated. There was talk of this parliamentary democracy and it was a very positive – very positive feeling I got.

And so it really depressed me to come back two months later to see the aftermath of these horrible ethnic riots which have resulted in at least 400 deaths, but probably far, far more and 400,000 people displaced. And just walking through the streets of Osh, as I did in the middle of July, several weeks after the riots, it was very apparent, even to a "beginner," quote, unquote, like myself, where the cards lay in the city and in this country.

The Uzbek population, which is about half of the south, they were visibly affected by this. You could just tell on the looks of their faces. They were not – I don't think I saw a single Uzbek walking on any of the major streets or thoroughfares in Osh. They stuck to their homes and their neighborhoods whereas the Kyrgyz, you could see them.

They walked around like they owned the place. They were you know, laughing, smiling. It was clear that they had won some sort of victory. They felt that they'd won some sort of victory whereas the Uzbek population. We spoke to the women; they were almost all distraught, often crying, complaining about their husbands, brothers, sons, male relatives who are continually being detained by police and security forces.

So it's two different countries and a lot changed over the course of those two months. And I don't know which one is going to emerge in the next few weeks where we have these

elections coming up because there seems to be no way out for the Uzbek community. Those who can afford it, as I understand, are flying to Russia, moving their entire families to Russia.

All the plane tickets out of Osh to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Russian cities, are booked for the next several weeks, if not months. Those Uzbeks who can't afford have to stay put – and I don't think I spoke to a single Uzbek – and spending about eight or nine days in Osh – a single Uzbek who was the least bit positive about their future prospects in this country.

They are terrified of their neighbors. They're terrified of the police and security forces of the mayor, who, as we'll discuss later, many people hold responsible or largely responsible for the violence. And they have very little trust in the central government.

I think President Otunbayeva is one of a handful, if not the only, Kyrgyz politicians whose heart is in the right place and is trying to do the right thing. But she has very little power to affect change, especially in the south. As we saw a few weeks ago, when she tried to remove the mayor from office and he still there – (chuckles) – which is a very firm repudiation of the central government's authority and I think a very harrowing sign of what may come in the following weeks as these elections take place. So that's it.

MR. LEVINE: That's good. That's very good, thanks.

ERICA MARAT: Thanks for inviting me here. I'm very delighted to be part of this distinguished panel and I'll try to answer the question of the panel, "Can Democracy Take Root in Kyrgyzstan?" I personally think that democracy did take root among some parts – some groups of society, especially, you know, the well-known civil society groups in Kyrgyzstan, who advocate a wide range of issues.

But democracy is yet to be understood by Kyrgyz politicians. For a comparison, I can tell you that there are strong civil society groups that, for instance, advocate gay rights. At the same time, there are political leaders who are likely to be represented in the parliament in October who still use words or phrases like dictatorial democracy. They think this is a cool thing to do.

And that said, I think that Kyrgyzstan's short-term future is quite bleak, but in the long term, I do have reasons to be hopeful. Why do I think that the short-term future is rather pessimistic? In the upcoming elections, I see two probable scenarios playing out. First, that Ata-Meken and Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, the two biggest political parties who were the masterminds of the current constitution in Kyrgyzstan will take majority of parliament.

If this happens, then a lot of other political parties were not able to overcome – these two thresholds, the 5-percent threshold nationwide and .5-percent threshold in, you know, for each electoral precinct. They will be very much antagonized and they will form a very strong non-state opposition.

They will, again, resort to street riot politics. They will try to mobilize mobs and some NGO activists even afraid that they're going to mobilize their so-called informal armies,

basically, you know, groups of armed and physically strong men to challenge their political competitors. This is one scenario.

Another scenario is that when the Ata-Meken and Social Democrats don't take a majority in the parliament and they will have to merge with other political parties to form a majority. And this way, we'll see a more fragmented parliament and hopefully – this might be a very naïve overview.

But I know that a lot of people, at least in Bishkek, hope that the street riot politics, you know, this culture of street riots that is quite destructive, very often, will be transformed into parliament and the parliamentarians will be sorting out their issues inside the parliament. But this is a very optimistic scenario.

But if we see that neither party takes majority and not even two parties can make up majority, again, we'll still see tensions in the political domain. But then again, why do – why do I see reasons for hope in the future? I'm not the first one to say that these are the elections. These are the first elections in Kyrgyzstan, in Central Asia, that take place in an environment of uncertainty and this is a good thing already, I think.

There is no single political power that is trying to manipulate the election results. And as funny as it sounds, I think that is a change already for Kyrgyzstan. Again, it might end up quite, you know, quite sadly. We might see more violence, probably. But if these elections, in fact, do take place peacefully and are recognized to be fair and free, that's going to be a very important precedent for Kyrgyzstan. It might set a standard, a certain standard for local politicians, for local civil society groups for the future.

Because there is this environment of uncertainty and Central Election Commission is quite independent, made of different political parties' representatives and NGO activists, I can see some very, very slight changes in the way politicians campaign. For instance, my favorite example – and again, it might sound very, very naïve, but there's an uptick of Twitter users among politicians. And to me, at least, this signifies that they're trying to formulate their political messages – in the case of Twitter, in 140-symbol space – but they're trying to formulate their messages a little bit more coherently instead of just relying on bribing their voters, just relying on charity events. That's a very, very small step, but it is a step forward, to my mind.

MR. LEVINE: Should we stop at Twitter?

MS. MARAT: I'd just say one last thing. Very often, we hear that because of this chaos in Kyrgyzstan – and I'm not going to go into complexity of what's happening in southern Kyrgyzstan – that Kyrgyzstan is a failing state. There are all the reasons to say that, but to me and perhaps that's – because of my background, I think it's a state in formation – state in formation. So perhaps this chaos will end up in something useful in the future.

MR. LEVINE: Thank you, Erica. Jeff?

JEFF GOLDSTEIN: I've been asked to talk about the role of outsiders in what's been happening in Kyrgyzstan and so I'd like to begin by going chronologically what happened before April, between April and June and then after the violence in June, and finally, end up with some – what I think are recommendations for international involvement in Kyrgyzstan.

I think it's quite true to say that international involvement up until April 7th had profoundly negative effects on what was happening in Kyrgyzstan. The United States government, which was focused solely on ensuring that the United States was not kicked out of the airbase at Manas, turned a completely blind eye to human-rights violations in Kyrgyzstan, including things like murder, which had become a sort of regular part of Kyrgyz politics again under Bakiyev. I think this gave the authorities in Bishkek – contributed to their feeling of overconfidence in their position.

At the same time, there was a very general feeling among the population that the money that the United States was paying, particularly a \$280 million-a-year contract to buy jet fuel for the airbase, was feeding corruption. And I think this both had an effect of increasing public unhappiness with the government. But also in terms of what Steve mentioned, I think it has serious implications for the long-term ability of the United States to keep – excuse me – to keep open the base at Manas.

Russia also played an interesting role here. Many people point to the fact that immediately before Bakiyev's fall, Russian TV, obviously, state-controlled, began a campaign of criticism of Bakiyev and some people argue that Russia helped bring Bakiyev down. I personally don't agree with this. I think it's a lot of mirror-image thinking because for example, in 2005, everyone in Moscow was saying that the Velvet Revolution was run out of Washington.

I think this is a profoundly disrespectful view to the people on the ground because what happened in Kyrgyzstan both in 2005 and 2010 were largely driven by internal dynamics. I would also note that if the Russians were trying to drive Bakiyev, one would assume that they would have had a successor ready in the wings and clearly, they did not.

After April, I think people in Washington in the government were really energized. They were refocused on it for the first time in many years. Washington was looking at a part of Central Asia as its own entity and not simply merely a conduit to supply Afghanistan. And there was a lot of talk about doubling down on democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

The United States came up with what was a considerable amount of additional assistance for Kyrgyzstan in a year of tight budgets. Unfortunately, that all came to an end with the violence in the south. I think one of the things that needs to be looked at in terms of this was the reaction of the neighbors, which was very mixed.

I think Kazakhstan, for example, played a very mixed role. On the one hand, as chairman of the OSCE, they helped to get Bakiyev out of the country, which was, I think, very positive because the new government didn't really know what to do with him. They were afraid to arrest him but they couldn't allow him to remain in the south.

On the other hand, they kept the border closed for almost two months, which was profoundly destructive to what is already a very fragile economic situation in Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan – and it almost pains me to say it, but Islam Karimov actually played a not-unhelpful role by restraining any aggressive talk or aggressive action from his side. He did, I think, violate international humanitarian law by forcing the refugees who had come across the border to return home, clearly before most of them were ready to do that.

My concern about Uzbekistan is looking forward because by being restrained, Karimov looks good as long as the situation in Kyrgyzstan is calm. But should there be another round of interethnic unrest there and Uzbeks begin to be killed, you would have to assume there are going to be some people in the Uzbek elite who are going to say it was a mistake to be so restrained the first time around. And so I think there's no guarantee should things go badly again that Uzbekistan would be able to be so restrained. And that could have very serious repercussions for stability in the whole region.

The international community, I think, completely missed an opportunity in Kyrgyzstan. During the violence, the Kyrgyz government in Bishkek basically panicked. They asked Russia to send peacekeepers. And for reasons that are still somewhat unclear, the Russians refused.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, both of which are sort of forums to help create stability in Central Asia and were seen by some in Washington as a bugaboo and a real threat, clearly demonstrated that they are toothless tigers by being completely unwilling to react in this case.

The United Nations Security Council held one informational briefing on Kyrgyzstan after the violence and that was it. The OSCE took six months – or six weeks, I'm sorry – to agree, in the end, to send 52 unarmed police monitors to Kyrgyzstan where they could at least provide some foreign eyes on the ground. However, it took them so long to do it that people, like the mayor of Osh, we've heard about, who have their own reasons, both pecuniary and in terms of power, not to want prying eyes on the ground, were able to mobilize and basically create such an uproar in Kyrgyzstan that the police monitors have not been deployed and it's not clear that they will be deployed.

So in terms of looking forward, I would say that some of the things that the international community really needs to be doing right now, the first is there needs to be continued pressure on the government in Bishkek to deploy these police monitors. Because basically, you've heard, from what Jamie said, that you have a population down there that feels completely unprotected and completely at the mercy of both their neighbors and the powers that be.

So it's very important that you have someone on the ground that can provide some kind of feeling that at the very least, there is a deterrent element there. I think it's very important that there be programs to support police and security forces reform in Kyrgyzstan. There are very believable reports that the Kyrgyz security forces actually participated in the pogroms in June.

But this has to be done very carefully. Providing equipment and particularly, providing arms to these people is very dangerous because one of the things we saw in June was a lot of police equipment wound up in the hands of the people perpetrating the violence.

So many things that focus on training, on perhaps helping to pay these people better, trying to create loyalty because one of the problems in the south was that many of the people in the police had been appointed by the Bakiyevs and their loyalty to Bishkek was very highly questionable.

I think it's very important now that the international community has promised to provide \$1 billion, actually, \$1.1 billion in humanitarian redevelopment assistance, that the international community very closely monitors the use of these funds so that they're not wasted or fall the victim of corruption or use that is not to the liking of the Kyrgyz people.

And I think that Kyrgyzstan's civil society, which, as we've heard, is the strongest in Central Asia, can have a very important role to play there. And I think it's very much incumbent on the U.S. and other international actors to support civil society there, both to play the role of watchdog of the government, but also to provide policy advice to the government which has – I guess it would be kind of, say, very minimal human resources at this point.

Just two more things because I know I'm running to the end of my time, but it's very important that the international community keep on the Kyrgyz government to allow an open and full international investigation of what happened in June because you're not going to be able to have reconciliation until there is some agreement on what actually happened.

And as Jamie mentioned, you have this horrible situation in south where each side has its own narrative of what happened and they're completely contradictory. So until you have something out there that can be sort of a definitive judgment – and I think, given the political atmosphere in Kyrgyzstan, this cannot come out of a Kyrgyz investigation.

And finally, I think it's very important to continue monitoring the human-rights situation in Kyrgyzstan. We've just had an example where yesterday, a Kyrgyz human rights activist who is Uzbek by nationality was sentenced to life imprisonment for being involved in a murder of a policeman, an event which in all likelihood, he was not even present.

There is quite definitive physical evidence that he has been tortured. During the trial, which took place in the south, family of the victims were in the courtroom throwing, actually, objects at the defendant, intimidating their lawyers, et cetera. And basically, the trial was a farce.

And unfortunately, what you have right now with the elections coming up is this terrible atmosphere of nationalism that has taken over that I think is actually a very serious threat to the prospects of democracy in Kyrgyzstan and something that Erica didn't really mention but is a very major factor now. And unfortunately, with the elections coming up, it is in the interest of most of the parties to pander to this.

MR. LEVINE: May I stop you right there?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Okay.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, all right. I was thinking about doing it earlier, but I was interested in what you were saying. Erica, let me ask you, first. Jeff raised the issue of Azimzhan Askarov. "Bigger," meaning, than simply a trial and punishing this one man? Is there something that we need to know that's bigger than that?

MS. MARAT: Well, I think Human Rights Watch did a really great job investigating all those atrocities that were done by law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan during and after violence in Osh. But unfortunately, it's not going to change those law enforcement structures because – and even outside trainings, which already have been in place.

For instance, OSCE have been conducting some trainings; will not change the situation. What we see is an opposite reaction. They want to be even worse. They want to be even more restrictive to hide their crimes because they know they're being publicized now, their crimes. They want to hide them because they don't know how to act differently because the system is like the – unless the political system changes, they have no incentive to change.

So and this is just an example – Askarov's case an example of this broken system of law enforcement which, in turn, comes from this broken political system in the country where you don't have strong political leadership, whereas there is a situation of where state institutions are so weak.

So international society – international community can do something in this case, but they're going to solve the bigger problem, you know, of those law enforcement agencies acting so unprofessionally.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, but the thing about the – is it simply – you're saying that it's simply a reflection of corruption within the system, not a message from – I mean this particular verdict –

MS. MARAT: I think it's both. I think it's both.

MR. LEVINE: – a message from someone.

MS. MARAT: I mean I don't have all the evidence, you know, available, but it could be – it could be, you know, hatred, ethnic hatred. But it's also low professionalism. So it's these – (inaudible) – of things.

MR. LEVINE: All right. And then, Jamie, let me ask you something. Again, pivoting off of something that Jeff said: Would it matter – could it happen that an outside force – an outside – not outside peacekeeping force comes in and is it credible that it's an unarmed force?

MR. KIRCHICK: I'll just give a personal example. I got a tip when I was there about raid on an Uzbek home and I showed up and I was literally pushed into this house by a horde of Uzbek women standing outside screaming at these police and security officers to cease and desist. And behind me, were about three representatives from the U.N. human rights office, just in blue, you know, blue vest; no guns, obviously.

And it was clear from the minute we walked into this house that the situation was diffusing. I think the mere presence of Westerners really kind of the fear into the police and the security officials that they would not be able to act with impunity that they otherwise would. Kyrgyzstan is not Uzbekistan.

It's not a police state. The military may be disorganized, but they're not as ruthless as they are in some of the neighboring countries and there are a variety of reasons for that. It's also not like a lot of other conflict situations in Africa or the Muslim world where, you know, having a blue helmet is essentially a giant target on your back.

So my understanding is, is that having unarmed – whether OSCE people or just people from NDI and IRI and other civic society groups on the streets being eyes and ears would be very beneficial and cheap.

MR. LEVINE: And one wonders whether Kazakhstan has done – has adequately performed its role as chairman of OSCE.

MR. KIRCHICK: That's a whole another debate, really, is – (chuckles).

MR. LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Yeah, let's open this up. This is being videotaped. It's being taped. The podcasts will appear on the website. So therefore, when you ask a question, we're going to ask you to do it on mike and to identify yourself first. We've got one mike up here and then there's a roving mike right here. So very knowledgeable panelists; ask away. Yes, sir?

Q: Eli Lake, Washington Times. This is a question for the panel. How would you describe Russian influence on the current situation in Kyrgyzstan and you know, I'm assuming it's a mixed picture. So if you can kind of say, you know, what's good and what's bad at this point?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, I think, Russia, innately, is going to have huge influence in Kyrgyzstan by virtue of geography, history, by virtue of the fact that as of the most recent statistics, 30 percent of the Kyrgyz GDP is remittances sent home largely by Kyrgyz working in Moscow.

I think that what happened to Bakiyev was not lost on any of the current generation of political leaders in Kyrgyzstan. I think they are all very interested to have good relations with Moscow. I think just as when you talk about Washington, it's dangerous to talk about what Moscow's policy is because I'm not sure they're any more of a unified political animal than Washington is.

It was quite a surprise to a lot of people that having had an invitation to send peacekeepers to Kyrgyzstan, the Russians said no. So I think Russian policy is also still forming. One thing that they have said and made clear, as have the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks is they really don't like this experiment in parliamentary democracy. And I think there are a lot of people who feel that should they have an opportunity to help make this experiment fail, there's a significant possibility that they will take that opportunity.

MR. LEVINE: Yes, sir.

Q: Steve Bulthuis, World Bank Group. I have a question for any of you. I'm wondering if you can speak to the future of the Bakiyev clan. There is some report of volatility among his younger relatives. And I'm wondering if, secondarily, if – obviously Russia had, before the revolution, sort of started its machinations against him, but I wonder if he has any patrons in the region.

MR. LEVINE: Would you like to try that one?

MS. MARAT: No, he doesn't yet. He has no place to go, but we still – in Kyrgyzstan, you can still see traces of Bakiyev influence; a lot of politicians that are also part of the government now. They have – they still have some strong formal, you know, direct ties with Bakiyev, be that business or some political connections.

Kyrgyzstan is not a big country and everybody is somehow connected to each other, especially if at some point, they were part of his government. And many of the politicians today who are running elections who are in the government were part of Bakiyev's government.

Regarding his family, I think interest in where they are right now is kind of fading, now, in Kyrgyzstan. There are different rumors flying around. And it's sort of curious to see where the president will end up after he's no longer welcome in Belarus, which is possible.

MR. LEVINE: The last I read is he was speculating about going into the children's toy business. He gave an interview to a Russian newspaper saying this, which was very strange.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: I would just say that after the violence in June, the initial government explanation was that Bakiyev's people had paid the snipers to help create some of this interethnic clash and I think that one of the things that's very important in terms of looking at what happened is what actually was the role because some people tend to believe that the government uses it as an excuse to cover up its own failure to prevent the violence.

MR. LEVINE: Does the panel reject the notion that Bakiyev clan members needed what happened in the south?

MS. MARAT: You know, it's – I mean whoever has an explanation of what happened in Kyrgyzstan shouldn't be taken seriously. (Laughter.) But what Bakiyev did – what Bakiyev did during his five-year presidency, he basically ignored those interethnic tensions.

He didn't do anything to at least put some sort of standards, the way – you know, the way those interethnic relations should develop – exist. Unlike Akayev, who – it turned out that the previous president, the first president, Akayev, he – although a lot of his slogans, like, Kyrgyzstan is our common home; we're all for civic nationalism, including that of all ethnicities.

Even though not everyone took his policies seriously, they did somewhat work. At least they set some sort of standards in the country as to who's a citizen, what is a citizenship and what is ethnicity, which is really novel for a country like Kyrgyzstan, a post-Soviet country like Kyrgyzstan, where you know, your nationality is – how do you say – where you don't make that big of a difference, you know, between ethnicity and citizenship. So Bakiyev was guilty in that sense.

MR. LEVINE: Yes, sir, right here.

Q: Hi, I'm Bilal Hab (ph) from George Mason University. My question is, there is a connection that I didn't hear is, you said that nationalism is rising. You also said that, like, many of the Uzbeks actually fleeing Kyrgyzstan, but there is also an election coming up soon. And then you said that there's violence and the region may be destabilized. Don't you think that the elections, then, are premature?

MR. LEVINE: Would anyone like to volunteer for this one? Do you have a preference for whom?

Q: No, just the answer. (Laughter.)

MR. KIRCHICK: I would say, you know, this government – it's legitimate at this point that there was a referendum two months ago, although which – something like 90 percent of the – or 70 percent of the people voted, 90 percent in favor. It's a little unclear how representative that poll was. But this current government has the support of most of the people.

But you still, it's still running on empty in the sense that there's no parliament. I mean you have a provisional government of 12 or 14, I believe, pretty disputatious power-hungry people, you know, vying for power. So you, at some point, you have to channel this frustration into something legitimate and that's a parliamentary election.

So President Otunbayeva has said that she has the ability to postpone the election, if need be. She can call a state of emergency if need be, but something has to happen sooner or later or else things could really boil over. I mean the Uzbek population needs to feel some sort of representation in the government.

That was a major reason why these riots happened in the first place is that they were making a good faith effort to become more involved in the political process and every attempt that they made was met with rejection from the larger society. So I think that this is the best hope in terms of providing stability.

MS. MARAT: Yeah, it's sort of – after a referendum, it's sort of an act of statehood. That's the way you localize – (inaudible) – you know, that there is a state across the country, not just in Bishkek. Like a lot of international experts warn that the referendum was too early to take place, you know, two weeks after Osh violence, Osh and Jalalabad violence. But it did take place and it seemed to go well. So and that – we hope that parliamentary elections will go as planned as well.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: You know, I think that the fact that the elections bring with it risk is not an argument not to have them. But I do think in terms of what Jamie said that one of the real issues out there is going to be are there any parties that are going to be brave enough in the face of the wave of nationalism to actually reach out to the Uzbek voters because one of the results of this election could actually be that the Uzbeks feel even more disenfranchised than before.

So I mean that remains to be seen. It's a very politically dangerous move in a country where the vast majority of voters are, in fact, Kyrgyz, now, to be seen as being too overtly stretching a hand out to the Uzbek minority.

MR. LEVINE: Yes, ma'am. You first. You also, incidentally – for the people in the front, there's a mike right here.

Q: I like it carried. (Laughter.) Melinda Haring, National Democratic Institute. Erica, of the parties that are participating in the parliamentary elections, are any of them talking about reconciliation as a major issue that they'll tackle? And in your view, which of the parties that are participating would do the most to further reconciliation with the south? Thanks.

MS. MARAT: That's a great question. Well, there are 28 parties as I know as of today that are registered with the central commission – Central Election Commission. No one really bases their – sadly so – no party really bases its political campaign on reconciliation efforts. They do mention that we need to live in peace; we're willing to (build a ?) better future for Kyrgyzstan.

But you know, you've got to understand that the situation is so complex right now. So suddenly, your ethnicity matters a lot and suddenly, whatever you say is taken against you or in support of you. So if you say that we need reconciliation, interethnic reconciliation because this and that happened, automatically, you lose part of support.

And it's like going beyond those just very, you know, very vague slogans is very difficult at this point because there is nothing to agree upon like what caused it and what is going to – where it's going to.

And as Jeff mentioned, there is strong nationalism felt, especially Kyrgyz media – not all Kyrgyz media, but in some Kyrgyz media that are allowing themselves. They're using this freedom of speech and allowing themselves to position as, you know, to sort of suppress verbally ethnic minority. And this type of behavior is not countered by Kyrgyz politicians or very rarely countered, you know, criticized by Kyrgyz politicians. So that's very sad.

So to answer your question, no, there is no single party, no party that is actively promoting reconciliation.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: And I would actually say that there are some who are actively propagandizing the other way. There was an interview today in Ferghana.Ru with the leader of the Ata-Jurt, which is a party in the south largely created by people who are linked to the Bakiyevs, which is – stridently nationalist would be a nice way of saying it. (Laughter.)

MR. LEVINE: Okay, yes.

Q: Hi, I was wondering if you could speak –

MR. LEVINE: Could you identify yourself?

Q: Oh, I'm Bronwyn Dessinna (ph). I was actually part of the subcommittee on national security's investigation – congressional investigation on Red Star contracts and the relation to Manas.

And I was wondering if you could comment further on the bidding war that occurred between Russia and the U.S. for Manas. Clearly, the lease is going to be under review again once the new government is in place. And I was wondering if you thought that there was a probability of what Bakiyev had done originally, which was prompting a bidding war between Russia and the U.S., and how likely that would be with the new government to raise money and also what Russia's stakes would be.

MR. LEVINE: Who's the question for?

Q: Anyone.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, I think that Bakiyev did an excellent job of selling the same carpet multiple times. What the U.S. had promised for Manas was a certain amount of money in assistance programs. When Bakiyev threatened to throw them out, all of a sudden, it became cold, hard cash. And now, the United States is on the line to pay \$60 million for a lease on the base.

What will happen after the elections or during the election campaign is up for grabs. There have been some very, sort of, yellow journalism articles in the press the last couple of days saying that now, there's been a secret deal to extend the base and suggesting that the money that's being paid for it is going into the pockets of the government for fueling their election campaign.

So I think there is a prospect in there to have this issue become, sort of, made more populist through the election campaign. I think in the end, the line the Russians are taking now is that we have no problem with Manas being there as long as it's there for a limited period of time, that it's there to help fulfill a mission.

When that mission is fulfilled, it should leave. It should not be sort of a base for American influence in the region. So I don't really see that there's necessarily going to be much basis for competition there. But again, as I said, it's very dangerous to talk of Moscow as a foreign policy whole. Are there people influential in Moscow who would love to see us out of Manas? Absolutely.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. Phil?

Q: Thanks, I'm Philip Shishkin. I'm a freelance journalist and a fellow at the Asia Society. My concern – and I wonder whether you share this – is the whole notion of democracy in Central Asia has been damaged, if not shattered. I mean, Kyrgyzstan has always been the sort of the display case of Central Asian democracy.

I think Akayev once said that if the Netherlands is the country of tulips, we're the land of NGOs and sort of all the surrounding countries really viewed it with a huge concern. People like Karimov and Nazarbayev, they really did not like having this sort of thorn – this democratic thorn in their side.

Now, we've had two revolutions here, each one with an aftermath that's been ugly. And so you know, it's been of great benefit to people like Karimov and Nazarbayev, who just anointed himself, I think, president of perpetuity, basically.

MR. LEVINE: Phil, you have to ask a question. (Laughter.)

Q: The question is whether you think that the idea of democracy in Central Asia has been completely shattered now and whether people like Karimov and Nazarbayev have won with their alternative models of governance?

MS. MARAT: Can I answer?

MR. LEVINE: Sure.

MS. MARAT: You know, there are politicians – to me, like, the way I see it, there are two types of politicians in Kyrgyzstan. And of course, there are overlaps. There are those who use – who say that they are for a dictatorial democracy, trying to sound democratic, but in fact, referring to – making references to Marxism and Leninism and all those. You know, they're basically carrying all those Soviet knowledge of what politics should look like.

And there are also others who are trying, who are struggling, somehow, to make a difference in Kyrgyzstan and they're not necessarily the young people. You know, there are some young politicians in Kyrgyzstan who say that dictatorial democracy is a good thing or you know, authoritarian leadership is a good thing.

But there is – there are some politicians and also NGO activists who say – who are so motivated by the idea that if democracy fails in Kyrgyzstan, if we don't succeed, then it will fail for the region. So it's like it's something powerful.

And this was – this mindset was established in '90s, where in fact, Kyrgyzstan was a more liberal country. It was not a strong country but it was liberal country. So this sort of experience, this memory of that mindset; it still carries on and it might try not to be a quite powerful motivation for good action.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: I mean, I would argue that the fact that Karimov and Nazarbayev are so concerned about what's going on in Kyrgyzstan is evidence that they don't think the idea of democracy is dying in Central Asia and they're quite afraid of it.

Regardless of what happens in Kyrgyzstan, I mean after all, at some point, both Nazarbayev and Karimov are going to pass from the political scene. And yet, the systems they've created have no mechanisms to determines what happens then. So I would not at all see this in terms of one model being proved right or wrong. This is an evolutionary process that's going to take many, many years.

MR. LEVINE: Very interesting questions. I want to go – anyone in the back? You guys silent back there? Okay, I'll consider this the back – this, with the glasses, yes, you. Yes.

Q: Henry Myerberg from New York. Just a question, generally, are any of the politicians talking about the economic vision in Kyrgyzstan besides talking about the, you know, the politics of the situation, vying for power. Like, what is going to make Kyrgyzstan a viable democracy without an economic plan seems, you know, like half a story.

MR. LEVINE: Did you identify yourself as from New York? (Laughter.)

Q: I said it because I'm an architect of New York. I just happen to be working in Kyrgyzstan.

MR. LEVINE: Okay.

MR. KIRCHICK: Well, last time I was Kyrgyzstan, I met, actually, with a group of young libertarians who have started a new think tank called the Central Asian Free Market Institute and they're a really impressive group, like, very young – 22, 23, 24 – fresh out of college, which is – that's a very inspiring thing to me. They were citing Hayek to me and you know, sounded kind of “tea party”-ish. (Laughter.) But you know, it's better than sclerotic state control of the economy. The acting economic minister now is a man who I met back in April when he was just running a tour company, and now he's the acting economic minister.

So I definitely think that there's – there's definitely an entrepreneurial spirit in Kyrgyzstan that's reflected sort of in the marketplace culture. And I do think there is hope for a more, kind of, free-market economic model taking place.

But what's really – what really disadvantages Kyrgyzstan is that there's no natural resources to my knowledge, or very minimal. And there's some gold, I guess, but compared to its neighbors, it really lacks those. So it's hard for it to find a real economic base. Most of the

economy is sort of black market, unofficial. The drug trade is obviously very powerful. That's the real major challenge that the country faces.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: You know, I would say that Kyrgyzstan has some real economic challenges in front of it. In addition to what Jamie has mentioned, the biggest industry in Kyrgyzstan up until April was a – (inaudible) – shipment of Chinese goods into the rest of Central Asia because as a member of the Eurasian Economic Zone, they had lower tariffs. So they would take goods from China, re-label them as Kyrgyz and export them.

Well, now, Kazakhstan, their biggest market for these goods, has joined a customs union with Russia and Belarus, on the outside of which Kyrgyzstan now finds itself. And so this, which was, along with remittances, one of the biggest economic props of the system, has now been kicked out.

I think one of the small sort of silver linings of what happened in June, very small, in some polls that were done by NDI right after the April events when people asked what do you want of the government, economic issues were all at the top. Employment, increased income, better social benefits, et cetera.

Polls taken after June show that these now are a very much secondary concern to people. What they want is stability and security. So in that sense, the new government which comes in after these elections and if the elections are in early October, depending on how long it takes to form a government, it could be November before it's formed.

They're coming in right before winter in a part of the world that sometimes has very bad winters. So I think this fact has meant that the bar, economically, has been lowered for whatever the new government is going to be, at least in terms of getting through the first winter.

MS. MARAT: Can I add something?

MR. LEVINE: Yes.

MS. MARAT: Just very quickly. I think about 80 percent or 90 percent of political parties that are – actually have a political program, they identify themselves more as leftists than as you know. So they basically – they're all for nationalized economy, nationalizing you know, major natural resources, et cetera.

But the thing in Kyrgyzstan now is that the government doesn't really have to support the population because the population – there is this welfare formed from migrants, remittances that the population – that the majority of the population survives on. And it's a very huge disincentive for anyone, you know, any political force to come up with efficient economic policy.

And if you listen to debates, a lot of them are staged by RFE in Kyrgyzstan among different politicians. They don't have anything to say about economics. They don't have any – they don't even know the linguistics of you know, economics. So but what we need to do and

hopefully, with the help of international community, is that all those remittances are still, you know, Kyrgyzstan is still at the stage where all the remittances are consumed, you know.

They're used for consumption for goods. They're not reinvested. So this is something that has to happen in Kyrgyzstan like it happened in other countries, like India, like Bangladesh, for instance or Latin American countries. So I think this is something to consider in the future.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. Yes, sir. Yeah.

Q: Hayden Hurst from ManTech, International. The gentleman on the left, in your initial speech, you mentioned that the United States had cooperated with the Bakiyev regime, who was complicit in a variety of items, including murder.

I think, however, that a majority of people would say that the United States cooperates with a variety of other odious regimes. They've done so in the past. They continue to do so now. I'm curious if, specifically with regards to Kyrgyzstan, do you think that some sort of red line was crossed in terms of particularly support for an exceptionally gross violation of human rights? Thanks.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, in February of this year, there were parliamentary elections in Tajikistan which were quite bad elections. And the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe put out an exceedingly long and very detailed press release talking about the people they had sent out to observe the election and all the violations that they had seen and what their conclusions were.

Seven months earlier, in July of last year, there were presidential elections in Kazakhstan. The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek put out a statement that was this long that basically said we agree with the OSCE about what they said. That was it. What's the difference in terms of U.S. interest in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan? There's only one, and that's the base.

So yes, I think when you look at how different the U.S. reaction was in Tajikistan and it was in Kyrgyzstan, it's very clear that because of our interest in not getting thrown out of the Manas base, the United States took a different attitude.

MR. KIRCHICK: Can I just add – you know, it's understandable that the United States would turn a blind eye to a lot of abuses in Kyrgyzstan prior to the revolution. The only problem to that sort of approach in foreign policy is that when the guy that you're supporting gets overthrown, the people who take hold after him tend not to like you and tend not to appreciate all the support that you gave him prior.

I arrived in that country hours after he was kicked out and I rarely came across any pro-American sentiment. And we're now in a situation where we don't know what the future of the base is going to be. So it's just very – I mean, supporting dictators unconditionally, I think, is just a very irresponsible and unpredictable policy and that's the major lesson from Kyrgyzstan.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. Now, I've been told I need to take two or three more questions. But I was also told that we're going until 8:30. We're going till 8:00 or 8:30. It's five minutes

to 8:00 and we have a room full of people. (Laughter.) We're going to have a riot. All right, okay, all right, all right. Okay, okay. (Laughter.) Okay, all the way in the back.

Q: Justin Polin from the Hudson Institute. I was wondering if the violence in the south and the general dispossessed nature of the Uzbeks has allowed or offers the opportunity for Islamist movements to gain the foothold among that population?

MR. KIRCHICK: The Islamists argument, I think, was seized upon by the government in addition to the Bakiyev excuse, you know, this was Islamists who are drug traders who provoked this violence. And in that sense, I think it's a chimera. I don't think Islamists were in any way responsible.

I've spoken to Islamists when I was there. They didn't really have a reason to do this. Most of the Islamists in Southern Kyrgyzstan are Uzbek anyway, so it wouldn't have made sense to launch a pogrom against their own ethnic brethren.

The only sense in which I think that this opens up a door for Islamists is that the Uzbek community may become so desperate as the situation deteriorates that they may see the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan or Hizb ut-Tahrir or some of these other local Islamist groups as being their only line of defense.

And they may be, you know, more willing to accept them into their neighborhoods and more willing to cooperate with them should they feel very desperate, you know, in the face of their neighbors, in the face of the security forces, in the face of the police. So in that sense, of the situation deteriorates, you could see a door open for increased Islamist penetration of southern Kyrgyzstan. I don't know if that's –

MR. LEVINE: Yeah? Okay. Josh?

Q: Josh Kucera. I'm a freelance journalist. To follow up on that, so you guys have, I think, correctly, said that the Islamists and the Bakiyevs were not to blame for the Osh violence. You've all kind of supported the theory that, yes, that this was an ethnic – there was a lot of ethnic tension that led to this.

But I think a lot of the evidence has shown that these pogroms were really well-organized and that the security forces took part and that there was a lot of advanced planning. So the question then is, it seems like these weren't spontaneous manifestations of ethnic discord; that somebody was behind them. So who was it?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, I mean, I, again – I think what's necessary is for someone who does not have a dog in this race to go out there and do an investigation to determine what really did happen. I can give you opinion, but it's just that.

I would say, based on what I saw in Osh that, yes, a lot of the violence was organized. It was clear this was not just random people attacking random places. But again, that being said, there are groups, international organizations that specialize in going in and finding out what

happened in this kind of situation. And until that's been done, I think it's really somewhat irresponsible to speculate.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, right here, this man.

Q: I'm Johan Engvall from Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and I have a question and that's about – can a parliamentary system really work in Kyrgyzstan despite the tradition of – maybe not today so much clans, but families that they're competing with each other? Even if it didn't work under Akayev and Bakiyev, turned out to be weak leaders, but can you – you may still argue that you know, there's a need for some force that can stand above these competing families.

MS. MARAT: That's a good question. You know, there was a joke in Kyrgyz media saying that if you look at the party list of all the, you know, all parties, you can see the leaders of those parties, you know, as ranked first in the list, their families, their extended families, their livestock and something else, basically ridiculing that. It's like parties represent families – family or group of families.

I want to believe that the parliamentary system is going to succeed, but the truth is we don't know. That's the truth. And it might turn out to be, you know, something viable for at least some period of time.

It's definitely going to take months for parliament, whatever the configuration is, to select the government, the ministerial cabinet and the prime minister. And there is going to be a lot of intrigue because, you know, importantly, politicians don't know how to do that. They don't understand it yet. They're discovering it as we do.

If this dynamic plays out, if those families, friends – you know, livestock – (chuckles) – if they find ways of existing in this chaotic situation, maybe there'll be stronger competition for a good leader and some good leader will come out of this chaos. But again, it might just turn out to be total collapse.

MR. LEVINE: All right. Yes, sir?

Q: Thank you. My name is Paul Koring. I'm a journalist for The Globe and Mail of Canada. I'd like to pull the lens back a little bit, if we could.

I've heard all three of you talk about, sort of, the need for outside involvement, for support of civil institutions, for America and the West to pay attention. It seems to me far more likely that, at least in terms of this administration and most of the close Western allies, there is a quite keen interest in disengaging from Central Asia, in finding a way out of Afghanistan, finding a way out of the region, not looking for more involvement and more problems.

Whether that is smart policy or not, it does seem to me to be the direction that things are going in. If I'm correct, if that happens, and if you get a rapid disengagement, what impact will

that have on Kyrgyzstan? Disengagement rather fast, I mean. Who's going to fill whatever vacuum that leaves?

MR. LEVINE: Who wants to take a big picture?

MR. KIRCHICK: I mean, I think there are some factors that actually would argue against that. Energy resources in Central Asia aren't going away. The U.S. is going to be interested in that; Europe will be interested in that. Interest may be low now because the economy is in a low state and the needs for those resources are low at the moment, but it's still a very significant – I mean, Kazakhstan is one of the leading producers of oil and gas in the world today and that's not going to change.

The fact that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and all of Central Asia are located between Russia, China and the West, that's not going to change either. I do think it is true that what happens with Afghanistan has had an unfortunate impact on Central Asia because, as I mentioned, the United States has tended to look at Central Asia more as an adjunct to Afghanistan policy than as a region of its own.

And again, if anything good, maybe, has come out of this, it's that hopefully, it's caused at least some of the policymakers in Washington to realize that it's in the United States interest to have a policy towards Central Asia in and of itself.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, okay. Yes, sir?

Q: Well, as we sit here in Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty – sorry, Alex Jillions from National Democratic Institute. And I wanted to ask a question about media, particularly in the south, probably to Erica Marat and Jamie.

From your travels in the south, at least, I'd like a little sense of what citizens in the south are seeing on television, are reading in the media, are listening to on the radio. And in particular, what are they hearing about reconstruction and reconciliation efforts from the national stage? So maybe you could talk about that.

MS. MARAT: Do you want to –

MR. KIRCHICK: Well, I can only tell you what I heard from a couple of people. State television, as I understand it, played a very negative role in all of this, in telling a very one-sided Kyrgyz narrative of what happened. One Western aid worker who I interviewed said he spoke to an Uzbek woman who flipped on the TV to see her destroyed home with a crying Kyrgyz woman outside of it, pretending that it belonged to her, and that these sorts of images were rife on television. So this is what Kyrgyz are hearing in terms of the media.

In terms of the press, the print press, newspapers, there's been an uptick in, sort of, this nationalist sentiment. So this is why, if I can do a little promotion and get some chips from my boss, Radio Free Europe has played such an important role in this country because there are so few reliable sources of information, in terms of the local media, local Kyrgyz media, certainly

not telling a fair story. So it's important that BBC, RFE/RL and the Western press tell what's actually happening.

And what's so depressing about this is that when I was there in July, it was like being in a country of deluded people. I mean, I was very hard-pressed to find a Kyrgyz person who would just be open and honest about what had happened. I was told dozens of times that the Uzbeks burned down their own homes, which I know sounds preposterous and it is, but this is what they were told. So it's going to be very difficult to, you know, change hearts and minds.

I mean, Western journalists were really vilified when I was there. We were looked at very suspiciously. I was told frequently that Western journalists were purveyors of Uzbek propaganda, that because we relied disproportionately on Uzbek stringers or the wire services have relied on Uzbek – I don't even know if this is true or not – but most of the stringers in the south are Uzbeks and therefore, they're giving the Uzbek side of the story. So the media played a largely negative role in fomenting a lot of this.

MR. LEVINE: Erica?

MS. MARAT: Unfortunately, I'm not ready to answer this question because I haven't been there since the violence.

MR. LEVINE: Both of you are going? Are all three of you going?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Yes. I was there in July and I'll be going back.

MS. MARAT: Oh, okay. You have more to say. Let me just say a few things about Kyrgyz media. And I hope, you know, I'm going to see – what I'm going to say – you're not going to see an ethnic Kyrgyz in me – but I have a lot of journalist friends in Kyrgyzstan, in Bishkek in particular, who speak Russian, who kind of speak Kyrgyz. And ethnicity didn't matter to them, right? Suddenly, as violence broke out, they became Kyrgyz, or like half-Russian or half-Uzbek or Uzbek.

There was a fair amount of reporting about, you know, atrocities against Uzbeks. But for those journalists for whom ethnicity suddenly became an issue, they were asking themselves: Why can't we treat everyone as a citizen, you know, as citizens? Why can't we report that there was one Russian who died, or you know, two Kyrgyz who died? So it was a counter-reaction to the narrative that was purported by international media for very good reasons.

But it was suddenly, you know, for instance, some people would argue that Kyrgyz – homes of Kyrgyz were not destroyed; that's why international journalists did not see the suffering of Kyrgyz people at this point. Things like this, if I say about them, for instance, if my friends in Bishkek say about this, they are automatically taken as being nationalist, as being protective of their ethnicity.

At the same time, you know, journalists and NGO activists did condemn this violence and they did feel very apologetic in front of ethnic minorities. And there are other journalists

who are more assertive in their feelings, you know? They see it as a chance to protect what they see the underdog in this international reporting. They say, well, if we see – if we have 400 Uzbeks who died, why does 10 Kyrgyz who died not matter? So I'm just trying to explain to you the psyche.

MR. KIRCHICK: When I was in Osh, even Kyrgyz there said that they felt that the government was using TV to portray the situation as more stable than it was.

MS. MARAT: Yeah, that's true.

MR. KIRCHICK: And they believed that the people outside of the south had no conception because of this of just how fragile the situation was.

MS. MARAT: That's true. That's one thing that's true, that the government tried to present a more rosy picture. That's absolutely true.

MR. LEVINE: I want to go again to the back, all the way, all the way in the back, that I can't even see – yeah, there it is.

Q: Hi, my name is Pete Jed Allen (sp). I'm currently a Georgetown law student, but was formerly the Kyrgyzstan desk officer for the Department of Defense in 2008-2009.

I'm just curious if any of you has a sense for – there may be some more tweeting going on now, but I suspect that most of Kyrgyz politics will still be dominated by money. I wonder if any of you has a sense for where control of a lot of the cash-bearing assets has gone now that Maksim Bakiyev has been kicked out of the country, and whether that can give any indication for where the politics may go.

MR. LEVINE: Anyone want to take a stab at that?

MS. MARAT: Well, I don't know if you heard that the government now announced this financial amnesty initiative, that all those – they're targeting all this money made by the previous families that somehow – that this money returns to Kyrgyzstan. So far they haven't been successful. But in terms of where this money went, to offshore accounts. I don't have more information on that. There were articles on that written.

MR. KIRCHICK: All right.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Good question.

MR. LEVINE: Yeah, very good question. All right, this hand in the back as well.

Q: Hi. Miriam Lansky, National Endowment for Democracy. Jack, I want to thank you for mentioning Azimzhan Askarov. He's been a grantee for about 10 years and he was, as you said, sentenced to life a couple of days ago. There's been a tendency – and I wonder if some

of you might comment on this – in the investigations to blame the Uzbeks for what happened to them and to try to kind of subvert a legal, normal due process.

There's also been – okay, we can understand that the president might not be able to remove the mayor of Osh, but apparently the president can't move a couple of cases from the south to the north. What does that mean? Has the president, for instance, been able to remove the prosecutor, Beknazarov? What do these kinds of tendencies say? There are plenty of people in the provisional government who have loyalty bases in the south – Beknazarov being one, Tekabayev being another. Can you speak to that a little bit?

And another that bothers me that I'm sort of curious what you think about is the plans for rebuilding Osh, that certainly belong with the current government, that would displace Uzbeks from the traditional way in which they've lived for hundreds of years and put them in high-rises. What do you think about such plans?

MR. LEVINE: Are you asking a specific person?

Q: I'm putting a – I think questions of responsibility have come up already, and I'm throwing a couple of things out there.

MR. LEVINE: All right.

Q: And anyone can respond, but these are fairly pointed questions. I'm wondering what you think.

MR. LEVINE: No, I'm interested too to hear this.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: I mean, I would say in the Askarov case, the failure of the president to have the trials moved to the north is an admission of political weakness on her part. The fact that she has recently replaced the supreme court chief justice may eventually play a positive role because the lawyer for Askarov has indicated he will appeal, first to the next layer, which would be the Jalalabad regional court, where I don't think we can expect any better treatment, but then eventually it will reach the supreme court.

So conceivably, something better could happen there. It was unfortunate that the United States embassy was not represented at the trial, although there were observers there from the EU and ODIHR. I understand that the security officer at the embassy felt it would have been too dangerous, but that was unfortunate.

The embassy did put out a press release, which I think was at least a small step in the right direction. I think a lot of international pressure needs to be brought to bear, including and up to questions of how much of the promised international aid – not the humanitarian part, but the redevelopment part – should go ahead in a condition where the government is not assuring basic fairness in this process.

MR. LEVINE: Does anyone else want to take a stab at that?

MS. MARAT: I do have a little hope and believe that the government is going to do something about it. It's unfortunate what happened and if the government does not do something about it, then it is really bad. This government does not deserve support.

MR. LEVINE: But the question isn't just about this case. Can the government in Bishkek enforce its will?

MS. MARAT: I think it can. I think it can. It can't vis-à-vis the mayor, Myrzakmatov, but when it comes to courts, I think Otunbayeva has power over the courts.

MR. GOLDSTEIN: There may be also a window of opportunity immediately after the election, before the new government is formed. Because then you don't have to worry about how any action you take is going to affect the vote and anything that's done does not cause problems for a new government that's not set up yet. So perhaps there is some window of opportunity to move forward in that period immediately after the elections.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, right here.

Q: Thank you. I'm Dawn Calabria from Refugees International. And like many of you, I was in Osh on July 2 for a week. And when you talk to Kyrgyz victims and Uzbek victims, what they all said was, we need real information; we would like to have journalists tell us what is happening; we don't know what's happening. When I talked to a group of Kyrgyz displaced women and we talked about this, someone said, well, maybe we could get them some radios.

They were very afraid. There were all these rumors. They were going to be attacked every night; they were going to be killed. They were being guarded by a group of policemen in the place where they were, the summer camp. And one of the women in the back raised her hand and said, our television tells us nothing. There's no truth on our television. So I think the role of journalism is really important.

One of our concerns about the situation in Kyrgyzstan is there are 75,000 displaced persons who have no homes. The government in Osh has done everything it can to restrict the ability of people whose homes were damaged to rebuild.

MR. LEVINE: Is there a question?

Q: The question is what's going to happen to these people if the mayor of Osh insists that they're going to go into high-rises where they're going to live for the next two years?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: I think he's paving the way for another riot, or even worse, another round of pogroms – ethnic cleansing, forced relocation. He's really playing with fire. And unless he's dealt with – I mean, he is the problem – and unless he's dealt with, then I see no alleviation of the situation.

Q: Andrew Fink. I'm at Booz Allen Hamilton. Mr. Goldstein, what is your read on the reaction of the Communist Chinese to both the political and the economic – and their interest, both political and economic – in the situation in Kyrgyzstan since April?

MR. LEVINE: Could you repeat the question?

Q: Oh, sorry. I'm running on not much sleep. What are the – or, would you like me to repeat the question?

MR. LEVINE: No. I just mean louder.

Q: Yes, I'm wondering about your read on the reaction of the Communist Chinese to the developments in Kyrgyzstan since April?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: The Chinese government has been studiously quiet on the situation. Immediately after the events of April 7 in Bishkek, when some people took the opportunity to loot stores, including Chinese-owned stores, they did evacuate a large number of Chinese citizens from Kyrgyzstan. I'm actually, frankly, not aware to what extent these people have returned since. But the Chinese government has, as far as I know, not really had any comment, either bilaterally or in terms of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where they are, of course, also a member.

MR. LEVINE: Okay, I'm going to take three more questions. First, this one here.

Q: Mr. Kirchick, both you and the woman who asked a couple of questions ago, sort of, evoke a situation of two very ill-informed populations living in kind of mortal fear of each other, in close proximity. And it sounds an awful lot to me like, you know, Rwanda or a situation like that. And I'm wondering, do you get the sense that this is, sort of, about to go nuclear, so to speak? And if so, what do you think the U.S. and the international community can do to prevent it from happening?

MR. KIRCHICK: Yeah, I mean, I've very hesitant to make dire predictions or compare the situation to Rwanda or Bosnia. But there are similarities. I mean, people were painting the word "Kyrgyz" on their homes to ward off attackers.

Ethnic abuse, in terms of epithets – like the word "sart" (ph), which in local dialect is a term of abuse, has been directed – from what I have heard anecdotally from Uzbeks, they are on the receiving end of this. The social respect is breaking down, where you're having young Kyrgyz youths treat elderly Uzbeks in very disrespectful ways. So there's lots of signals that we see and we've already seen violence unleashed.

And as I've said before, I got a really uneasy feeling there and I think Jeff did too, spending a couple days there. There's just a feeling in the air – you just sense it – that the place could explode again. And I think short of some sort of outside intervention – not armed, but some sort of observer force, and really forcing the parties to the table in some sense, then another wave of violence is all but inevitable.

MS. MARAT: Can I add just a couple of words?

MR. LEVINE: Yeah.

MS. MARAT: I think Human Rights Watch and Médecins Sans Frontières were the two prominent international organizations that worked on the ground there – especially Human Rights Watch, and ICJ, to a great extent, produced really great reporting.

What needs to be done is some sort of analysis based on this reporting. It's just raw data, especially the Human Rights Watch, of what's going on. But somebody needs to dig deeper and also, yeah, an international investigation should take place by default. But we need to have at least more, you know, debate about what's going on. We need all sides to open up to say whatever they have and try to make sense of that.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. Yes, sir?

Q: I'm Scott Shambaugh (sp). I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kyrgyzstan throughout most of May. I spoke with a former student of mine who was formerly a member of parliament – I don't know on what side – but he had passed away about a year ago.

And this spring, they had – this spring, going into summer, they had a feast in memory of him on the anniversary of his death. And this feast was attended by hundreds of people and the guest of honor was no less than Rosa Otunbayeva. And the occasion of the feast was the renaming of this village, Zadarbayev (sp).

And I think this kind of thing – I don't know if this was before the events, the ethnic violence, or after, but regardless, in a time of uncertainty, and where the country is in a period of conflict. I think that sort of thing – renaming a village that has already been renamed after its Soviet name – that sort of thing –

MR. LEVINE: Question? Yeah.

Q: – is representative of a kind of cultural and social lack of focus on economic development. And that kind of development needs to happen for Kyrgyzstan to really get out of the hole it's in. So what evidence do you see that the events that have happened – the coup and the violence – have they produced any sort of revelation that there has to be a change, a shift in cultural norms or social norms in order for the country to move forward, especially on the economic front?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: Well, I mean, on the political front, one of the arguments that the backers of a parliamentary system out forward was that there was a need to move away from the traditional Kyrgyz strongman model. So I think in that respect, yeah, there has been a conclusion that the old model didn't work and it needs to be fixed. I think as we discussed earlier, that's much less true on the economic front.

MR. KIRCHICK: Yeah, I would agree with that.

MS. MARAT: Yeah, we need some more talk about – from politicians about civic – whatever. Well, what citizenship means, you know? Try to emphasize that because it's not always clear to everyone in Kyrgyzstan what citizenship actually entails. People identify themselves more on the grounds of their ethnicity than citizenship. And that's something that has to be done.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. No hands; I'm going to ask the last question. Erica, I was very interested in your use of this term, the uncertain elections, and the interesting impact of that in Kyrgyzstan. But Jeff raised this question: not just Kyrgyzstan, the impact – the potential impact regionally. So you've all three painted this terribly gloomy picture of how things could transpire. If things transpire in a positive way, if it comes off well, could there be – what's the regional, potential regional impact of that, or none?

MR. GOLDSTEIN: I don't think there's any short-term prospect for democracy in any of the other Central Asian countries. I think Kyrgyzstan is the only country where there is a sliver of hope for democracy, and even there, it's not – it's very tenuous and it's not in the short term either. I mean, I would invest a lot of time and effort in Kyrgyzstan because there is potential there.

MR. KIRCHICK: I think that farther down the road, there will be political transitions in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. And how things play out in Kyrgyzstan now could potentially have some impact on how they play out down the road. Again, whether those will take place next week or not for 20 years is something that we don't know. But I do think that there could be a positive example effect if somehow, things do go well in Kyrgyzstan.

MS. MARAT: I think there are several layers of how this might play out for just ordinary Uzbeks, Uzbekistanis or Kazakhstanis, or Tajikistanis. What happened in Kyrgyzstan is a bad example. Probably, they wouldn't want this bloodshed. But if you talk to civil-society groups in the rest of Central Asia, they do tend to be more positive – have more positive feedback about what is going on in Kyrgyzstan. At least this gave, sort of, freedom in public space.

It does turn out to be ugly sometimes, with the nationalist press publishing very discriminating articles, but at the same time, there is a very strong, evolving, vibrant civil society in Kyrgyzstan. One can't deny that. And that's something that civil society activists in other countries want to have as well at some point.

MR. LEVINE: Okay. Jeff, Erica and Jamie, thanks so much for spending this time with us tonight. (Applause.) Thanks, everyone, for coming.

MR. LEVINE: Oh, Jeff Gedmin wants to say something.

MR. KIRCHICK: Jeff Gedmin wants to say something.

JEFF GEDMIN: Hi, I'm Jeff Gedmin. I'm with RFE. There's not much to add because it's a terrific panel, and thank you for that, and great expertise in the audience. And so since I was invited, I'll just say that I don't know nearly as much as the panel does and many of you, but I was there recently, last week. And I think my impressions tracked with what I heard from the panel tonight.

First, I was struck and really quite shocked by the extent of the destruction in Osh. I wasn't quite prepared for that. And it certainly did suggest to me, as one hears on the ground too, that there was coordination and planning. I know one stretch I drove three kilometers, and on both sides of the street, each and every house was utterly, entirely destroyed – not damaged by fire, but just gutted.

The second impression I had last week was – and we heard this from the panel, too – I was quite shocked by the state of denial by the political class in Bishkek. It was really quite uniform: hypersensitivity, vehement rejection that this was driven mostly by Kyrgyz perpetrators – or let me put it this way, that Uzbeks were principally the victim of this. And by all evidence that I could see, Uzbeks were principally the victim of this.

And last but not least, disturbing to me is that those who held that view and were part of the state of denial were not simply nationalists or ultranationalists. It included people who I would consider, you know, quite moderate and quite liberal and quite – you know, the people that you are supporting and want to support for a more pluralistic and tolerant system. So I don't know how one resolves that, I guess, with time and a debate that hasn't started yet.

The last thing I would say is the most moving conversation I had was with a gentleman who approached me in Osh after an NGO roundtable, who identified himself by the last name of Saipoth (sp), who was the father of this young journalist who worked for RFE and VOA and was murdered three years ago in Osh – probably, one thinks, by Uzbek security services. And he was two things: He was despondent and first told me how sad he was that his son was forgotten in Kyrgyzstan.

But he was also quite hopeful. He was there at an NGO roundtable where people were nearly shouting at each other, and very present, and very focused, and said, you know, the Western world, the United States has to remember what we're fighting for. So with that, thank you because I think he is very far away, but it's quite heartening to see so many interesting and engaged and serious people on a rainy Thursday night in Washington talking about this subject. So thank you. (Applause.)

(END)