

Exiting Anarchy: Explaining Militia Disarmament in Georgia and Tajikistan

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This is a draft. Comments are welcome.

Tajikistan and Georgia both fell prey to massive bouts of civil violence in the immediate aftermath of independence from the USSR. In both countries, the government changed hands more than twice in the space of a single year. With no meaningful remnants of the Soviet army to draw upon, both the incumbents and the insurgents fought over rural territory with armies of impromptu militia groups, organized into ad-hoc and shifting coalitions. There were dozens of these groups fighting in both countries in the early 1990s, and while they sometimes organized into large umbrella organizations, giving journalists the impression of unified opposition or principled collaboration, the practical size of a fighting force was 40-100 men. When the “conventional” phases of the civil war were concluded, these heavily armed paramilitary coalitions returned to the capital city and turned their guns on civilians. These militia factions had more social legitimacy, better organization, and heavier weapons than the remnants of the Soviet police, and they had demonstrated that they could replace the president at will.¹ Social order collapsed for months, and a terrible epidemic of looting, extortion, rape, and murder was set loose upon Dushanbe and Tbilisi.

And then the violence stopped. There is great consensus that the urban situation in both states became much more peaceful when the militias departed, and they departed almost overnight. In Georgia, Mkhedrioni and other militia factions finally cleared out of their roadblocks in early September of 1995, and youth groups no longer walked the streets shooting machine guns into the air. In Tajikistan there were two periods of closure and disarmament – April of 1993 and November 1994. Stability and order did not emerge seamlessly in Dushanbe, as there was territory just outside the city limits where government forces could not safely traverse until the late 1990s. But the departure of the militias removed the feeling of an urban war zone. Commerce became possible midway through 1995, and humanitarian aid organizations began to open their doors.

This paper explores the puzzle of the relatively sudden emergence of order and stability in Dushanbe and Tbilisi, the capitals of Tajikistan and Georgia. In both cases, a number of wartime militias managed to merge their core memberships into state organs at the end of the civil war, taking over the Ministry of Defense, Interior, State Security, and other so-called “power ministries.” The paper hypothesizes that the anarchic violence in both capital cities during this period was actually the result of competition between militia groups that were bargaining over these spoils of the civil war victory. Militias were an important way for insecure members of the ruling coalition to guarantee that they would not be pushed out of power. The process of moving from a “winning wartime coalition” to a “minimum winning coalition” therefore created perverse incentives among urban militia groups, leading to the rapid expansion of militia groups and a deluge of violent crime. While many existing studies of militia formation tend to focus on factors relating to the *supply* of militias in a society, such as how they are organized and financed, in these urban environments it is equally important to focus on the *demand* for militias, which in this case originated in the political system. When the political system was closed and its members were relatively secure, militias disappeared organically,

¹ The first democratically elected president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was removed in a bloody coup carried out by the Mkhedrioni and the National Guard. The first post-Soviet president of Tajikistan, Rahman Nabiev, was also kidnapped at gunpoint by the “Youth of Dushanbe” and forced to sign his own resignation papers at the airport.

despite the extreme weakness of the governments and the absence of an external intervener to carrying the weight of urban policing.

The first section of this paper will present a quick primer on both states' civil wars. The second section will briefly discuss my research methods. The third section expands upon the theoretical framework sketched above, and presents data from the Georgian and Tajik cases suggesting the plausibility of the mechanisms. The fourth section discusses possible alternative hypotheses, and the fifth section concludes.

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND ON THE CIVIL WARS

The Armies

Within a few weeks of independence from the Soviet Union, both Georgia and Tajikistan were embroiled in civil war.² Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive history of the events that culminated in the outbreak of these wars, two general points should be raised at the outset of the narrative. First, the militia groups that emerged during the period of state collapse had far more social legitimacy than the rump state institutions inherited from the Soviet period. This partially explains why Georgia and Tajikistan collapsed fully in the wake of independence, while most of their neighbors were spared violent state breakdown. Second, the opening phases of both civil wars were fought between improvised private armies, usually pieced together by mobilizing pre-existing family, criminal, or social ties. This contrasts with the wars fought in Chechnya, Transdniestria, and Nagorno-Karabakh during the same period, where remnants of the Soviet army were deployed against irregular militias.³

In both of these states, there were active militia organizations forming alongside political parties during the immediate lead-up to independence. The Mkhedroni in Georgia, for example, had been actively recruiting in Tbilisi since 1989. The various Islamic and ethnic parties in Tajikistan were recruiting as early as 1987, according to

² Depending on what sorts of coding rules one wishes to employ, it is possible to identify more than two civil wars in both states during this time period. This sort of "counting" problem is always most acute in situations of state failure, when the identities of incumbents and insurgents are rapidly changing. For excellent analyses on the factors leading to the breakout generally, see Georgia, see James Fearon and David Laitin, "Random Narratives: Georgia," 2006, available online at [http://www.issafrica.org/ISSA/Pubs/Working_Papers/WP060101.htm](#), (accessed January 2, 2007); Ronald Suny, "Elite Transformation in Late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Transcaucasia, or What Happens When the Ruling Class Can't Rule" In Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker, eds., *Studies in Post-Soviet Leadership* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Derluigan, G. M. 2005. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer In The Caucasus: A World-System Biography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ch. 5-7; Wheatley, J. 2005. *Georgia: From National Awakening to the Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*. Hampshire: Ashgate; Muriel Atkin, "Thwarted Democratization in Tajikistan," In *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 277-311; Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs 2001): 25-50; Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000).

³ For an overview of these conflicts see Lynch, D. 1999. *Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs Press; King, C. 2001. *The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States*. *World Politics* 53:524-552; Lieven, A. 1998. *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Gall, C., and Thomas de Wall. 1998. *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*. New York: New York University Press.

some sources, and the criminal groups that served as the social basis for the Popular Front have ties that extend back to the 1970s.⁴

The rise of militia politics had unexpected consequences, contributing further to state disintegration. As nationalist militia groups rose to political prominence in Tbilisi, minority ethnic enclaves began to organize militias of their own and to defend themselves (a process that eventually spiraled into full-blown wars of secession). The same basic dynamic played out in Tajikistan, where the rise of Islamic activists threatened established state patronage networks. The threatened elite from the communist era cannibalized local military garrisons military and police forces to build “defense” militias.⁵ To summarize: As various social forces lost faith in the ability of the post-Soviet government to secure their interests or fairly, different groups found themselves seeking protection more locally, from mafia protectors or kin networks.

The remnants of the Soviet police and military infrastructure were generally ineffective at suppressing militias before this cycle of violence escalated out of control. Though anti-state attitudes were prevalent during this period, it is possible that security institutions had particular legitimacy problems in Georgia and Tajikistan.⁶ The massacre of Georgians by Soviet police in April of 1989 was a focal anti-Soviet event in Georgia in the late-Gorbachev period, but for generations Georgians had been notorious for draft evasion and half-hearted soldiering in the Soviet army.⁷ In Tajikistan, there were strong perceptions that clan networks originating in the northern town of Leninobod (now Khojand) dominated all practical dimensions of politics.⁸ Although they may have disagreed about who was ultimately pulling the strings, the larger point is that most Tajiks intuitively understood the ministries to be mechanisms for clan or family dominance, not impersonal institutions likely to secure public goods for competing factions. With this as background, it is not surprising that two years after the collapse of the state, these institutions could mount only a feeble response to determined militias.

As was mentioned above, the very large paramilitary groups that emerged during this period were never very well organized. Since these groups were operating in the shadow of the law in the late Gorbachev period, membership was rarely formalized. Groups tended to rely on some mix of charismatic authority and established local networks (kin and criminal) for recruitment.⁹ After the threat of police repression

⁴ Olimova, S. a. M. O. 2001. "The Islamic Renaissance Party," in *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*. Edited by K. A. a. C. Barnes. London: Conciliation Resources.; See also Shirazi, H. A. 1997. Political Forces and Their Structures in Tajikistan. *Central Asian Survey* 16:611-622.

⁵ Whitlock, M. 2001. *The Land Beyond The River*. New York: St. Martin's Press, p. XX.

⁶ Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): pages XXX-XXX [police protests].

⁷ See Blauvelt, T. "Military Mobilization and National Identity in the Soviet Union", *War & Society*, May 2003.

⁸ Kathleen Collins suggests that this is one of the primary factors that explains why Tajikistan fell prey to civil war in the aftermath of independence while the other Central Asian republics managed to basically preserve peace with inherited Soviet institutions. See Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transformation in Central Asia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 3-4.; For a similar view, see also Olivier Roy, "Is The Conflict In Tajikistan A Model For Conflicts Throughout Central Asia?" in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, edited by Mohammad-Reza Djalini, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon): 132-50.

⁹ See Ro'I, Y. "Nationalism in Central Asia in the Context of Glasnost & Perestroika" in Z. Gitelman (ed), *The Politics of Nationalism & The Erosion of the USSR* (1990); ch. 3; Nourzhanov, K. 2005. Saviors of the

disappeared, the groups' size expanded exponentially, and the top leadership had strong incentives to pretend to be in control of a hierarchically organized army. In reality, however, these groups were beset with internal divisions that persevered from initial recruitment patterns. There were no mechanisms in place to screen new members or discipline individuals that misbehaved. Almost none of the recruits had any military experience, but groups still found that they could easily access cheap weapons through collusion with unpaid Soviet army units "beached" in the newly independent republics. There was no shortage of handguns, grenades, machine guns, ammunition -- or even tanks, mortars, and heavy weapons -- for those that could generate hard currency or generate favors with the local Russian military commanders.¹⁰ The general proliferation of cheap armaments into society lowered the costs of militia formation, and had a snowballing effect by magnifying local security dilemmas. Local violence entrepreneurs recruited militia members based on the looming threat of annihilation by the enemy.¹¹

The Wars

The Georgian Civil Wars of the early 1990s were multi-front clashes between various local Georgian, Abkhaz, Adjarian, and Ossetian militia formations, all using weapons looted from Soviet military garrisons in the late Gorbachev period. In the chaotic aftermath of independence, Russian troops sided with ethnic/religious minorities in South Ossetia and Adjara, leading to the quiet secession of these territories from the Georgian state. After only eight months, the recently elected president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was removed from power by two urban paramilitary warlords (Dzabba Ioseliani, the head of the Mkhedrioni and Tengiz Kitovane, head of the National Guard). These men invited Eduard Shevernadze to return from Moscow to his native homeland and assume the presidency, thinking to make him their puppet. Supporters of the previous democratically elected Gamsakhurdia government ("Zviadists") re-grouped in their traditional homeland in Western Georgia and organized for guerilla war.

Under the pretext of counterinsurgency, Kitovane's militias then "invaded" Abkhazia, another de-facto secessionist province. This period of fighting was substantially bloodier than others, and ended with massive population displacements against Georgian civilians by the Abkhaz militias (who were aid by regular and irregular

Nation or Robber Barons? Warlord Politics in Tajikistan. *Central Asian Survey* 24:109-130; Naiyazi, A. 1998. "Tajikistan I: The Regional Dimension of the Conflict," in *Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia*, vol. 140-170. Edited by B. C. a. A. M. M. Walker. London: Frank Cass.

¹⁰ The belief by different militia groups that they could draw Russian military and political aid to their cause, adding men and material to aid in their struggle, was instrumental in the decision to escalate bargaining into war. Laitin, D. 2001. Secessionist Rebellion in the Former Soviet Union. *Comparative Political Studies* 34: 839-861. [[+interviews ##68 (Dushanbe), 22 (Tbilisi), 71 (Dushanbe), 112 (Kalikhum), 14 (Tbilisi).]]

¹¹ For local security dilemmas, and especially the importance of offense-defense indistinguishability in situations when there are incentives to deploy population displacement strategies, see Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, no.1 (1993): 27-47. It is important to note that the emotional appeal to "fear" is often a psychologically satisfying substitute for "greed." It's much easier to justify taking something you want from someone on the pretense that she was about to steal from you first. I found this sort of reflection somewhat lacking in my interview respondents, but I believe it is an underappreciated aspect to what was motivating conflict participants. For an alternative perspective, see Petersen, R. (2002). *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in 20th Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Russian detachments). This military victory by the Abkhaz rebels led to the complete de-facto secession of Abkhazia, and the defeated Georgian units returned to the capital of Tbilisi along with 200,000 displaced civilians fleeing the conflict zone.¹² Between the secessionist provinces and the territory still in the hands of the Zviadists, the government in Tbilisi controlled only a small fraction of the state's territory at the end of 1994.

The civil war in Tajikistan was equally complex. The fighting began over control of the post-Soviet state apparatus rather than by various attempts to secede, so it is difficult to sub-divide the civil war violence into smaller conflicts. From the beginning, the paramilitaries organized into two large coalitions. "The Old Guard" was primarily made up of regional-clan organizations that occupied privileged government and black-market positions in the latter period of the USSR, mostly based in the regions of Khojand and Kulob. "The Opposition" was made up of a mix of democratic, Islamic, and Pamiri intellectuals, and rural clans from the disenfranchised agricultural regions of Gharm and Khatlon. The war began in full when militias loyal to the opposition removed the first post-Soviet president (Rahman Nabiev), and implemented a power-sharing agreement that was backed by the remnants of the Soviet Army in Tajikistan. During this period, Akbarshah Iskanderov served as a figurehead for the gridlocked power-sharing government. The warring factions inside the capital jockeyed for influence, while militias from regions controlled by "The Old Guard" (Khojand and Kulob) left the capital to regroup. These rebellious militia groups renamed themselves as the Popular Front for Tajikistan (PFT), refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new government, returned to their regional homelands, and organized for war. Safarali Kenjayev and his militia seized the capital in October, and he briefly declared himself president; Russian forces blocked reinforcements from PFT forces in the south, and Kenjayev was forced to retreat. In the following weeks, Russians and Uzbeks withdrew critical support for the coalition government of Iskanderov, forcing them to surrender the presidency to the Popular Front. Kulobi militias under the general command of Sangak Safarov captured Dushanbe in December of 1993 and installed the presidency of Emomali Rakhmonov. To cement their victory, they engaged in massive population displacement in the densely populated lowlands of Khatlon, where citizens were thought to be sympathetic to the opposition. UNHRC estimates that at least 100,000 civilians forded the icy Amu Daria River in midwinter, fleeing to the relative safety of Northern Afghanistan.

Fighting was sporadic and disorganized, with criminal hooliganism and mob violence far more common than pitched battles.¹³ Interview data confirm the impression that groups survived this period through a mix of looting, racketeering, and charitable donations from friends and family until they became the de-facto state army.

The Aftermath

It was not until the conclusion of the "conventional" stage of the civil war (e.g., when Kulobi militias took Dushanbe in December of 1992 or when the Abkhaz forces routed the Georgians and ethnically cleansed Sukhumi midway through 1993) that intellectuals and journalists had any experience with the war at all. That experience came in the form of the influx of refugees and militia fighters to the capital city. These men

¹² See Nadareishvili, T. 1997. *Genocide in Abkhazia*. Tbilisi: Samshoblo.

¹³ Mueller, J. (2000). "The Banality of 'Ethnic War'." *International Security* 25(1): 42-70; Charles Fairbanks, "The Postcommunist Wars," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (October 1995): 18-34.

claimed to be patriots and war heroes, and having “bled for their nation” they now demanded recognition and special privileges as patriots. These men could easily justify their continued mobilization by noting that the lull in fighting was very fragile, and that the next phase of the civil war could erupt at any time. In the interim, these men set up armed checkpoints inside the capital city, and began raiding neighborhoods of minority ethnic groups who were seen as residual “collaborators” in the civil war (Abkhaz, Ossetians, and Muslims in Georgia; Pamiris, Garmis, and Karateginis in Tajikistan).

Various militia captains and high-profile wartime field commanders were immediately incorporated into the new state as heads of ministries or deputy heads of ministries. Incorporating the militias in this manner was obviously a case of dividing the spoils of victory to the men with guns, but it was also the only obvious way for the state to have any coercive power at all. Recruiting, training, and arming an entire new police force was a task that would take years. In the interim, as a Georgian intellectual suggested, “better the wolf in your living room, where you can hope to tame him, than hungry in the yard outside.”¹⁴ So in the initial aftermath of the war, many militia members found themselves as agents of the state, often in newly created ministries headed by their former field commanders. Militia members were, for the most part, initially placed in the same ministry as their regimental lieutenant or field commander. The explicit hope would be that this would quietly push the hooligans off the streets.

[Insert Figure 1 About Here]

In defiance of expectations, however, the number of urban militias in both Georgia and Tajikistan was paradoxically *expanding* during this time. The risk of dying in the civil war had deterred many youth from joining; now that the worst phases of the violence had passed, many young men came to realize that joining a militia offered excitement, social recognition, opportunities for easy money, and now potentially government jobs, as well. As the rank-and-file absorbed new members, even the most disciplined wartime cadres began to take on criminal characteristics. Worst of all, since the state had no salaries to pay any of its employees, these “incorporated” militias were still supporting themselves through extortion, roadblocks, exploiting economic bottlenecks, and simple theft and looting. But now they were in uniforms.

It was an awful time. It did not take long for public order to collapse completely. Well-armed units from the war could credibly threaten the president with a coup if he did not implement policies to their liking, which removed all pretense of a rule of law. Multiple uniformed agents, representing different branches of different ministries, could steal with absolute impunity. Violent crime continued to escalate during this period. Rape, racketeering, and murder became commonplace. In response to this seemingly uncontrollable urban violence, many of the citizens closed their businesses, stayed indoors, or fled the capital all together.¹⁵

¹⁴ Author interview with Alexander Rondeli, 10/28/07

¹⁵ For Georgia, see Gia Nodia, 2002. "Putting The State Back Together in Post-Soviet Georgia," in *Beyond State Crisis?: Post-Colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*. Edited by M. B. a. C. Young, pp. 413-439. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press. For Tajikistan, Atkin, M. 1995. "Islam As Faith, Politics, and Bogeyman," in *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*. Edited by M. Bourdeaux, pp. 247-272. London: Sharpe. Akiner, S. 2001. *Tajikistan: Disintegration of Reconciliation*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.

This period of intense violence and predation did not last forever. There is a great deal of consensus that the streets of Tbilisi became relatively safe again in September of 1995, in the immediate aftermath of the assassination attempt against the president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze. This was not the end of racketeering or corruption in the police forces, but it was the end of heavily armed bands of men wandering the streets of Georgia. In Tajikistan, the worst period of urban violence (including the pogrom of the Pamiris and Karateginis) concluded in April of 1993, and there was a second-tier drop-off in urban violence in late 1994. Although Dushanbe continued to have an unusually high violent crime rate for the Former Soviet Space throughout the 1990s, it was nothing out of the ordinary for a large urban South American city.¹⁶ NGOs and Christian Missionaries were able to safely open their doors by 1995.

Two puzzles emerge from these empirical patterns. First, what explains the upsurge in violence inside the capital after the end of the civil war, and second, why did that violence end so suddenly? Most descriptions of this period are quick to dismiss this period as essentially anarchic, which implies that it would be impossible to make predictions about the timing of the intensity of the violence. In order to understand how the armed groups were removed from the streets, it will be necessary to look more closely at the dynamics that sustained the “anarchic” violence in the aftermath of the civil war.

SECTION TWO: RESEARCH METHODS

Data presented in this paper is based on fifteen months of field research were conducted in Georgia and Tajikistan between January 2006 and August 2007. I conducted a total of 119 formal semi-structured interviews with civil war participants, as well as another 43 interviews with individuals that I will term “opportunistic joiners.”¹⁷ Many of the respondents are current or recent members of the police or the army; those who are not tend to be marginally employed (e.g., as farm laborers, construction workers, taxi drivers, migrant/seasonal laborers, store owners, nightclub bouncers, or working generally in the informal/criminal). Respondents do not represent a random sample of the former combatants from either country, but great lengths were taken to find a sample of diverse respondents, believed to be representative. The historical stories generated from interview data were triangulated with local academics, journalist and researchers to ensure accuracy. Due to the sensitive nature of the data, every effort was made to build rapport with interview informants, including extended ethnographic research in a remote village on the Tajiki-Afghan border.¹⁸

Interviews took place in the capital cities of Tbilisi and Dushanbe, as well as more rural towns and villages. Most interviews were conducted in Russian and the topics covered included pre-war occupations, history of recruitment, activities during and immediately following the civil war, and a variety of topic related to the life trajectories

16 Lafree, G. 2006, “Democracy and Crime: A Multilevel Analysis of Homicide Trends in Forty-Four Countries, 1950-2000,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 605, No. 1, 25-49 (2006)

17 In this study, I define “opportunistic joiners” as a men that affiliated themselves with a militia 1) exclusively in the capital city or another major urban area, and 2) after the end of the end of the worst phases of the civil war violence.

18 In order to gather perspectives from the consolidation period’s “losers,” four months of extended ethnographic field research were conducted in the village of Kalikhum in the Darvaz district of Tajikistan.

of their co-combatants. Key informants were interviewed multiple times, and often provided a range of introductions.¹⁹ Primary interviews usually took place in government offices or public restaurants, but as rapport developed, subsequent interviews often took place in informant's homes.

The following theoretical sketch is drawn almost entirely from conversations with these men. Occasionally I found it useful to triangulate their "street level" perspectives with a more "top down" perspective provided by a local academic or political figure. But in general, it quickly became obvious that the former combatants and postwar militia members watched the week-to-week changes in the emerging power structure with much greater attention than the elites. They realized their role as pawns in a dangerous game of power consolidation, and they had a great deal of incentive to understand the rules of the game. Lucky for me, they were willing to speak about that period with great candor. The fact that these men were often quite capable of speaking in great detail about the micro-politics of consolidation 11-13 years after the fact is itself data. As will become clear, they were trying to position themselves to eventually secure jobs in the next government, and often took great personal risks in the mean time.

SECTION THREE: THEORY AND CASE STUDIES

A satisfactory theory of militia disarmament should be able to contribute to our understanding of four aspects of the postwar story above. First, the theory must be able to explain the rapid expansion in the number of militia members on the street after the conclusion of the civil war. Second, these militia members began to engage in violent actions against each other and against civilians. Taken together, these are the two facets of the "anarchy" described by most observers in Dushanbe and Tbilisi at the time. Third, the theory must be able to explain a decline in militia membership and a reduction in violent acts over time. Fourth and finally, the theory should ideally be able to comment on the speed of the final transition away from militia politics and towards recognizable state-led order.

Phase One: The Winning Coalition Expands

The expansion of militias in the immediate aftermath of the war was the easiest aspect of this story for my informants to analyze and comment upon. Two factors seem to have been working simultaneously to explain the proliferation and expansion of militias in Dushanbe and Tbilisi.

The first was simply that without any functioning state bodies to arrest them, and without any real risk of dying in war to deter them, there was a large influx of opportunistic young men who wanted to take part in the looting, and grab their share of the spoils. While family or clan connections defined the core membership, there was always tertiary milieu of young toughs that could mimic the groups' symbols and claim to be agents of one field commander or another, and in the chaotic environment, it was relatively easy for newcomers to put on a black leather jacket and "pass" as a member of almost any group. In a crude economic sense, one might consider this factor as lowering the "supply costs" for a militia seeking to start-up or expand its membership.

¹⁹ To protect the identities of respondents, only first names were recorded in these interviews. Often the respondents asked me to record a false name, or no name at all.

An underappreciated corollary to this first factor, however, is that there was also a sharply increasing *demand* for militias. The field commanders, militia captains, paramilitary lieutenants, and other mid-level to high-level members of the wartime coalition that controlled the capital were generating this demand. These men had organized for war on the implicit assumption that the spoils of victory would be eventually split among them, and now that the spoils were about to be divided, everyone understood that “power sharing” between the militias would create winners and losers. Having lived through the excesses of state corruption in the late Soviet period, militia captains intuitively understood that the stakes were high: Winners would get life-long positions in government ministries or exclusive control over gray-market bottlenecks, and those deemed expendable would have to retreat from the capital, land in prison, or worse.

For the foot soldiers in these militia wars, the alternative to success was equally grim. Most of these men were marginally employed in the late Soviet period, with no skills and little education. Many were alcoholics, criminals, common hooligans, or serially unemployed; virtually all were men who had worked with their hands their entire lives, and expected their children to do the same. They had come of age in a system where familial and kin networks were necessary for everyday life, and had an intuitive understanding that getting one of the new police jobs would be their best, only chance to increase their life opportunities. The late stages of militia consolidation represented their only chance to convert their violent social capital into a better future.

It was also clear that the spoils of the winner’s coalition would be divided up in rough proportion to the size of the militia that was under their command. The most lucrative and secure positions would go to the individuals that were strong enough to threaten the rest of the coalition members – and even credibly threaten to remove the president – if they were pushed aside.²⁰ In practice, this meant that men who had initially helped to organize the paramilitaries in the late Soviet period, and then risked their lives in the civil war, were suddenly at risk of being excluded from the spoils of victory unless they kept a large number of men mobilized, ready to make trouble. Militias in the post-Soviet consolidation period emerged as a form of political insurance – their purpose was not to conquer territory or even to fight other militias, but to remind observers that there would be serious consequences if the warlord were cut out of the distribution of pork.

In order to keep their privileged role in the state, then, influential individuals scurried to establish networks of loyal and dependent men, whose career trajectories were directly tied the warlord’s patronage. Whether one imagines that these moves were driven by greed or fear, they had the indirect the effect of splintering the umbrella militia coalitions (e.g., the Popular Front and the Mkhedrioni) from within. Now more than ever before, these coalitions were more historical markers than anything else, signaling a somewhat redundant political affiliation of the prominent leader. The new rank-and-file that emerged in this period were either men with strong familial or friendship ties to a warlord, or men that could be manipulated and discarded at low cost. My interviews with the “opportunistic joiners” revealed that it was common for extended family members of wartime fighters that had stayed with their families during the war to come to the city “in

²⁰ This was a point on which there was surprising consensus among my respondents – that the militias primary purpose was as bargaining leverage and signaling power to secure patronage inside the state, rather than to fight each other or simply raise money. Many men referenced the removal of the previous presidents as proof that large numbers of guns and supporters was the only way to secure ones’ future.

support” of their brethren after the war.²¹ Oleg Karandelishvili gave a telling anecdote: “My brother told me that he was sure to get a job in the Special Reaction Emergency Unit if his group was strong enough to get noticed by Dzabba [Ioseliani, the head of the Mkhedrioni]. He said that it would be good for the whole family, so sold one of the horses, took my hunting rifle, and went to get a car in Rust’avi [to come to Tbilisi].”²²

[Insert Figure 2 and Figure 3 About Here]

With the winning coalition fragmented into constituent parts, and a rising generation of gangsters being wooed by insecure personalities to join the new ministries, it is fairly easy to understand the expansion of militia groups in this period. To a certain degree, expanding the number of heavily armed, self-financing, predatory militia members in a fixed area is itself a recipe for increased violence against civilians, and this should not be discounted.²³ But interviews revealed that it was another mechanism that explained the upsurge in violence during this period: Zero-sum competition between militia groups as the ruling coalition contracts its membership.

Phase Two: Urban Violence Raises the Entrance Costs For New Militia Members

As explained above, one of the factors that can explain expanding of militia membership in the postwar period was shared realizations that unless they had sufficient muscle backing them up, a warlord would eventually find himself cut out of the best parts of the spoils of governance. The obvious response to this set of incentives was for everyone to signal their strength. Students of interstate relations should be familiar with the idea that this sort of balancing behavior can take one of two forms: Either a militia can advertise a partnership with other strong militia captains based on trust and shared interests, or a militia can expand the size and power of its own membership.²⁴ In the weeks and months after the conclusion of the civil war, as the streets became flooded with new militia members, it became clear to all that if players continued to choose the second strategy, the emerging arms race would impose terrible costs on society.²⁵ While there may have theoretically been many possible solutions to this problem, the one that

²¹ Another important source of “labor” in this period were emerging urban youth gangs in Dushanbe and Tajikistan – individuals that were too young to have participated in the war and felt that they “missed their chance.” Young men could be recruited into unpaid positions directly by the new power ministries – giving them a license to set up roadblocks and steal from civilians – with a particular militia commander promising that their positions would become salaried once the state got up and running. It did not take long for newcomers to adopt to this environment, learning that the way to “shoot your way in” to a position of local prominence was by building up a large youth gang and hoping to be “bought out” by one of the higher-up militia captains, seeking to expand his holdings.

²² Author interview #17, Tbilisi. (Pseudonym provided by interviewee)

²³ See for example Weinstein, J. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁴ These should be familiar “internal” and “external” balancing strategies, for students of IR. See Jack Levy, “Domestic Politics and War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Spring 1988, 653-673.

²⁵ In the eloquent summary of a Georgian Mkhedrioni member: “In our country we have factories, we have wine, we have people who know how to do business. We aren’t a poor people now, we weren’t then. But nothing was possible so long as everyone was stealing from everyone all the time!” [Interview #55, Tbilisi] Another telling quote from a Kulobi police chief stationed in Kurgon-Tubbe: “There was a time when we were all drinking the same pool, and more thirsty men would arrive with guns every day.” [Interview # 179, Kurgon-Tubbe]

emerged on the streets of Tajikistan and Georgia was to raise the costs of building a large militia force by making militia membership a risky proposition. In the words of a member of the Georgian National Guard: “We needed another war to scare the hell out of the kids. But the kids – they never went to war. So we needed to bring the war here.”

There is broad consensus across interview respondents in Tajikistan and Georgia that the upsurge in violence in the “anarchic” period was the result of calculated, violent competition among warlords, jockeying for power in the capital city. The use of strategic violence was the easiest mechanism that was used to raise the costs of militia formation. This period of violence might not have been necessary if there had been mechanisms in place to stop the opportunistic expansion of militia size earlier, or if the warlords could credibly commit to each other about the distribution of future state resources and simultaneously draw down their troops. But without a functioning state authority to enforce such an arrangement, it was necessary to somehow choke off the “supply” of new militia recruits. Although the argument does seem a bit functionalist, it is clear from interview data that a series of unpredictable and violent urban gang wars deterred some of the opportunistic recruits that had only joined their militia because the war was over.

The obvious first targets in this period of urban violence and targeted assassinations were the unaffiliated and weak youth gangs that emerged to take advantage of the looting and chaos. Whatever the distribution of power between wartime militia leaders, they obviously had a shared interest in restricting the entrance of new players into this game. New players would have to be either bought off or killed off; either strategy would be somewhat costly for existing players. Various “neighborhood self-defense” committees were also targeted for symbolic dismemberment or incorporation during this period. In Tajikistan, the pogrom against the Dushanbe Pamiri and Karategini populations (both of which were ostensibly fifth-column allies and easy recruits for the militias of their civil war rivals, the United Tajik Opposition) grew directly out of these strategic imperatives.

My interview data indicates that as the supply of easy recruits dried up, militia memberships declined substantially during this time. Some of the youth gangs disbanded completely under these new constraints.²⁶ Yet in this violent period the overall number of militias remained largely unchanged – the large militias continued to fragment, and there seemed no shortage to the number of legitimate contenders capable of holding their own in escalating urban gang warfare. The next phase of militia politics had smaller numbers of more determined and committed men, all still trying to prove that they were worthy of inclusion in the ruling coalition. With the costs of building up one’s own militia increasing, the militias that were most successful at pursuing “external balancing” strategies – fostering close ties with other militias, building tactical alliances (that would calcify into strategic alliances) with elites that have connections in foreign capitals, and the like – slowly to be recognized as the dominant players. On the streets, the visible signs of militia strength (e.g., fierce, well-armed, and unpredictable militias on every street corner) began to fade, replaced by “connected men” that traded on their reputation

²⁶ 6 of my interview respondents in Georgia, and 14 of the respondents in Tajikistan, reported that they retired solely because they were cowed by the violence that occurred once the militias became serious about going after each other. The descriptions of the violence in this period was consistent – targeted atrocities against militia members or their families, clearly intended to either provoke a retaliation or encourage departure from a particular geographic area of the city.

for friendship with government insiders. These early moves towards a formalization of expectations, relationships, and stable political relationships between a relatively fixed number of militias eventually congealed into something recognizably state-like.

Phase Three: “Wartime Coalition” Moves Towards “Minimum Winning Coalition”

Over time, a coalition of strong militia captains emerged that trusted each other to protect common interests, and were capable of acting collectively against opponents or new entrants into the violence game. In time, trust and reputation became resources that were just as important as men and weapons, especially since the payoffs for sustaining such group were enormous and well-understood. But how was it possible for trust and reputation to emerge in such a high-stakes, institutionally fluid environment?

It is well established in the experimental economics literature that so long as some players value the future, and there are gains from tactical cooperation, it is possible to sustain cooperative outcomes even in competitive games with extremely harsh payoff schedules.²⁷ These experimental findings lend insight to how collusion between different militias emerged in Dushanbe and Tajikistan, and how tactical cooperation may have calcified into long-term strategic partnerships. Long time horizons are necessary to ensure that the promise of future gains can be weighed against short-term losses, which expands the range of tactical bargains that can be struck. Trust between players is also necessary, ensuring that if cooperation leads to asymmetric benefit to one player or another, this will not be exploited to threaten their holdings. The militia coalitions that emerged in the governing coalition in Tajikistan and Georgia looked very different, but these characteristics are borne out in both cases.²⁸

In Tajikistan, family and clan linkages sustained the trust between the initial nexus of militias. Warlords that managed to sustain cooperation during this period were all members of the Kulobi clan network. These family relationships not only extended the shadow of the future for these parties, but also ensured a substantial harmonization of long-term interests between the warlords, and positive externalities associated with “competitor” warlords’ growth. Concretely – government policies that favor the interests of the southern region of Kulob may not be equally divisible between the winning warlords, but they will probably all benefit all of the warlords’ families and constituencies. By the mid-1990s, it was clear that the government was firmly in the hands of the Kulobi militia groups, at the direct expense of their Khojandi and Hissori allies in the Popular Front.

In Georgia, trust networks held the militia coalition together originated in two competing institutions: The Mkhedrioni, and the (initially defunct) Ministry of the Interior. While personalities from the National Guard (held together by Tengiz Kitovane) and some of the other militia groups that were prominent in the transition period persevered in one form or another up until the 2003 Rose Revolution, it was only because they allowed themselves to be consigned to tertiary roles in the organization. It was the

²⁷ Kagel, John & Alvin Roth, *Handbook for Experimental Economics*, 1995 (Princeton: Princeton University Press), esp. pages 26-35, 121-166, 377-390.

²⁸ Data from my case studies speaks primarily to the formal and informal institutions that were used to create trust between the warlords. I have speculative answers to the question of why the post-Socialist warlords seem to display such longer time horizons than similar warlords in Western Africa, but little data to support these intuitions at this time. A persuasive answer to this question is likely one of the key variables that explains the relatively short length of the civil violence in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

war-forged bonds between different sub-lieutenants that allowed the Mkhedrioni to be so hegemonic in first militia coalition in Georgian politics. At first, the founder and leader of the Mkhedrioni network, Dzabba Ioseliani, was the only man capable of converting these solidarities into political capital. Over time, as various Mkhedrioni lieutenants enriched themselves in various criminal-business partnerships, Eduard Shevardnadze was able to co-opt this trust. He promoted key Mkhedrioni figures into important positions in his Ministry of the Interior, and trusted that they would come to value their relationship with him -- and the huge rents that came from upholding the status quo order in the ministry that he controlled -- more than their emotional connection to their old commander.²⁹

Among the foot soldiers, trust and time horizons were equally important. For militia members to risk their lives in this period, there had to be a reasonable chance that they would be rewarded in the future. This meant that they had to believe that their patron had a reasonable chance of sustaining a permanent position in the government, *and* believe that he would remember those men in the streets that took risks to put him there. These men hoped that “the big men” would remember them down the road and owe them a favor; ideally, the “big man” would be a brother-in-law or a cousin, so that the favors could be called in over and over again. Interview respondents that remained active in this period often did so only at great personal risk and expense, trying to signal their commitment and loyalty to their bosses, setting the foundation for a long-term patronage relationship.

The character of the violence changed substantially in this period. Political bargaining between militia factions began to replace armed confrontations on the streets. This happened without reducing the risk of retaliation if one were to attempt to opportunistically imitate membership in a faction, or to start a new militia group from scratch, so it would be wrong to assume that the absence of observable violence meant that the streets were “safe” for militias. But the streets were probably a lot safer for civilians, because the militias feature smaller numbers of more disciplined individuals.³⁰

Because there was still a lot general uncertainty over the exact contours of the tomorrow’s ruling coalition, and because cycling in the coalition was still probable, there was a strong incentive for warlords to keep substantial standing armies in reserve. There were still checkpoints and roadblocks because only a handful of these groups were sufficiently well positioned to draw rents and sustain their memberships without directly threatening violence. Assassinations and shoot-outs during this period were still regular events, as a crude but effective way to determine which violent social capital was real and

²⁹ Shevardnadze’s tactics and strategies for co-opting Ioseliani’s network will be treated in great detail in a different dissertation chapter; they are only sketched here.

³⁰ Just like in the first and second stages, there were many individuals that saw advantage and attempted to “pass” as men with connections. It was possible to pretend to have ties to a particular government official, or to pretend to be collecting taxes on behalf of a particular ministry, while in fact operating independently. Double-taxation and triple-taxation was extremely common. But by far the most common form of “passing” in this environment came exploiting the common uncertainty over the exact make-up of the future governing coalition. Everyone understood that political connections were always flux, and that while future political connections were of the utmost importance there was no good way to predict who would be the most powerful member of tomorrow’s ruling coalition. Charismatic and daring opportunists could exploit supposed connections with supposed political up-and-comers to extract concessions from established players.

which was counterfeit. So in the end, even though there was not a perfect balance of power between the armed groups, deterrence between the militia captains generally held due to uncertainty over whether other parts of the government would come to a particular captain's aid. And because this political uncertainty sustained a high demand for militias, opportunistic criminals reaped the benefits.

Phase Four: A Stable Coalition, And Compromises for the Losers

If this relatively peaceful standoff between shadowy armed camps were to continue indefinitely, it's possible that we would observe a gradual decline in the presence of militias in the capital over time. One might imagine that different militias would each capture a piece of the governance apparatus, and then slowly come to trust one another and draw down their memberships as they were all enriched (and subsequently co-opted) during the state's gradual economic recovery. As mentioned above, however, this did not happen. Rather there was a rather dramatic month in both cities in which the militias disappeared from the streets, and order was restored. What can explain this sudden shift towards order?

The drawdown in militia membership was precipitated by a consensus among militia members that their prospects of being "bought out" by the state had disappeared. In both states, this new set of expectations was driven by a focal event that shored up uncertainty on two questions. First, it became public knowledge that some of the militias would be excluded from the future state coalition. This meant that the upper rank's promises to their associates on the streets became worthless, and a large number of street thugs were suddenly operating without "a roof" – no political protection from other factions, no long-term immunity from the fumbling legal system, no reason to believe that their patron would help them advance through the ranks. Second, it became public knowledge that the remaining "insider" militia groups were willing and capable of either jailing or annihilating those excluded militia groups if it should come to some last-ditch outright confrontation. Given this fairly transparent collapse in the "demand" for militia groups, the pool of armed men dried up overnight.

In Georgia, the event that shored up certainty about coalition membership was a failed assassination attempt on the life of the president, Eduard Shevardnadze, on August 29, 1995. This assassination attempt was orchestrated by the head of the Mkhedrioni, Dzabba Ioseliani, and the Russian-backed head of the Ministry of Defense, Igor Giorgadze. Shevardnadze survived the car bomb by pure luck, but this event guaranteed that his regime would persevere in the near term, and would surely enjoy popular legitimacy while he purge the coup-plotters from the ruling coalition. There was a massive rush by fence-sitters to prove their loyalty to the president – and avoid being caught up in the retaliation – by isolating and withdrawing from the coup plotters. The aforementioned Mkhedrinoi members that had integrated themselves into the Ministry of the Interior were some of the first to turn on Dzabba, in an effort to save their jobs and their positions.

Shevardnadze also unveiled his secret weapon at about the same time, the reorganized and reinvigorated Ministry of the Interior. Staffed with a mix of long-term friends from Shevardnadze's days in the Soviet Ministry of the Interior and co-opted Mkhedrioni organizers, and supported by an outpouring of pro-regime social legitimacy, this force began to go on the offensive. Many street-level representatives of the

Mkhedrioni, and Giorgadze's loyalists in various subsections of the Defense ministry, immediately left Tbilisi; those who were too dim to see that the tides were changing spent some time in prison. In the words of a trusted informant, "We were running the streets...we were kings of this city. And then, overnight, we all just ended up in jail."³¹

In Tajikistan, there were two focal events that increased certainty over the long-term sustainability of the Rakhmonov regime. The first was a stroke of luck in March of 1993, when two prominent warlords, Sangak Safarov and Faizali Saidov, killed each other in a quarrel over leadership positions within Tajikistan's new army. Until that time Rakhmonov had been seen as the hand-picked representative of Safarov, the most important commander in the Popular Front. He deftly handled the political situation in the wake of this unexpected event to demonstrate that he enjoyed the support of a plurality of remaining Kulobi militia commanders, heading off the first serious intra-Kulobi power struggle.³² The Popular Front's coalition began to pull apart in 1993 and 1994, driven by the rush for the spoils of governance described above, and divided in their loyalties to the elite patronage network of the old Nabiev regime (based in the northern Khojandi clan network) or the emerging Rakhmonov machine. As the various militia captains chose sides (or hedged their bets by pushing for increased autonomy), the Tajik army "became nothing more than an arms depot for the new political party." The second event was the November 1994 election that Rakhmonov used to legitimize his power. The election was flagrantly rigged, but it clarified that in the medium-term, Rakhmonov was determined to hold on to power. The election also provided an opportunity for the Russian government to explicitly endorse Rakhmonov, which shored up the (considerable) uncertainty over whether Russia would eventually back a coup to reinstate their traditional Khojandi clients.³³ In the wake of these events militia captains could be certain that if they were to remain in the capital city, their futures lay with the Rakhmonov regime. Factional fighting shifted substantially to armed clashes outside of the city limits of Dushanbe from this point forward.

Focusing on these focal events should not divert attention from processes that had been working behind the scenes to facilitate quiet exit of militias from the capital city. The shift from a non-consolidated political environment, where militias have a protected niche, to a consolidated political system, where militias cannot easily survive, can be conceptualized as a sort of punctuated equilibrium: A short burst of rapid change sandwiched between two relatively long periods of stasis.³⁴ It's important to note two factors that made these peaceful "consolidation events" possible.

³¹ Interview #59, Tbilisi, November 18, 2006

³² The graph in figure ## is a bit misleading in this regard. The biggest explanation for the decline in the number of militias in Dushanbe in April of 1993 is that after the fall of Dushanbe the Popular Front pressed its advantage, driving the fleeing remnants of the Opposition forces (as well as tens of thousands of civilians) south, down the Vaksh Valley and across the border to Afghanistan. The deaths of Safarov and Saidov happened while the victorious militias were regrouping in the capital, and Rakhmonov demonstrated that he would rebuild his coalition catering a variety of mid-level Kulobi warlords. [Interview # 83 (Dushanbe), # 92 (Kulob), #99 (Dushanbe), #114 (Kalikhum), #144-5 (Dushanbe)]

³³ Weeks before the election, Russia sent 15 billion rubles to the Dushanbe regime, enabling the Rakhmonov government to pay government salaries for the first time since independence. (Muriel Atkin, 303). Afterwards, the Russian government hailed Tajikistan's presidential election as proof of Tajikistan's "progress towards democracy." Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 10 November 1994.

³⁴ Krasner, S. D. 1984. Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics. *Comparative Politics* 16: 240-241 for applications of punctuated equilibrium to statebuilding.

The first of these processes is that the emerging regime took steps to lower the stakes for losing militia captains, and even provide different safety nets for the paramilitary foot soldiers that were doomed to be shut out of the consolidation process. Both states passed blanket amnesty laws for acts of wartime violence, for instance, which absolved most militia members of responsibility for crimes during the transition period. There were ongoing insurgencies that were being carried out in rural areas of both states, and militia groups could withdraw from the capital and carry the fight to the enemy – integrating with the emerging state army or border guards – without anyone losing too much face. Ongoing border friction in Abkhazia and the ongoing insurgency in the highlands of Tajikistan both provided convenient “safety valves” for both post-Soviet presidents throughout the 1990s.³⁵ Emigration from the state was another common safety valve, especially in Tajikistan, for violent paramilitary fighters that wanted to start new lives. Relatively stable employment opportunities emerged for these men as bodyguards or private security for the new urban businessmen, or to join in the emerging transnational smuggling and racketeering organizations that were operating far from the capital but with tacit regime approval. Most of all, both regimes were careful to cultivate a reputation for allowing former militia commanders to retreat from the political arena with dignity, and without the risk of future retaliations.³⁶ It took time for these non-state opportunities to become common knowledge, and for the reputations of the president to allow the losers to feel safe, but over time it is probably safe to assert that the stakes of losing were less dire.

The second process was that the militias became socialized to the norms of the inherited Soviet police institutions in both states. The militia members that joined the various sub-sections of the Ministry of the Interior in Tajikistan and Georgia were newcomers to the opportunities in a highly bureaucratized and bottlenecked economy, and their time in the security ministries gave them their first “top down” view of the state structure. By nature of their position in the power ministries, they inherited all of the tricks that allowed the police to profit the lucrative black/gray market trade opportunities of the late-Soviet period. For many of my interview respondents, this amounted to an expropriation infrastructure more efficient than anything in their wildest dreams.³⁷ After spending a few months inside the state police, traffic police, border guards, or whatever organizational acronym was appropriate at the time, it became fairly obvious to see that road blocks and individual shakedowns were completely insignificant compared to the real money that could be made by controlling the bureaucracy. As one PF member mentioned in passing, “It is a Soviet mentality we inherited. It is not [President Rakhmonov] that makes the law here -- the bureaucracy makes the law.” After a few months on the inside of the new state, many of these militia members began to identify themselves as state agents, and were already identifying that their futures lay in manipulating the politics of the bureaucracy rather than continuing to nurse imagined ties with the “hooligans” on the street. When the time came to stand with the regime or

³⁵ This phenomenon will be examined in greater detail in forthcoming chapters.

³⁶ An interview with a longtime employee of the United Nations Tajikistan Observation Mission (UNTOP) revealed an interesting insight on this point. “Rakhmonov always gave a warning before he went after you. He’d warn once, twice...he’d wait for months or years, giving people a chance to remove themselves from politics once they were becoming too threatening. He always gave everyone opportunities to get away.” Author interview with Waldemar Rokoszewski, 7/22/07.

³⁷ [quote from interview #116 – “I was a farmer!” ... needs translation]

preserve the option of standing against it, men on the inside were quick to circle the wagons and protect their gains.

Summary

In the immediate aftermath of the civil wars, the costs of militia formation were artificially low for three reasons: the absence of an effective police force, relatively easy access to cheap heavy weapons from Soviet garrisons, and a negligible risk of dying in war. When it became clear that these opportunistic joiners could become pawns of various militia leaders in the consolidation game, there was suddenly also a great demand for militias. Wartime alliances splintered, militias expanded their membership to defend their position in the winning coalition, and new players entered into the violence game hoping to be bought out. The first major restriction in militia size was a result of urban warfare, which made militia membership a risky proposition, effectively raising the costs of militia formation. The militias that remained were more disciplined, and oligopolistic collusion emerged between warlords aimed at raising the costs for new entrants without the need for actual violence on the street. Coalition membership was uncertain, however, and prone to cycling. The second major restriction in militia size was the result of an exogenous event that clarified coalition membership for all players. The demand for militia members collapsed as the political system centralized and closed.

[Insert Figure 4 About Here]

Figure 4 summarizes the observable implications of the theoretical framework sketched above. T0 represents the immediate aftermath of the conventional phase of the war, when the wartime militias return to the capital. T1 represents the first phase of militia politics, when there are incentives to expand membership. T2 represents the second and third phases of militia politics, when violence between militia groups raises the costs of militia membership. The third phase is separated from the second analytically by a shift from *actual* violence between groups to *expected future* violence between groups; observationally, it is difficult to separate the two periods, but violence becomes less random. Demand remains fairly static until T3, the fourth phase, when the number of militias restricts along with the collapse of demand.

SECTION FOUR: ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

While a number of scholars have examined the settlement of the Tajik and Georgian civil wars, the question of militia disarmament in the capital has not received sustained or serious treatment. It is easy to understand why the violence associated with postwar militia politics has tended to be subsumed in the larger narrative of the civil war – after all, the total deaths from this “anarchic” period of urban violence are dwarfed by the death and suffering associated with the “conventional” phases of the war in rural areas. Moreover, this period of violent confrontation does not mesh comfortably with most narratives of these civil wars, which focus on the master cleavage and exclude the intra-

factional violence.³⁸ It was also a very chaotic period, where many things were changing very quickly; writing a coherent narrative would be difficult even if there were trustworthy written records and government statistics (and, of course, there are not). Worst of all, both governments have tended to discourage scholars from closely examining this period, since it raises problematic questions about their narrative of the civil war settlement and postwar state building. As a result, this difficult period of history tends to be understudied, and the puzzling events associated with the consolidation have not been problematized. Nonetheless, there are three alternative hypotheses that can be extracted from the literature. I will briefly treat each in turn.

H1: With the war over, these groups disbanded naturally

Sadly this is the dominant alternative hypothesis that emerges from narratives of both conflicts – which amounts to a consensus in the literature that this puzzle is not a puzzle at all. This framework emphasizes the fact that these groups supported themselves by riding the surge of wartime nationalism, and when their duty was served they trickled back to their families and regular jobs. These sorts of arguments tend to receive little criticism because they rely on the residual romantic images of these groups as heroic patriots who emerged to defend the nation against its enemies and then retreated voluntarily. In a sense, then, the militias reign ended quickly because the conflicts were settled quickly and decisively. According to this theory, with the Russian military guaranteeing the autonomy of the Georgian separatists and the United Tajik Opposition desperate and starving in the mountains of Afghanistan, the militias were unnecessary, and faded naturally from the political scene.

This hypothesis can be rejected out of hand. To begin with, it rests on the assumption that these groups were organized based on voluntary donations by patriotic supporters, rather than extortion and theft. This is false, as anyone who lived through either civil war or the anarchic postwar power grab, can attest. The second huge problem with this theory is there was no expectation that the civil war was over in either country at the time. The expansion and contraction of militias modeled in this paper occurs within the capital city, against the backdrop of general state failure and clashes of large private armies outside the capital.³⁹ In Tajikistan centralization process that took place in the capital preceded general territorial consolidation and political settlement by a period no less than five years. In Georgia, the “frozen conflicts” remain unresolved, and militias clash along the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia weekly. Third and finally, the most likely scenario for renewed civil cycles of war in the mid-1990s was a paramilitary-backed coup.⁴⁰ In other words, arguing that paramilitary disarmament in the capital city was a result of general peace gets the causality completely backwards: General peace became possible because the paramilitaries in the capital city were disarmed.

³⁸ This is common in civil war narratives. See Kalyvas, Stathis, “The Ontology of “Political Violence: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* (1:3), 475-494. See also Kalyvas, 2004 “The Urban Bias in Research on Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* (13:3), 1-31.

³⁹ It also bears mentioning that the empirical patterns observed in this paper (first *expansion* and then contraction, punctuated by a sudden drop-off) cannot be explained by this framework in any way.

⁴⁰ As was mentioned above, armed group removing the president from power triggered the worst periods of violence in both wars. Space constraints prevent the full counterfactual from being presented in this space, but the various scenarios for renewed war in both countries will be given a fuller treatment in the dissertation.

H2: Russia Backed the Governments, Allowing Them To Crush The Militias

There is no question that a neighbor with a large and powerful military, whose intervention would feel, to some citizens, less like an invasion and more like a homecoming, was a huge potential asset to the incumbent regimes. Russian intervention was decisive in the settlement of the Georgian civil wars, first in aiding the three separatist territories in their bids for secession, and later by deploying the Black Sea fleet to crush the Gamsakhurdia insurgency. While the Russian role in the Tajikistan is still the subject of some academic debate, the Russian government threw its weight behind Rakhmonov regime in October of 1994 with fifteen billion rubles of direct aid and much-needed recognition and legitimacy. The Russian 201st Motorized Infantry division played a critical role in protecting certain critical infrastructure throughout the war, protecting the power plant and bread factory from being destroyed in the fighting. There is a great deal of evidence, in other words, that the Russian government waited until it had substantial leverage over the new regimes and believed that they could be counted on to submit to Russian policy preferences in key categories, Russia deployed its diplomatic and military support to help the winners win decisively.⁴¹ In this hypothesis, militias expanded after they seized the capital because there was nothing to stop them; militias contracted later once the Russians established an imperial relationship with the new governments, allowing the regimes to quickly increase their coercive power.

This is a much better alternative hypothesis than the first, if for no other reason than that it contains at least a few elements of truth.⁴² Like the first hypothesis, however, it relies on a very selective and strained reading of history. The first thing to note is that while the Russian government may have had a clear interest in helping state consolidation in Tajikistan,⁴³ a substantial strand of the Russian political opinion believed

41 This is obviously a loaded assertion, requiring more supporting evidence than this research note can contain. A few stylized facts are in order. The wave of Georgian nationalism that precipitated its independence had a particularly strong anti-Russian flavor. The Russian Federation eventually responded by throwing its support behind separatist provinces (Abkhazia, Adjara, South Ossetia) to gain leverage over the new Georgian polity. It pleased many when the nationalist intellectual Zviad Gamsakhurdia was replaced with the Moscovite apparatchik Eduard Shevardnadze, who submitted to membership in the CIS. But relations with the Shevardnadze government frayed, and to this day the threat of inadvertent escalation along the borderlands of the “frozen conflicts” keeps Georgia from joining NATO. In Tajikistan, Russia wanted a government that was hostile to Islamic radicalism and could secure the southern border with Afghanistan. Russia backed Rakhmonov at key times, but kept open the option of supporting Khojandi cadres in their bids for either secession or ascendance in Dushanbe until the late 1990s. Russia has kept hands in Tajikistan’s politics by quietly absorbing tens of thousands of Tajikmen – many of them former soldiers – as illegal migrant laborers living in the suburbs of Moscow and St. Petersburg. These men could be deported at any time, crippling to the Tajikeconomy and probably toppling the government.

42 A later dissertation chapter will tackle the Russian role in these conflicts in full detail.

43 Even this part of the narrative obscures key facts. Russian forces initially turned their guns on the Popular Front coalition, protecting the Iskanderov regime by cutting off reinforcements from Kulob in October of 1992 and allowing “Opposition” militias to retake the Presidential palace. Moreover, it’s not clear that this position emerged clearly in Russian government circles until midway through 1995, and there was no momentum to assist in settling the conflict until events in Afghanistan prompted them to involve themselves directly in the peace process. See Jawad, N. S. T. 1995. *Tajikistan: A Forgotten Civil War*. London: Minority Rights Group; Rubin, B. 1993. The Fragmentation of Tajikistan. *Survival* 35:71-91; Rashid, A. 2002; *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Akhmedov, S. 1998. "Tajikistan II: The Regional Conflict in Confessional and International Context," in

that a permanently destabilized Georgian polity was preferable to a state headed by Eduard Shevardnadze. There is an impressive amount of anecdotal evidence that Russian agents orchestrated the assassination attempts against Shevardnadze in 1995 and again in 1998 – more or less to punish him for attempting to *cut* military ties with Russia and move towards NATO. This should immediately give advocates of this theory pause.

This speaks to a second problem with these explanations: Russian policy was in no way coherent or consistent during this period. Most of the arguments imported from international relations models rest on the ability of a foreign intervener to credibly commit over time more effectively than local actors. Because Russia was itself embroiled in its own kind of state failure and political reorganization, its ability to commit to anything at all was in serious question. When pressed, virtually every Georgian and Tajik academic that I interviewed would talk about Moscow's interventions during this period as opportunistic, inconsistent, and divisive. The only real disagreement was whether that was actually Russian policy towards the NIS, or whether the foreign policy inconsistencies were just the result of the intrinsic limitations on Russian ability to make foreign policy in general.

It is also well established that various "Russian" military divisions were actually operating independent of orders or pay from Moscow for months, at least in Tajikistan and Georgia. My interview data reveals mountains of anecdotes of cynical, manipulative double-dealing on the part of Russian soldiers and diplomats on the ground. So long as the urban chaos and political uncertainty persevered, Russian military commanders were important power brokers, and could extract considerable rents from their privileged lines of communication with the Russian military command. Individual soldiers, who had often not been paid for months (or, worse, back-paid with currency that had lost all value due to hyperinflation), were making money off of selling off weapons and ammunition, or promising their services as mercenaries for limited engagements. In short, these men might have been a temporary mercenary army for the governments, but they were hardly a surrogate for real state-building efforts on the ground.

H3: Gangs Provided Public Goods While the State Was Weak

A large literature emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union about the rise of mafia and militia groups, providing local order and contract enforcement in situations of extreme state weakness.⁴⁴ There is a great deal of evidence that the initial militia recruitment drives and social legitimacy for virtually all of the Georgian and Tajik militias came from providing security to threatened civilians, and in a sense they did

Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia. Edited by B. C. a. A. m. Michael Waller, pp. 171-186. London: Frank Cass.

⁴⁴ Blasi, J., et al., eds. 1997. *Kremlin Capitalism: Privatizing the Russian Economy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Handelman, S. 1995. *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Serio, J. a. V. R. 1995. Thieves Professing the Code: The Traditional Role of Vory v sakone in Russia's Criminal World and Adaptations to a New Social Reality. *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 4:72-88; Reno, W. 2002. "Mafiya Troubles, Warlord Crises," in *Beyond State Crisis?: Post-Colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*. Edited by M. B. a. C. Young, pp. 105-127. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Press; Lane, F. 1958. Economic Consequence of Organized Violence. *Journal of Economic History* 18:401-17; Tilly, C. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing The State Back In*. Edited by D. R. Peter Evans, and Theda Skocpol, pp. 169-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

“out-compete” defunct Soviet institutions in both the Georgian and Tajik context.⁴⁵ Much like the second hypothesis, this theory suggests that the militias will disappear when the state gets strong enough to provide their public goods – notably security – at a lower social cost.

Unfortunately, my review of this literature finds it long on description and short on predictive power. Indeed, the main hypothesis that emerges from this literature is that militia groups are temporary, and will disappear when the state gets strong enough to provide public goods more efficiently than they do. Taken on face, this proposition borders on tautology. Returning to Figure 4, this theory would assert that the government is “stronger” at time T0 than T1, and stronger at time T3 than T2, but never be able to explain why or how this happens. Treating state strength as an exogenous model parameter, in other words, makes state reconstruction something that is assumed rather than explained. How do different militia tactics and strategies affect this process? How might these strategies vary across cases? It’s difficult to say in this framework.

For whatever its weaknesses, the basic model of militia politics that I have presented in this paper can provide a springboard to examine range of behaviors that militia organizers and violent young men made during the consolidation phase. This model suggests that the oligopolistic militia partnerships that emerged in this period were significant, because they coopted recognizable “state” functions. Moreover, considering why these partnerships were more likely to form in the post-Soviet space than in other parts of the world might encourage researchers to generate testable hypotheses about why some states consolidate quickly and others do not.

CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested that the anarchic violence that gripped Dushanbe and Tbilisi after the end of the Tajik and Georgian civil wars can be understood as violent competition between paramilitary militia groups. The memberships of these groups expanded, and then contracted, based on two factors. The first factor was a changing urban risk environment for potential militia recruits, which was itself a function of militia groups’ tactical and strategic choices. The second factor was changing expectations about the composition of the ruling coalition. It only became possible for groups to feel secure, and draw down their forces, once expectations stabilized that the “wartime winning coalition” had been reduced to the “minimum winning coalition,” and that the smaller coalition could fend off opportunistic attacks from its rivals.

Within a period of 3-4 years, then, an effective monopoly of violence emerged somewhat organically in the capital cities of Georgia and Tajikistan based on personalist rule and informal patronage structures. Integrating militias into the state structures was the only effective way of buying off armed factions that could have kept the country in a prolonged state of anarchy. The emergence of an established “oligarchy” of militia warlords embedded in the state’s infrastructure was a critical prerequisite to eliminating militias from the capital city. In other words, the risk of civil war decreased in these states not only *despite* but *because* the states were becoming more personalist, corrupt, and autocratic.

⁴⁵ See for example Whitlock (2002) and Nodia (1997).

For both policy makers and political scientists, this paper demonstrates the importance disaggregating the clunky dependent variable of “statebuilding” into its constituent parts, and analyzing these processes in discrete temporal periods. By focusing on a specific set of actors in similar institutional environments, it is possible to identify specific mechanisms that sustain peace, and why particular tactics and strategies were pursued by militia leaders and new governments, in a way that is not possible with cross-national comparisons, or decade-length case studies. The arguments in this paper imply the possibility of an uncomfortable tradeoff between different normative goals in a particular intervention (e.g., providing basic order in the short term, the creation of sustainable democracy in the medium term). In the abstract, this should not be surprising to anyone, least of all to political scientists. But it is incumbent upon researchers to map the contours of these tradeoffs more rigorously if we are to contribute to the general understanding of how sustainable peace emerges out of state failure. This paper is a modest step in that direction.

FIGURE 1: Post-Revolutionary Governments of Tajikistan and Georgia

<u>Name</u>	<u>Warlord in Civil War?</u>	<u>Position in Government</u>
<i>The Presidium State Council of Georgia:</i>		
Tengiz Kitovane:	Yes	Head of the National Guard
Dzabba Ioseliani:	Yes	Head of the "Mkhedrioni"
Eduard Shevardnadze:	No	President
Tengiz Sigua	No	Prime Minister
<i>First Cabinet of Emomali Rakhmonov</i>		
Emomali Rakhmonov	Yes	President
Abdujalil Samadov	No	Prime Minister
Yakub Salimov	Yes	Minister of Interior
Sangak Safarov*	Yes	"Commanding General of All Armed Forces" (died 3/1993)
Ghaffor Mirzoyev*	Yes	"Deputy" Minister of Interior
Suhrob Kasymov	Yes	Head of Special Forces
Mahmadsaid Ubaydullaev	No	Vice Prime Minister
Alexander Shishlyannikov	Uzbek Military	Minister of Defense
Saidamir Zukhurov	Yes (KGB)	Chairman of NSC
Mahmadnazar Salikhov	No	General Prosecutor

* = unofficial cabinet members that attended meetings in "advisory" capacity

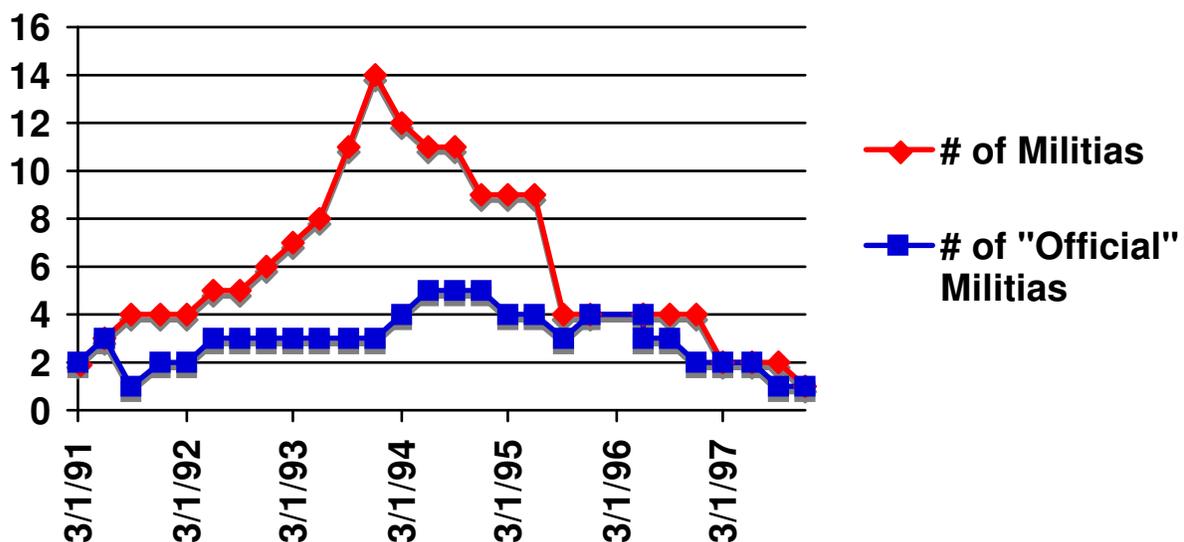
FIGURE 1: Militia Factions Inside Tbilisi, 1991-1997

FIGURE 2: Militia Factions Inside Dushanbe, 1992-1999

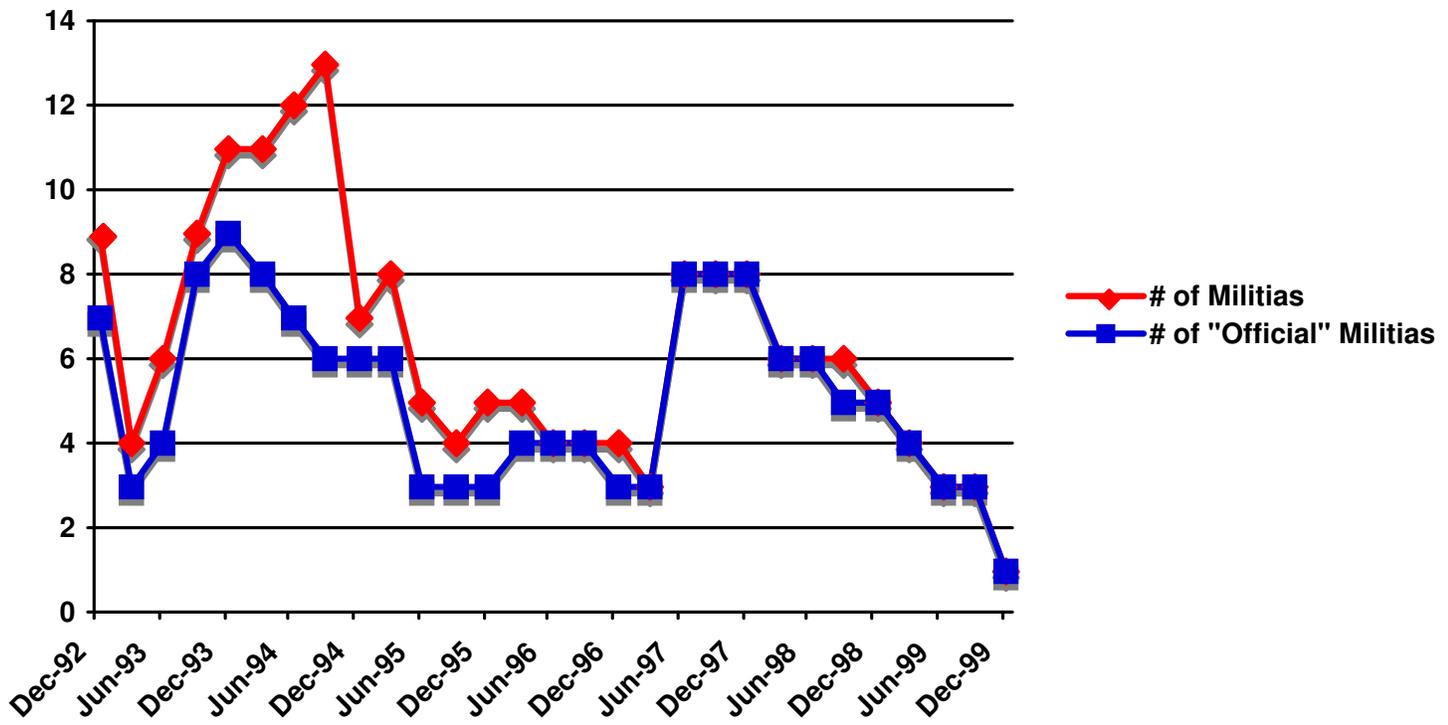


FIGURE 3: Graphical Representation of Theory: Militias Over Time

