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“Warlord Politics After the Post-Soviet Wars”

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# *Liquidation Lotteries*

*Warlords & Coalition Politics in Post-Soviet States*

*Currently Under Review at Cambridge University Press*

*“I get it. I know what you want. I understand. You want to make up a list, on your computer, of all our bad men. ‘Terrorists.’ You want to cross names off the list when they were killed or jailed. To see that we Tajiks can take care of our own. But we can. We did. You’ll see.”*

*Yuri, Dushanbe, 2007*

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## Chapter 2

# Predator Collusion: A High-Stakes Game

A persuasive account of state recovery must answer two puzzles. First: How do civilian executives become strong once formal institutions collapsed? The answer, as already forecasted in the first chapter, is that they were figurehead placeholders for coalitions of warlords, who “run the streets” out of sight. But since this arrangement ultimately benefitted the presidents at the expense of the warlords that installed him, it is reasonable to ask a second question: Why did warlords agree to install a president if they knew that a possible result was that he would use divide-and-rule tactics to cut them out of the spoils? The answer is that while some high-profile warlords are jailed or killed in the high-stakes consolidation lottery, many others slide out of view, reinventing themselves as state agents and becoming quite wealthy.

State-building, in this account, is a constantly renewable process of contracting and bargaining between violence entrepreneurs. Warlords are locked in competition. Their rivalry can easily turn violent. If it does, war occurs. War can end either through military victory or through coalition building. Though they have the option of working together, cooperation is risky. If they can assemble a coalition with sufficient military power to seize the capital city and achieve international recognition, they will have the option of installing a civilian regime. They then gain access to foreign aid, military assistance, and low-interest capital investment. The civilian regime – personified by the figurehead president – becomes their hostage. If the gains associated with seizing the capital city and extorting the rents of sovereignty are greater than the expected utility of outright war, all warlords may rationally abjure violence.

This chapter presents an account of civil war settlement under conditions of state failure. Though it is presented in the form of a two-stage,  $n$ -player coalition game, one does not have to be a student of game theory to understand the argument in this chapter (proofs and formal propositions can be found in Appendix B). In the first stage, warlords choose to either fight or join a coalition and back the ascendancy of a president. If no president is installed, the game ends with continued warfare. If a president is installed, a second stage takes place in which the president distributes the wealth of the state – newly increased as the president is able to get more aid and other benefits from foreign actors – among various warlords. Warlords observe the distribution and choose to either accept the transfer or attempt to remove the presi-

dent in a coup. All players are assumed to understand this basic game in the same way, second-guess each others' strategies, and maneuver strategically. Analysis of the model reveals a few analytically distinct equilibria. One of particular interest is an equilibrium in which all warlords merge into a single coalition – a de-facto monopoly on the production of violence. Other equilibria describe stalled negotiations or persistent state failure. Order-providing institutions and understandings are sustainable despite the inability of foreigners to monitor or enforce local arrangements. Peace is self-enforcing without the need for an external guarantor.

Importantly: In the “liberal interventionism” framework referenced in chapter one, the central problem of civil war settlement is convincing rebels to disarm. Since warlords' bargaining power extends from their capacity as violence entrepreneurs, I assume no one actually disarms. One might observe certain kinds of cosmetic disarmament – warlords may don suits, shave their beards, and reinvent themselves as party officials or vote brokers – but they maintain control of men and weapons. Order is contracted through a process of incorporation and buy-out, with payments taking the form of graft: state offices, black-market monopolies, or rigged privatization schemes. “The state,” in this account, is little more than a cosmetic legitimizing device for predators that have reinvented and redefined themselves as state agents.

### A Game

The strategic contest takes place in a small, internationally-recognized sovereign state. This state contains lootable resources and government positions, and the conflict is over the right to appropriate these spoils through selective enforcement of property rights. The actors in this contest are *warlords* – violence entrepreneurs with private armies. They are locked in a struggle for power. Assume the state contains  $n > 2$  warlords indexed by  $i$ ,  $W = \{1, 2 \dots n\}$ . At the beginning of the game, every warlord  $i \in W$  simultaneously chooses to either fight or join in a coalition to install a president. Each warlord  $i$  has the option to “Fight” to capture the capital city, exclude rivals from power, and expropriate state wealth  $v$  for himself.

Fighting imposes costs  $c$  on each warlord, since sustaining a militia cannibalizes productive assets and exposes his family to some risk of violence. Civil war is costly and unpredictable from the perspective of a warlord. A charismatic leader's ability to sustain a militia and press the military advantage depends on a host of military, social, and psychological variables that cannot be predicted (see Chapter Four). A prominent warlord can be killed by a ricocheting bullet or replaced by a crafty lieutenant (see Chapter Five). Warlords are forced to choose strategies behind a veil of ignorance about their own relative capabilities compared to their opponents. Coalitions can form and re-form unpredictably.

A simple way to capture the contingent character of this process is to treat warlords as symmetric and interchangeable. If all  $n$  warlords play “Fight,” all will receive payoffs of  $\frac{v}{n} - c$ . This could represent either that each warlord gets a portion of the spoils, at cost, or that they win control of all the spoils with an equal probability.

As an alternative to going alone, warlords can work together to “Install” a president. If they succeed, they will form a group with sufficient domestic armed power

to provide order in the capital and minimally secure the borders. The coalition will then temporarily abjure violence and back the ascension of a civilian government, headed by a figurehead president  $P$ .<sup>43</sup> If enough warlords collude together a government emerges capable of appealing to international donors directly. The “stability threshold”  $s$  represents the number of warlords necessary to control the capital against rival warlords outside the coalition, making it safe for foreign governments to open embassies and diplomatically recognize  $P$ ’s regime. If  $s$  or more warlords work together then a government emerges with sufficient domestic power to acquire foreign aid, claim the country’s seat at the United Nations, and secure foreign investment. A second stage of the game begins (below). If fewer than  $s$  warlords opt to collude together then the government that is installed will be incapable of controlling the countryside, and warlords revert to fighting. A failed attempt to govern is costly, since investing resources in failed diplomatic “Install” efforts translates into a slight military disadvantage. This disadvantage is represented by a sucker’s payoff of  $\frac{v}{n} - c - w$  for any warlord  $i$  who plays “Install” while others played “Fight.”

The “stability threshold”  $s$  is a fixed parameter is a benchmark for how many warlords are necessary to install a president in the first stage of the game. It is also represents the minimum number of warlords necessary to keep a president in power in the second stage of the game. In Rousseau’s classic stag hunt, all of the hunters have to work together to bring down a stag. But it is not a logical or realistic requirement for all of the warlords to have work together to install a figurehead president. And unlike many coalition formation games analyzed in institutionalized settings, there is nothing particularly special about the 50% threshold for a simple majority. The number of warlords who have to work together to stabilize a state sufficiently in the eyes of the international community international varies by context. A low stability threshold means that a government can access  $v^*$  even if there are large pockets of territory controlled by unaffiliated warlords. A high stability threshold means that a government needs to incorporate most of the warlords before it gets access to the goodies dangled by the international system.

Warlords who chose to fight at the beginning rather than support the president will be cut out of these spoils, and they have no realistic chance of displacing the entire coalition of warlords that now claims the capital city. For a warlord  $i$  who remains outside of a consolidating state the next-best-thing he can do with his private army will yield a payoff of  $r$ , with  $0 \leq r \leq \frac{v}{n} - c$ . The game ends for these warlords.

Obviously  $r$  depends on a warlord’s economic and social endowments, regional geopolitics, and the ability of the regime to draw on great power support to “squeeze” recalcitrant warlords. Charismatic warlords may be able to flee to the mountains or across international borders and keep the fight alive for years. They may be able to transmogrify into narcotics traffickers or soldiers of fortune. They may be allowed to simply disappear. Or they may not. They may end up on no-fly lists, tagged and tracked for the rest of their lives. They may be quickly killed.

The number of warlords who play “Install” in the first round can be called  $k$ . Call the subset of  $k$  warlords who play “Install”  $W^P \subseteq W$ , such that  $W^P = \{i, j, \dots, q\}$ . So long as  $k \geq s$ , a coalition government forms. Power-sharing follows. A figurehead president  $P$  is installed to shake hands with foreign heads of state. Warlords do

not disarm.<sup>44</sup> They keep access to men and weapons through a variety of invisible channels, and are well-positioned to extort the president by threatening a coup. For this president  $P$  and the  $k$  warlords in  $W^P$ , the second stage of the game begins.

The first thing that happens in this second stage is that the influx of foreign aid, extort-able civilians, and illicit rent-seeking opportunities increase the lootable wealth in the state from  $v$  to  $v^*$ . This new wealth  $v^*$  comes into existence in a form that is controlled by  $P$ . If foreign investors want to extract mineral wealth from the country's interior, build an oil pipeline across the territory, or sell liquor or cigarettes in the capital, they will have to broker with this president's agents. The same is true for foreign militaries that want to silence transnational dissidents or liquidate terrorists living on the territory. A president is a focal symbol of order and stability, and is assumed to have the ability to choose the timing of cabinet appointments.

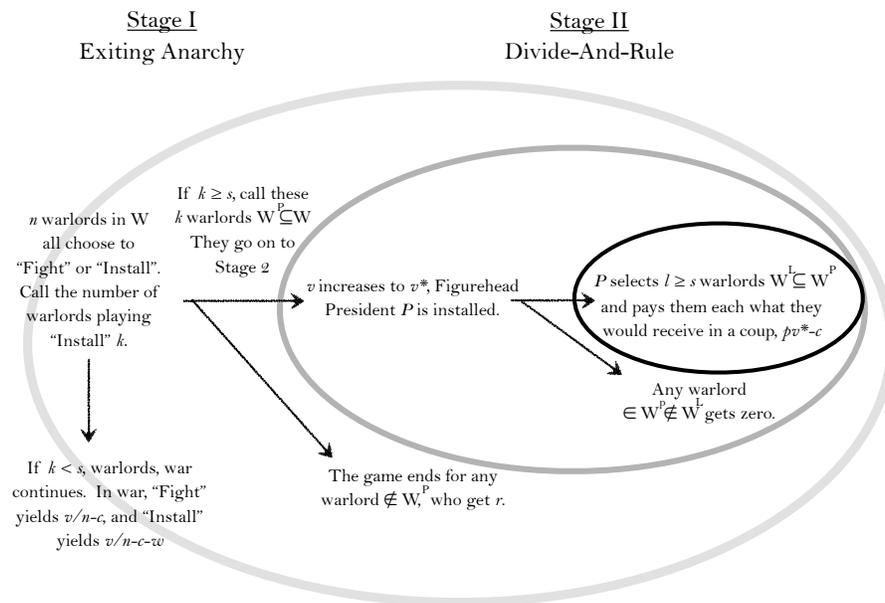
Though  $v^*$  is nominally controlled by the figurehead president, power still comes from the barrel of a gun. But  $P$  does not necessarily need all of the  $k$  warlords to rule. The president will pick  $l \geq s$  warlords to form his inner circle. Call the subset of  $l$  warlords selected by the president  $W^L \subseteq W^P$  such that  $W^L = \{i, j, \dots, q\}$ . Warlords in  $W^L$  merge their memberships with the army and police forces. The threat of a coup, as such, hangs over all distributional politics that follow. Warlords in  $W^L$  are well-positioned to replace one civilian president with another if their demands are not met.  $P$  will distribute  $v^*$  among the  $l$  warlords in  $W^L$  and himself, with his decision represented by  $x = (x_i, x_j, \dots, x_q, x_P)$ . Wealth transfers will take the form of ministry positions, non-enforcement of tax laws, closed-bid contracts, and rigged privatization schemes: arrangements designed to be opaque to foreign observers. Each of these warlords observes his transfer and chooses simultaneously whether he wants to "Coup" or "Accept" the president.

Choosing to coup invites violence which imposes costs on the warlord ( $c$ , invariant from the first stage), but he has some probability  $p$  of succeeding. If a coup succeeds, and  $v^*$  remains unchanged, the warlord can completely exclude rivals and install himself head of state.<sup>45</sup> Every warlord is a capable observer of the political environment, and can assess his subjective probability of successfully carrying out a palace coup at a given time. To simplify matters and highlight essentials, let us also assume  $p$  is invariant to  $l$ .<sup>46</sup> The expected coup payoff, therefore, is  $pv^* - c$ , which is greater than zero – the costs of military fighting in a coup should not take the possibility of coup off the table. And if a coup succeeds, the president  $P$  is deposed and ends the game with a payoff of zero. If more than one warlord coups at the same time while  $s$  or more other warlords play "Accept," then the coupling warlords have equal odds of ending up in power. If there are  $m$  warlords attempting a palace coup, they each have an expected payoff of  $\frac{p}{m}v^* - c$ . But to preview analysis in Appendix B, all that is going to matter is the payoff based on the probability of pulling off a successful coup when no one else is trying to do the same, which will be  $pv^* - c$ . If a warlord  $i$  attempts a coup alone and does not succeed (which will occur probability  $1 - p$ ), it does not affect other warlords' payoffs so long  $s$  or more support the president. If fewer than  $s$  warlords play "Accept," then the coalition breaks down and all of the warlords fight among themselves to install each other as president. In this case, the president receives zero and each warlord receives his coup payoff. So

long as the number of warlords playing “Accept” is greater than  $s$ ,  $P$  stays in power and all the warlords in  $W^L$  simply receive their transfer according to  $x$ .

Finally, in every case where  $k > l$ , there will be at least one warlord  $i \in W^P \notin W^L$ . This unlucky warlord  $i$  receives zero, and is assumed to be incapable of challenging the combined force of the  $l$  warlords who now back the president. He played the lottery and lost, and will be liquidated: shut out of state jobs and racketeering rents. His political rehabilitation will be revoked, and it will no longer be taboo to notice prior criminal behaviors. He will probably flee the country. Even if he does not, his private army will disband itself as soldiers realize their patron cannot pay them.

**Fig. 2.1** A Visualization of The Game (Off-The-Equilibrium-Path Outcomes Not Shown)



**Analyzing The Game: Three Different Stable Outcomes**

Despite the fact that warlords have the first and last move in the game, *regardless of parameter values* the figurehead president, once installed, ought to be able to remain in power by buying off a coup. Often he can appropriate substantial rents for himself from the ability to make warlords choose from a limited palate of options.<sup>47</sup> He can build a version of a minimum winning coalition for domestic stability and and create a “shadow state,” exclusively loyal to him, which exists in parallel to regular state institutions. A crafty president can – and therefore will – use pay  $s$

warlords exactly what they would receive in a coup ( $pv^* - c$ ), paying the rest zero, and keeping everything else for himself.

Knowing this, what is a warlord to do in the first stage? Obviously it depends on what other warlords are doing. If most are fighting, he should fight as well. But even if enough warlords are working together for a figurehead president to be installed, each warlord  $i$  must compare his opportunities in  $W^P$  to his reservation value  $r$ . Since  $s$  is static, every warlord  $i$ 's utility is decreasing in  $k$ : Every warlord that plays "Install" worsens the  $W^L$  "insider lottery" odds for a warlord in  $W^P$ . And since warlords are symmetrical and interchangeable to the president, and the president doesn't need all of them, in the first stage warlords are gambling when they install a figurehead president. Still, if  $v^*$  and  $s$  are high and the reservation value  $r$  is low, a warlord might opt-in to the liquidation lottery.

In Appendix B, three different classes of subgame perfect Nash equilibria are identified, none of which involve the play of weakly dominated strategies: The *state failure* equilibrium, various *full incorporation* equilibria, and various *partial incorporation* equilibria. These equilibria have different distributional consequences.

- **State Failure: All Warlords Fight** The *state failure* equilibrium is inefficient but robust: If all warlords are planning to wage war and seize the capital, an individual warlord  $i$  can only make himself worse by not taking part in the scramble.
- **Partial Incorporation: Some Install A President, Some Refuse** In a *partial incorporation* equilibrium, some warlords form a coalition to install a president and some warlords remain outside the consolidation process. All warlords expect the president will use divide-and-rule tactics to play one against another, assembling the "cheapest" governing coalition of warlords possible, and keeping the rest for himself. The odds of winning the lottery diminish as  $k$  grows with every additional warlord who opts to enter the state. It makes sense for some, but not all, warlords to collude in the extortion game, and warlords in the state coalition prefer that hold-outs remain outside state structures.
- **Full Incorporation: All Warlords Install A President** In a *full incorporation* equilibrium, all warlords act together to install a president, expecting to extort him. The president can be counted on to distribute the rents of sovereignty  $v^*$  among the warlords who installed him.

What might be observed in a *state failure* equilibrium? Conditions that approximate Hobbesian war of all against all, with various factions fighting each other for survival. Tactical bargains between warlords break down. Rampant side-switching and coalition politics makes it impossible to identify the "master cleavage" of the conflict. Violent and unpredictable anarchy, chaotic looting, and social disintegration follow. Groups may blight the countryside, organizing and surviving by acting more like locusts than Maoists, with no desire to create order and no political project beyond survival and day-to-day enrichment.

What might be observed in a *partial incorporation* equilibrium? Some warlords will have been incorporated into the state apparatus and some have not. Some warlords inside the state do very well. Other warlords who reject state authority do just as well. Civil war may simmer at a low intensity. The sovereignty of the state may be challenged by territorial “shadow states,” strong organized criminals that operate in defiance or regime preferences, or foreign-backed insurgencies. One might observe stalled peace process, persistent low-intensity conflict between a coalition of urbanized gangsters that control the capital city and rural gangsters that reject the regime’s authority, or just a generically “weak state.” What all these situations have in common is that some “insurgent” warlords reason that there is more to be gained at the fringes of state control than there is to be gained serving as regime agents.

What might be observed in a *full incorporation* equilibrium? The vast majority of warlords will have been incorporated into the state apparatus and reinvented themselves as regime allies, rural policemen, or organized criminals with strong ties to the regime. Violence is no longer political. Different organizational and institutional forms form the “rules of the game” at this stage, but the underlying arrangements are not considered to be open for modification. While the threat of a palace coup hangs over the distribution of spoils, these threats can take the place of actual changes in government. The figurehead president manages a patronage network that allows warlords to reinvent themselves as state agents in the army, ministry of interior, tax police, or local government. Violence entrepreneurs are sated with rents received, and the emergence of unaccountable patronage networks inside regime ministries. Relationships with the president and with other warlords – not formal institutions – are the mortar that hold the arrangement together.

Taken sequentially, the three classes of equilibria identified in the last section provide an informal account of how failed states rehabilitate themselves after extended periods of violent anarchy. All warlords recognize that a *state failure* equilibrium is inefficient and to be avoided if possible. Some warlords initially collude to provide order, gain access to international wealth, and gain monopoly rents from the state apparatus that falls under their control. A local “puppet president” is selected as a placeholder for opaque coalition politics. Complicated bargaining follows and back-room deals are struck. As foreign aid and investment increases and the president acquires a reputation for fair dealing, parameter shifts gradually facilitate a switch from a *partial incorporation* equilibrium toward a *full incorporation* equilibrium. Peace and order are supported, in this account, by warlords’ ability to extort presidents directly and the international community indirectly. Warlords transmogrify into violence sub-contractors for the regime. Incrementally stripping bargaining power away from the men with guns is a local process, with the threat of a coup looming over the distribution of postwar spoils.

### **The Stability Threshold & The Reservation Value**

To preview the analytic narrative that follow: Two parameters critical to the comparison of Georgia and Tajikistan are the stability threshold ( $s$ ) and the reservation value ( $r$ ). The story of consolidation in the two decades since independence is

the story of declining reservation values. The decline in fortunes for warlords remaining outside the states can be either endogenous to the processes modeled (as a stable “shadow state” coalition emerges, it is increasingly capable of squeezing of atomized criminal competitors) or exogenous (driven by the actions of outsiders, especially great powers). Exogenous shifts in the reservation value are of obvious interest for students of international affairs. The obvious exception to the rule of reservation value decline is in the South Caucasus, where certain Abkhaz and South Ossetian warlords remain shielded by Russian military power. The timing of the 1997 peace accords in Tajikistan conform with shifts in Russian military policy towards Shah Massoud, the Tajik warlord in Afghanistan, who stopped providing safe havens across the border. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan dramatically reduced the expected utility of running a non-state armed group in Central Asia in a way that Tajik warlords simply not have been anticipated on September 10, 2001. As reservation values fall, the attractiveness of a lottery – even a rigged lottery – increases.

The stability threshold ( $s$ ) for a particular state is determined by international actors: foreign governments and offshore capital markets. It captures how a regime is regarded by important international actors in a position to provide recognition, aid, and military assistance. These actors attempt to include in their assessment local conditions (military technology available to warlords, terrain, distributions of popular support for radicals in the population at large) but their access to information about these conditions is limited. Neighborhood effects matter a great deal. In some settings, foreign powers are desperate to recognize an agent – any agent – to “keep a lid” on revolutionary activism in a state, and will send assistance to keep their client in power. If a regime has strong external backers, then the stability threshold  $s$  may be  $\frac{n}{3}$ ,  $\frac{n}{4}$ , or lower. A low stability threshold is more likely when the threat of anarchy loosed by certain out-of-coalition gangsters threatens the collective security of the international community. At the opposite extreme, foreign powers dislike the political orientation of the de-facto government and respond with sanctions or shunning – often observed in post-revolutionary settings – the stability threshold  $s$  may be close to  $n$ . A high stability threshold is justifiable when a regime faces strong international pressure and the out-of-coalition alternatives are seen as viable alternatives by the international community.

Analyzing the consolidation game with different stability thresholds is meant to capture differences between post-civil war regimes capable of attracting foreign patrons easily and post-civil war governments that are under constant pressure from outside forces. How does the game play out differently? When  $s$  is very high, most of the warlords in a country are necessary to provide order. This increases the “lottery odds” for a single warlord, making him more likely to be in a position to extort the president and get away with it. When  $s$  is very low, a small coalition of warlords is sufficient to keep the president in power. Equilibrium predictions are equivocal. If  $s$  is low, it is relatively easy to form a government but relatively difficult for the president to credibly commit to distribute wealth widely. This is a situation that has lower “lottery odds” from the perspective of any single warlord, since the president can easily play one out-of-coalition warlord against another and drive expected rents

toward zero. By contrast divide-and-rule is more difficult if  $s$  is high, but it is also more difficult to install a president in the first place.

When the stability threshold is extremely high, a *partial incorporation* equilibrium closely resembles a *full incorporation* equilibrium. Nearly all the warlords have to be bought off in order to achieve a minimum of stability. When the stability threshold is very low, a *partial incorporation* equilibrium has a very different feel – more of a high-stakes standoff between factions. *Full incorporation*, if it emerges at all, only does so when warlords’ reservation value ( $r$ ) drops precipitously toward zero. Chapter Five will frame Tajikistan and Georgian as exemplar cases of “low stability threshold” and “high stability threshold” consolidation projects.

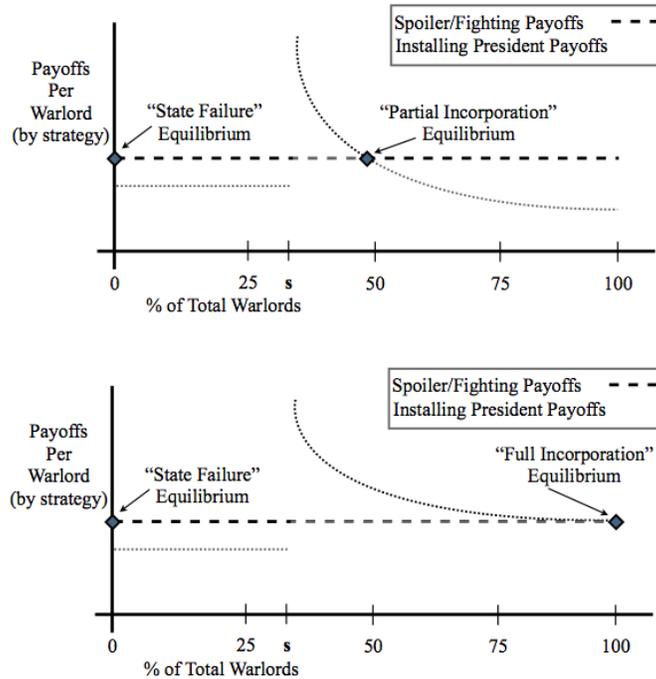
### Observable Implications

This chapter was motivated by a question: If warlords were the ones best positioned to profit from the breakdown of social order, and they knew that they were eventually going to be divided against each other by the president, why would they ever install a president in the first place? The answer is that they anticipate the total amount of wealth in the country to extort ( $v$ ) will increase once the floodgates of foreign aid ( $v^*$ ) are opened. The decision to install a puppet president is akin to buying a lottery ticket on inclusion in a winning coalition, which gets to extort the president for offices, privatization rights, and de-facto monopolies. How many opt in depends on their outside options; the stability threshold (higher implies better lottery odds); their odds of successful coup once president is installed (more go in if odds are better); the value of increased revenues from international support (higher obviously better). Equilibrium selection is fundamentally a matter of local politics. What coalitions emerge is a result of practice, politics, persuasion, personalities, and path-of-play as much as parameters. Informal patronage structures are assumed to run parallel to formal institutions. But this model accounts for a process by which warlords opt to civilianize themselves and loot the state from within because they could predict a vast quantity of potential wealth available to the “shadow state” coalition, while a figurehead president serves as a focal point for internationals.

Social order after civil war emerges out of collusion by predatory violence entrepreneurs. Conflict resolution professionals can benefit from revisiting familiar anecdotes of postwar settlement through the theoretical lens this model provides. Instead of treating the armed strength of a rebel challenger as an exogenous model parameter or giving causal weight to the policies of the third-party intervener, this approach seeks to explain variation in the relative size and strength of the incumbent and insurgent coalitions. The comparative statics of the model are straightforward and intuitive. Conditional on having achieved a *partial incorporation* equilibrium, the likelihood of a *full incorporation* equilibrium should increase with  $v^*$ . A higher ratio of  $v^*$  to  $v$  means more wealth for the warlords to steal. The reservation value for staying outside the consolidation process  $r$  is also a critical parameter, as discussed above. For easy exposition in Figure 2.3, I assume the most difficult case for consolidation: Even if  $s$  or more warlords install a president, I hold  $r$  identical to the “war economy” payoff,  $\frac{v}{n} - c$ . By choosing to “Fight” in the first stage, warlord  $i$

can always guarantee himself a “war economy” flow payoff. Note that in this stylization, higher costs of war and violence  $c$  translate directly into low reservation wage “war economy” payoffs, making it easier for the president to convince recalcitrant warlords to join the state. One might think of  $v^*$  as carrots and  $c$  as sticks.

Fig. 2.2 Intuitive Comparative Statics: How Outsiders Assist Consolidation



These comparative statics are not unqualified. Strategies are determined jointly, and the model explicitly admits the possibility of a violent *state failure* equilibrium regardless of model parameters. This has troubling policy implications for outsiders attempting to shape incentives in failing states. If armed actors have decided to seize the statehouse or extort the president, eleventh-hour wealth transfers may simply increase the value of the prize being contested. Once Georgian and Tajik criminal actors decided that others planned to break from the social contract and attempt to seize the capital with armed force, no amount of aid was likely to halt the slide towards violent anarchy. Put differently: There are two fully sustainable types of “war equilibria” possible in this model, and only them, the *partial incorporation* equilibrium, is even in principle susceptible to manipulation by outsiders.

Returning to Table 1.1 in Chapter One: The assumption symmetric warlords anchors this book in the lower half of the table, where foreigners are assumed to be blind to local particulars. Against the anarchic backdrop of state failure, it is too

costly for foreigners to even observe particulars local coalition politics, let alone shape them. Subsequent chapters will tackle the politics of equilibrium selection, and the movement from one type of equilibrium to another (“state failure,” “partial incorporation” or “full incorporation”) over time. From the perspective of Russia, trying to shape the contours of war termination indirectly – primarily by inducing warlords to cast their lot with the government (in Tajikistan) or stay outside the consolidating state (in Georgia) – the model suggests a relatively blunt set of financial, diplomatic, and military tools.<sup>48</sup> These comparative statics make relatively clear predictions about the costs and benefits of warlord incorporation into the state. It is clear in the top picture in Figure 2.2, which shows the payoffs in a *partial incorporation* equilibrium, that the payoffs to warlords who remain outside the state are identical to those inside the state. Since warlords are symmetric in power by assumption and indifferent between strategies in equilibrium, the model suggests that it is very difficult for anyone – foreign analysts or the warlords themselves – to predict who will accept the figurehead president and which will continue to oppose the state’s consolidation project. Because the president can tailor  $v^*$  rewards to field commanders individually, the model implies that in a *partial incorporation* equilibrium no measurable characteristics of a warlord should predict loyalty or defection (since they would already be priced by the president). The larger point is that homogenous warlords may, in equilibrium, rationally choose heterogenous strategies.

The notion that *partial incorporation* equilibrium can be sustained even with completely identical warlords is a subtle but important departure from this volume’s treatment of the post-Soviet wars from many other accounts. That certain armed actors attempt to stay out of the consolidation process, calculating they can do better at the fringes of state control, *needs have nothing to do with linguistic or religious difference, regional economic grievances, or anything else*. Oral historians, museum curators, and social scientists often succumb to the temptation to label the politicized cleavages that emerged from the post-Soviet wars as “primordial” or “natural.” A perspective based on coalition formation, by contrast, is designed to accommodate side-switching political reversals. When  $v^*$  gets very high or the reservation value  $r$  drops, the model predicts that cultural distance will be paved over as warlords opt to quietly join the state. Differences can be deconstructed. The territory of Adjara can, at the whim of a few warlords, be suddenly rejoined with the Georgian polity.

Russia’s role in both Georgia and Tajikistan continues to be disputed by local civil war participants, and will be the source of debate by future generations of Georgian and Tajik historians. To the extent that there was variation between Russia’s policy towards Georgia and its policy towards Tajikistan (as most observers would agree that there was) the model cannot explain it – only assume it. The model cannot account for changes wrought on post-war societies by the content of foreign aid, since  $v^*$  is assumed to be divided up in the form of graft. The model cannot explain why some separatists succeeded on making good on their demands and others did not.<sup>49</sup> And the model cannot explain why violence escalated to war in some parts of the Soviet periphery and not others. What exactly *does* the model do?

The model frames the politics of regime consolidation as being about the strategic relationships between warlords *and each other*. If the president is a placeholder for

a warlord coalition, it annihilates that easy distinction between “formal” (desirable) and “informal” (corrupt) institutions. Presidents are installed, or not, because of joint warlord strategies. Once installed, presidential chiseling is constrained by the ability of warlords to cooperate and collude together – to threaten a coordinated coup if the president breaks his promises, or to demand that some warlords be included in (or excluded from) the inner circle,  $W^L$ .<sup>50</sup> Equilibrium selection requires analysis of the way that inherited beliefs and social structures constrained the path of play. The model also sheds light on the question why the period just after presidents were installed was so violent: The president had not yet selected  $W^L$ , and warlords in  $W^P$  were jockeying for position in a high-stakes game of musical chairs, with  $v^*$  as the prize. The model does not attempt to explain the expansion and contraction of militia memberships – it explicitly treats warlords, and the militias they command, as fully interchangeable, identical, and unitary. Viewed from the streets, of course, warlords are not at all interchangeable. Popular and capable warlords could recruit larger armies and demand to be “bought out” by the state. Wartime coalition politics was tremendously uncertain and contingent, and there was great uncertainty about who the warlords were and which were strongest. Many foot soldiers came to imagine that their individual contributions of labor to a militia could change the course of the consolidation process. All of this is detailed in Chapter Four.

Another thing that the model does is emphasize that the president is in an agency relationship with violence entrepreneurs, whose threat of a coup hangs over distributional politics. The model describes an oligopoly of violence emerging based on structures of personalist rule. These structures are described in Chapter Five.

Finally: This account gives tremendous agency to warlords, the political actors capable of overturning local order. Who were these warlords? How did they come to seize the reins of politics in post-independence Georgia and Tajikistan? Why did violence escalate so quickly? Before we can exit from anarchy, we must first enter it. The narrative journey from independence to state failure begins in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

# Warlord Coalitions & Militia Politics

For many, the answer to the puzzle of short wars along the post-Soviet periphery is over-determined: Russia intervened, *only* Russia intervened, and the totalitarian legacy of scientific socialism bequeathed institutions hard-wired for centralization. Large, slow-moving structural variables – inculcated beliefs and hard geopolitical realities – made for quick and stable war outcomes. But this chapter will provide evidence that the great powers did not send money or guarantee regime support until *after* strong clients emerged, via local understandings between armed groups. In the language of the model: Russia was essential to establishing the stability threshold  $s$ ; outsiders dangled  $v^*$ , and locals adjusted. Aid produced new rents, which incentivized warlords to cartel the production of street violence, establish local order in the capital and secure international borders, and keep violence out of sight and off-camera. Understandings between militia captains had to emerge on the ground before foreigners could help to “shore it up” with aid and assistance. The blurring of proper nouns in the over-taxed memories of foreign observers was always part of the plan. As a Tbilisi diplomat put it: “Independence for these republics meant that the angry people with the long last names just weren’t Moscow’s problem anymore.”<sup>165</sup>

This chapter begins by describing the process by which heads of state of were selected and installed. The presidents that were selected to head the warlord coalitions in Georgia and Tajikistan were nationalist technocrats, with established reputations for honesty and fair-dealing. The people doing the selection were warlords – and in a few cases war criminals with notorious reputations. Figurehead presidents then managed shifting, overlapping coalitions of these criminal interests.

The remainder of the chapter will explain how warlords came to understand which of them were “winners” and which were “losers” in the consolidation process. Ceding power to a civilian figurehead carried risks for warlords. All had criminal backgrounds and knew that their political immunity could be revoked if the political winds changed. In the interim period after installation but before the “coup proofing” process was complete, political uncertainty translated into street violence. The number of armed actors expanded during this period. To the extent that there was any disarmament, it was by the losers of the consolidation process, who were abandoned by their soldiers once it was clear that their patrons would not ever be

in a position to give them jobs. A model that treats all warlords as essentially interchangeable in this process – subordinating the causal weight of social networks, warlord ideology and charisma, or clandestine foreign interventions – is sure to be a messy fit with either the Tajik or Georgian reality. Whether it is a worse fit than rival two-player “incumbent vs. insurgent” models is for the reader to judge.

### **Equilibrium Selection: Puppet Presidents**

In this book’s account, order emerges when some warlords recognize that there are rents to be gained ( $v^*$ ) from creating a territorial cartel of violence and extorting foreigners. The central observable implication of the theory is that the post-war government ought to be composed of a large number of warlords and a figurehead president. This president is forced to do the bidding of the warlords who install him because these warlords continue to control the guns, and he understands that if he does not he will be replaced by some other public intellectual or representative of the *nomenklatura*. How does this account square with the historical record?

Consider Table 4.1, which displays the coalitions that emerged out of anarchy in Georgia and Tajikistan. A “warlord,” in this table, is a socially recognized actor who commanded at least 30 armed men at the time.<sup>166</sup> In the inaugural cabinets there was cosmetic attention to creating a sense of political continuity for civilians, with familiar Soviet ministry titles doled out and familiar faces in positions of power. But many of these were notorious familiar faces, transformed overnight into non-elected veto players. In Tajikistan, Sangak Safarov, the head of the army, had served 23 years in jail for murder. Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Mirzoev had been previously convicted of gang rape – not once but twice. Yakub Salimov, the face of the Dushanbe mafia, was selected to be the Minister of the Interior. Rauf Saliev, a well-known Dushanbe racketeer and established drug kingpin, was selected to head the new Secret Police. Even the spokesperson for the political opposition – Abdulmalik Abdullojonov, the Prime Minister – had a reputation for being friendly with Khojandi organized crime networks. The entire Tajik coalition was clearly assembled with an audience in the emergent CIS security framework, under the suzerainty of Uzbekistan and the watchful eye of the KGB. The same basic story plays out in Georgia, but without the Russian influence and with power much more centralized in the hands of the celebrity head of state, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, and Tengiz Kitovani and Jabba Ioseliani, introduced in the previous chapter.

In Georgia, Jabba Ioseliani, the head of the Mkhedrioni, was responsible for hatching the plan to invite Shevardnadze back to his homeland, to serve on their military council as the head of “his” newly-independent state.<sup>167</sup> The conversation between Kitovani and Ioseliani which debated the wisdom of bringing Shevardnadze back has spawned many urban legends, but it is clear that the main actors involved in the conversation were anxious about the possibility of being marginalized in a future coalition. Kitovani, recalling the tactics Shevardnadze used to ascend to the post of the First Secretary of Georgia’s Communist Party, predicted that they would be “dogs on a leash or jailed” within 5 years.<sup>168</sup> Ioseliani carried the day, arguing that Shevardnadze had spent a lifetime cultivating a reputation for honesty, chaste

**Table 4.1** Who Was In Charge After The Post-Soviet Wars?

| Name  | Warlord?         | Criminal? | Position In Government      |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| <i>The Presidium State Council of Georgia</i> |                  |           |                             |
| Tengiz Kitovani                               | Yes              | Yes       | Head of National Guard      |
| Jabba Ioseliani                               | Yes              | Yes       | Head of the “Mkhedrioni”    |
| Eduard Shevardnadze                           | No               | No        | “Head Of State”             |
| Tengiz Sigua                                  | No               | ?         | Prime Minister              |
| <i>First Cabinet of Emomalii Rakhmanov</i>    |                  |           |                             |
| Emomalii Rakhmonov                            | No               | No        | Head of State/President     |
| Abdumalik Abdullojonov                        | No               | Yes       | Prime Minister              |
| Rustam Mirzoev                                | No               | Yes       | Deputy Prime Minister       |
| Yakub Salimov                                 | Yes              | Yes       | Minister of the Interior    |
| Ghaffor Mirzoyev*                             | Yes              | Yes       | Deputy Minister of Interior |
| Sangak Safarov*                               | Yes              | Yes       | Head Of Armed Forces        |
| Alexander Shishlyannikov                      | No <sup>#</sup>  | No        | Minister of Defense         |
| Saidamir Zukhurov                             | No <sup>##</sup> | No        | Chairman of NSC             |
| Rauf Saliev                                   | Yes              | Yes       | Head of GAI                 |
| Shurob Kasimov                                | Yes              | Yes       | Head of Special Forces      |
| Mahmadnazar Salikhov                          | No               | ?         | General Prosecutor          |

\* = Unofficial cabinet members (attended meetings in “advisory” capacity)

# = Ethnic Russian, Armed Service Representative of Uzbekistan

## = Representative of KGB

? = Reasonable people disagree

loyalty to the ideals of the Communist Party, and taking care of his friends. Despite their initial reluctance, both Segura and Kitovani were swayed by the logic that they were more likely to stay afloat financially with Shevardnadze at the helm than with some unknown alternative. There was agreement, however, that Shevardnadze’s was a dangerous fixture: Ioseliani recalled an understanding between himself and Kitovani that the old man’s “hands must be held.”<sup>169</sup>

When Shevardnadze returned to Georgia in Spring 1993, these men were immediately promoted within the power structure and merged their militias into the state armed forces and security services. At this time Zviad Gamsakhurdia was technically still the president of Georgia – it was not until the constitutional referendum of 1995 that Shevardnadze could claim that title for his own. He was initially just

one member of an ad-hoc military council, a consensus body composed of Ioseliani, Kitovani, and Gamsakhurdia's former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua (another architect of the coup, but with no particularly strong social base).<sup>170</sup> Shevardnadze made symbolic gifts to the warlords, distributing uniforms and titles. Kitovani became the Minister of Defense. Ioseliani held many formal titles including Head of the Emergency Reaction Corps (an autonomous sub-division of the armed forces). One of Ioseliani's hand-picked lieutenants, Temur Khachishvili, became the Minister of the Interior. Kitovani was permitted to parade with sophisticated military hardware procured from high-placed Russian military connections, such as a computerized T-72 tanks. Ioseliani sat beside Shevardnadze in the State Council. He also expressed his friendship with Ioseliani and Kitovani in regular public statements, suggesting that he was personally insulted when people referred to those men as criminals. One of the first things Shevardnadze did was politically rehabilitate the coup-plotters in the most public manner possible, stating in an interview with the *Moscow News*:

Discussing the criminal records of certain people who are my partners now is offensive to me. One should not be reminded of sins committed in youth. On the contrary, I admire the people who had enough strength, will power, and courage to overcome all and make a new start in life. I categorically disagree with those who keep reminding them of their past. Now they are great statesmen. . . . Before returning to Georgia I resolved to forget old grudges and abstain from witch hunts.<sup>171</sup>

The Presidium State Council was run as a consensus body: Every member had a veto over every decision. Every member also had proposal power. This was an unwieldy way to get much of anything done in terms of the domestic policy, and not surprisingly it did not persist for very long. What was most clear from this arrangement was the experiment being embarked upon: Essentially, Shevardnadze was allowed to take responsibility for forging an autonomous foreign policy for Georgia, delegating a small number of warlords the task of keeping the capital city from rioting. This provided a window of time to see what Shevardnadze could do. Five months later, on a hot day in August, Kitovani's militias – now acting in their capacity as the Georgian national army – would invade Abkhazia under the pretense of taking the war to Gamsakhurdia and his “Zviadists.”

In Tajikistan there was no analogous celebrity figurehead to serve as a focal point for coordination. Sefarali Kenjayev, a Hissori who was the former Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, was the founder of The Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT), a loose coalition of paramilitary groups united by a desire to defend the interests of the groups that had traditionally gained the most during the late Soviet period. His faction of the Popular Front was actually the first to capture Dushanbe in October 1992. For a window of about eighteen hours, his men occupied the relevant buildings in the capital city. But other warlords did not coordinate on his ascendancy. His soldiers were driven from the capital when it became clear that neither the Russian garrison in Dushanbe nor PFT troops from the south were rallying under his flag.

In mid-November 1992, after three different national rulers had been forced to flee the capital city, the 16th Session of the Supreme Soviet convened in the unusual location of *Arbob Kholkhoz*, a collective farm on the outskirts of Leninobod. This city was the political stronghold of the traditional Khojandi families who had en-

couraged the formation of the Popular Front. PFT field commanders were visibly in attendance. “Baba Sangak” Safarov himself guaranteed security for the event, and was present at every major meeting. Many of the Gharimi and Pamiri representatives refused to make the journey due to security concerns and were thus not present for voting.<sup>172</sup> It was decided at this meeting that Nabiev would be resigned as president and that the office of the presidency would be temporarily abolished. Parliamentarians in attendance voted to elevate Emomalii Rakhmonov, a completely unknown figure, to the dual offices of head of state and head of government.

There was no doubt in the minds of any of the assembled representatives that Rakhmonov was Safarov’s candidate. They hailed from the same region of Kulob (Dangara) and even the same region of Dangara. In fact, Rakhmonov had only been elevated to the post of Sovkhoz Chairman of the Kulob Soviet a few weeks before this meeting, after the previous Sovkhoz head had been murdered by Safarov on the 28th of October.<sup>173</sup> A government representative recalls a conversation with Rakhmonov the night before he was installed as Head of State in the following way: “He made it clear that the country needed peace, and that peace would require difficult choices. But those choices were not going to come any more at the expense of Kulob. He wanted to build a strong state . . . based on the values he had learned in Kulob, and to give charity to the people who had helped him climb.”<sup>174</sup> In the prophetic words of Barnett Rubin, the installation of Rakhmonov represented the first signs of “a shift from ‘those who held the factories and party personnel committees’ to ‘those who held the guns.’”<sup>175</sup> Approximately one month later, on December 10, demoralized Pamiri militias finally capitulated and Popular Front forces entered Dushanbe. The capital would not change hands again.

#### **No Disarmament & No External “Security Guarantees”**

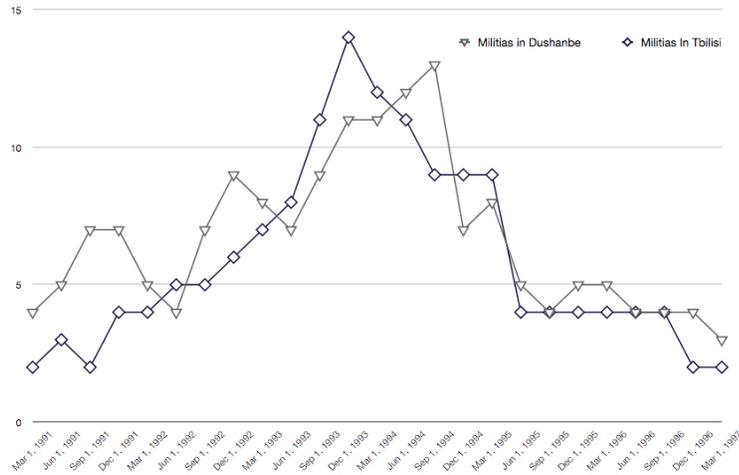
The model in Chapter Two assumes that after installing a president, warlords will maintain effective control of men and weapons. Power is still about controlling violence. Militias provide leverage to extort the civilian president for ministry jobs. Warlords are permitted to re-invent themselves as reformed political figures, but they keep soldiers on call, ready to mobilize at a moment’s notice.

This account matches closely with the empirical reality of these post-Soviet settlements. Voluntary warlord disarmament was a dead letter. In both the hinterlands and secessionist “shadow states,” combatants dug in. In the capitals, as civilians watched police forces become saturated with militia members, there were perverse incentives for young men to try to reinvent themselves as warlords and shoot their way into the ruling coalition (below). Friction between the police and militias was often friction between individuals different sides of the semi-permeable state membrane. Weapons proliferated. Many joined the state security services expecting they would get access to better guns and newer equipment, making it easier to return to the mountains if they had to.<sup>176</sup> Abdullo, a Tajik field commander, explaining why his UTO unit allowed itself to be integrated earlier than some of his rivals, recalls that when he had his men take a vote one of the arguments that carried the day was “wanting to try the new American AK-47s.”<sup>177</sup> It was widely understood that field

commanders expected to keep some sort of face-saving fallback position if promises were broken down the road. The pervasive culture of street violence and the demonstrated inability of the regime to keep its promises meant retreating to the mountains was never far from anyone's mind in this period. As Koba, one of my Georgian key informants put it, "the Gamsakhurdia coup sent a clear message: If you can shell the statehouse . . . you probably won't be the one starving in the mountains."<sup>178</sup>

Rather than disarmament, what can be easily observed in Figure 4.3 is a proliferation of active militias in the immediate aftermath of Rakhmonov and Shevardnadze's ascension to power. This was a period of unprecedented militia expansion and fragmentation.<sup>179</sup> The locus of bargaining had shifted to the capital city, and the gold rush for spoils created perverse incentives for militia expansion.

**Fig. 4.1** Non-State Militias in Dushanbe and Tbilisi, 1991-1996



State weakness is often presented as the "cause" for the proliferation of violence entrepreneurs – and in one sense it was. After all, there was no one to make arrests. But note well that in this account it was actually the expectations of a *strengthening* state that led to the expansion and fragmentation of militias. The promise of future bilateral aid from foreign donors increased the value of the prize being fought over. Violence between factions was replaced by violence that was essentially *within* the winning faction. Sustained and intense intra-ethnic violence followed.

Militias did eventually disappear – not because they were disarmed, but because their memberships disintegrated, or switched commanders, as warlords were forced out of the violence game. This could happen rapidly. Though no one surrendered their weapons, many groups “dissolved” – whatever social capital that sustained them broke apart, and recruits went their separate ways. Viewed through this lens, the violence during this period is best understood as a product of high-stakes tournament between paramilitary militia groups, competing to be part of the winning coalition selected by the installed president. Some militia captains – with the aid of young men recruited with promises of plunder and patronage – became valuable assets for the regime, while others were driven from the capital city at gunpoint. It is difficult to sustain the case that any of this was the result of plans hatched in Moscow. Eduard Shevardnadze was an agent of the discredited Communist party and the even-more-discredited Gorbachev regime.<sup>180</sup> Rakhmonov was a complete unknown – political wildcard compared to the fully-vetted prime minister, Abdulmalik Abdullojonov. This is not to say that importance of Russian preferences for foreign aid, military assistance, and diplomatic recognition were absent from the minds of Georgian and Tajik warlords – it is that local actors were more than capable of anticipating Russian demands and providing them with much of what they actually wanted before they asked for it. A common strategy employed by both Rakhmonov and Shevardnadze was the practical move of installing a Russian general as the Minister of Defense (or an ethnically-Russian Uzbek general in the Tajik case), pre-positioned to leak information back to Moscow – which I interpret as evidence that the new governments had a commitment problem with the former metropole they were anxious to solve. But the speed at which these complicated and contingent political coalitions formed and re-formed must have outpaced the flailing Russian foreign policy apparatus.

Chapter Two provides an account where peace is observed after insurgents give up and scramble to cut the best deal that they can. The basic logic of the mechanism suggested by the model – lowering reservation values – needs have nothing to do with security guarantees to a post-war regime. This account fits the post-Soviet empirical record quite closely. Russian elites did not even bother articulating an interest in serving as an honest broker, and were overall neither capable of nor interested in punishing regimes in newly sovereign states for renegeing on promises to the insurgents. Moscow’s consistent rhetorical promise, to the extent that it was coherent, was to aid the Tajik government as it pressed hold-outs and to aid secessionist minority enclaves against the peace overtures of the Georgians.

Reasonable people have confused the actions of prominent Russian field commanders or members of the Soviet 201st Motorized Rifle Division – which included giving or selling weapons to both sides – with official Russian policy. The official Russian policy, to the extent that it was coherent, was calibrated to cauterizing violence and stopping the chaos from spreading beyond Tajikistan’s borders. Russia’s nightmare was that Afghan warlords and American-funded Mujahideen would ally with the UTO and infect the entire region with radical ideology.<sup>181</sup> It was also interested in a great many other things: supporting traditional Khojandi client networks, managing the relationship with the newly sovereign state of Uzbekistan, establish-

ing legal precedents for CIS intervention into the near abroad, and more. As shall be made clear in the pages that follow, diplomatic efforts to facilitate peace talks (often jointly with Iran and the United Nations) occurred alongside direct military support for counterinsurgency. Keeping the Tajik state intact as a sort of buffer-zone, and hoping that radical Islamist-types would self-select into that mountain theater to be killed, passed as grand strategy in the early 1990s. The Yeltsin government had its hands full trying to establish its own domestic authority at home.

It is reasonable to ask: How could the Russian government possibly have offered credible “security guarantees” to Tajik civil war participants under these conditions? There was not much of a sense that it was even worth learning the proper nouns of the Tajik civil war until sometime midway through the peace process. There was little political coherence to the opposition militias. Warlords were often deploying *noms de guerre* or sending cousins or nephews to negotiate in their stead. From the perspective of civilians living in contested regions, this was a time of unchecked banditry, looting, and terror. As a former high-ranking UN member and observer of the inter-Tajik peace talks stated, “The main misunderstanding of the United Tajik Opposition was that they were ‘united.’ The second major misunderstanding, at least by the end, was that their ‘opposition’ was political in any way. The war gave these men cover, but their motives never matched well with their rhetoric. . . . These were gangsters, pure and simple.”<sup>182</sup>

The situation in the South Caucasus, where the conflict broke down territorial lines, was different. Russian policy in Georgia raised the reservation value for Abkhaz and South Ossetian warlords so high that no offer from Shevardnadze could make them better-off than they already were behind the shield of Russian guns and UN flags. This had the effect of providing security guarantees to non-Georgian ethnic insurgents who had seized inherited administrative structures in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjara.<sup>183</sup> The tragic result of this support, however, was often as not the ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Abkhaz and South Ossetian militias – certainly not a framework of general disarmament or conflict de-escalation. Just as Russian backing for ethnic minority militias had served as a recruiting tool for the Mkhedrioni and National Guard units (who could then claim to acting to protect, or avenge, their brethren), ongoing Russian support for the territories has reinforced the necessity of a strong Georgian army. These conflicts remain frozen and persist to this day.

### **Urban Warfare: The Time of Troubles**

By January 1, 1993, war reporters would describe both the Tajik and Georgian capitals as controlled by a militarily dominant coalition of paramilitaries. The Popular Front had driven their opponents across the Tajik border into Afghanistan or into the impassable Pamiri mountains of Badakshon to freeze. The forces of the Mkhedrioni and the National Guard – which would soon prove incapable of imposing their will on the Russian-backed secessionist enclaves of Abkhazia, Adjara, or South Ossetia – were in control of Tbilisi. Militia members confronted an unpaid Soviet-era police structure that was cut off from political and material patronage in Moscow. Urban citizens recall two distinct waves of urban violence after Dushanbe

and Tbilisi fell into the hands of ruling paramilitary factions. The first was a chaotic reign of terror when militia members were encouraged by commanders to claim their share of the spoils of victory in the form of looting.<sup>184</sup> Bahron, who was a pastoralist in Kulob and never had visited Dushanbe before the war, remembers a sense of betrayal and resentment that he felt toward the civilians in the capital:

“We came into this city and realized that they had everything, these Pamiris and Leninobodis. We finally saw with our own eyes that [their commander] Hussein had been telling the truth – the Russians had been sending money to Tajikistan for years, but these men in the capital had stolen it! All their homes had glass windows and gas. We knew . . . that we had been fools to spend so many winters in the cold.”<sup>185</sup>

But this relatively short period of unchecked looting – lasting weeks, not months – was replaced by a very long, very tense stand-off between the armed groups. The second came after this carnival of violence had subsided, after the end of major combat operations. For while war had raged in rural areas, for most civilians in the capital, the state continued to provide many public goods. Metros and busses continued to run. Schools continued to operate. Citizens kept their heads down, went about their routines. Bread factories kept pushing out *non* (bread) in Tajikistan, and the metro system kept hauling young men and women to dates across Tbilisi. Most of the militia members believed that they were *owed* something by the civilians back in the capital who were the beneficiaries of their protection and sacrifice. A key respondent voiced a common complaint heard by many veterans of Abkhazia:

“Back in Tbilisi life went on pretty much as before. There were parties, wine, weddings, graduations . . . People bought cars and planned for their future. But we’d been fighting for their behalf! For their kids! I watched friends get shot! For them! And then it was over and we came home they were like ‘Oh, that war was such a tragedy.’ They didn’t help, and didn’t know a thing about it! So yeah, we were mad.”<sup>186</sup>

With both capitals awash with cheap weaponry and angry young men, militia captains became power brokers, managing the resentments and expectations of their soldiers. Terrible urban warfare gripped the urban centers of Dushanbe and Tbilisi for months. As prominent warlords began to merge their memberships with the security services of the captured regime apparatus – appropriating for themselves lucrative positions in the Ministry of Defense, Interior, State Security, and other power ministries – it became impossible for civilians to tell police from criminals. Urban residents of Tbilisi and Dushanbe recall this period as “The Time of Troubles.”

And then the violence stopped. Lifetime residents of these capital cities agree substantially on the month – sometimes the week – that order was restored in their neighborhood. Violence broke out in these states slowly, as a result of accumulating processes of escalation through the late Soviet period. Peace, by contrast, broke out virtually overnight.<sup>187</sup> By the end of 1995 most militias had retreated. Dushanbe and Tbilisi were patrolled by uniformed police officers – some of whom did not feel a need to carry weapons. To the delight of the international aid community and foreign diplomatic corps, prominent militia commanders were arrested. Anarchy on the streets subsided. Driving militias from the capital city was considered a tremendous victory for state-building. But where did these police forces come from? What

processes were sustaining urban violence during the “Time of Troubles,” and why did those processes come to an end? And if it was possible for forces of order to triumph so quickly and completely, why did it take so long for the “tip” towards order and security to occur?

The “Time of Troubles” was a relatively brief period – after Dushanbe and Tbilisi had changed hands, but before the emergence of a secure regime – when militia members had the opportunity to convert their short-term social capital into long-term life opportunities. It was a window of time characterized by deep uncertainty, by the foot-soldiers themselves, about the final shape of the post-war coalition. It was also a period when these foot soldiers felt the window closing on their ability to make heroic demonstrations that might have had some chance of shaping the settlement to their advantage. Competition became violent as the wartime coalition splintered apart and different militia groups cannibalized each other’s memberships. Political actors supported large militias as a sort of political insurance against being trimmed from the spoils of victory. Many militia members were lured into service by promises of good jobs by their patron. Once external events clarified membership in the ruling coalition, large militias became obsolete. The promises of many would-be patrons were suddenly worthless. It took days, not weeks, for militia recruits to switch commanders or quit the streets.

The failure to account for the sudden disappearance of urban militias reflects a more general failure to properly account for the motivations of combatants in the post-Soviet wars.<sup>188</sup> That the bargains between warlords and their subordinates could disappear overnight undermines the idea that the sustained presence of militias can be explained by theories that rely on slow-moving structural factors such as state weakness, easily accessible cultural repertoires of violence, deep primordial solidarities, or psychopathy.<sup>189</sup> Up until the moment that they departed the streets of the capital, *the departing militia members explicitly considered themselves part of the state*, and were well-positioned to contest their share of the rents of statehood. Rather than imagining these groups through the various analogies of “ethnic armies,” “mafia businessmen,” or “criminal thugs,” during this period these groups can be productively thought of as participants in a high stakes tournament. Warlords struggled with the problem of recruiting and retaining volunteers in an environment where money had lost value. Militia members were trying to help their paramilitary captain secure a good position in the consolidating regime in a complex and uncertain environment, but one that was less anarchic as time passed.

How were the stakes of this violent tournament understood? Having lived through the rampant corruption of the late Soviet period, the emergent violence entrepreneurs understood that the best opportunities for a better life involved getting their family members “inside.” Interviews with militia members from rural areas – who often had little formal education and who had never been to the capital city before the civil war – shared understandings with their urban counterparts. Foot soldiers watched as warlords and their lieutenants secured virtual empires inside the new ministries, inheriting centralized proto-industrial economies, with numerous bottlenecks in the provision of public goods. Each bottleneck was an opportunity for rent-seeking. The ability to issue passports or transit permits, or operate busses or trucking businesses

without fear of being stopped at checkpoints, blurred the line between smuggling and trade. Consumer goods of all kinds traveled by road to the post-Soviet capitals. Liquor, gasoline, drugs, and cigarettes were the most profitable trade goods, but food was imported as well. And entrepreneurs with money, property, or connections could buy police divisions wholesale with a few well-placed appointments. Private armies could mediate contract and wage labor disputes. Criminal kingpins and warlords were the pivot-players in this relationship, and they managed armed forces that could bring the whole system down if they were crossed. As the security services formed and re-formed, commanders used their armies like lobbyists – to jockey for power, influence, and privileged jobs.

The fighters, who had often made great personal sacrifices in an attempt to transform their society, wanted these jobs. The wars terminated in a way that settled none of the underlying grievances that motivated young men to fight. If they could not achieve their deepest desires, they could at least be realistic about compensation for their sacrifices and labor. Not all jobs were equal. The most coveted positions were in subsections of the Ministry of the Interior and the Border Guards, since it was well-understood that these jobs could be immediately converted into tax farming and smuggling rents. Because the politics of privatization were being worked out at the same time as the civil wars were being settled, being in the police was a path to nearly instant racketeering wealth. The liquidity of property rights made mutually-beneficial transactions between criminals and residual nomenklatura transparent. The worst jobs tended to be in the army, since it often left soldiers stationed outside the capital or tasked with conducting grinding, thankless counterinsurgency operations in the mountains. Particularly in Tajikistan, the army came to be seen as a dumping ground for the least politically-connected militias. But at least it was a job.

The evidence that follows suggests that there was a powerfully simple logic to the violence that followed. Militia members were recruited into militias by either the lure of short-term benefits (excitement, racketeering rents) or the hope of long-term jobs in the consolidated regime. These benefits were weighed against the probability of injury or death that came with entering the violence game under the leadership of a particular militia captain. Promises of jobs were always conditional on the militia captain being incorporated into the regime. Because it was impossible to predict what the final membership in the ruling coalition would be, it was very difficult for warlords to make promises of spoils credible to their memberships.

One of the main strategic micro-behaviors that militia recruits engaged in, faced with this uncertainty, was switching militias. As Table 4.2 makes clear, side-switching during and after the civil war was relatively common, particularly after major combat operations were concluded. It was common for small groups of men recruited in the same neighborhood or village to “move together” since this would give them protection and bargaining power within the new militia structure after switching commanders.<sup>190</sup> Side-switching was more prevalent in Georgia than in Tajikistan. In Georgia, these close trust networks could be re-inserted as a full-module into a different commander’s network (allowing “horizontal” movement between militias). In Tajikistan the *avlod* obligation networks that connected recruits and commanders (a “vertical” relationship) bound tight, transmitted through an in-

**Table 4.2** Evidence of a Street Violence Market: Militia Members Switched Patrons

| VARIABLES   | All Georgian Tajikistan |     |     |
|---|-------------------------|-----|-----|
|   |                         |     |     |
| Switched Commanders At Least Once During Civil War  | 35%                     | 45% | 25% |
| Switched Commanders At Least Once After Civil War   | 47%                     | 31% | 17% |
| Quit His Militia When He Felt His Life Was At Stake | 38%                     | 52% | 24% |
| Observations  | 173                     | 84  | 89  |

visible audience of second cousins and tongue-clicking matrons. As a result, Tajik militia members in my sample were unlikely to desert from a militia even when their life was at stake, and members tended to remain in the service of the commander who recruited them. The obvious impetus for side-switching was when a commander was killed. In Georgia, by contrast, almost half of respondents in my sample switched commanders at least once during the war, and nearly four-fifths switched at least once during the Time of Troubles.<sup>191</sup>

A generic focus on social solidarity and criminal entrepreneurship in militia groups can obscure the main currency that was actually used to recruit militia members during this period: An emerging “futures market” in political favoritism, contracted by warlords at the time of recruitment. Violence during this period was an indirect byproduct of high-stakes bargaining between paramilitaries, competing over the spoils of victory. Some militia captains – with the aid of young men recruited with promises of plunder and patronage – became valuable assets for the regime and earned shares of black market goods and services. Others were driven from the capital city at gunpoint. Understanding how militias were recruited gives insight into changes in the character of the violence as the war progressed. The price of social order, at least in the minds of soldiers who already had blood on their hands, was making sure that the distribution of wealth and influence could be rationalized in the context of leaders’ ability to organize violence. If it could not, there were strong incentives for newcomers to try and break in to the system, hoping to be bought out.

#### **A Political Economy of Militias: Expansion & Contraction in 4 Phases**

In the post-Soviet wars, the decision to join a militia amounted to risking one’s life in exchange for some short-term mix of security and loot, and the long-term promise of better life opportunities if a recruit aligned himself with a worthy patron. The participants in this violent scramble understood that some warlords would be in the coalition assembled by the president and others would be marginalized. The

men that were the most likely to join these militias tended to be either serially unemployed or temporary “true believers.” Too many young men thought that they willing to forego safer life opportunities for the excitement of holding a gun. Separating the wheat from the chaff required some sort of tournament between militia captains: A sorting process to determine which individuals had the most talent for convincing others to fight on their behalf.

One of the central characteristics of the post-Soviet wars is that they were fought with voluntary labor in states with few meaningful institutions. There was no trusted national currency, no banking system, no courts to enforce contracts. The nature of the spoils being fought over required political capital – but the political center had already been shown to be vulnerable to rapid disintegration. The leaders (“warlords”) and followers (“recruits”) had come of age in a social system where kin networks were necessary for everyday life. Friends and allies drew on dense networks of social capital, and joined militias on the intuition that getting a foothold inside the new state bureaucracy represented their best chance to increase their life opportunities. In one sense, there were a few analytically distinguishable kinds of uncertainty: Uncertainty by a recruit over the character of the warlord (whether a patronage relationship is incentive compatible), uncertainty by a recruit over which warlords will emerge inside the “shadow state” at the end of the coalition-formation process (whether the warlord ever actually be in a position to dispense patronage), and basic labor market uncertainty about the quality of a recruit.

The brutal tournament cut through these layers of complexity: When the chips were down, which warlords could organize violence most efficiently? This question could only be answered in real-time, and with deeds – not words. The brutal urban warfare that emerged during the “Time of Troubles” resolved three kinds of uncertainty in the emerging market for militia labor. It reduced uncertainty for militia members about which warlords were able to recruit large groups of capable fighters, driving charlatans and incompetents from the fray. It reduced uncertainty for militia captains about the loyalty, fighting capability, and overall resolve of their men. And in the end it reduced everyone’s uncertainty about which warlords were likely to end up in the winning coalition, and be able to deliver on their promises of patronage. The gang war in the streets accomplished what the war itself had not – it screened the unfit members from the mob, let everyone gauge their relative strength accurately, and finally select a minimum winning coalition.

Most civilians’ primary memory of this period is being caught between different spheres of authority. The practical effect was often competitive racketeering: double- and triple-taxation for those unlucky stragglers who could not, or did not, hide their wealth. Consider this story from a Dushanbe-based musician:

“I had a friend who loved rock music. After independence . . . he could make good business on the street just selling copies of his Led Zeppelin tapes. The problem was that guys who worked for the government . . . they never paid. They’d come and pick over his merchandise, take what they wanted. Then the tax police would come and do the same thing. Then guys from the army. Then some guys came who claimed they were with the mayor? Then the same local police came by again – guys from [his neighborhood]. He tried to complain. They said there was nothing they could do – that everyone had to chip in and be patriotic.

So after just a while he just stopped. He figured somebody would steal from him no matter what, but he didn't count on lots of different people stealing.<sup>192</sup>

With no functioning state authority capable of centralizing control of the militias and paying member wages, there was not an obvious solution to the problem of public order. Disputes over who exactly was permitted to profit from informal tax structures led to infighting between warlords. Directors of profitable national industries began to be killed with regularity. Informal taxation schemes evolved organically to divide up territory and spoils between warlords. There was no recognized authority to split tax rents. As the various warlords ascended to ministry positions, new lieutenants had to step up and prove themselves. Various militia captains – the de-facto providers of urban order – were suddenly thrust into the midst of everyday governance dilemmas that could not be delegated or deferred. How would food be distributed to families who could not afford to pay? Where would the influx of refugees from rural areas be housed? What sorts of punishments should be meted out against people accused of crimes? Who gets to carry a gun? What should be done with aspiring journalists who are bearing witness and naming names?<sup>193</sup>

The solutions to many of these problems required cooperative arrangements between different neighborhoods. This meant either cooperation between militia captains or expansion of one militia at the expense of another. And so long as the residual fears about the potential for a re-ignited wider conflict justified their existence, there was substantial social support for popular captains to keep their armies intact and throw their weight around the capital. But as old obligation networks began to reassert themselves, some began nervously looking up the hierarchy, trying to determine who had actually secured a “roof” and who had not.<sup>194</sup> Competitive pressures led militia captains to expand their recruit pool and to target each other.

There were two different sorts of newcomers to the violence game: New foot soldiers (essentially “new cheap labor,” seeking to prove themselves as muscle) and new organizers (essentially “new violent social capital,” seeing to establish themselves as political entities and potential patrons). Because all of these groups lacked formal uniforms and many commanders relied on pseudonyms and *nom de guerre*, it was relatively easy to put on a black leather jacket and take to the streets. Some of these men came from various corners of the capital, and some came from rural areas or other towns. Once a few promising up-and-comers had been incorporated into the police force, there was no obvious way to cartel the violence market. The general tactic was to promise permanent jobs (with pensions) in exchange for service. This futures market in political favoritism depended on recruit beliefs that his patron would eventually be in a position to make good on this promise.

It is important to note that there are two separate audiences for the theater of militia arms-racing. First, the different militia commanders were competing with each other for limited space at the political trough. Political parties were brokering with armed groups and choosing which militia factions could make good on offers of security. Weak commanders were potential targets for dismemberment by established players or by new entrants into the violence game, anxious to make a name for themselves. Second, commanders had a similar incentive to signal to potential militia recruits that they were capable patrons. Recruitment was based on promises –

“cheap talk” – mediated by potential members’ expectations that the warlord would be capable of paying them down the road. This was a probabilistic assessment. Was a captain’s star rising or falling? A militia captain could not convince recruits to join up or recruit allies would be identified as weak and vulnerable. The sense that “winners win,” and that success was the best predictor of future success, drove many militia captains in Tajikistan and Georgia to escalate neighborhood violence. Captains took serious risks to provoke responses from other militia captains so that they could establish a reputation for courage, staying power, and viscousness. It was better to be an agent of a strong, politically-ascendent warlord than a weak one.

#### *Phase 1: Warre*

The breakdown of social order that accompanied the first months of independence provided an opportunity for unemployed youth to shoot guns, escape the boredom of their daily lives, experience the thrill of taking part in demonstrations, and commit petty criminal acts – in other words, to do the kinds of things that many young males everywhere like to do. As noted above, all of the armed groups that fought in the post-Soviet wars developed criminal characteristics and recruited from the urban and rural unemployable underclass. Yet to treat these groups as nothing more than roving bands of criminal alcoholics intentionally misunderstands the nature of the social bonds that kept these groups in the field.<sup>195</sup> A Tajik field commander, explaining why he recruited primarily from his karate dojo, stated: “I needed men who were serious. I knew things would get bad, and I wanted men who I trusted to watch my back.”<sup>196</sup> A former Mkhedrioni member echoed this – “Of course there were kids and drunks around. But that’s not what [the bosses] needed. They needed reliable people. We were building an army, not a gang. We were reclaiming the nation from the Russians.”<sup>197</sup> Interview respondents in both countries often freely admitted that other men in their unit were alcoholics, drug addicts, and troublemakers who liked violence for its own sake – but were usually quick to note that those men tended to be bad soldiers, who could not see the big picture and were unworthy of their peers’ respect.<sup>198</sup> No one wants to risk their life for a drug addict or sadist.

The “master cleavage” of the war dominated targeting decisions and pogrom behaviors. In Dushanbe, Gharmi, Karategini, and Pamiri neighborhoods were essentially cleansed through targeted campaigns of murder and rape. The property deeds of their homes – sold at a tremendous loss – were transferred to real estate speculators with political connections in the Popular Front or the new regime.<sup>199</sup> In Georgia, though there was a similar deluge of anarchy in which ethnic minorities faced harassment and humiliation on the streets, neighborhoods were not purged in the same way. Families could largely stay indoors and wait out the chaos.<sup>200</sup> In response to this wave of urban violence, many citizens closed their businesses, stayed indoors, or fled the capital all together. But many people kept their distance from these militias in the 1991-1993 period. Organizing for war for uncertain gain during a period of acute state failure was risky and costly. Joining one of these groups required participating in a culture of violence that was repulsive to many.

*Phase 2: Opportunistic Joiners In The Aftermath*

Recruiting dynamics changed once the capital city was under control of a strong militia coalition. Potential recruits realized that there was a real possibility that victorious militia commanders would actually be able to make good on their promises. But the ruling coalition was still in flux. Everyone knew that political fortunes were uncertain. On the one hand, it was very difficult for anyone to determine which commanders were lying (to themselves as much as to potential recruits) about their future political fortunes, or which commanders were simple opportunists. On the other hand, capturing the capital city or acquiring a position of status were no longer mere hypotheticals – political power was suddenly fluid and tangible. Ministry portfolios were doled out, and often to well-known criminals, as political acknowledgement of certain individuals' armed strength. The stakes of victory in the consolidation game were also far clearer, as foreign aid began to trickle into the state coffers.

Without any functioning state bodies to arrest them, and without any real risk of dying in war to deter them, many young men were attracted to the seductive, intoxicating glamour of life with a nationalist militia.<sup>201</sup> While family or clan connections defined the core membership for groups during the war, a tertiary milieu of young men who were not likely to grow up to be middle class professionals were always available, anxious to ascend through violent rituals to manhood. And in the chaotic environment sketched above, it was relatively easy for a newcomer to “pass” as a member of almost any group, if a few others would vouch for him.<sup>202</sup>

At the same time that the *supply* of youth on the streets was expanding, field commanders, militia captains, paramilitary lieutenants, and other wartime coalition members that controlled the capital were increasing their *demand* for new recruits, borrowing against the future to hold on to power. With the spoils of victory being divided in real-time, everyone – militia captains, paramilitary lieutenants, and foot soldiers alike – came to understand that the process of moving from a “winning wartime coalition” to a “minimum winning coalition” would be competitive. There would be relative winners and relative losers. Some of the warlords would be pushed out of the ruling coalition and others would re-appropriate their hard-earned wealth. The short civil wars meant the militia coalitions had seized the capitals without developing any institutions to redistribute spoils equitably.

Though the concern of being written out of the coalition was more acute in Tajikistan than in Georgia, militia members that had fought since the beginning recall this period of uncertainty largely the same way: They went from not being sure if their group could win the war to not being sure if they could keep what they had won. In a few short weeks, the inherent tensions relating to the divisibility of state spoils started to splinter the unity of the umbrella militia coalitions. Identifying oneself as “Mkhedrioni” or “Popular Front” was increasingly meaningless and redundant – what mattered was one’s particular factional commander, and groups began to identify themselves to each other by referencing their patronage relationship. Fears of being manipulated and discarded were rampant.

Urban militias were, at this point, a crude but well-understood kind of political insurance. Their primary purpose was to remind other social actors that there would

be serious consequences if the warlord, or the group he claimed to speak for, were cut out of the distribution of pork. The difference was that this time there was no uncertainty about Russian's military or diplomatic preferences hanging over things. This time, individual militia members could take concrete actions to improve their lot. They could recruit family members and friends to join their group. They could switch factions and ally with a more promising leader. They could try to become warlords themselves. They could acquire a sniper rifle and take aim.

*Phase 3: Attrition & Selection In The Time of Troubles*

Efforts to cartel violence failed. In Dushanbe, once it became obvious that armed groups from the region of Kulob had begun to consolidate their position inside ministries at the direct expense of their other allies in the Popular Front, a steady stream of Hissori, Khojandi, and Lakai foot soldiers began to drift in to Dushanbe. As a former combatant from the region of Khojand recalled of this period, "We knew we needed more men, so that Kulov [the captain] could speak with a louder voice. . . . [S]o we brought friends."<sup>203</sup> Georgians could also draw on clan and family networks that stretched to rural areas. Oleg's anecdote is representative: "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 Jabba [Ioseliani, the head of the Mkhedrioni]. . . . He said that it would be good for the whole family, so I sold one [of the family horses], took my hunting rifle, and went to get a car in Rust'avi [to come to Tbilisi]." Oleg was a self-described family man who had fled with his family stay neutral during the worst phases of the civil war violence, but his family pressured him to help his brother get a good job during the scramble for post-Soviet spoils.<sup>204</sup> "The state" was increasingly little more than a name and a handful of empty buildings in the capital city, but in the words of a former Popular Front member in Tajikistan "Everyone got it . . . whoever controlled the police...controlled the bazaars and the streets. And whoever controlled the streets could whisper in the ear of the big man [Rakhmonov], who would stand like a statue."<sup>205</sup>

As it became more and more obvious that the symbols of the Georgian church and political slogans were simply cover for open banditry, militia commanders moral authority declined. This opened the door for a third group of militia recruits: local self-defense militias that formed as a response to the disorder and chaos that the "first wave" of militias brought back to the capital city. These men, many of which were career police officers, self-consciously described themselves as cut from a different kind of cloth than the militias that emerged from anarchy. Rather than being motivated by abstract fears (e.g., Russian influence), they often described their fears as far more local and tractable: They were disgusted by the criminal elements within the mass movements. These urban formations described themselves as protectors of innocents from arbitrary violence, providers of local public goods (most notably security), and generally fair providers of order – similar to how the Mkhedrioni presented themselves in the pre-independence period. Their challenge to the the Mkhedrioni and National Guard formations was met with predictable violence. Various "neighborhood defense committees" formed out of youth gangs emergent in

the slums of Tbilisi, who began to fill unpaid positions at the lowest levels of the power ministries in both capitals. The description of the basic arrangements described were strikingly similar: A leader was given permission to collect taxes on behalf of a particular militia commander in exchange for local autonomy and free access to the electricity and water grid, with the promise that their positions would become salaried at some future point.

It did not take long for newcomers to realize they might be able to shoot their way in to power, as well. A common strategy was building up a competent group of violence specialists, taking territory, and eventually merging his forces with captain who could share his veteran nationalist credentials. Levan, a neighborhood organizer who was later incorporated with his men into local police structures, understood that holding firm would eventually allow him to be “bought out” from above and described the bargaining in a fairly matter-of-fact manner: “The Mkhedrioni were serious at first . . . but then some of the best of them died in the war, I think. Anyway, after a while their men asked for too much . . . there were beatings and then rapes, and it got to be too much to bear. So we organized ourselves . . . and eventually their bosses came to ask me if I wanted to work in the Ministry [of the Interior]. I said no . . . [but then] they offered again, and I accepted.”<sup>206</sup>

Militia members who were active in Dushanbe and Tbilisi tend to recount the inter-factional violence of the 1993-1994 period through one of two self-serving narratives. The first story was the hardened, virtuous “true believer” militia members fighting against upstarts, criminals, and opportunistic newcomers. A member of the Georgian National Guard put it like this:

“Kids from the city . . . they watched movies, they thought they wanted to be war heroes like Rambo. But they had missed the war. They knew nothing. We needed another war to scare out the kids [who] never went to war. So we needed to bring the war here.”<sup>207</sup>

The alternative version was that it was the “real” soldiers that were the goons and cowards, less equipped for this new period of violence than new recruits coming up from the streets, who had ties to the solidarity communities emerging in various urban slums and squatter camps. To hear them tell it, these newcomers were just as ruthless and organized in their application of violence as the first wave of fighters but possessed better discipline, better intelligence via ties to the community, and perhaps simply a greater willingness to actually stand and fight to hold their turf. What both groups agree on is that this period was far more dangerous than participating in the rural phase of the civil war. “There were frontlines in Abkhazia, and if you weren’t brave you could hang back. In Tbilisi, there were no frontlines.”<sup>208</sup>

The first few months of violence took its toll on many of the prominent warlords and militia armies. Militias organized around charismatic authority were vulnerable to decapitation. In Georgia, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Gregori Gulua and Deputy Minister of Defense Nika Kekelidze were brutally assassinated within weeks of each other in the Spring of 1994. Assassination of prominent militia leaders induced rapid and unpredictable shifts in the political fortunes of subordinates. In March of 1993, two of the most prominent Tajik warlords – Sangak Safarov and Faizali Saidov – were both killed in a shootout.<sup>209</sup> Until that time Rakhmonov had

been seen as the hand-picked representative of Safarov, the most prominent commander of the Popular Front.<sup>210</sup> Suddenly the seat behind the throne was vacant.

This kind of violence had two main distinguishable effects. The first effect was attrition. This violence raised the costs of organizing based on raw opportunism. Men who joined these groups with a “live only for today” attitude were poorly suited for this new crucible. Even more important than weeding out the unfit soldiers was weeding out unfit warlords. If a leader could not sustain optimism about his ability to make it into the state, or maintain a reputation for generously distributing spoils to his men, his men were likely to switch to a different commander (in Georgia), replace him with a better commander (in Tajikistan), or simply quit. A second, related effect was creating common knowledge of the relative strength of different warlords. Both Tajikistan and Georgia are honor-based societies. Blood-feuds are enforced. Public actions that could risk spirals of violence were costly signals of a willingness to endure extended retaliatory violence. Before the violence there were clear incentives for warlords to say the same thing – but actual violent contests established a pecking order. The strong were sorted from the imitators, the confident from the brash. After a year of this sort of violence, there were no imitators.

The most common flashpoints for symbolic violence were the checkpoints and roadblocks that various militia members established inside the urban areas. Checkpoints at major street intersections made it possible to control which vehicles moved in and out of particularly wealthy neighborhoods, black- and gray- market bazaars, or areas with large quantities of foot traffic. These areas provided a key source of income for self-financing urban militias and were a sign of prestige and strength for the mafia captains that controlled them. A murder taking place in a “protected” bazaar would drive off merchants, lowering the tax base for the warlord offering protection; a shooting or public beating at an roadblock would test the mettle of the soldiers that remained. Different paramilitary factions would intentionally march their troops through parts of town controlled by other militias, openly risking provocation and escalation. In Georgia, one Mkhedrioni described his clash with another sub-group of “new” Mkhedrioni:

“They came at us at night, when we were walking home. . . . They surprised us, and [aimed – gesture] guns on us. Then they took turns beating us with boards. . . . One of them broke my finger kicking me while I tried to [protect – gesture] my head. When they were done, one of them said that they didn’t want to have to come back, but that it was payback, and that if we came back next time they would use the guns. . . . [W]e wanted to take the fight to them, but Davit [our boss] calmed us down. They both went and talked to Jabba, and he sorted it out. They didn’t come to our street anymore, and we never saw each other again.”<sup>211</sup>

Militia membership based on vague associations had gone from being a relatively fun and even lucrative lifestyle choice to being an extremely dangerous pastime. As noted above, the point of these acts of violence was not just the control of the checkpoint or the taxes from the bazaar – the point was to see which groups were actually capable of convincing their men to stick around and endure punishing losses and which groups were trying to fake their way through the consolidation process. A Kulobi foot soldier said of this period “We stayed in the streets because we needed

to show Rustam [our boss] that we were capable of staying in the streets. We were told ‘no one has use for cowards.’”<sup>212</sup>

Clashes gradually became more and more dangerous. Competition for urban territory was often settled with guns or pipes, and bodies were often left on display to show the cost of being affiliated with a weak faction. Armed shootouts with high-powered weapons – and, in more than one case, even the shelling of urban neighborhoods with mortars – were the end result of these escalating displays of paramilitary strength. Sasha, a member of a Hissori faction of the Popular Front, described the summer of 1994 as the most dangerous period of the war:

“It was the worst time ... it was so hot during the days, and there was no gas, no water. And every week, we would stand at our post in the heat. And in the night, there was always gunfire ... One night our wall [checkpoint] was attacked by men with grenades and explosives, who sprayed bullets all down the street to drive us away – but we took shelter and returned fire into the darkness ... Those men that ran away weren’t welcomed back ... It was very dangerous, and no one was making money on the job ... But we couldn’t leave ... not without just all going home [leaving Dushanbe and going to Hissor]. There were three other factions [of the Ministry of the Interior] that were waiting for an opportunity to take our taxes, to show that [our commander] was weak, to take his job and send us all into the army. We did not fight a war to be unpaid infantry for Kulobi generals.”<sup>213</sup>

Or consider this quote from Georgia:

“Everyone knew which was our restaurant; it was Levan’s space – Mkhedrioni space ... we even had a picture of Jabba on the wall ... we would all meet up there after work [at the Ministry] to relax. But everything changed when Levan got pulled up to work [in the Ministry of Justice] with [Tedo] Ninidze ... Then he was big time ... there was one night ... it was February 1995 ... we realized that the room was thinning out ... people were all going back to the toilets but not returning. Men in ski masks had come in through the back, and were waiting for us there, one at a time. They put our faces in the toilets and ... knocked out my teeth on the porcelain. ... They said that we should tell Levan what happened. ... when we did, and he told us that we should think about joining the Army, that we could get hot meals and better work there ... and that we wouldn’t be able to stay at the Ministry.”<sup>214</sup>

Some recruits, expecting good jobs in the state bureaucracy, could convince themselves to endure these kinds of risks.<sup>215</sup> Dense social networks and ties of reciprocal obligation convinced many militia recruits to endure with their commanders through this violent tournament. But which of the two self-serving narratives sketched at the beginning of this section was more accurate? What kinds of militia members had the comparative advantage in during the consolidation phase?

43% of respondents – half of the Georgians and about a third of the Tajiks – reported that they retired from militia activity because they feared for their lives. Since this variable is dichotomous, a logit estimator was employed to see what individual characteristics made a militia member relatively likely to quit in the face of violence. The independent variables included in the regression are all also coded as binary variables for ease of interpretation. Model 1 and Model 2 present the cumulative and favored models. In my sample, “opportunistic joiners” – new entrants into the violence game, who joined the civil war after the bulk of the violence was completed – were more likely to quit the streets when violence intensified. Social ties between

**Table 4.3** Which Militia Members Quit When Their Lives Were At Stake?

| VARIABLES                   | (1)                            | (2)                            | (3)                           | (4)                            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                             | Full                           | Favored                        | Only Georgian                 | Only Tajik                     |
| Georgian                    | 0.853 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.695)  | 0.957*<br>(0.495)              |                               |                                |
| Joined After Fighting       | 2.311***<br>(0.600)            | 2.390***<br>(0.502)            | 2.237***<br>(0.639)           | 2.777**<br>(0.931)             |
| Joined to Protect Family    | -1.465*<br>(0.727)             | -1.470*<br>(0.716)             | -1.703*<br>(0.832)            | -0.608<br>(1.710)              |
| Operated Close to Home      | 1.465*<br>(0.609)              | 1.558**<br>(0.599)             | 1.321 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.765) | 1.996*<br>(1.021)              |
| Switched Units During War   | 0.141<br>(0.516)               |                                |                               |                                |
| Switched Units After War    | 0.273<br>(0.657)               |                                |                               |                                |
| Trusted Commander           | -0.707 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.496) | -0.658 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.474) | -0.522<br>(0.603)             | -0.710<br>(0.851)              |
| Stayed for a Better Job     | 0.043<br>(0.611)               |                                |                               |                                |
| Stayed for Fun              | -0.837 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.545) | -0.863 <sup>#</sup><br>(0.531) | -0.397<br>(0.624)             | -1.949 <sup>#</sup><br>(1.243) |
| Wanted Influence in Capital | -0.568<br>(0.661)              |                                |                               |                                |
| Constant                    | 0.169<br>(1.111)               | -0.254<br>(0.848)              | 0.751<br>(0.875)              | -1.139<br>(1.884)              |
| Observations                | 115                            | 120                            | 69                            | 51                             |
| Pseudo- $r^2$               | 0.281                          | 0.286                          | 0.229                         | 0.351                          |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05, # p&lt;0.25

commander and recruit predicted staying power. Men that fought through the civil war had established close ties to their patron and had a higher expectation of a good job – conditional on their militia being a part of the solidified winning coalition, of course. In addition to the simple “opportunism” dummy, two additional indicators of dense social ties emerged as statistically significant (though only marginally so in some specification): a dummy variable for Georgian paramilitaries – which, as discussed above, were substantially more prone to defection and side-switching – and a dummy variable for the question of whether militia reported “really trusting” their commander. Georgians were more likely to quit under the threat of violence, and those who reported trusting their commanders seem less likely to do so.

Militia members that formed out of self defense – that reported “joining primarily to defend their family” – were relatively willing to endure violence.<sup>216</sup> This variable can be interpreted as sorting “opportunistic” joiners from “late” joiners: Urban self-defense militias that formed during the post-war chaos were well-incentivized to stick around. Urban hangers-on who joined after the fighting but were *not* actually acting in defense of the neighborhood were likely to quit in the face of determined terrorism. Consistent with this interpretation is that the minority of respondents in both states that reported carrying out militia operations close to home were *more likely* to retire from militia life when faced with serious violence. The initially puzzling inconsistency can be explained by a closer examination of these 39 cases – in 28 of them, the “home region” that the respondent was describing was a particular neighborhood of the capital city, which meant that they were essentially an additional dummy variable for (largely late-coming) Tbilisi- and Dushanbe-based gangs. My interpretation of this trend is militia recruits whose homes were in *urban* areas were more likely to have friends and family that could help get them visas out of the country or resettle them in a stable job. Many urban militia recruits had better “exit” options. Rural migrants were as a rule more desperate, and as a result more willing to endure violence to avoid returning to the lives they had before.

A disturbing and unexpected pattern in the data: Militia members who reported “fun,” “excitement,” or “enjoyment of the experience” as a motivation for joining a militia or sustaining militia membership were, statistically speaking, *more* likely to sustain ties with a militia when confronted with violence. Given that it was the opportunistic Georgians (“Mkhedrinoi Youth”) who, for the most part, were reporting having joined for fun, my prior was that multicollinearity would wash out statistical significance, or that the coefficient would be signed in the opposite direction. To make sense of these trends, Model 3 and Model 4 subdivided the data further into Tajik and Georgian militia members. A few new patterns emerge. The “opportunist” and “close to home” variables provide powerful, if indirect, evidence that the militia members who were most willing to risk their lives were those who joined early, contributing their social capital to a warlords’ political project on behalf of their civilian social network. Those networks were stronger when they originated in rural areas than urban areas. The *avlod* ties in Tajikistan bind particularly tight. Georgian responses to the questions about “protecting one’s family” and “really trusting the commander” that drove the general results in Models 1 and 2. In Georgia, only recruits who were successful at finding militia commanders who they trusted enough

to persevere through the Time of Troubles stuck around. There was insufficient variation in the Tajik responses to these questions to generate meaningful statistical significance in the face of controls.<sup>217</sup> And the puzzle of the “good times” variable is resolved: The effect was driven by the small number (11) of Tajiks who responded in the affirmative, rather than the large number of Georgians (33) in the various subsamples. Returning to the interview transcripts, I realized that this trend was driven by a mix of hardened veterans of the Soviet campaigns in Afghanistan and a few very scary characters who spoke to me only after my research was nearing completion. They reported “enjoying” their time in the militias because they enjoyed the power that came to them from the sudden reversal of long-established hierarchies.

Militia members considered their life opportunities inside a politically aspiring militia in contrast to the relevant counterfactuals. These calculations took place in a complex social environment where there was never enough information to confidently assess whether one was placing the right bet. Men were weighing the costs and benefits of sustained membership, taking calculated risks, and implementing their best strategies on a day-to-day basis. This is not to imply that these men engaged in hyper-rational behavior on a day-to-day basis, nor is it to dismiss the emotional and psychological complexity that surely surrounded every individual decision to enlist in a militia, participate in violent actions, take beatings, watch friends be shot at close range, or eventually attempt to return to civilian life. Patterns in the data simply suggest that they understood themselves to be embedded in a high-stakes bargaining game and weighed the consequences of their actions. Players at the bottom of the hierarchy were watching the political consolidation process at the top with a great deal of attention and focus. Foot soldiers were keenly aware of the week-to-week and even day-to-day shifts in the fortunes of prominent militia commanders as they navigated the thicket of *nomenklatura* politics and were constantly re-evaluating their own safety and prospects at the bottom of the power structure based on their expectations of what was happening to their patron. In general, the relative power of different leaders came to be measured by their official title in the regime. Moreover, there was a rough consensus that the best jobs would go to the men who demonstrated an ability to absorb punishment and stand firm, and if a leader acquired a reputation for weakness his men would surely seek a different patron. In dozens of interviews, respondents said that the violence gave them a chance to see whether their commanders were “real men.” It is clear that members were constantly updating their expectations about whether the risks they were taking outweighed the potential benefits, which meant constant attention to the micro-politics of the consolidation processes within ministries.

#### *Denouement & Deterrence in The Time of Troubles*

After a few months urban attrition, militia competition adapted. As the supply of easy recruits dried up, some of the youth gangs disbanded completely. Yet as large militias continued to fragment, it gradually became clear that there was, in fact, a limit to the number of potential contenders that could hold their own in this tournament. Only those warlords with access to deep reservoirs of social capital

and powerful friends could survive for long in this environment. Groups became smaller, better organized, and their leaders began to view each other differently. This new period featured somewhat smaller numbers of far more determined and committed men, all still trying to prove that they were worthy of inclusion in the ruling coalition. Cosmetic displays of force became less necessary. Trust between warlords did not emerge automatically, but selection was probably a necessary step.

In this new environment, fierce, well-armed, and unpredictable militias on every street corner were gradually replaced by “connected men” who traded on their reputation for friendship with other respected and prominent militia heads. Positions inside the government became an acceptable metric for keeping score of political favors, as tactical bargains calcified into strategic alliances. Many “deposed” or “excluded” warlords during this period were still making decent sums of money managing drug transit lines, sitting import-export bottlenecks, or managing bazaars. The loss of an esteemed position in a ministry, however, indicated a decline in a warlord’s long-term bargaining power vis-a-vis other warlords, however, since it indicated that he had lost his protection from the president and his time in the winning circle would eventually draw to a close. It was a sign of true strength to openly flaunt the authority of the president, normally only undertaken by warlords who had a firm territorial base and foreign guarantees of their security, such as Aslan Abishidze in Georgia or Mahmud Khoudobourdiev in Tajikistan. These early moves towards a formalization of expectations, transparent assessment of risks, and stable political relationships between a fixed number of militias began to congeal into something recognizably state-like. A Mkhedrioni member in Rustavi summed this transition from violence to connections well: “At first none of us knew who was who . . . [but] after a few months it was really clear who the big men were. Then it just becomes about who you know, and if you have respect.”<sup>218</sup>

As it became obvious that the umbrella organizations had outlived their usefulness as mechanisms of patronage, and affiliation with a large number of undisciplined street hooligans began to be seen as a liability, militia formations began to restrict their membership to the core of original friends and allies. The threat of violence was still ever present, but as reputation began to take the place of brute force it became possible for militia members to cease carrying weapons, which reduced the frequency and intensity of armed brush-ups on the streets. This made it easier for the captains to make credible promises to their subordinates on the streets. As family networks reasserted themselves and unaffiliated opportunists fell away it also raised costs of violence indirectly, since in any clash there was a much higher chance that a death would escalate to a blood feud. Efforts were made to keep civilians in their homes where they could be easily controlled and taxed. To this day, most adult residents of Dushanbe can recall the name of the warlord that controlled their neighborhood bazaar through this uncertain period.

It also became clear that allegiances between militias, and across different ministries of the new government structures, provided a better source of funding and resources than unaffiliated racketeering projects. Friends in high places could make sure that their subordinates got access to government supplies of ammunition and intelligence and could more easily coordinate with police and army forces to arrest,

intimidate, or kill opponents. Control of state ministries also lowered the transaction costs associated with smuggling gasoline, narcotics, tobacco, and weapons – all of the economic activities that had allowed militias to be self-financing during the initial period of state failure were fairly natural candidates for economies of scale, best achieved through a state monopoly inside the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>219</sup>

One of the major prizes during this transition period was downtown real estate. A number of neighborhoods adjoining the main downtown thoroughfare (Rudaki in Dushanbe, Rustaveli in Tbilisi) contained apartment buildings that had been granted by the Soviet state to members of the local intelligentsia, academics, artists, and local party notables. In Dushanbe many of these individuals had used their connections to simply flee the country with whatever they could scrape together, leaving their apartments in the hands of friends and relatives. In Tbilisi, by contrast, the titles passed quietly to their previous Soviet owners – who found that keeping their family apartment required friends in high places. By midway through 1994, a number of innovative militia captains in the Ministry of the Interior (notably Kakha “Black Panther” Tamunindze, who also had connections in the Office of the Prosecutor General) began to force families near Rustaveli and in the Old City to pay protection money, gradually raising informal taxes until they finally acquired title transfers. The only protection against this sort of mafia expropriation was for a family member to acquire political protection from someone in the political hierarchy even higher than the militia captain – which (often enough) *was* Shevardnadze himself, who took special care to cultivate favors among this intellectual class. In Tajikistan, the intimidation of civilians who happened to be sitting atop valuable real estate was often more crude and cruel.<sup>220</sup> In both capital cities, many of the refurbished houses that are today rented to Western Embassy personnel, aid workers, and UN diplomats were acquired at gunpoint during this period.

Coalitions of strong militia captains emerged during this period to protect common interests, 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 or weapons, as political relationships had gradually come to replace visible demonstrations of group strength. A more orderly sort of bargaining was possible, with smaller numbers of disciplined individuals as enforcers. The situation in the capital city moved from something that could be described as “anarchy” to something that looked far more organized – a stand-off between competing armed factions, each with powerful patrons within the government. This process favored the militias that could play politics, and it was the crafty leaders – able to foster close ties with other militias, build tactical and strategic alliances with other states’ intelligence services, and secure access to financiers and commercial distributors of illicit goods – who came to be recognized as the dominant players. The ruling coalition was born in the streets.

### **Uncertainty and Updating**

For Georgian or Tajik citizens living through this period of transitory anarchy, the view from 1994 was bleak. Neither civil war seemed to be on the path to reso-

lution. Enemies had been driven into the mountains, but with foreign support they could easily return. “At first, we thought that Gamsakhurdia and his army would return . . . After the debacle in Sukhumi, my friends and I returned to the capital city to see what [the Russians] would do next to undermine us. Would they stir trouble in Adjara? Javakheti? Akhalkalaki? Or try again in the city [Tbilisi]? No matter what, we had to be vigilant and ready.”<sup>221</sup> In Tajikistan, the United Tajik Opposition had re-grouped in the mountains of Afghanistan and were attempting to re-insert themselves into Tajik politics. The important questions for the victorious militias revolved around distributive politics, and how the new state would be organized. Everyone knew that Rakhmonov and the Kulobi coalition that installed him would claim of the state apparatus for themselves, at the direct expense of the Leninobodi families that had run the state continuously since the 1950s. But the situation was still fluid, and most predicted that Kulobi rule would be a passing phase, with politically connected Leninobidis returning to their traditional positions at the upper-tier of the state. The question was when and how they would accomplish this.

The drawdown in militia membership was precipitated by a consensus among militia members on the streets that the window for being “bought out” by the state had closed. In both states, this new set of expectations was driven by a focal event that shored up uncertainty on two questions. It became public knowledge that certain militia captains would be excluded from the future state coalition, which rendered a large number of promises from the upper ranks worthless. Many hopeful street operators were suddenly operating without “a roof” – no political protection from other factions, no long-term immunity from the fumbling legal system, and no patron to advance them through the ranks. It also 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 and that they likely had the resources to win. In other words, a minimum winning coalition had emerged, and the oversupply of militia members was a burden to this coalition. Given this fairly transparent collapse in the “demand” for militia groups, the pool of ambiguously affiliated gunmen dried up overnight.

What was necessary for the general decline of militia politics was an exogenous shock – something completely unexpected that would force everyone to update their beliefs. This event had the effect of clarifying which warlord commanders were going to be “in” and “out” of the warlord coalition, which allowed their soldiers to cut their losses and quietly flee the scene. Just as important, the response of the “inside” militias had to be sufficiently coherent and convincing to demonstrate that they were actually capable of winning against any viable coalition of enemies. This sort of certainty would have been impossible before the “violence market” had opened up and provided different warlords with the ability to demonstrate that they could recruit and maintain a militia at a relatively low cost. And it is beyond the scope of any general theory to predict something that locals could not predict themselves.

In Georgia, the event that shored up certainty about coalition membership was a failed assassination attempt on the president, Eduard Shevardnadze, on August 29, 1995. Most agree Jabba Ioseliani and the Russian-affiliated Minister of Defense, Igor Giorgadze, orchestrated this assassination attempt. Shevardnadze survived the

car bomb by pure luck. When the president made it a public fight between himself and the coup-plotters – standing minutes after the car bomb before a hastily assembled parliament session – everyone wanted to be on his side. His survival changed everyone’s calculations about the future. It became clear that his regime would persevere in the near term – the public outcry associated with the assassination attempt provided a buoyant month of popular legitimacy. Ioseliani was finished. Mkhedrioni members that had integrated themselves into the Ministry of the Interior turned on Jabba immediately, practically falling over one another to arrest him. Street-level Mkhedrioni enforcers, and Giorgadze’s loyalists in various subsections of the Defense ministry, immediately left Tbilisi. Those who were too slow to notice the tides changing spent time in prison. Giorgi, a former member of the National Guard who now works as an embassy driver, spoke for many: “We were running the streets . . . we were kings of this city. And then, overnight, we all just ended up in jail.”<sup>222</sup>

The assassination attempt also put to rest the idea that Shevardnadze’s survival was dependent on networks in Moscow. At least some Russian actors – likely well-placed political players, given Giorgadze’s conspicuous decision to flee to Moscow in a Russian military aircraft – had the means and wherewithal to attempt to install a different puppet president. There was a deep sense that Georgia was under siege, but also a sense that if they rallied behind Shevardnadze he might be able to purge the state of the vipers.<sup>223</sup> The contingency of everything described in the next chapter must be re-emphasized, however. If Shevardnadze had died, Ioseliani might still be running large parts of Tbilisi in one way or another. In the words of Alexander Rondelli: “If those had been East Germans who designed the bomb and timer instead of Georgians, we’d be just like Armenia now.”<sup>224</sup>

Rakhmonov organized the 1994 election to shore up his claim to power. A defining feature of Tajikistan’s politics in the mid-1990s was the uncertainty over the degree of foreign support that the government would receive from Russia and Uzbekistan. To return briefly to the language of the model, one might say that players were uncertain of the stability threshold  $s$ . No one knew whether Rakhmonov and his Kulobi backers would really be allowed to rule without sharing meaningful power with Uzbekistan’s traditional clients, or if some sort of tacit Russian or Uzbek “security guarantees” would kick in. The election broke down predictable regional lines.<sup>225</sup> Everyone anticipated that Rakhmonov would have an advantage in the capital city and its environs, as well as his traditional power base in the south. 79% of the population of Khojand (31% of the population) and 96% of voting Badakshanis (3% of the population) voters choosing Abdullojonov. But opposition votes were swallowed under the demographic weight of the newly-created super-district of “Khatlon,” which was created by merging three oblasts in the southern region – Hissor (5% of the population), Kulob (12% of the population), and Kurgon-Tubbe (21% of the population). The entirety of this newly-created district of Khatlon was delivered to Rahmonov with 99.5% of the votes counted for the sitting president.<sup>226</sup>

After the stunning results, Rakhmonov announced he would be reshuffling his cabinet, elevating his core Kulobi supporters at the direct expense of the Hissoris, Khojandis, and other traditional Uzbek clients within the Popular Front. From the perspective of domestic power consolidation it was a risky, brilliantly brazen move,

presenting the Russian government with a clear take-it-or-leave-it offer. They could either explicitly endorse the presidency of Rakhmonov or declare the elections invalid and return the country to war. Moscow opted for stability on Rakhmonov's terms. 15 billion rubles were sent to the Dushanbe regime, which paid government salaries for the first time since independence. Tajikistan's presidential election was hailed as proof of Tajikistan's "progress towards democracy."<sup>227</sup> All of this outraged the government of Uzbekistan which continued to support warlords that recruited from the home areas of its traditional clients. And it was certainly not the end of challenges to Rakhmonov's rule, as we shall see in Chapter Six. But in general, militia captains who wished to remain in the capital city began were forced to acknowledge that Rakhmonov was there to stay, not a temporary place-holder before the Khojandis re-claimed the presidency. Factional fighting shifted substantially to clashes outside of the city limits of Dushanbe from this point forward.

Both regimes also laid the groundwork for the peaceful withdrawal of militia forces by lowering the stakes of politics for losing militia captains and even providing different safety nets for the paramilitary foot soldiers who were shut out of the consolidation process. Both states passed blanket amnesty laws for acts of wartime violence, absolving militia members of responsibility for crimes during the transition period. Ongoing insurgencies in rural areas of both states meant that militia groups could withdraw from the capital and carry the fight to "the enemy" – integrating with the 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 places to send unruly militias for both post-Soviet presidents throughout the 1990s. The opportunities for war profiteering and narcotics smuggling made these sorts of "internal exile" options relatively profitable for the militia captains. Emigration from the state was another common safety valve, especially in Tajikistan, for violent paramilitary fighters who wanted to start new lives. Relatively stable employment opportunities emerged for these men as bodyguards or private security for the new urban businessmen; emerging transnational smuggling organizations that were operating with tacit regime approval was another exit strategy. Both regimes were careful to cultivate a reputation for allowing former militia commanders to retreat from the political arena with dignity and keep their wealth and without the risk of future retaliations, so long as they kept out of politics. It took time and demonstrations for warlords to believe that they could simply walk away from the violence game – and sometimes these promises were revoked capriciously. But many doors were left open for unlucky warlords to exit.



Merging militia forces into the rump bureaucracy was a violent, uncertain, and competitive process. Militia commanders convinced their memberships – all of whom wanted to be compensated for their sacrifices – that they had a shared interest in eliminating imitators and claiming the lion's share of state spoils for themselves. New contenders could not be deterred, however, as there was an easy supply of labor from the ungovernable sub-proletarian urban shadow economies. "War of attrition"

dynamics helped to create common knowledge about the balance of power between warlords. The upsurge in violence was the result of calculated, violent competition: Warlords were trying to gauge each other's actual strength before agreeing on how to divide state spoils; militia recruits were trying to gauge warlords' access to state spoils before committing to militia membership. None of this had anything to do with "anarchy" or security dilemmas, except as a permissive cause. It was the fact that all actors could see the *end* of transitional chaos on the near horizon that made urban violence between militias necessary.

These groups became increasingly indistinguishable from patronage-based political parties or lobbying groups. Wage competition between various militia groups gradually sorted the violence market. Memberships of these militia groups expanded, and then contracted, based on a few parameters: the overall urban risk for potential new militia recruits, the attractiveness of "exit options" from militia life, and expectations about whether their captain would stay a part of the ruling coalition. Militia members watched anxiously as power consolidated, knowing that they were bit players in the drama of consolidation politics, trying to convert their social capital into a better life in the security ministries – a life that might include respect, prestige, the chance for their children to attend school, and eventually retirement with a pension. Focal events made it clear that in the halls above the streets, a stable coalition had emerged. But nothing in this account implies that "the state" suddenly became strong enough to take on militias and restore order. Rather, in Tajikistan and Georgia "the state" was itself formed from a subset of militias and warlords who had their armed checkpoints, bazaars, shadow-economy enclaves, and local tax collection legalized by the decrees of a government they installed. Many of the ministers, deputies, and uniformed members of the Georgian or Tajik security services were themselves former militia at the time when the streets went quiet.

Thus far the narrative has treated civilian elites – including the president – as interchangeable and disposable. Multiple presidents had already been removed in coups. The initial bargain that brought warlords into the state was predicated on the promise that the president cede warlords positions in the government. Though formal institutions were vital to serve as a go-between for aid, legitimacy, and policy concessions, violence entrepreneurs could always threaten to smash these institutions if they were not given their fair due. As they began their tenures as heads of state, neither Rakhmonov nor Shevardnadze had any real control over the patchwork of paramilitaries that had penetrated the state apparatus, or even knowledge of their activities. At some points both rulers were literally prisoners in the presidential palace. Regional experts bluntly characterized civil-military relations as "feudal."<sup>228</sup> The same bonds of trust that were used to survive the war and the Time of Troubles could be used to organize a coup against the president, and this fact was well-understood by all parties behind the throne. Even in the late 1990s the presidents were sometimes described by militia members as "marionettes."<sup>229</sup> How these "puppet presidents" cut their strings is the puzzle that motivates the next chapter.

## Appendix B

### Appendix B: Mathematical Proofs

This appendix presents formal propositions to supplement the presentation in Chapter 2. To recap:

- Each of  $n$  warlords chooses simultaneously whether to battle for total dominance of a state (“Fight”), or to support the candidacy of a civilian president (“Install”). Call the full set of warlords  $W$ . Call the total lootable resources in the country  $v$ . If the total number of warlords supporting a president is less than a commonly known stability threshold  $s$ , the outcome is war. In war, each warlord who played “Fight” gets  $\frac{v}{n} - c$  and each warlord who played “Install” gets  $\frac{v}{n} - c - w$ .
- Define the number of warlords who play “Install” as  $k$ . Call this subset of  $k$  warlords  $W^P$ . If  $k \geq s$ , a president is installed. Warlords who played “Fight” in the first stage get a reservation value  $r$ . The game ends for these warlords.
- The lootable resources of the state  $v$  increase to  $v^*$ . A figurehead president  $P$  is installed. He selects  $l$  warlords, such that  $k \geq l \geq s$ . Call this subset of  $l$  members  $W^L$ .  $P$  proposes a distribution of  $v^*$  among these  $l$  warlords and himself,  $x = (x_i, x_j, \dots, x_q, x_p)$ . Warlords in  $W^P$  but not in  $W^L$  get a payoff of zero.
- Each warlord in  $W^L$  observes his distribution and either “Accepts” or “Coups” the president. A coup imposes costs  $c$  on a warlord and succeeds in installing himself as president (claiming  $v^*$ ) with some probability  $p$ . The “Coup” payoff, then, is  $pv^* - c$ . If  $s$  or more warlords play “Accept,” the president’s distribution  $x$  is implemented. If fewer than  $s$  warlords play “Accept,” the president receives zero and each warlord receives his coup payoff. The game ends.

The appropriate solution concept for this game is a Subgame Perfect Nash Equilibrium, in which no player can promise or threaten actions that he would not take if presented with the option. To simplify matters and highlight essentials, my analysis focuses on simple strategies in which a warlord only conditions second-stage actions on whether or not a government formed, without reference to particular composition of the coalition.<sup>353</sup> Even with this constraint, this game contains many such equilibria. Once we eliminate strategies that are weakly dominated – in other words, once we restrict analysis to equilibria sustained by strategies in which players could do no worse but possibly improve their welfare regardless of strategies chosen by other

players – it turns out that only a few of these equilibria are important for analysis.

**PROPOSITION 1:** This game has a subgame perfect Nash equilibrium in which no player plays a weakly dominated strategy in which all warlords choose “Fight” in the first period. Call this a *State Failure* equilibrium.

PROOF: One has only to consider a defection by a single warlord in the first stage. If  $i$  knows that both of the others will choose to fight, second stage payoffs will not be realized. A comparison between  $\frac{v}{n} - c$  and  $\frac{v}{n} - c - w$  makes “Fight” the best reply. Any strategies off the equilibrium path can be chosen and this equilibrium path remains an equilibrium.

This essentially captures the situation described in Chapter Three: many warlords fight, each hoping to control the capital. This is an inefficient equilibrium for two reasons. First, war is costly. Fighting destroys productive assets, leaving  $v$  smaller for whatever warlord succeeds in the military contest. Second, fighting in the first stage foregoes the wealth associated with international recognition ( $v < v^*$ ). Nevertheless, if other warlords are planning to try to violently seize the statehouse, any warlord  $i$  can only make himself worse by not taking part in the scramble. As in Rousseau’s stag hunt and Jervis’s security dilemma, gains from cooperation do not easily overcome incentives for defection when trust is low and stakes are high.

We now move to analysis of the final subgame, with the assumption that warlords will backward-induct strategies in the first “installation” stage of the game based on expectations of what will unfold in the second “consolidation” stage. Since warlords have the last move in the game, it is intuitive that they will be well-positioned to extort the president. Yet as has been shown in many contexts: The first mover in a bargaining game can extract substantial advantages from the ability to make opponents choose from a limited palate of options.<sup>354</sup>

**PROPOSITION 2:** In the final subgame (starting with  $P$ ’s proposal), there is a subgame perfect Nash equilibrium where  $P$  distributes  $x$  such that  $x_i = pv^* - c$  to each of  $s$  warlords in  $W^L$ .

PROOF: First consider defection by a single warlord  $i$  who has been offered  $x_i = pv^* - c$ . By changing strategies to “Coup,”  $i$  will only receive  $pv^* - c$  what he is already getting as  $x_i$ . Next, consider whether  $P$ , who can keep for himself what he does not transfer, can improve his welfare by changing his distribution.  $P$  knows he will receive 0 in the event of a successful coup by any warlord  $i$ , or if fewer than  $s$  warlords play “Accept.” Looking down the game tree, he knows he must devise transfer schemes that induce exactly  $s$  warlords to play “accept.” Since  $P$  can he should not transfer more than the minimum necessary. Consider the extreme case, where  $s = n$ . Every warlord must be included in  $W^L$ , and if a single warlord plays “Coup”  $P$  gets zero.  $P$  can pay each of  $n$  warlords  $x_i = pv^* - c$  and keep a positive transfer  $x_P = nc$  for himself (the rents from sparing all warlords the cost of fighting).

Since neither the president nor the warlords can change strategies and improve their welfare, this is a SPNE.

All warlords understand that  $P$  only needs the loyalty of  $s$  of  $k$  to pass the stability threshold in order to protect him against the  $k - s$  people or groups who are outside the insider coalition. Since  $P$  gets to keep what he does not distribute,  $P$  has the ability and incentive to offer exactly  $s$  warlords just what they would receive in a coup, and no more. The president cannot credibly commit to paying all  $k$  warlords who install him if  $k > s$ . Every warlord  $i \in W^P \ni W^L$  will receive zero.

**PROPOSITION 3:** In the final subgame, any outcome in which  $P$  is removed in a coup, or any outcome in which the sum of  $P$ 's proposed transfer to warlords  $x_1 + x_2 \dots x_n$  exceeds  $s(pv^* - c)$ , requires the play of weakly dominated strategies either on the equilibrium path, off the equilibrium path, or both.

PROOF: Since the president  $P$  gets to keep  $v^* - l(pv^* - c)$  for himself, his payoff is strictly decreasing in  $l$ .  $P$  should want to include exactly  $s$  warlords in  $l$ , which is the minimum necessary to keep himself in power. If  $c \geq pv^*$ , then the president is no longer incentivized to keep the coalition small, but can no longer credibly commit to any transfer of wealth to any warlord. As shown in *Proposition 2*,  $P$  should always be able to stay in power through the correct allocation  $x$ . For a warlord  $i$  to be induced to play “accept,” he must be transferred  $x_i \geq pv^* - c$ .

If warlords understand the broad contours of the game – understand that the president will pay exactly  $s$  warlords their coup value, understand that they are interchangeable, and choose strategies accordingly – then in the installation stage they were essentially gambling when they installed postwar presidents. This gamble can be justified. It is possible to support a subgame perfect Nash equilibrium in which every warlord opts to join the state. I will refer to this this a *full incorporation* equilibrium.

**PROPOSITION 4:** Subgame perfect Nash equilibria can exist in which no warlord plays a weakly dominated strategy in which all warlords play “Install” in the first period. Call these *Full Incorporation* equilibria.

PROOF: For “Install” to be a best reply, it must be true that  $r \leq \left(\frac{s}{k}\right)(pv^* - c)$ . This is true for every warlord  $i$  if  $r \leq \left(\frac{s}{n}\right)(pv^* - c)$ . Many distributions of  $x$  by  $P$  are supportable equilibria, but in each distribution the president will select  $s$  warlords and transfer each of them  $pv^* - c$ . Generically: There are  $\frac{n!}{s!}$  SPNEs of this sort. For example: If  $W = \{A, B, C, D, E, F\}$ , and  $s = 5$ , there are 6 different distributions of  $x$  that are six different SPNEs: One where each of A, B, C, D, E, and F is transferred  $x_i = 0$ , while the other five are transferred  $x_i = pv^* - c$  and  $P$  keeps  $x_p = v^* - 5(pv^* - c)$  for himself. If  $n = 6$  and  $s = 4$ , there are 30 different SPNEs. In each of these, 4 warlords receive  $x_i = pv^* - c$ , 2 warlords receive zero, and the president retains  $x_p = v^* - 4(pv^* - c)$ . When “Install” is chosen, this distribution is unknown.

As a general principle, each warlord  $i$  should compare his life opportunities in  $W^P$  to his reservation value  $r$ . Since  $s$  is static, and warlords are symmetric,  $i$ 's utility is strictly decreasing in  $k$ : Every warlord that plays “Install” worsens the  $W^L$  lottery odds for every warlord in  $W^P$ . Still, if  $r$  is low,  $v^*$  is high, and  $s$  is high – i.e., the lottery odds are good – it is possible to support situations where every warlord strictly prefers joining the state to staying outside of it.

**PROPOSITION 5:** Subgame perfect Nash equilibria can exist in which no warlord plays a weakly dominated strategy in which some  $k \geq s$  warlords play “Install” and join  $W^P$ , but at least one warlord plays “Fight” in the first period and remains outside of the consolidating state. Call these *Partial Incorporation* equilibria.

PROOF: There is a  $k'$  such that  $r \leq (\frac{s}{k'}) (pv^* - c)$  but  $r > (\frac{s}{k'+1}) (pv^* - c)$ . If one more warlord were to enter, it would no longer pay (in expectation) for any of them to enter.<sup>355</sup> In this setting  $k'$  is approximately equal to  $(\frac{s}{r}) (pv^* - c)$ .

As a simple extension: Consider a more realistic model that introduces initial heterogeneity in the warlords value for the outside option if the state consolidates but they opt to stay out. Instead of having all warlords symmetric in  $r$ , assume  $r_i$  is not the same for all  $i \in W$ , and that they cannot (at low cost) mimic the characteristics of the “high reservation wage” types to get the best deal. In that case,  $F(\cdot)$  represents the cumulative distribution of  $r_i$ , meaning that  $F(z)$  is the share of warlords with  $r_i \leq z$  and  $nF(z)$  is the number of warlords with  $r_i \leq z$ . The equilibrium is determined by a cutpoint value  $r^*$

$$r^* = (\frac{s}{nF(r^*)}) (pv^* - c)$$

Note that the left hand side of the equation is increasing in  $r$  while the right hand side is decreasing. This means that the equilibrium will be unique. All warlords with  $r_i > r^*$  will stay out, and those with  $r_i \leq r^*$  will enter. All the comparative statics on  $s$ ,  $v^*$ , and the average  $r$  value from above still hold in this richer setting, but now we have produced the natural result warlords who stay out have an idiosyncratic feature – such as safe refuge across an interstate border or sustained military support from a great power – that gives them better payoffs outside the consolidating state.

<sup>41</sup> Consider the now-classic rationalist account of revolutionary social mobilization presented by Timur Kuran (1991). Costly social mobilization is a coordination problem. Risky protests against the government might be worthwhile if they are likely to induce “tipping” behavior – creating a situation where the regime collapses and there is no authority to retaliate against activists. An individual’s choice to participate in a revolution will depend on the trade-off between an external payoff (i.e., personal rewards and punishments, which will vary depending on whether they are acting alone or in a group) and an internal payoff (i.e., the psychological costs of preference falsification). See Petersen (2001) ch. 2 for a discussion of how different community thresholds yield different equilibrium strategies.

<sup>42</sup> Participant observation has been the research design that most consistently yields persuasive “internal explanations” for violence. Seminal ethnographic (and often self-narrative) investigations into the social structures and psychological dispositions which make violence thinkable include Orwell (1952), Capote (1965), Fanon (1968), Herr (1968), Scott (1976), Popkin (1979), Pileggi (1985), Katz (1988), Vigil (1988), Jankowski (1992), Buford (1993), Espiritu (1996), Grossman (1996), Brass (1997), Sacco (2003), and Jackall (2005). For an excellent introduction to the anthropology of violence, see the assembled essays in Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004).

<sup>43</sup> It would be more realistic to complicate warlords’ coalition formation problem, imagining the universe of national intellectuals, statesmen, heads of prominent tribes, or bureaucrats forming a pool of potential presidents  $P = \{f_1, f_2, \dots, f_z\}$ . In this more complicated, realistic, and dynamic version of the game, when warlords opt into a coalition, they would have to not only choose to “fight” or “install,” but to “install” while declaring loyalty to a potential figurehead. I assume that the process of coordinating on an acceptable figurehead is resolved extra-model.

<sup>44</sup> Disarmament of armed rebels has been described as the “fundamental barrier to civil war settlement” in Walter (1997) and Walter (2002).

<sup>45</sup> Embedded in this assumption is that the coup winner can maintain the favor of the international community and investors, so he still receives  $v^*$ . Payoffs in a coup ought to reflect the most optimistic possible post-coup situation from the perspective of a warlord. After backwards induction, the “ceiling” of a coup payoff will represent the “floor” of a risk-averse president  $P$ ’s transfer to a warlord. It is plausible that in the event of a poorly executed palace coup,  $v^*$  would shrink back down to  $v$ . In this case expected coup payoffs are only  $pv - c$ . If this is *known* to be true, these losses will ultimately benefit the president  $P$ , who now only has to pay  $v^* - l(pv - c)$ . One can get approximately the same results by allowing  $c$  to be different in the first and second stages of the game ( $c_1$  and  $c_2$ ), incorporating certain losses in investment as higher costs of fighting  $c_2$  in the second stage.

<sup>46</sup> I have no particular theoretical priors on the question of whether the probability of a successful coup should vary with the number of warlords in  $W^L$ . It could be that a large number of warlords in the coalition implies a smaller probability of any one of them successfully seizing power. It seems equally plausible that a larger number of warlords competing behind the throne makes coup prospects for any warlord  $i$  *higher* because of collective action problems opposing it or organizing a counter-coup. General results still hold if we let  $p(l)$  be the probability of ending up in power if you coup, as a function of number in  $W^L$ , so long as  $p(l)$  is decreasing but not decreasing as fast as  $1/l$ . The derivative of  $l(p(l)v^* - c)$  with respect to  $l$  must be positive.

<sup>47</sup> Ferejohn (1986) presents a lucid and elegant exposition of the rationale for this assertion.

<sup>48</sup> See Fearon and Laitin (2004), 33, FN 70. These tools, and their inherent limitations, are clearly familiar to contemporary American practitioners of counterinsurgency, and they were equally well-understood by Russian military professionals in the early 1990s. For evidence that warlords cannot be distinguished even in an era of retinal scans, see Filkins and Gall (2010).

<sup>49</sup> In the language of the model, some warlords have higher reservation wages than others because of historical inheritance, or unusually good luck at attracting foreign assistance. Appendix B has an extension showing that heterogeneity in  $r$  can yield unique equilibrium predictions.

<sup>50</sup> Analysis of beliefs generally the scientist towards ephemeral matters: trust, shared values, focal points for identifying when to coordinate for a coup, and other gritty particulars of human political action. These kinds of politics are virtually impossible to analyze in the absence of formal institutions, however, because doing so requires assumptions about what other warlords would

do off-the-equilibrium-path. Data on counterfactuals is rarely reliable. Subgame perfection cuts through this knotty problem by assuming that all of the warlords hold the correct beliefs, informed by history and culture, and are at least in part endogenous to the path of play, as described in Ferejohn (1991), 285. See also Bates et al. (1998) and Thelen (1999), generally.

<sup>51</sup> For book-length contributions to our understanding of the Soviet collapse see Roeder (1993), Solnick (1998), Treisman (1999), Bunce (1999), McFaul (2001), Beissinger (2002), Brown (2007), Roeder (2007), and Kotkin (2008). For a pithy 9-page summary, see North (2006), 146-54.

<sup>52</sup> Bunce (1999) makes a convincing case that the variation in post-Communist violence can be predicted by institutional characteristics, particular composition of the armed forces (102-126).

<sup>53</sup> This event is documented extensively in Tishkov (1995).

<sup>54</sup> Derluguian's tells the tale of the dog that did not bark like this: Kabardino-Balkaria had emerged from an impenetrable mountain backwater to a relatively wealthy ski resort town during the 1980s. The Balkars, 10% of the new republic's population, found themselves under-represented when inaugural elections removed Soviet ethnic quotas. Costly ethnic war was looming. A local hero, fellow sociologist Yuri Shanibov, stepped in. Transforming himself into the pious Muslim "Musa Shanib," and backed by a rowdy crew ("athletes – wrestlers, boxers, martial artists – veterans of the Afghan war and simple hooligans [ready] for the fight" (p. 266)) he brokered an elite compromise that satisfied the Balkars and staved off a repeat of Chechnya. Or so the story goes.

<sup>55</sup> Laitin (2006).

<sup>56</sup> Olcott (1994), 45.

<sup>57</sup> Solnick (1998), 6-7, 251.

<sup>58</sup> For generalizations based on elite continuity and institutional continuity, see Suny (1995); Jones-Luong (2002); Collins (2006), and most famously McFaul (2002).

<sup>59</sup> I gratefully borrow the phrase "sub-proletarian" from Georgi Derluguian, who borrowed it from Pierre Bourdieu's observations of social structures in Algeria.

<sup>60</sup> Darchiashvili (1997a).

<sup>61</sup> A classic observational study of crowd dynamics used the following phrasing: "When studying the imagination of crowds we saw that it is particularly open to the impressions produced by images. These images do not always lie ready to hand, but it is possible to evoke them by the judicious employment of words and formulas. . . . Reason and arguments are incapable of combatting certain words and formulas." LeBon (1895), 96-7.

<sup>62</sup> Many fans of mafia movies like to imagine they would be good at this. Most are wrong. It is harder than it sounds to convince young men to break long-standing social taboos against violence. It takes an explicit re-appropriation of religious authority afterwards to "forgive" violent acts committed against innocents, once the alcohol wears off. It takes a particular kind of "true believer" personality to convince followers that abstract ideas are, in fact, worth dying and killing for. And then there's the matter of looking victims in the face and knowing their pain is your fault.

<sup>63</sup> An exception to this rule is the work of Kimberly Marten (2012), who puts the extortion dynamic at the center of her excellent case studies.

<sup>64</sup> For extensive details of the kinds of bargains that emerged in Georgia and Tajikistan, see Slade (2007); Jones (1997); de Wall (2005); Aves (1996), Pirseyedi (2000), Torjensen (2005), Akhmedov (1998); ICG (2004); Nourzhanov (2005); Rubin (1998). In Georgia the most profitable smuggling industries were either drugs, black market currencies, or (improbably) citrus fruits from Abkhazia, which could be re-sold on the Siberian black markets at prices at an astronomical markup. Cotton mono-cropping dominates the Tajik economy, so to this day the most lucrative wealth-creation opportunities came from brokering deals with rural kolkhoz in the unconvertible local currency, then re-selling the final products on the world market and banking the profits in an offshore foreign account. For a detailed discussion of this system, see Van Atta (2008).

<sup>65</sup> See Zurcher (2005); Keen (1998); Kaldor (1999); King (2001a). A hauntingly memorable expression of this argument as applied to Bosnia's war can be found in Sacco (2003).

<sup>66</sup> See Buford (1993); Mueller (2000), and especially Petersen (2002). Various musings on human nature consistent with this insight are scattered throughout Keegan (1994).

<sup>67</sup> When mobilization was *not* perceived as being risky, violence against helpless minorities was sometimes just a pick-up game – see Mueller (2000), Fearon and Laitin (2000) and King

<sup>166</sup> The “criminal” moniker is applied conservatively, only to individuals who are regularly referenced as criminals in the secondary literature.

<sup>167</sup> Wheatley (2005), 69-70. Jonathan Wheatley had the opportunity to personally interview Ioseliani. Ioseliani claims that he was the one who personally telephoned Shevardnadze, and also that Kitovani wanted to bring Shevardnadze back as foreign minister only (98, fn7).

<sup>168</sup> This particular quote is almost surely apocryphal, but I reproduce the quotation marks because it has the ring of truth. Interview conducted in Georgia, 12/14/2006.

<sup>169</sup> Wheatley (2005), 70.

<sup>170</sup> Wheatley (2005) 69.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted in Goldenberg (1994), 93.

<sup>172</sup> Nourzhanov 2005:118, Whitlock 2002: 177.

<sup>173</sup> See Nourzhanov 2005, 117.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Shohin Asadov, 3/13/2007.

<sup>175</sup> Rubin (1998), 129.

<sup>176</sup> In model parameters: lowering the cost of fighting  $c$  and/or raising the reservation value  $r$ .

<sup>177</sup> Interview conducted in Dushanbe, 8/11/07.

<sup>178</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi, 12/03/06. Not the same Koba as before.

<sup>179</sup> The data on the number of militias in the capital over time were coded using newspapers, public records, and trusted third-party reports from the period. Interviews with former combatants were used to clarify the identification of marginal cases, where the autonomy of a particular field commander was contested. In order for a militia to qualify as an independent observation it had to have at least 30 members, a name, a socially recognized leader who spoke on behalf of a group, and a presence inside the capital city. I constructed a timeline at 3-month intervals for both countries; they are superimposed on the same graph for comparison. Though coding decisions related to the timing of fractionalization of the “umbrella” groups and subordination within ministries are occasionally somewhat arbitrary. Data patterns were uncontroversial Georgian or Tajiki respondents.

<sup>180</sup> Eduard Shevardnadze tried to go “over the heads” of local militia actors and secessionist warlords alike, dealing directly with players in Moscow to reincorporate Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He rebuffed, partially for refusing to join the CIS, partially because of personal disputes with elites in Moscow who wanted to see him fail. Later, forces in Moscow would be implicated in multiple assassination attempts against the Georgian head of state.

<sup>181</sup> Akiner (2001) reproduces rumors of over 30 military training camps, mostly on the territory of Afghanistan, run by Mujahideen and Arab instructors. (fn 16, p. 43), and Ahmed Rashid (2002) suggests that by the end of the Tajik civil war, the UTO began to act like a real army, mostly because of the training and support from the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who was operating in Northern Afghanistan. Most former Russian military and civil war participants interviewed tended to be skeptical of Rashid’s position, emphasizing that different field commanders remained essentially self-financing and autonomous, colluding with state militias to transport narcotics.

<sup>182</sup> Interview conducted 12/04/2005.

<sup>183</sup> Darchiashvili (1997*a*), 2-7. It practically goes without saying that certain Georgian nationalists tend to see Russian fingerprints everywhere – an approach that whitewashes the nihilistic anarchism that took root among the Georgian political elite, the ethnically-exclusivist radical populism that seized the streets, or the criminal behaviors of the new military caste.

<sup>184</sup> This resonates with more general accounts of “carnival” and “revenge” following military victory by criminalized armies in Yugoslavia and elsewhere. See Mueller (2000), 54-56.

<sup>185</sup> Interview conducted 8/14/2007 in Dushanbe.

<sup>186</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi, 12/4/06.

<sup>187</sup> The autumn of 1994 for Tajikistan and the summer of 1995 for Georgia are typical cited. In Dushanbe, stability and order did not emerge seamlessly; there was territory just outside the city limits where government forces could not safely traverse until the late 1990s. But there was a second-tier drop-off in urban violence in late 1994, when the departure of the militias removed the feeling of an urban war zone, making the city center safe for foreign embassies, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs to open their doors.

<sup>188</sup> There are two main reasons that the spectacle of urban violence has received relatively short shrift. The main reason is that the patterns of urban violence cut cleanly across the “master cleavage” of the civil war: Georgians were murdering other Georgians, and Tajiks from the same region were killing each other in the streets of the capital. The urban violence simply did not “fit the story,” and as such this period of *intra-factional* violence tends to be treated as an afterthought in otherwise excellent case studies. It is typically described as a period of general state failure, criminalized “bandit patriotism,” or (most commonly of all) “anarchy.” Even the best descriptive accounts of the period tend to simply describe the period in vague terms (e.g., “militias ruled the streets”), then provide a description of a changed situation with no reference to what mechanisms produced or sustained the change (e.g., “order was restored”). For Georgia, see Aves (1996) 5, 54-55; O’Ballance (1997) 112, 133, 152-160; Zurcher (2005) 137, 148; Leeuw (1999) 182-3; Devdariani (2005) 167; Darchiashvili (1997b) 3; Demetriou (2002) 26. There is virtually no scholarship on the urban aspect of the war in Tajikistan; the narrative of state failure and anarchy emerged as a constant theme in conversations with current and former European embassy employees and local academics – see Akiner (2001) 37-44; Lezhnev (2006) 51-72. See, for example Whitlock (2005) in Tajikistan, O’Ballance (1997) in Georgia. A secondary reason is that most of the men who were the targets and perpetrators of violent tactics were disposable and anonymous. The bilingual elites of the Soviet academy were (understandably) unwilling descend into the streets and survey the opinions of the angry, violent, unpredictable young men from rural areas that had taken over the streets. The perspectives of the foot soldiers who were mutilated in the streets during the Time of Troubles have tended to go unrecorded because nobody cared.

<sup>189</sup> For explanations that rely on state weakness, see Volkov (2002), Gambetta (2002), Lezhnev (2006). For explanations that rely on easily accessible cultural repertoires of violence, see Mardin (1978), G. Shabad (1994). For explanations that rely on psychological predispositions, see Stinchcombe (1968), Fanon (1968), Petersen (2002).

<sup>190</sup> As Table 3.1 reports, identical percentages of Tajiks and Georgians (about 80% in both subsamples) expressed that one should never really trust anyone “not in your family,” which speaks to similar cultural scripts, on this matter, across these two states.

<sup>191</sup> Tajik respondents were also more than twice as likely to report that they trusted their immediate commander. My data makes it impossible to discern whether this was a cause or effect of the pervasive Georgian militia-switching.

<sup>192</sup> Interview conducted in Dushanbe, 02/21/07.

<sup>193</sup> It was especially unsafe time to be an aspiring journalist or photographer. Armed actors, especially in Tajikistan, had an interest in keeping the details of politics, and of the emerging street hierarchies, from being recorded. A partial list of murdered Tajik journalists from this period, assembled in Panfilov (2003): Murodulla Sheralizoda (5/5/92), Olim Zarobek (5/6/92), Shirindzhon Amridzhon (5/26/92), Emilia Podobed (6/92), Turadzhoni Kobil (8/1/92), Olimdzhon Iorasen (10/92), Tabakkal Faizullo (10/92), Ahror Sharif (12/9/92), Saidmurod Iorien (1/93), Abdulkhakim Shukurzoda (4/21/93), Pirimkul Sattori (5/28/1993), Hushvaht Haidarsho (5/19/94), Hamidzhon Hakimov (11/18/94), Muhiddin Olimpuri (12/12/95), Zuhuruddin Suiiari (4/26/96), Viktor Nikulin (3/28/96).

<sup>194</sup> The language of the “roof” is inherited from Soviet times. As Fairbanks (1996) notes, strong informal rules from Soviet times prohibited the betrayal of patrons – advantage was gained by loyalty to the party apparatus and deference to a small number of “administrative gatekeepers” (369-72). The well-studied tendency for “cadres” to move vertically and horizontally through the Soviet party structure is a phenomenon that has analogies in most armies, political parties, and bureaucracies. This perfectly compatible with prominent models of clientelism or patronage politics developed in other parts of the globe: Ideally, someone two or more tiers higher in a hierarchy will ensure that a lower-ranked individual’s interests are represented.

<sup>195</sup> My attempt to describe these groups is found in Chapter Three. For an extremely eloquent presentation of a simpler alternative perspective, see Mueller (2000).

<sup>196</sup> Interview conducted in Dushanbe, 7/26/2007. Later in the interview he added: “Not everyone likes to hit.” A statistical confirmation of this insight is presented in the next section.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Nicholas Rurua, currently serving in the Georgian parliament. Interview conducted in Tbilisi on 12/03/06.

<sup>198</sup> This is broadly consistent with a number of sociological works on the organization and composition of gangs. Peripheral members are often relatively violent and difficult to control, but the members of this disorganized milieu tend to be trying to impress the core of competent and disciplined organizers, who manage economic and political relationships. See Jankowski (1992), Venkatesh (2007, 2008). Almost none of my respondents identified *themselves* as free-riders, of course. It is possible that this reflects a systematic bias in my interview pool. I believe it is more likely that interview respondents presented idealized versions of their own motivations and actions and attributed less-favorable characteristics to others.

<sup>199</sup> The character of the ruling coalition that supported Rakhmonov was never clearer than in the treatment of “enemy” ethnic groups after the state was seized. Militia members in Tajikistan were encouraged to “drive [the Pamiris] back to their mountains” by their captains, leading to an highly organized campaign of civilian displacement and property expropriation by the new Kulobi rulers. Interview conducted in Kulob 8/4/07. This had the effect of raising the political stakes of politics significantly in Tajikistan, making control of the state apparatus an all-or-nothing game. It was a tactic that was quite useful in uniting the various factions of the Popular Front for a time.

<sup>200</sup> When asked about this, most Georgian militia members insisted that this was because of leadership effects at the highest levels: Both Kitovani and Ioseliani were already attempting to rehabilitate themselves and transmogrify into “legitimate players” in Moscow’s emergent criminal underworld. They impressed the need for restraint and a culture of moral virtue for their men. There is a famous (though possibly apocryphal) story that Kitovani ordered one of his junior lieutenants to be publicly tortured and killed for raping (or perhaps simply sexually harassing) a young woman whose uncle was a Georgian Orthodox priest.

<sup>201</sup> Interviews with participants and “opportunistic joiners” revealed three broad of explanations for missing the war. First, many were simply deterred by the threat of dying in the fighting, particularly when Russia had not yet taken sides. Second, respondents who had families had to see to their safety during the war, which often meant fleeing with their children or parents to rural safe zones or to live with urban relatives. A third explanation was simply that their offers of service were rejected by whomever was recruiting in particular area, who had clan or ethnic criteria for group membership. A Georgian respondent reported with great seriousness he was “too fat” to join the Mkhedrioni in his neighborhood in 1992, though this did not stop him from eventually signing up a year later after the war in Abkhazia was settled. Interview conducted in Kutaisi, 11/11/2006.

<sup>202</sup> Certain tattoos helped distinguish long-time members of the *vori v zkonone* (“Thieves in Law”) in Georgia; there was not an analogous signaling mechanism in the Tajik prison system.

<sup>203</sup> Interview conducted in Bishkek on 5/14/2007.

<sup>204</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi 11/2/2006.

<sup>205</sup> Interview conducted in Dushanbe on 7/17/2007).

<sup>206</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi, 11/17/2007. Readers might note the casual reference to the Ministry of the Interior as “The Ministry” – clearly its own center of institutional gravity.

<sup>207</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi, 11/3/2006. Abdullo, a Dushanbe police captain, provided a quote that was a close miss for an epigraph to this chapter “No one would back down without a fight. So, we fought.” Interview conducted in Dushanbe, 2/2/2007.

<sup>208</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi, 10/28/2006.

<sup>209</sup> Experts still disagree on the precise details of Safarov’s death. Olivier Roy (2000) and a few others argue that their argument escalated over accusations that the former was “too soft” on returning Gharmi refugees coming down from the mountains of Afghanistan (49). Safarov, Roy claims, feared that with the Gharmis driven from the region, the ethnic balance would shift in favor of the Uzbeks in areas around Kurgan-Tupe; Saidov’s mother was Lakai Uzbek, and he rejected any right of return for the Gharmis. Gretsky (1995) plausibly claims that this was a dispute about control of the new national army. Nourzhanov (2005) articulates the consensus belief on the deaths of Safarov and Saidov: “the whole accident was planned in Dushanbe and that the Kulyobi commanders were liquidated by the very same people whom they had put in power” (118).

<sup>210</sup> President Rakhmonov 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. As the various militia captains

chose sides – or hedged their bets by pushing for increased regional autonomy outside of the capital city (the strategy of Ibodullo Boimatov and Mahmud Khudoiberdiev, two extremely influential non-Kulobi warlords) – the Tajik army “became nothing more than an arms depot for the new political party.” Interview with U.N. representative, conducted in Dushanbe, 8/16/2005.

<sup>211</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi on 11/14/2006. One of the interesting aspects of this story is that it highlights the important role of informal institutions in conflict resolution – in particular the charismatic authority of Jabba, the head of the Mkhedrioni. The form that the resolution took (division of territory) also reflects a political bargain between commanders to collude to share the rents (in the literal sense of apartment rents) in the capital city. It is also clear from this anecdote that Jabba had no ability to control the day-to-day operations of the lower-ranks of “his” hierarchy through the sorts of mechanisms of a minimally competent Mafia family or rebel group. Wheatley (2005) observed that whatever its origin myth, by 1994 the “Mkhedrioni” was less a political movement and more a catch-all legitimizing label for thieves in rural areas: “smaller criminal gangs (often referred to as Mkhedrioni) dominated at local level, typically offering protection to local communities against other marauding gangs. Very often the leaders of these gangs would assume nominal state positions, such as that of mayor or district administrator (*gamgebeli*).” 80.

<sup>212</sup> Interview conducted in Dushanbe 8/15/2007

<sup>213</sup> Interview conducted 2/7/07 in Dushanbe. Note the explicit ranking of jobs in terms of perceived enrichment opportunities: the Ministry of the Interior, where one could expect relatively autonomy and many opportunities to interface with merchants and extort civilians, is the prize. Valued much lower is a uniformed job in the military hierarchy.

<sup>214</sup> Interview conducted 10/25/06 in Tbilisi.

<sup>215</sup> Generalizations in this section are drawn from a statistical analysis of only the sub-sample of respondents who reported being present in the capital city for the Time of Troubles, excluding fighters who only fought in the rural parts of either conflict.

<sup>216</sup> I attribute this trend to a higher level of psychological satisfaction and cognitive consistency associated with being “on the defensive” in an of anarchic social environment.

<sup>217</sup> An alternative explanation is that the same sorts of psychological and emotional mechanisms in the laundry-list above (e.g., the tyranny of sunk costs, shame, etc.) may have made it difficult for the respondent to admit that he had never really trusted his commander in the first place – but only in Tajikistan.

<sup>218</sup> Interview conducted in Rustavi, 11/22/06.

<sup>219</sup> Zucher (2005), Akiner (2001). Shevardnadze brought warlords with interests in the black markets for oil futures, scrap metal export, drug trafficking, and currency speculation – all businesses that thrived in periods of stability – into the MVD, the old Soviet Ministry of the Interior. The highest level of the Ministry of the Interior was composed of a mix of old friends from Shevardnadze’s time in the ministry and co-opted Mkhedrioni organizers.

<sup>220</sup> Unlike in Tbilisi, however, brazen quasi-legal land grabs by politically protected individuals persist to this day. The 2006 bulldozing of one of Central Asia’s oldest Jewish synagogues for the construction of a third presidential palace is an exemplar of this trend.

<sup>221</sup> Interview conducted 12/3/2006 in Tbilisi. This particular respondent also captured the mood at the time, which was that the humiliating defeat in Abkhazia needed to be revenged. “We needed a new military, a strong military! We needed to build ourselves strong, to return to Abkhazia! Otherwise, the Russians would just come again and again. [Russians] needed to be shown.”

<sup>222</sup> Interview conducted in Rustavi, 10/24/2006.

<sup>223</sup> Recall from the model: A very high stability threshold  $s$  increases the probability of any single warlord being pivotal, making presidential promises to pay off warlords more credible than they would be otherwise.

<sup>224</sup> Interview conducted at GFSIS, 11/2/06.

<sup>225</sup> Whatever one thinks of the validity of these numbers, the ability to conduct an election under conditions of abject state failure is an impressive display of the administrative capacity that the Soviet legacy bequeathed. Voter turnout was reported at 88.33%; The percentage of the total voting age population who participated was 77.28%. Though Gornob-Badakshan was functionally independent at the time, it is important for the dynamics that followed to note that they did vote

in this election. The election was also a referendum on the new constitution, and 90% of voters chose to adopt it. See IDEA (N.d.), Atkin (2002), 104. Grotz (2001), 20.

<sup>226</sup> See the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press: 1994-95, vol. 46, no. 45, pp. 20. Population numbers are from the 1989 census, reported in Nourzhanov and Bleur (2013), 285. It should be emphasized that the Khatlon region of Tajikistan was the site of scorched-earth anti-civilian tactics aimed at terrorizing civilian populations out of their homes, and many of the people conducting the election were the beneficiaries of these land-grabs. The election effectively ended all conversation about post-war land redistribution in Tajikistan.

<sup>227</sup> Atkin (1997a), 303.

<sup>228</sup> Jones (1996) 46, Fairbanks (2002) 136-150.

<sup>229</sup> I heard this term used to describe Shevardnadze in my very first life history interview with a former Mkhedrioni member, conducted in Tbilisi on 2/27/2006. In my third-to-last interview in Tajikistan (conducted in Dushanbe on 8/16/2007, a Kulobi member of the Popular Front dismissed Rakhmonov in the early 1990s as a *kukla* (puppet).

<sup>230</sup> Interview conducted in Tbilisi 11/29/06. For excellent descriptive accounts of this period, see Aves (1996); Brown (1998); Gretskey (1995); Demetriou (2002); O'Ballance (1997).

<sup>231</sup> See O'Ballance (1997), King (2001b). Similarly, by 1999 Emomalii Rakhmonov started to relentlessly amass as much power as possible, finally turning on his own inner circle starting in about 2002. See ICG (2004).

<sup>232</sup> "Two-level games" is obviously an homage to the seminal framing of Putnam (1988).

<sup>233</sup> This could be parameterized as a lower  $v^*$ .

<sup>234</sup> In the absence of formal institutions capable of structuring relationships between armed actors, warlords needed to use informal institutions with high transaction costs. For an excellent overview of the various sorts of efficiency losses associated with the use of informal institutions, see Dixit (2004), especially chapter 3 and 4. A partial exception to this is the United Tajik Opposition, but as the case study that follows makes clear it was highly vulnerable to divide-and-rule strategies from the center.

<sup>235</sup> See Proposition 4 and the associated proof in Appendix B.

<sup>236</sup> The well-known secessionist regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajara fit into neat spaces on pre-existing Soviet maps, and the lesser-known Armenian and Azeri enclaves of Akhal-kalaki, Dmanisi, Ninochminda, Marneuli and Bolnisi all managed to trade votes for de-facto independence throughout the 1990s. The Mingrelians in Western Georgia were also slow to forgive the elites in Tbilisi for the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia and the counterinsurgency campaign against the Zviadists.

<sup>237</sup> I borrow this delicious phrasing from King (2001b).

<sup>238</sup> See Areshidze (2007), 36; O'Ballance (1997), 138-9.

<sup>239</sup> Between 1995 and 2000, over \$700 million of bilateral aid arrived from the United States. In 2000 USAID's budget amounted to \$200 per Georgian citizen, as compared to merely \$1.25 per Russian. In addition to being the fourth-largest per capita recipient of USAID the 2002-3, Georgia also received some \$400 million Euro in the decade before the Rose Revolution from the coffers of the European Union, with separate additional contributions from many individual member states. Tudoroiu (2007), 323. See also Bruce Jones (2006), 41-2.

<sup>240</sup> One of the often overlooked aspects of the Shevardnadze legacy was his quiet promotion of the idea among influential Georgians that this kind of aid and investment – the sort that does not come with Russian strings attached – should always be preferred to Russian bilateral aid or investment from Russian banks. Interviews with Vladimer Papava, Conducted in Tbilisi, 2/6/06 and 11/4/06. See also Vladimer Papava (2003), generally.

<sup>241</sup> See Nodia (2002), 428.

<sup>242</sup> See Trenin (1995), 137. On the same page the author editorializes further: "[T]he Russians gave the Georgians more than enough weapons in 1992 to impose a military solution in all internal disputes. It is certainly not the fault of the Russian army that Tbilisi made such poor use of them."

<sup>243</sup> See Jones (1997), 527, Nodia (2002), 419.

<sup>244</sup> Wheatley (2005), 85.