

Kyrgyzstan 2010: Conflict and Context

Shirin Akiner

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Executive Summary

In 2010, Kyrgyzstan was convulsed by civil strife. The conflict made headline news around the world, partly because of the brutality and devastation, but also because of the geostrategic significance of the country. Kyrgyzstan, a small, land-locked state, is located high in the Tien Shan mountains, at the heart of Eurasia. Among its regional neighbors are Afghanistan, China and Russia, as well as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan that, like Kyrgyzstan, previously formed part of Soviet Central Asia. Important extra-regional players include the United States, Turkey and some European countries. All have interests in Kyrgyzstan; hence, the 2010 conflict was a tragedy for the Kyrgyz people, but it had a significance that spread far beyond its borders.

In the early 1990s, independent Kyrgyzstan adopted a wide-ranging program of economic and political reforms, underpinned by democratic ideals. Dubbed “the Switzerland of Central Asia,” it was regarded as an exemplary model for regional development. However, the reality on the ground was somewhat different. The policy planners failed to take adequate account of such factors as the lack of strong institutions and the deficit of professional expertise. Moreover, strategies that had been successful in other transition economies were often ill suited to the physical and social environment in Kyrgyzstan. Flawed reforms exacerbated existing social tensions and latent fault lines came to the surface. In particular, animosities between the north and the south of the country, as well as between ethnic communities (notably the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz), gained potency.

The Kyrgyz leadership sought to address these problems by changing the political system. A new constitution was adopted in 1993, but a year later was deemed to be defective. It was the first step in a long process of constitutional tinkering. It led to paralysis in government as rival factions vied for influence. Corruption flourished at all levels of society. In March 2005, mass demonstrations were held

throughout Kyrgyzstan. President Akayev resigned and a new government headed by Kurmanbek Bakiev was installed. He secured almost 90 per cent of the vote in the presidential election that was held later that year. However, the high hopes that he had inspired soon evaporated; pernicious infighting between the politicians crippled the government and corruption soared.

Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations were becoming more complicated. Close ties had been established with the United States soon after independence. They were strengthened in December 2001, when President Akayev agreed to the establishment of a base at Manas, adjacent to Bishkek international airport. The purpose was to provide support for military operations in Afghanistan. Subsequently, it became the main transit route for NATO-ISAF forces posted to Afghanistan. Russia, too, was improving its relations with Kyrgyzstan. In October 2003, a CSTO/Russian airbase was opened at Kant (about 25 km from Bishkek). Its avowed mission was to promote national and regional security. Kyrgyzstan was now in the unique position of hosting bases of the two "Cold War" protagonists, Russia and United States. Inevitably, Kant was seen as a rival to the base at Manas, although the legal status and operational capabilities of the two facilities were different.

By 2009, Kyrgyzstan was experiencing a rising tide of internal and external challenges. The economic situation was deteriorating – the result of mismanagement as well as low global prices for gold, Kyrgyzstan's main export commodity. In the wider neighborhood, there was renewed instability in Afghanistan and an upsurge of violence between Uighur separatists and Chinese security forces in Xinjiang. Bakiev responded by adopting policies that were inconsistent to the point of incoherence. Throughout that year, he flip-flopped between Moscow and Washington, favoring whichever side offered better deals. Moscow finally lost patience when Bakiev, having agreed to the establishment of a Russian/CSTO base in southern Kyrgyzstan, reassigned that same site to a joint Kyrgyz-U.S. military project – in return for increased U.S. benefits. Bishkek-Moscow relations spiraled into terminal decline.

At home, Bakiev was losing support. Opposition leaders were openly critical. Public anger, too, was rising, sharpened by the price hikes for essential utilities

introduced on January 1, 2010. On April 1, there were further price rises, triggered by Moscow's imposition of higher tariffs on energy exports to Kyrgyzstan. Demonstrations broke out all over the country; Bakiev was ousted within a couple of days. Some commentators claimed that Moscow had instigated the coup, but U.S. government officials rejected this explanation. The context was the rapprochement between Moscow and Washington, culminating in the signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty on April 8, 2010, in Prague. Relations between the two big powers had rarely been better. Neither side took advantage of the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan to further their own strategic interests. Instead, they worked together to stabilize the situation. Both sides recognized and supported the new Interim Government.

However, the country's pent-up frustration could no longer be contained. This set in motion a vicious cycle of conflict. There were three distinct phases. In April, most of the action was in the north, where political demonstrations were interspersed with random criminal attacks. In May, clashes took place in the southern town of Jalal-Abad and were characterized by crowd attacks on selected targets; at this stage, local political interests crosscut ethnic allegiances. In June, the conflict spread to Osh and its vicinity; here it became unambiguously inter-ethnic, with the Kyrgyz majority fighting the Uzbek minority. According to official estimates, around 500 people were killed, almost 2,000 seriously injured, and some 400,000 displaced.

Regional and international responses to the crisis were constructive and timely. All the main humanitarian agencies provided assistance. National governments as well as private individuals and informal associations around the world likewise sent aid. The regional security organizations provided some support, but refrained from active engagement in the conflict. Most of the displaced persons were ethnic Uzbeks; many fled across the border to seek asylum in Uzbekistan. Had Tashkent used this as an excuse to occupy southern Kyrgyzstan, the situation might have escalated into an inter-state war. In fact, the Uzbek government acted in an admirably restrained manner. It provided food and shelter for displaced persons; then, when the situation in Kyrgyzstan was calmer, it facilitated their return home.

The violence subsided as suddenly as it had begun. Localized clashes continued for some time, but there were no more brutal assaults. On June 27, while large numbers of people were still displaced, the Interim Government held a referendum to win approval for changes to the constitution. The aim was to curb presidential power by giving parliament greater authority. The public voted massively in favor of these amendments, hoping that stability and prosperity would follow. Orderly parliamentary and presidential elections were held in due course. Reforms were introduced and, with international assistance, some progress was made in improving social services. The affluent urban dwellers welcomed these changes. Yet they had little impact in rural areas, where the majority of the population lived: all the social and economic problems that had existed before 2010 were still there. Moreover, giving greater powers to parliament merely created more opportunities for corruption. Thus, despite some positive developments, this remained a fractured, vulnerable society.

In the geopolitical sphere, Russia and the United States continued to be the key strategic partners, although in both cases bilateral relations were occasionally strained. The U.S. military finally vacated the Manas base in June 2014. In July 2015, Kyrgyz officials announced that Bishkek had invited Russia to install a base in the south. This decision was taken against the backdrop of deteriorating security in Afghanistan. NATO-ISAF formally completed its mission in December 2014. Only a small nucleus of non-combat (mostly U.S.) troops remained in Afghanistan for training purposes. Moscow was now coming to be seen as the main regional security provider – though, given its economic woes, there were doubts about its ability to fulfill that role.

Within Central Asia, relations were mostly cordial, although there was still a high level of distrust towards Uzbekistan. Consequently, small border disputes could suddenly escalate into serious military confrontations, as happened in March 2016. On that occasion, the situation was soon defused, but the underlying issues were not resolved, leaving the possibility that they might lead to another flare up in the future.

Established ties with Europe remained important for Bishkek, likewise its links with Turkey. However, the Kyrgyz government was shifting from a bi-polar to a

multi-polar concept of the world and now began actively to cultivate relationships with Asian states. China was by far the most important partner, but strong ties were established with Japan, South Korea, India, Iran and several Gulf states. This “pivot to Asia” broadened Bishkek’s political options; it also boosted flows of investment as well as allowing the country to join the expanding network of trans-regional transport corridors – crucial preparation for future trade and economic cooperation.

Interpretations of the conflict cycle of 2010 have changed with time, with the emphasis shifting from the ethnic violence in June to the ousting of Bakiev in April. This came to be portrayed as a “national liberation struggle” against a corrupt tyrant. In reality, many of the problems remained. Yet for all its shortcomings, the constitutional amendments did set in motion a process of reflection and analysis regarding the nature of governance. Some political leaders began to appreciate the need for prudent management of the national economy and genuine reform of public administration. If they could implement these policies, Kyrgyzstan would have a chance to realize its rich potential.

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan gained independence at the end of 1991 and immediately embarked on an ambitious program of economic reform. This was underpinned by a commitment to democratic ideals and the emergence of a thriving civil society. The international community was impressed and regarded Kyrgyzstan as an exemplary model for regional development. There were many Kyrgyz, especially among the educated, urban sector of the population, who shared this positive view. Consequently, it came as a shock when, in 2010, the country was engulfed by a terrible series of violent clashes. It was tempting to seek “instant” culprits and readily comprehensible “causes.” The easiest solution was to present the conflict as an internecine struggle between rival ethnic communities. However, as those with long first-hand experience of the region pointed out, this explanation was too simplistic.¹ Some commentators suggested that a “third force” was responsible for the violence, variously identified as supporters of ex-President Bakiev, Islamist groups, criminal gangs, foreign powers – or a combination of these elements. Such allegations may indeed have contained a grain of truth, but they were at best only partial explanations.

Looking back at the country’s recent history, it is clear that the conflict took place against a background of social tension, disaffection and increasingly anarchic tendencies; external factors, especially the rivalry between the United States and Russia, did not help matters. This paper argues that the events of 2010 ought not to be examined in isolation but should be set within the systemic and structural “anatomy” of Kyrgyzstan, as well as the wider geopolitical environment. In retrospect, was the 2010 conflict a turning point that allowed the country to make a

¹ See Madeleine Reeves, “Getting To The Roots Of Resentment In Kyrgyzstan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 4, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Getting_To_The_Roots_Of_Resentment_In_Kyrgyzstan/2090331.html; also Hamid Ismailov, “Kyrgyz and Uzbek Obid-kori,” *BBC News*, June 25, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/worldservice/writerinresidence/2010/06/kyrgyz_and_uzbek_obidkori.html

fresh start – to address inherent problems? Or was it just another episode in a series of upheavals that shocked society, but failed to bring about real change? There are still no definitive answers to these questions. Nevertheless, it is worth revisiting the events of that year to try to identify key developments. Firstly, what were the “conflictogenic factors” that created the preconditions for violence? Secondly, what happened – what was the sequence of events, the role of the protagonists and the damage that resulted? Thirdly, what are the post-conflict trends within Kyrgyzstan, and how has it responded to the changing geopolitical environment – especially the growing influence of China and other Asian states? Finally, through the prism of the conflict, it is important to try to understand the challenges that Kyrgyzstan faces today.

Part I: Context

Kyrgyzstan faces a daunting combination of natural challenges. A relatively small country (198,500 sq. km), it has a history scored by rupture and discontinuity; a fragmented physical and human geography; an extreme climate, a remote location and a limited resource base. In addition, it is landlocked, bordered by China in the east, Tajikistan in the south, Uzbekistan in the west and Kazakhstan in the north. The wider neighborhood is characterized by serious security threats and, in places, chronic instability.

Yet the country also has impressive assets, not least the high degree of human development, particularly in the fields of education and health care, which it acquired during the Soviet period. This enabled some sectors of the population to make a rapid adjustment to post-Soviet realities and to flourish intellectually, socially and economically. Education had previously been state-funded and accessible to all. After independence, this sector began to be privatized and internationalized. This created exciting new opportunities for the more affluent layer of society, broadening horizons and extending the range of choices. Many, however, were not so fortunate. For them, the transition was acutely disorienting and painful.² Systemic weaknesses in governance aggravated these problems. Thus, two very different, and widely divergent, trajectories of development emerged at the upper and lower ends of the social scale.

Socio-Economic Factors

This section discusses the principal “conflictogenic” factors – factors that contributed to the creation of a conflict-prone environment. The contention is that sys-

² For a thorough, field-based study of problems in the school sector, see Alan J. DeYoung, Madeleine Reeves and Galina K. Valyayeva, *Surviving the Transition: Case Studies of Schools and Schooling in the Kyrgyz Republic Since Independence* (Greenwich, Connecticut: IAP, 2006).

temic problems created a vicious cycle of mismanagement, hindering political reform, economic restructuring, and the provision of social services. In turn, poor governance exacerbated social problems, contributing to rising levels of crime, Islamist radicalization and the erosion of civic identity. The combination of factors such as these reinforced the structural divide between the north and the south of the country by accentuating internal disparities, thereby deepening existing intra-regional tensions.

Weak Governance

The early years of independence, as indicated above, were marked by a euphoric dash to liberalize society. New ideas were embraced enthusiastically and uncritically. Kyrgyzstan was a pioneer in the speed and scope of its reforms and was soon hailed as “an island of democracy.”³ President Askar Akayev (in office, 1990-2005) was genuinely committed to making a rapid transition from the one-party rule of the Soviet past to a multi-party democratic system. There were many in Kyrgyzstan who shared his vision. Yet from the outset, there was a mismatch between good intentions and realities on the ground. There was paralysis in government as warring factions blocked or subverted attempts to reform the system. A new constitution was adopted in 1993, but a year later was deemed to be defective. President Akayev abolished the existing one-chamber parliament and ruled by decree until a new, bicameral legislative body was formed in 1995. The following year, major changes to the constitution were put to the vote in a nationwide referendum: there was a 96 per cent turnout, with 94.5 per cent of the votes favoring the amendments.

However, this did not result in better governance. Rather, it was the beginning of a long process of constitutional tinkering.⁴ The emphasis on structure and form soon became a substitute for addressing substantive social and economic issues. This fostered a situation in which political activism became an end in itself – a

³ See John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers), 1999; also Eugene Huskey, “Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization,” in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. Karen Dawisha, and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 242-76.

⁴ For a concise summary of these developments, see the entry for Kyrgyzstan in D.J. Sager, ed., *Political Parties of the World* (London: John Harper Publishing, 2008).

lucrative career path devoid of any notion of public service or responsibility. The number of registered political parties mushroomed,⁵ but rather than participating in a constructive democratic debate, most of the party leaders were preoccupied with their own personal ambitions.⁶ Bribery and corruption became engrained. There were some who realized what was happening, but were powerless to stop it. Akayev himself made a lucid analysis of the challenges and pitfalls that the country faced,⁷ but this did not prevent him from becoming part of the corrupt culture.

In March 2005, demonstrations erupted throughout the country in protest at vote-rigging in the parliamentary elections. These manifestations were said to be spontaneous, but it was widely rumored that they had been given support and encouragement by Western-sponsored NGOs, who believed that Kyrgyzstan was ripe for a “Color Revolution” similar to those that had taken place in Georgia and Ukraine.⁸ President Akayev resigned and the Kyrgyz media were jubilant, the previously pro-government newspapers leading the pack in their lavish praise for the “Tulip Revolution.”⁹ However, the celebrations soon turned to rioting. The violence that followed was almost entirely confined to the south, mainly to Jalal-Abad, where at least three people were killed and hundreds more were injured (see below “A Conflicted Society”). It was an intimation that the center of political gravity was shifting from the north (Akayev’s power base) to the south.

⁵ Muratbek Imanaliev, ed., *Politicheskie partii v Kyrgyzstane* (Bishkek: Institute for Public Policy, 2006); also Bermet Imanalieva, “Political Parties in the Kyrgyz Republic: Their Organization and Functioning,” No. 22, *Voices from Central Asia* (Washington D.C.: Central Asia Program, George Washington University, September 2015).

⁶ International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the “Island of Democracy,” *Asia Report* No. 22, August 28, 2001.

⁷ Askar Akayev, *Kyrgyzstan: on the Way to Progress and Democracy* (Bishkek: International Department/Presidency of Kyrgyz Republic, 1995).

⁸ Some Western commentators dismissed these allegations, claiming that they had been circulated by an “embittered Akayev.” However, the present author was in Bishkek that summer, teaching on a Soros-sponsored program, and young Kyrgyz professionals of various political affiliations agreed that there had been foreign support and encouragement for the revolution. See also Aleksander Knyazev, *Gosudarstvennyj perevorot 24 marta 2005 g. v Kirgizii* (Bishkek: Obshchestvennyy fond Aleksandra Knyazeva, 2007), http://www.knyazev.org/books/Gov_over_3.pdf, for a detailed analysis of these events. He, too, pointed to the role played by foreign, mainly U.S., NGOs as “agents of change” through “colored revolutions” (esp. chapter 1: 10-43).

⁹ For a flavor of the triumphalist mood of the day, see, for example, “Revolutionary mood sweeps Kyrgyz press,” *BBC News*, March 26, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4382591.stm>

The beneficiaries of the March uprising were a *troika* formed by Kurmanbek Bakiev (from Jalal-Abad), Roza Otunbayeva (from Bishkek), and Felix Kulov (from Bishkek). Bakiev skillfully sidelined the others and was soon the sole leader of the country; his position was secured in the presidential elections of July 2005, when he gained almost 90 per cent of the vote. His victory was welcomed at home and abroad, since he was seen as the “new broom” who would cleanse Kyrgyzstan’s Augean stables. This did not happen: instead, within a few months high expectations gave way to disillusionment. He not only lost public support, but also alienated many of his political allies; most were dismissed from their ministerial posts, some were stripped of their property, and others imprisoned on dubious charges.¹⁰ Five years later, in 2010, he too would be driven from office in the midst of an even more brutal explosion of violence.

Flawed Economic Reforms

Attempts at economic restructuring were also faltering. Kyrgyzstan, one of the poorest Soviet republics, had been heavily dependent on inter-republican trade. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Kyrgyzstan’s supply chains and markets disappeared, resulting in a severe contraction of its economy. This created both the need and the opportunity to restructure the system. To this end, the Kyrgyz authorities worked closely with international organizations and eagerly followed their prescriptions. Yet the policy planners had failed to take adequate account of such factors as the paucity of appropriate professional skills and the lack of strong institutions. Moreover, strategies that had been successful in other transitional economies were often ill suited to the physical and social environment in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, despite some apparent successes in privatization, little real progress was made and dreams of creating a “Central Asian Switzerland” soon evaporated.

Nevertheless, the Kyrgyz government remained committed to the goal of creating a Western-oriented, free market economy. In 1993, with the support of the IMF, Kyrgyzstan left the ruble zone and introduced its own currency; that same year it

¹⁰ See International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State,” *Asia Report* No. 109, December 2005; and, International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: A Deceptive Calm,” *Asia Briefing* No. 79, August 2008.

applied to join the World Trade Organization (it acceded in 1998). Both moves were premature. The cost of living for ordinary people soared and trade with the neighboring states suffered. The most serious long-term effect was that Kyrgyzstan's manufacturing base was virtually wiped out by the influx of cheap foreign products. With careful planning and some initial state support, many of these enterprises would probably have survived. As it was, when they closed down, jobs were irrevocably lost, as were skills and work practices.

The situation in the agricultural sector was even worse. Traditionally, the mainstay of the Kyrgyz economy had been animal husbandry. By the late 1980s, the country had around 12 million head of livestock. The rapid privatization of this sector dismembered the large collective farms and destroyed the vital support services that they had provided. Inputs such as fuel for agricultural machinery, seeds, fertilizers, winter fodder, veterinary services, indeed many other basic facilities, were now beyond the reach of the new smallholders and herders. The animals were soon slaughtered, the land left untended, and the rural population began to drift to the towns in search of non-existent work.¹¹

Neither Akayev nor Bakiev was able or willing to put in place effective job-creation schemes. Large-scale infrastructural projects could have helped to alleviate the employment problem. However, little progress was made in this field. One of the country's most urgent needs was the modernization and expansion of the transport and communications system. Without this, it was impossible to fully exploit Kyrgyzstan's natural resources. Road access to important deposits of coal, gold and other minerals was so poor that commercial operations were often not economically viable. Trade within the country was also hampered by inadequate transport connections. Successive governments grappled with the economic restructuring packages that international financial institutions proposed, but the visible impact on the lives of the general public was minimal. The foreign loans

¹¹ A lively, well-informed account of this process is given by Boris Petric, *Where are All Our Sheep? Kyrgyzstan, a Global Political Arena* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2015).

seeped away, while the country's external debt grew by leaps and bounds. By 2006, Kyrgyzstan was one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world.¹²

Failing Social Services, Youth Alienation

There is no space here to discuss in detail the impact of poor governance and weak economic management on the provision of public services. It is suffice to say that post-independence, there was a steep decline in all areas of social care, including health and education.¹³ For the better-off urbanites, this was an inconvenience, but not a critical setback. They had the means to cushion themselves against the decline in state-funded services. For the poorer (and by far more numerous) rural dwellers, it was a catastrophic blow.¹⁴ Deprived of access to basic welfare services, they tended to seek help from other sources – mostly religious organizations.

The most alienated sector of the population was the rural youth. Those aged 30 years and younger were the products of independent Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵ They grew up in a world of limited access to education and shrinking employment opportunities. They fed the drift of migrants from the countryside to the towns. Deracinated and disoriented, they were at high risk of being drawn into extremist religious or criminal groups. The Bakiev administration recognized this problem and in 2006-2008, put forward a number of framework schemes and initiatives. In 2009, a law was passed “On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy”; also, a specialized Department for Youth Issues was set up within the Ministry of Labor,

¹² In 2006, the World Bank and the IMF agreed to offer Kyrgyzstan the status of Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC). This was regarded by many in Kyrgyzstan as a symbol of the country's economic degradation; see further Alexander Knyazev, *Vektory i paradigmy kirgizskoi nezavisimosti (ocherki postsovetsoi istorii)* (Bishkek: Obshchestvennyy fond Aleksandra Knyazeva, 2012), http://www.knyazev.org/books/vectors_n_paradigms.pdf, esp. 216-18. In February 2007, the Bakiev government unanimously rejected participation in the HIPC initiative (for background, see Erica Marat, “With Kulov gone, Bakiyev Dumps HIPC Initiative” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 4, no. 38, February 23, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32528&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=171&no_cache=1#.V2qY6Ot94dU).

¹³ A fine comparative study of developments in higher education and the health services is given by David Scott, *The Management of Public Services in Central Asia: Institutional Transformation in Kyrgyzstan* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁴ The rural population accounted for some 64% of the population (*CIA World Factbook*, January 2016).

¹⁵ In 2015, an estimated 48% of the population was aged 24 years or under (*CIA World Factbook*, January 2016).

Employment and Migration.¹⁶ The aims were exemplary, but remained largely unfulfilled.¹⁷ Post-Bakiev, proposals were again put forward to involve youth organizations in the political process, and there were calls for the creation of a youth ministry.¹⁸ The fundamental weakness of initiatives such as these was that they only encompassed “the willing” – the educated urban youth who were keen to participate in such activities. They scarcely touched the marginalized, disaffected youth who formed the bulk of the population.

Crime and Corruption

By the 1980s, in Kyrgyzstan as in other Soviet republics, it was becoming ever more difficult to maintain law and order. The situation deteriorated still further after independence, when the poorly paid, ill-equipped police and security forces were virtually powerless to combat rising levels of crime. The penal system was brutal. Conditions in the penitentiaries were appalling: overcrowding, poor sanitation, malnutrition, disease, physical and verbal abuse were endemic.¹⁹ Bribery became a basic survival mechanism, for criminals as well as for the population at large.

A major source of criminal activity was the narcotics trade. The northern smuggling route from Afghanistan ran across southern Kyrgyzstan. It was primarily in order to combat such rackets that in 1992, a Parliamentary Committee for Defense, National Security and Crime Prevention was established.²⁰ It was replaced by the State Commission on Drug Control in 1993; the narcotics trade was now a serious

¹⁶ It envisaged the creation of a Republican Youth Initiative Support Fund, but Bakiev was ousted before such plans could be realized. See Ivan Marchenko, “Youth Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Stiff Mission,” interview with Aidar Jorobekov, Director of the Department for Youth Issues, March 16, 2010, <http://www.eng.24.kg/politic/2010/03/16/10616.html>; also United Nations Development Programme, “Kyrgyzstan: Successful Youth – Successful Country,” *National Human Development Report*, 2009/10, chapter 2, 12-18.

¹⁷ For a critical assessment of these policies, see Chinara Esengul, Baglan Mamaev, and Natalia Yefimova-Trilling, *Youth and Public Policy in Kyrgyzstan* (Reinheim, Germany: Youth Policy Review Series, 2014), esp. 82-86.

¹⁸ Dalton Bennett, “Kyrgyz Youth Activists Struggle to Find Place in Bishkek’s New Order,” *Eurasianet.org*, May 24, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61137>

¹⁹ International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan’s Prison System Nightmare,” *Asia Report* No.118, August 16, 2006.

²⁰ *Jane’s Sentinel: Security Assessment*, Russia and the CIS, London, Jane’s Information Group, 1996, section 6.7.4.

problem, but it had not yet reached a critical level. This changed after the launch of Western-led operations against the Taliban; almost immediately, there was an exponential rise in drug cultivation and drug trafficking. Although the Taliban had practically eradicated opium cultivation in Afghanistan in their last year in power, by 2007 it had risen to 193,000 hectares, while drug production rose to 8,200 tons.²¹ This resulted in a rapid escalation in the volume of drugs smuggled through Kyrgyzstan. It began as a transit trade, but soon had a devastating impact within the country. There was a surge in violent crime, as well as a sharp rise in local addiction, with attendant health and social problems. There was also a shift from the traditional use of hashish to opium and, increasingly, to heroin.²² Moreover, the narcotics trade linked into other, newer forms of organized transnational crime, including human trafficking and terrorist networks.²³

To put these problems into perspective, the level of drug-related crime in Kyrgyzstan was still very much lower than in countries such as Mexico or Laos.²⁴ However, until very recent times this had been a relatively law-abiding society, hence the sudden rise in crime rates had a corrosive effect on public morale. It was widely (and credibly) rumored that highly placed Kyrgyz politicians and law enforcement officers were involved in criminal activities, protecting gang leaders and receiving a share of the profits in return.²⁵ The Kyrgyz government cooperated with international agencies and donors to combat these crimes. The State Commission on Drug Control was transformed into the Drug Control Agency

²¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009: Summary Findings," September 2009, http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf

²² Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political Dimensions* (Washington D.C. and Stockholm: Silk Road Studies Program and Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper, 2005), 15-19.

²³ An excellent study of the organization and operational tactics of Kyrgyz drug traffickers is given by Alexander Kupaadze, "Kyrgyzstan – A virtual narco-state?," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25 (2014): 1178-85.

²⁴ Compare the profile of Kyrgyzstan with that of other "narco-states" as given in United States Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Drug and Chemical Control, "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," vol. 1, March 2014: 219-21.

²⁵ Chyngyz Kambarov, "Organized Criminal Groups in Kyrgyzstan and the Role of Law Enforcement," *Voices from Central Asia* no. 20, January 2015 (Washington D.C.: CAP, George Washington University). The author, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry, gives a well-informed picture of the links between organized criminal groups, business circles and politicians, throughout the post-independence period. See also Tamerlan Ibrahimov, *CABAR, Institute of War and Peace Reporting*, July 27, 2015.

(DCA) in 2003-4. It was an independent entity, thus not part of the governmental structure. Its tasks were to implement anti-trafficking policies, monitor effectiveness and coordinate the activities of other relevant bodies. The DCA operated under the aegis of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), but was fully and solely funded by the United States.²⁶ It was generally regarded as effective; in 2008, according to official reports, it seized 1,317 kg of drugs including 349 kg of heroin, 574 kg of opium and 360 kg of cannabis. In 2009, President Bakiev disbanded this body; according to the rumors of the day, he did this because some of the drug barons enjoyed presidential patronage and the DCA was hampering their operations.²⁷ It was subsequently re-established, with the support of UNODC, as the Kyrgyz State Service on Drug Control.

Corruption, already widespread, became more deeply entrenched. "Petty corruption" – that is, the giving and taking of bribes – permeated every sphere of activity, including the entire educational chain, health care and medical treatment, law and order, business, trade and virtually every other transaction. It went hand-in-hand with the increase in petty crime: casual street violence, robbery, and routine abuse of office by state employees. There was also "grand corruption," involving major corporations, misappropriation of revenue from key sectors of the economy and embezzlement of international donor funding.²⁸ The hurried privatization of state property, initiated in 1992, allowed senior officials to carve out personal economic fiefdoms. That same year there was an attempt to introduce a rational fiscal policy, but the very individuals who were supposedly responsible for administering the system soon undermined it by their profiteering. Foreign companies were often drawn into this web of corruption. Several Kyrgyz politicians, some of ministerial rank, were put on trial for corrupt practices.²⁹ The opposition of the

²⁶ Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia*, 71-76.

²⁷ "Drugs trade ravaging restive Kyrgyz city," *BBC News*, October 22, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11599977>

²⁸ For a trenchant exposure of corruption on a grand scale in Kyrgyzstan, see Johan Engvall, *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence* (Washington D.C. and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Silk Road Paper, 2011). See also Transparency International, Maira Martini, "Overview of Corruption in Kyrgyzstan," January 9, 2013, for a survey of the institutional impact and assesses the damage to the economy.

²⁹ Apart from widely publicized allegations of criminal activities by Akayev and Bakiev, cases brought against other government officials included: Feliks Kulov, ex-Minister of the Interior (embezzlement etc.

day routinely complained that such charges were trumped up for political reasons. With every change of government, these individuals were released and their names cleared. It was impossible to know whether they were actually guilty, but the public perception was that the judicial system was entirely subservient to the will of the politicians.

The loss to the economy caused by corrupt practices such as fraud, embezzlement, tax evasion and theft was very considerable: in 2010, it reportedly accounted for 10 per cent of GDP.³⁰ Successive presidents called for a fight against corruption. However, it was a notoriously “sticky” phenomenon – highly contagious, but very difficult to eradicate. It was also self-perpetuating, since the giver of a bribe expected to receive bribes from others. Moreover, giving a bribe was usually the only way to circumvent inefficient public services. There was no authority that could administer law and order impartially: the police were regarded as incompetent, lazy and venal; the judiciary was riddled with corruption and liable to manipulation by senior officials. This constant exposure to wrongdoing at all levels of society, which for the most part went unpunished, eroded people’s belief in the ability of the state to provide any meaningful form of protection, any semblance of law and order. Concomitantly, it resulted in a loss of trust not merely in the sincerity but also the morality of the political elite. This was one of the chief factors impelling people to turn to religion and, in some cases, to embrace extreme interpretations of “pure” ethical practices.

Islam and Islamist Radicalization

To understand how radical interpretations of Islam became embedded in Kyrgyzstan it is necessary to look at the historical background.³¹ The Islamicization of the

in 2000); Azimbek Beknazarov, former judge (abuse of office, 2002); Temir Sariev, future Minister of Finance and Prime Minister (handling of contraband, 2007) – to name but a few. All these charges were dropped when new governments came to power.

³⁰ See further Maira Martini, “Overview of Corruption in Kyrgyzstan.”

³¹ There is no agreed definition of key terms. In this paper, “radical” and “radicalization” refer to contemporary non-orthodox interpretations of Islam. The terms “Islamism” and “Islamist” are here used to indicate the political goal of establishing a state based on “Islamic principles” (a concept that is itself open to contestation). See further Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London and Washington: Pinter, 1997); for a broader discussion, Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

region probably began in the ninth century CE, but it was a slow, uneven process. In the north, the mountain peoples remained eclectic in their religious practices, blending shamanism with Muslim rites; in the south, a more orthodox form of Islam was established. During the Soviet period, these differences were largely erased by anti-religious campaigns and vigorous secularization. Yet in the mid-1980s, in the more liberal atmosphere of the Gorbachev era, Kyrgyzstan (like other Central Asian republics) experienced a revival of Islam: many Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars and other traditionally Muslim peoples became active worshippers at this time. The trend continued after independence. By 1994, some 1,000 mosques had been officially registered in Kyrgyzstan, roughly equally divided between the north and the south of the country. Islamic education was re-established with the opening of numerous *madrassahs* (Islamic colleges); many students went to Egypt and other Muslim countries to pursue their Islamic studies.³² Thousands of Kyrgyz citizens began to make the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca. Some of these activities were funded by Muslims abroad, but there were also local donors and community self-help groups who voluntarily united to construct mosques and other religious buildings, and undertook charitable work. The more cynically-minded Kyrgyz believed that these activities were a useful way to launder money and to provide a front for criminal enterprises.

At first, the government took a relaxed attitude towards religion. Missionaries flooded into the country, some from mainstream Christian and Islamic organizations, others from marginal, esoteric sects. This had a divisive effect on society, leading to the formation of exclusive, mutually antagonistic groups. The state authorities saw this as a threat to stability and in the mid-1990s began to introduce stricter controls on religious activities. The Muftiat of Kyrgyzstan, established in 1993, was responsible, amongst other functions, for the formal examination and registration of Muslim clerics. The ostensible aim of registration was to disbar unqualified individuals from holding religious posts – a necessary measure, given that a third of the applicants in 1999 lacked the most basic level of religious

³² See further Omurzak Sh. Mamayusupov, ed., *Islam v Kyrgyzstane: tendentsii razvitiya* (Osh, 2004); also Dmitri Trofimov, "Friday Mosques and their Imams in the Former Soviet Union," *Religion, State and Society* 24, nos. 2/3, (1996): 208-10.

training. Equally, however, registration enabled the state authorities to keep a close check on the ideological orientation of the religious establishment, likewise on the political and ethnic affiliations of senior clerics.³³

Meanwhile, there were growing concerns about the influence of radical Islamist groups.³⁴ In the late 1990s, members of the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) were reportedly infiltrating Kyrgyzstan.³⁵ Transnational Islamist groups were also establishing bases in Kyrgyzstan and the neighboring states. One of the biggest and best organized of such movements was *Hizb ut-Tahrir* ("Party of Liberation"). Founded in the Middle East in 1953, it was strongly anti-Zionist (in practice, anti-Semitic); it was also dismissive of Western values, regarding them as products of an infidel culture. Many orthodox Muslims, as well as politicians and members of the security forces, believed that it was a "cradle" organization for terrorists, hence it was proscribed in several countries, including most of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Others, however, insisted that it was a peaceful movement with wholly benign intentions. It succeeded in establishing clandestine cells in Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s and from then onwards attracted a substantial following throughout the country. It was banned in July 2006, following a raid by the Kyrgyz police on a secret Hizb ut-Tahrir cell, whose members were said to be collaborating with the IMU and other terrorist groups.³⁶

³³ Senior clerics were usually supported by informal networks, reputedly linked to cliques within the government. This, it was rumored, accounted for the frequent changes of leadership within the Muftiat. However, such changes were always said to be in accordance with the "will of the Muslim community." Thus, Kimsanbai-aji Abdurahman uulu (ethnic Kyrgyz, b. 1943 in Uzbekistan) was elected Mufti by popular acclaim in 1993; three years later, accused of "Wahhabi" leanings, he was removed from office. His successor, Abdysatar-aji Majitov, was similarly forced to step down following gossip that his son was engaged in "fundamentalist" activities. In 2000, Kimsanbai-aji was re-instated as Mufti, but in 2002 again removed from office "by popular demand." His successor survived until 2010, after which the Muftiat experienced further leadership problems.

³⁴ Bakhtiyar Babadzhanov, "The Ferghana Valley: Source or Victim of Islamic Fundamentalism?," in *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, eds. Murad Esenov and Lena Jonson (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1999).

³⁵ It was founded c. 1995, mainly by Uzbek veterans of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1980s) and the Tajik civil war (1990s). Over the past two decades, it has allegedly perpetrated terrorist acts in Uzbekistan and other regional states.

³⁶ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), esp. 66-70.

Another large and influential organization was the *Tablighi Jamaat*, founded in British India around 1927. Again, there were some who regarded it as a peaceful reformist movement, while others saw it as a step on the way to violent radicalization.³⁷ Missionaries from *Tablighi Jamaat* first appeared in Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s; within ten years, they had attracted a wide and diverse following among the Kyrgyz population.³⁸ The movement was regarded as a potential security threat in the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the state authorities were at first cautiously tolerant of *Tablighi Jamaat*, but kept a watchful eye on its activities. By 2013, however, concerns about the group's influence were growing and there were calls for it to be banned. As of 2016, this had not become official policy.

Members of the IMU were almost certainly involved in the insurgency in Batken, in the south-west of Kyrgyzstan, in 1999-2000, discussed below. This attack prompted the government to crackdown on all unregistered religious groups, and in particular those with Islamist sympathies. Western-led operations against al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups in Afghanistan had precipitated an influx of militants into Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the same time, Western organizations (governmental and non-governmental) began to exert considerable pressure on the Kyrgyz authorities to promote religious tolerance and to improve legislation and education in this field. This was reflected in the work of the Muftiat.³⁹ In less than a decade, the number of registered (thus officially approved) Muslim establishments had expanded considerably – by 2003, there were over 1,600

³⁷ *Tablighi Jamaat* developed as an offshoot of the Deobandi movement. Its primary purpose was to bring about a moral regeneration within the Muslim community. It spread throughout the Indian sub-continent and beyond that to Muslim communities around the world. By the early 21st century, it was reputed to have some 20 million followers, primarily in Asia, but also in Africa and some Western countries. Some members were allegedly involved in terrorist plots in the UK, but defenders of *Tablighi Jamaat* insisted that these were the actions of individuals, and not condoned by the movement itself.

³⁸ Kanatbek Murzakhalilov and Mirajiddin Arynov, "Tablighi Jamaat in Kyrgyzstan: Its Local Specifics and Possible Impact on the Religious Situation," *Central Asia and The Caucasus* 11, no. 3, (2010): 162-67. This trend is analyzed by Bayram Balci in "The rise of the Jama'at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: the revival of Islamic ties between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia?," *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 1: 61-76. See also International Crisis Group, "Women and Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan," *Asia Report* No. 176, September 3, 2009.

³⁹ Mufti Muratali-aji Jumanov (elected in 2002), eager to promote the concept that Western democratic values were compatible with Islam, worked closely with European and American civil society organizations. See further Mamayusupov, "Islam v Kyrgyzstane: tendentsii razvitiya," esp. 68-80.

mosques, 27 madrassahs, and Islamic universities and institutes.⁴⁰ Radical Islamist groups, meanwhile, continued to attract adherents. It was against this background of a perceived Islamist threat that in 2009 the Bakiev government adopted a new law on religion, which strengthened state control over all religious activities, but which was particularly directed against clandestine Islamist groups.

Erosion of Civic Identity

In parallel to the spread of radical religious movements, ethno-nationalist allegiances became more pronounced. During the Soviet period there had been two categories of identification: the ethnic concept of “nationality,” defined by genetic inheritance, and the civic concept of “citizenship,” defined by membership of the state. In theory, all citizens were equal and no single “nationality” was privileged above another. In practice, matters did not always work out so equitably. Within a given republic, the titular group (e.g. Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan) enjoyed many informal privileges. There were two compensatory factors. Firstly, minority groups had a range of cultural rights, covering education, book publishing, media channels, theaters and other such activities in their own languages. Secondly, opportunities for advancement were open to a large enough cross-section of the population to minimize ethnic resentment. As a result, for most of the Soviet period there was a high degree of inter-ethnic harmony and cooperation. On the eve of independence, out of a total population of just under 4.3 million, the main ethnic groups were: Kyrgyz (52.4%), Uzbeks (12.9%), and Russians (21.5%).⁴¹ In addition, there were Tatars, Uighurs, Germans, Koreans, Dungans (Chinese Muslims), Meskhetian Turks and over 70 other ethnic groups. Most of these communities were formed during the Soviet period; some were voluntary immigrants, but others such as the Koreans were political deportees.⁴² The Uzbeks were the only large group that had been settled in what was now southern Kyrgyzstan for the entire span of their recorded history.

⁴⁰ Ibid., esp. 112-319.

⁴¹ Source: Soviet 1989 Census survey; for a summary of relevant data in this census, see Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?* (London: Whitehall Paper Series, Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1993), 72.

⁴² Minority Rights Group, Shirin Akiner, “Central Asia: Conflict or Stability and Development?,” 1997.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the ideological framework that had underpinned the system also evaporated. In Kyrgyzstan, as in other ex-Soviet republics, the fashioning of new national symbols and a new “state ideology” grounded in the history and culture of the titular people became a priority. The desire to elevate all things Kyrgyz – language, myths and iconic symbols – was understandable, but it left the minorities feeling ignored and excluded. It was the beginning of the erosion of a shared civic identity. The Kyrgyz constitution proclaimed the equality of all citizens,⁴³ but there was soon more discrimination in favor of the majority group than there had been during the Soviet period. Concurrently, the cultural rights of minorities were circumscribed.⁴⁴ This change was paralleled by the shift in the country’s demographic balance, which resulted in a steep rise in the proportion of Kyrgyz in the overall population.⁴⁵ The Russian-Kyrgyzstanis were somewhat reassured by the retention of Russian as one of the country’s two official languages, but no such concessions were made to the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis – although this was their historic homeland.⁴⁶

In 1995, President Akayev established the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, thereby creating a formal channel through which the minorities could raise their concerns.⁴⁷ However, it failed to live up to expectations and was soon moribund.⁴⁸

⁴³ Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (Including Amendments Made in 2003), Chapter 2, Section 2, Article 3, February 18, 2003.

⁴⁴ Regina Faranda and David B. Nolle, “Ethnic Social Distance in Kyrgyzstan: Evidence from a Nationwide Opinion Survey,” *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 2, June (2003), gives a survey-based perspective on this topic. The opinion of the majority of respondents was that inter-ethnic relations were “good” or “very good.” Yet it was also clear that relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis were more “precarious” (192) than Kyrgyz relations with other ethnic minorities such as the Russians.

⁴⁵ By 1999, partly as a result of the high birth-rate amongst the ethnic Kyrgyz population, partly the emigration of some minorities (notably Russians, Germans and other European immigrants), the percentage of Kyrgyz in the population had risen to 64.9%, and by 2009, to 71.0%. In this same period, the percentage of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani population rose from 12.9% to 13.8% to 14.3%; see further *Kyrgyz National Census Report 1999*, <http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/census.pdf>; also “Demographics of Kyrgyzstan,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Kyrgyzstan; and *CIA - World Factbook*, for relevant years.

⁴⁶ Hyphenated forms such as Russian-Kyrgyzstani, Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani, etc. are used in this paper to distinguish between citizens of Kyrgyzstan, and non-citizens of Kyrgyzstan (i.e. between ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbek citizens of Uzbekistan). Cf. American usage “Italian-American.”

⁴⁷ Maria Utyaganova, “Kyrgyzstan’s Assembly Effective in National Unity,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, June 8, 2000.

⁴⁸ President Akayev did make some effort to support other multi-ethnic cultural projects, including Uzbek-language education in southern Kyrgyzstan. See Nick Megoran, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism,” *Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper*, December 2012, esp. 6.

Under President Bakiev, the Assembly was increasingly used to garner support for the government's own agenda.⁴⁹ Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani requests for more political representation and language rights were ignored.⁵⁰ At the annual meeting of the Assembly in 2006, Kadyrjan Batyrov, a leading member of the ethnic Uzbek community and one of the wealthiest entrepreneurs in the country, was among those who tried to raise these issues: he was prevented from speaking.⁵¹ This was a pivotal moment in inter-ethnic relations: it was now clear that Bakiev would not countenance any compromise on minority rights, but instead would pursue an avowedly ethno-nationalist policy. Realizing that it was futile to expect cooperation from the government, Batyrov took steps to provide the cultural and educational amenities that were needed, thereby deepening the ethnic rift.

The North-South Divide

The ethnic complexity of Kyrgyzstan is accentuated by its physical geography. High mountains run from east to west, dividing the country in half; it is not a precise administrative division, but a notional divide whereby the north is generally regarded as encompassing the modern provinces of Chui, Issyk-Kul, Naryn and Talas, while the south covers modern Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh provinces. The north-south transport connections have always been poor and after independence, they deteriorated still further. The Soviet-era Bishkek-Osh highway, which connected the two halves of the country, soon fell into disrepair as maintenance budgets were cut. There was a corresponding increase in the number of serious traffic accidents on this road. As a result, the principal link between the north and the south was air travel. The physical barriers to integration are obvious, but the more insidious barriers lie in such intangibles as mental outlook, lifestyles and community relations. The differences are partly the product of contrasting geographies. These include very different resource bases, which result in

⁴⁹ Global Center for Pluralism, Erica Marat, "Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism," May 2015, http://www.pluralism.ca/images/PDF_docs/pluralism_papers/ericamarat_prospectsforpluralism_EN_Global_Centre_for_Pluralism.pdf. This paper provides a thorough study of Kyrgyz policies to promote pluralism, from Akayev's administration through to Atambayev.

⁵⁰ See further: Minority Rights Group International Report, "State of the World's Minorities 2006 – Kyrgyzstan," December 22, 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/48abdd7457.html>

⁵¹ Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Taalaibek Amanov, *RCA Issue 460*, August 12, 2006.

different types of economic activity. In the north, dominated by high mountains, arable land is scarce and the main activity has always been subsistence farming and animal husbandry. In the south, which encompasses part of the Ferghana Valley, much of the terrain is flat. Here there are extensive plantations of rice and cotton; in the foothills of the mountains, the traditional occupation was sheep rearing. Valuable minerals are found in all parts of the country, but the gold fields are mostly in the north, whereas the south has deposits of oil and gas.⁵²

For much of its history, the north was isolated and inward-looking; the population in this part of the country was, and has remained, predominantly Kyrgyz. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, the urban settlements were heavily influenced by Russian culture; during the Soviet period, Bishkek (then known as “Frunze”) became the capital and seat of government of the Kyrgyz republic. The primary political, administrative and cultural institutions were based here. The largest airport, too, was located in the vicinity of Bishkek; subsequently, this became the hub of international communications. It was here that high-ranking foreign visitors were received, and here that international events were held.

The south has had a very different history. Located on the ancient Silk Roads, it inherited a cosmopolitan, multi-lingual population where the common urban culture was more important than ethnic background. The Kyrgyz in this region constitute the majority population, but there are also many minority groups, of which the largest is the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani.⁵³ During the Soviet period and early years of independence, the south tended to be regarded as a backwater. Yet, almost imperceptibly, it began to develop its own institutions and facilities. One of the “invisible” success stories of the 1990s was the development of Osh and Jalal-Abad as important centers of education, attracting thousands of students each

⁵² For a survey of the country’s mineral resources, see World Bank, Institutional Development Fund, Val-entine Bogdetsky, Karybek Ibraev and Jyldyz Abdyrakhmanova, “Mining Industry as a Source of Economic Growth in Kyrgyzstan,” Project Implementation Unit, 2005.

⁵³ According to the 2009 national census, out of a total population of 5.9 million, the demographic distribution (excluding unregistered migrants) in the south was as follows: Batken province population 428,600 (Kyrgyz 76.5%, Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis 14.7%); Jalalabad province population 930,630 (Kyrgyz 71.8%, Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis 24.8%); Osh province 999,580 (Kyrgyz 68.6%, Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis 28.0%).

year from South and Southeast Asia.⁵⁴ Local businesses also flourished here, often with foreign partners.

There were, nevertheless, divisions within the south, and as socio-economic tensions increased, these rifts began to widen. There were three main issues. One was the growing alienation of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community, the majority of whom lived in the southern provinces. As mentioned above, in the 1990s Kadyrjan Batyrov financed several local projects in this region, including the People's Friendship University. This flagship institution, which he founded in Jalal-Abad in 1999, provided tuition in Russian, but some courses were also taught in Uzbek. It acquired a reputation for academic excellence and by 2010 had some 1,300 students. It was the focal point for a number of other social activities. The destruction of this complex in the disturbances of May 2010 was more than a physical blow: it was an attack on the very core of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community's cultural life.

The second issue was linked to the collapse of the rural economy. In the 1980s, state support for this sector was reduced, causing severe social problems (see below "A Conflicted Society"). The situation became worse after independence, which saw chronic unemployment in the countryside – mostly populated by Kyrgyz agricultural workers – triggering a drift to the towns. These new arrivals, rootless and unqualified, would squat along the main streets, hoping (often in vain) to be hired as day laborers. From this vantage point they observed the lifestyle of the prosperous, as it seemed to them, urban dwellers, many of whom were Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis. This fed into a reservoir of anger against these "foreigners" who seemed to be profiting from the misery of the "titular" population. Economic grievances were thus transmuted into ethnic resentment. Opportunistic local politicians in turn easily exploited this. Religious groups also profited from this alienation – and created further divisions. The number of mosques in the south doubled and many new madrassahs were established there. The local

⁵⁴ Osh State University, founded in 1951 as the Osh State Pedagogical Institute, received university status in 1992, with instruction in Russian and English; the prestigious Medical Faculty was opened in 1993. Jalalabad State University, founded in 1993, provided higher education in such fields as medicine, electronics, and energy.

imams (almost all of whom were self-taught) were drawn from the local population and became a rallying point for micro-concentrations of an ethnic group – in some areas these were ethnic Kyrgyz, elsewhere Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis or Tajik-Kyrgyzstanis or Uighur-Kyrgyzstanis, among others. As mentioned above, there was also a proliferation of radical groups, especially Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat. They attracted members from all ethnic groups, so in a sense were a uniting force, but they were also divisive, since mainstream Muslims regarded them with suspicion.

The third problem was the power of the so-called *klany* (“clans”). The term is misleading because, in the original Gaelic/English meaning, it refers to a kin-based group with a common genealogy.⁵⁵ As used in Russian, however, and by extension throughout the Soviet Union/CIS, the word has acquired a looser meaning: there might be a nucleus of family members, but the group is predominantly heterogeneous, brought together by mutual interests and benefits; frequently, there is a criminal element. Such groupings often consist of people from different ethnic and/or religious backgrounds. Group solidarity is dependent on group success; hence, when the “clan” (in the Russian sense) is no longer able to deliver useful services, it disintegrates.⁵⁶ This was very evident in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the so-called clans rapidly fractured along ethnic or sub-regional (local) lines when “patrons” ceased to provide anticipated benefits. For example, in the 2005 presidential election, the Uzbek community supported Kurmanbek Bakiev “as though he was one of our own” (*kak svoego zemlyaka*), as Kadyrjan Batyrov put it.⁵⁷ When the Uzbek community did not receive the support they expected from Bakiev, they turned against him. Some of the local Kyrgyz from the south, such as the powerful Mayor of Osh, Melisbek Myrzakmatov, also shifted their allegiances, supporting Bakiev when he was in power, then turning against him as his position weakened.

⁵⁵ The Celtic “clans” could be very extensive, but ultimately, the members were bound by a blood relationship.

⁵⁶ In Kyrgyz society, however, native terms are used for traditional tribal divisions; see David Gullette, *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and Tribalism* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2010), 28-44.

⁵⁷ Interview with Kadyrjan Batyrov, April 22, 2010, <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=14573>

To summarize the above points, when Kyrgyzstan acquired independence, it had a number of assets, and yet, society was fragile with embedded tensions. These were aggravated by flawed political and economic reforms. Directly or indirectly, this encouraged inter-ethnic and inter-regional distrust. The growing power of criminal networks and the spread of radical Islamism, both of which were linked to clandestine transnational organizations, further undermined social stability. The extent to which criminal gangs and/or Islamist groups played a part in the events of 2010 is not clear, but at the very least, they added new complexities to an already complex situation.

A Conflicted Society

The recent history of Kyrgyzstan has been punctuated by rioting and violent civil disorders. Most of these clashes took place in the south of the country, though they sometimes spread to the north. The proximate causes of such conflicts were different, but taken together they were symptomatic of a fractured, vulnerable state. Before considering the events of 2010, it is useful to look back at previous clashes, especially the violence in Osh in 1990, which in many ways prefigured the events of June 2010.

Osh Province, May-June 1990

The first major conflict in modern Kyrgyz history erupted at the end of the Soviet period, when the power of the central government was waning and economic and environmental conditions were visibly deteriorating. It was part of a wave of violence that broke out across the Ferghana Valley. Superficially, these conflicts appeared to be the result of inter-ethnic tensions, but the underlying causes were competition for control of economic resources, especially precious land and water. One of the worst clashes occurred in the Osh province of south-west Kyrgyzstan, centered on the towns of Osh, Kara-Suu and Uzgen, close to the border with Uzbekistan.⁵⁸ The largest single ethnic group in the province at this time was the Kyrgyz (54.6%); the next in size were the Uzbeks (some 27%) and the Russians (around 10%). The bulk of the Kyrgyz population lived in the mountain regions,

⁵⁸ The present provinces of Osh, Jalalabad, and Batken at this time jointly constituted the Osh Province.

mostly involved in farming and animal husbandry. However, as mentioned above, by the end of the 1980s the Soviet economy was in crisis and support for the agricultural sector was sharply reduced. Many local Kyrgyz found themselves without work. They migrated to urban areas, but were rarely able to find jobs. Unemployed and desperately poor, they resented what they saw as unfair Uzbek domination of the fertile belt of arable land, likewise Uzbek control of profitable commercial enterprises in the towns. Their sense of injustice was potently voiced by the aggressively nationalist party *Osh aimagi* ("Osh Province"), which emerged in April 1990.

The Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani population, too, had its grievances: they were greatly under-represented in the administration (even by comparison with the Russians) and consequently had little say in local decision-making; moreover, facilities for Uzbek-medium education were being reduced and there were now few print or broadcast outlets for Uzbek-language programs. Deprived of opportunities for advancement, there was an exodus of young Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis; some chose to move to other parts of Kyrgyzstan, others to Uzbekistan. Alarmed by the erosion of the historical Uzbek presence in this region, community elders decided to take legal action. On March 2, 1990, they presented a petition to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, requesting the establishment of an autonomous territory within Kyrgyzstan in areas where there was a compact majority of ethnic Uzbeks (a pattern of jurisdiction that had been instituted elsewhere in the Soviet Union). This did not satisfy members of the Uzbek ethno-nationalistic group *Adalat* ("Justice"), formed in 1989, who wanted full autonomy from Kyrgyzstan.

Matters came to a head two months later. There had not been as yet any official movement on the question of autonomy, but relations between the Kyrgyz and Kyrgyzstani-Uzbeks were steadily worsening. Rumors, which may or may not have been true, claimed that Uzbeks were expelling Kyrgyz householders from predominantly Uzbek districts. The final straw was the decision of the local Kyrgyz authorities to award a large building plot to a group of young Kyrgyz in an area that was almost entirely occupied by ethnic Uzbeks. It was a highly provocative move. Within days, there were hostile confrontations between the two sides. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks had long been spoiling for a fight and had stockpiled small

arms, as well as rods, sticks, axes and other available weapons. On June 4, after a day of angry protest meetings, riots broke out. Over the following days, the fighting became intense. The brutality was appalling: according to eyewitness reports, victims were beaten and tortured; some were garroted; women were said to have been raped and paraded naked in the streets.⁵⁹

The situation was only brought under control when a Soviet army contingent of some 2,000 men was brought in, as well as over 1,000 internal security troops. Official sources estimated that at least 300 people had been killed, but unofficial estimates suggested a far higher figure. Many people received serious injuries; over 1,000 casualties were hospitalized. There was also massive damage to property, estimated at 100 million rubles. The rioters, both Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks, were mostly young men in their twenties. Several well-known figures, such as the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, condemned the violence and called for inter-ethnic cooperation. Askar Akayev and Islam Karimov also visited the region and saw for themselves the devastation and distress. When Akayev subsequently became President, he tried (albeit with limited success) to promote inter-ethnic harmony. Karimov, too, was affected by what he witnessed. This no doubt influenced his reaction to the violence in Osh in 2010, which followed a similar pattern.

Batken Province, 1999-2000

The incursions of 1999 and 2000 exposed the porous nature of Kyrgyzstan's borders and its vulnerability to external threats. In late August 1999, several hundred militants (estimates ranged from 500 to 1000 men), allegedly members of the IMU, suddenly appeared in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley. It was rumored that they had previously been based in Tajikistan, but had been expelled from there by the Tajik government. Their motives in entering Kyrgyzstan were unclear. According to some accounts, they wanted to establish an Islamic state; other explanations claimed that the insurgents were mafia barons fighting for control of

⁵⁹ For well documented accounts, see Abilabek Asankanov, "Ethnic conflict in the Osh region in summer 1990: Reasons and lessons," in *Ethnicity and power in the contemporary world*, eds. Kumar Rupesinghe and Valery Tishkov (Tokyo, New York and Paris: United Nations University Press, 1996), 116-25: and Knyazev, "Vektory i paradigmy Kirgizskoi nezavisimosti (ocherki postsovetskoi istorii)," 103-10.

drug-trafficking routes. There were also reports that some of the insurgents carried banners calling for a restoration of the Khanate of Kokand.⁶⁰ Other commentators suggested that they were aiming to carry out reprisals against Uzbekistan in response to the wave of repression that had been launched by the Uzbek authorities against suspected Islamists earlier in the year. Another possibility was that field commanders and/or foreign sponsors (possibly international terrorist organizations) were eager to test the level of combat readiness of the militants who reportedly possessed sophisticated modern weapons.⁶¹ It is worth noting that Russian border guards had been withdrawn from Kyrgyzstan, by mutual agreement, at the beginning of 1999. Inevitably, there were some who saw “the hand of Moscow” at work behind the insurgency, suggesting that it was meant to underline the need for a Russian military presence in the area.

There was another, somewhat smaller, incursion into southern Kyrgyzstan and neighboring areas of Uzbekistan in August 2000. Again, it was generally assumed that the insurgents were members of the IMU; some reports also linked the attack to drug trafficking. The Russian government offered its help, calling for united efforts to maintain regional security. Other CIS members, including Belarus and Ukraine, likewise offered assistance. The insurgents were driven out of Uzbekistan by mid-September, but they were not dislodged from Kyrgyzstan until early October. A victory parade was held in Bishkek on October 26. The militants’ losses were estimated at 120 dead and 200 injured.

After these attacks, there was a general tightening of security throughout the region. In 1999, the Kyrgyz President and the Secretary General of the CIS Collective Security Council signed an agreement on the provision of CIS military aid to Kyrgyzstan. That same year, armed forces from Russia and the four Central Asian members of the CIS (minus Turkmenistan) took part in the “Southern Shield

⁶⁰ The Khanate of Kokand was one of the three main states of the southern tier of Central Asia in the pre-colonial period; in the early nineteenth century it encompassed eastern Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and, intermittently, adjacent areas of Afghanistan and China. The Khanate was abolished, and its territory annexed by the Tsarist Empire, in 1876. In Soviet times, it was one of the centers of underground Islamic activity.

⁶¹ Personal communications to the author by Uzbek and Kyrgyz military-security personnel at a conference held in Tashkent, May 2000, under the auspices of the George C. Marshall Center for European Security and the Uzbek Ministry of Defense.

1999” counter-terrorist exercises in the Osh Province and adjacent territories. Southern Shield maneuvers were again conducted here in 2000. The CIS “South Antiterror 2001” exercises, too, were held in this area, with a scenario based on the Batken incident.⁶² Acknowledging the threat posed by extremist groups, in September 2000 the U.S. State Department placed the IMU on its list of international terrorist organizations.

Aksy, 2002

The first major post-independence clashes between the public and the police occurred in 2002. The trigger was the Sino-Kyrgyz Treaty on Border Delimitation, which resolved the question of disputed territory by ceding some 30 per cent (95,000 hectares) of disputed territory to China (east of Lake Issyk Kul) and the remaining 70 per cent to Kyrgyzstan. This treaty had first been agreed in 1999, but was not finally ratified by the Kyrgyz parliament until early in March 2002. It was bitterly resented by a large section of the Kyrgyz population, particularly in the south, where nationalist feelings were strongest. However, this grievance was soon overlaid by more general anger over government corruption and abuse of power, as well as the increasingly authoritarian nature of President Akayev’s rule. It also highlighted political tensions between the north and south of the country.

In mid-March, large crowds gathered in Aksy, in the Jalal-Abad region in southern Kyrgyzstan, to demand the release of Azimbek Beknazarov, a popular local politician who had led the campaign against the treaty. He had been arrested in January on charges that many regarded as politically motivated. On March 17, the police opened fire, without warning, on the 2,000-strong crowd, killing 6 people and injuring 62. As a placatory gesture, Beknazarov was freed, though the charges against him were not dropped. In May, there were further disturbances,

⁶² Uzbekistan took part in these exercises although by this time it was no longer a member of the Collective Security Treaty, having declined to sign the new Treaty in 1999. Thereafter, it did not take part in CIS exercises in the Ferghana Valley. For an account of these activities, also of NATO Partnership for Peace exercises in this region, see Matthew Stein, *Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity* (Fort Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, May 22, 2015).

including hunger strikes, picketing of government buildings and a blockade of the main highway between the capital Bishkek and the south.

In August, opposition parties, non-governmental organizations and other public bodies combined forces to create the Movement for the Resignation of President Akayev. The new grouping found strong support in the south of the country, from where, in early September, some 800 demonstrators set off on a march to the capital. They were halted well before they reached Bishkek. Government officials and opposition representatives held talks and signed a memorandum setting out terms and conditions for a peaceful end to the protest. The government acceded to some of the demands of the opposition, giving assurances, among other undertakings, that those who were responsible for the tragedy in March would be punished. In fact, they were all acquitted or pardoned. There were further disturbances in October, sparked by the appeal court's decision to uphold the sentence previously imposed on Felix Kulov, a former Vice President and Minister of National Security, and founder of the opposition party *Ar-Namys*. Thereafter, the protests died down and the year ended relatively peacefully.⁶³

Jalal-Abad, 2005

In 2005, following the flawed February parliamentary elections (triggered by the introduction of a unicameral legislature in place of the previous bicameral body), the country was gripped by mass demonstrations. The most vociferous protests were in southern Kyrgyzstan. On March 20, demonstrators in Jalal-Abad embarked on a wave of robbery and arson, mainly directed at government buildings. Four days later, the unrest spread to the capital, Bishkek. Thousands of people, wearing pink and yellow emblems to signify the "Tulip Revolution" (reminiscent of the orange banners displayed by protesters in Ukraine in 2004), took to the streets and forced President Akayev and his government to step down. This was followed by a wild spree of rioting and looting. The total cost of the damage was estimated at over U.S. \$24 million. At least three people were killed and several

⁶³ For more detailed accounts, see Knyazev, "Vektory i paradigmy Kirgizskoi nezavisimosti (oчерki postsovetsoi istorii)," 103-10; also Gullette, *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and Tribalism*, 19-21.

hundred injured. It is noteworthy that in this conflict there was no overt sign of ethnic discord.

A degree of order was re-established when Kurmanbek Bakiev was appointed interim head of state, pending presidential elections. As leader of the main opposition party and himself a former prime minister, he inspired a degree of confidence. Another opposition leader, Felix Kulov, was freed from prison where he was serving a 10-year sentence for alleged abuse of office. He was given charge of the security forces. Askar Akayev fled the country; he later explained that he had gone abroad “temporarily” in order to avert bloodshed. Cracks in the opposition ranks surfaced in April, when Kulov announced that he would run for president. It was feared that the rivalry between Bakiev and Kulov would result in a north/south split. Kulov withdrew his candidacy after receiving an assurance that if Bakiev won, he would be given the prime ministerial post.

On July 10, Bakiev won a landslide victory, receiving almost 90 per cent of the vote. Kulov was duly appointed prime minister, but relations between the two men remained tense. In the autumn, there were several violent incidents, including the murder of two parliamentary deputies. Some opposition groups accused Kulov of complicity in these actions. In October, Bishkek witnessed big rallies both for and against Kulov. President Bakiev was already mired in allegations of corruption and nepotism. Thus, by the end of 2005 the euphoria of the Tulip Revolution had given way to disillusionment and disappointment.

Geo-Political Trends 1992-2010

In the years before the 2010 conflict, the geopolitical setting became increasingly more complex. Kyrgyzstan faced two challenges: the need to manage intra-regional Central Asian relationships; and the need to balance the rivalries and ambitions of extra-regional players. It also sought to maintain a balanced approach in its membership of regional organizations of different orientations, such as the Tehran-led Economic Cooperation Organization, the Moscow-led Commonwealth of Independent States and affiliated groups, the Beijing-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization, various Turkish initiatives, as well as the Western-led NATO Partnership for Peace program and the Organization for Cooperation and

Security in Europe. Kyrgyzstan's main bilateral partners during this period were Russia and the United States: each of these states had its own agenda in its relations with Kyrgyzstan, as well as with each other. Equally, Kyrgyzstan was adept at playing one off against the other. Meanwhile, China was quietly emerging as a significant regional force. The result was a cat's cradle of constantly changing relationships. This provided endless material for conspiracy theories, which interested parties subsequently used to explain the upheavals of 2010.

Uzbekistan

Within Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan's most difficult relationship was with Uzbekistan, a neighboring state with a far larger population, bigger territory and more abundant natural resources. The current relationship took shape during the transition from Soviet republic to independent statehood. In the early 1990s, intra-regional relations were in flux: former "fraternal republics" had suddenly become separate sovereign states, with different styles of governance and different priorities. Borders that had once been open and almost invisible were now international frontiers. This created major problems for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The border between them stretches for over 1,300 km, skirting the eastern end of the Ferghana Valley, along the line where the mountains merge into the plains. The populations on either side of the border are ethnically mixed. During the Soviet period, there were no obstacles to moving back and forth; moreover, the transport systems and economies of the two republics were closely intertwined. There was also co-operation in the exploitation of border area facilities, such as water reservoirs that were located on the territory of one republic but managed by personnel from the other. Additionally, there were a few tiny border exclaves comprising members of one ethnic group residing on the territory of the other; thus, for example, Sokh was located within the Kyrgyz republic, but came under the jurisdiction of Uzbekistan.

Post-independence, these bilateral arrangements clashed with national legislation; in particular, the cross-border movement of goods, services and peoples was subject to national rules and regulations. This frequently gave rise to disputes, followed by the disruption of cross-border services and traffic. There were, too,

problems over the delivery of energy supplies from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan, arising out of disagreements over pricing and payment. An even more contentious issue was the exploitation of water resources. The Kyrgyz authorities – like their Tajik counterparts – wanted to construct large hydroelectric plants on the mountain rivers on their territory in order to achieve energy independence; the Uzbeks believed that such projects would not only be harmful for the environment, but would threaten vital transboundary water flows to downstream users. There were also other cross-border security concerns, notably the smuggling of drugs and other contraband goods, as well as fears of the spread of terrorism and religious extremism. The militant incursions in Batken province in 1999 and 2000, as well as the disturbances in Aksy 2002 and in Jalal-Abad in 2005, were indications of the unstable situation in Kyrgyzstan. In response to these threats, Uzbekistan adopted a tough border regime. This aggravated tensions between the two countries and compromised the status of the tiny exclaves. It also provided opportunities for external actors to take advantage of the situation by favoring one side or the other.

United States

All Kyrgyz presidents, from Akayev to Atambayev, insisted that they wanted to maintain strong ties with Russia and the United States – as was confirmed by the record of high-level bilateral meetings, agreements and joint projects with both states. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the United States appeared to be the favored partner. Most of the “opinion formers” (intellectuals, journalists and civil society representatives), as well as the educated urban youth, were strongly pro-American – in no small part owing to generous U.S. support for educational and democracy-building initiatives. In December 2001, the Akayev government, eager to demonstrate its support for “Operation Enduring Freedom,” agreed to host a U.S. airbase on its territory for the duration of operations in Afghanistan. The site chosen for this facility was Manas, alongside the Bishkek international civilian airport – symbolically significant, since the Soviet air force had previously operated out of this base. The U.S. military personnel at Manas were granted the same status as administrative and technical staff of the embassy; aircraft and other transport vehicles, as well as the cargo they carried, were exempt from Kyrgyz control.

These and other privileges meant that, in effect, the base had the status of a U.S. exclave on Kyrgyz territory. Negotiations between the American and Kyrgyz authorities were conducted in secrecy, between the relevant officials.

At first, the public paid little attention to these issues. By 2005, though, opinion was turning against the U.S. presence. This was partly linked to the general surge of hostility towards Akayev, who had been the architect of the agreement with the United States, but there were also other grievances. One was the massive corruption that surrounded deals to supply the base with fuel: the main beneficiaries were well-connected Kyrgyz individuals (primarily those with presidential family ties), but the U.S. officials and commercial enterprises who were involved in these transactions were deemed to have created the conditions in which fraud could flourish.⁶⁴ Another source of resentment was the level of rent paid by the United States for the use of Manas and related facilities and services: Kyrgyz politicians and the public alike regarded it as grossly inadequate and refused to be placated by substantial U.S. allocations of aid and development funding. There were also local concerns about such issues as noise and environmental pollution. In December 2006, negative perceptions of the U.S. presence were heightened when an American serviceman stationed at Manas fatally wounded a Kyrgyz citizen.

By this time, Russia was beginning to re-establish its presence in Kyrgyzstan (discussed below), prompting some analysts to suggest that Moscow was orchestrating the campaign against the U.S. base in order to eliminate a rival source of power and influence. Others claimed that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) had called for the closure of foreign bases, and specifically, the U.S. bases. In fact, no such ultimatum was issued, but this did not hinder the publication of a stream of subjective, and textually inaccurate, glosses on the 2005 SCO

⁶⁴ For an American assessment see, Report prepared by the Majority Staff of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Congress of the United States, "Mystery at Manas: Strategic Blind Spots in the Department of Defense's Fuel Contracts in Kyrgyzstan," December 2010. The document highlights "troubling circumstances" surrounding the Department of Defense's fuel contracts at the Manas Transit Center. It also acknowledges that "real and perceived corruption in the fuel contracts" seriously strained U.S.-Kyrgyz relations.

Summit Declaration.⁶⁵ Another set of rumors also had a powerful effect on public opinion: it was widely reported that Washington was basing an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) at Manas in order to spy on regional states, notably China, Iran and Russia.⁶⁶ The U.S. ambassador in Bishkek, Marie Yovanovitch, firmly rejected all such accusations.⁶⁷ She also insisted that, thanks to the U.S. base, terrorist attacks against Kyrgyzstan had diminished. Nevertheless, a coalition of political parties staged protests outside the U.S. embassy, demanding the closure of the base. This did not happen, but the manifest strength of public anger enabled President Bakiev to negotiate more favorable terms for the lease of Manas – one of many such deals.

Russia

Russia's relations with Kyrgyzstan followed a different trajectory. The two countries shared a long history of personal and professional cooperation. Moreover, the relationship was founded not only on bilateral ties, but was underpinned by common membership of regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Community (forerunner of the Eurasian Economic Union) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In the 1990s, Russia had been preoccupied with internal problems and its involvement in Central Asia was limited. This changed when Vladimir Putin became President in 2000: thereafter, Moscow began to strengthen its links with Kyrgyzstan and to expand its presence in the country. In October 2003, within the framework of CSTO agreements, but based on a bilateral intergovernmental agreement, a Russian airbase was formally opened at Kant (about 25 km from Bishkek), on the site of a former Soviet air force training center.

⁶⁵ The relevant section requests that, "in the light of the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan ... respective members of the antiterrorist coalition should set a final timeline for ... the stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states." For full text of the Declaration see: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/12/content_6020345.htm

⁶⁶ They were substantiated by eyewitness accounts by locals as well as by some foreigners, including an air force colonel serving with a UN peacekeeping mission who transited through Bishkek at this time (personal communication to the author in London in 2006).

⁶⁷ Alisher Saipov, "U.S. Ambassador denounces reports on AWACS deployment," *Fergana News*, February 18, 2010, <http://enews.fergananews.com/article.php?id=821>

It was a significant event not simply for Kyrgyzstan – now the only country in the world to host both Russian and U.S. bases – but for Russia itself, since this was the first new base to be opened outside the Russian Federation since 1991. Its primary purpose, according to official statements, was to promote national and regional security. Initially, some 150 troops and 20 aircraft, including fighter planes, bombers and helicopters, were stationed there; these forces were later increased. Inevitably, Kant was seen as a rival to the U.S. base at Manas, although the legal status and operational capabilities of the two facilities were different. The Russian forces, though much smaller in number, did have some “soft” advantages: they were more familiar with the social and cultural environment and had a shared language of communication, since Russian was still widely spoken. They were more successful than their U.S. counterparts in developing friendly contacts with the local population, with the result that their presence was generally regarded as less provocative.

In 2005, following the ousting of Akayev in March that year, Russia announced plans for capital investment in the infrastructure in and around the Kant base, with the aim of strengthening the capabilities of the CIS Collective Rapid Reaction Forces in the Central Asian region. The newly elected President Bakiev welcomed this project, stressing the importance of the base for enhancing both Kyrgyzstan’s national security and the security of the entire region. Further, he commented that the base would help the local economy by providing increased demand for services and local produce; by contrast, the U.S. base was often criticized for making too little contribution to the life of the host community. The Russian authorities also began to explore the possibility of opening a second base, to be sited in Osh. It was rumored that this new facility might operate under the SCO umbrella.⁶⁸ Bakiev was said to be receptive to the idea, but there were no immediate developments regarding this project.

⁶⁸ See Roger McDermott, “Russia studies Osh for Possible New Military Base in Kyrgyzstan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2, no. 107, June 2 (2005).

Towards the Closure of Manas

By 2009, Kyrgyzstan was experiencing a rising tide of internal and external problems. The economic situation was worsening, partly owing to incomplete structural reforms but partly, too, because of the global fall in commodity prices, which adversely affected the country's revenue from the export of gold and other minerals. The security situation was also deteriorating as internal tensions became more acute; corruption was more blatant and criticism of Bakiev became more outspoken. In the wider neighborhood, there was renewed instability in Afghanistan. The Western-led coalition was already preparing to draw down its forces, but regional peace-making initiatives were still at an early stage.⁶⁹ This created acute anxiety in the neighborhood states. The situation in Xinjiang was even more precarious, as clashes between Uighur separatists and the Chinese security forces reached a new intensity.⁷⁰ This was of direct concern to the Kyrgyz government, since there were some 50,000 Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan, many of whom belonged to families who had fled from Xinjiang to Soviet Central Asia in the 1960s – and who still had close relatives there. If, directly or indirectly, these Uighur-Kyrgyzstanis should become involved in the struggle for independence in Xinjiang, it would lead to a confrontation with China – which was fast becoming an important partner for Kyrgyzstan.

In these unpredictable circumstances, Bakiev juggled with competing interests and demands at home and abroad; at the same time, he sought to further his own ambitions and those of his family. Trying to reconcile these different goals, he adopted policies that were inconsistent to the point of incoherence. Ultimately, the lack of a clear sense of direction or commitment destroyed his credibility by making him appear either very weak or very duplicitous – or both. This was am-

⁶⁹ For a discussion of these issues, see Shirin Akiner, "Regional Initiatives to Promote Stability and Development in Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, ed. Oktay Tanrisever (Amsterdam and Washington D.C.: IOS Press and NATO Emerging Security Challenges Division, 2013), 173-89.

⁷⁰ Uighur separatists, some of whom had close links with militant jihadi groups such as the Turkistan Islamic Party, had been fighting for independence for several decades. There were a number of terrorist incidents in 2008. In July 2009, during a riot in Urumqi, over 180 people were reportedly killed and more than 1,000 injured; there was also widespread damage to private and public property.

ply demonstrated in his dealings with the U.S. and Russian bases in 2009. As discussed below, the situation was in constant flux; accusations, made and denied, stoked febrile conjecture as to who was more adept at exerting pressure on the Kyrgyz government – Washington, Moscow or Tashkent. The different narratives were characterized by strong “intentionality bias” – a presumed knowledge of the “true” (usually understood as “malign”) motives of the other parties.

Events unfolded swiftly in 2009. On February 3, it was announced that Russia had pledged to give Kyrgyzstan over \$2 billion in aid, loans and credits. The deal (which had been under discussion for some two years) included a non-refundable grant of \$150 million and a loan of \$300 million on very favorable terms (both sums were transferred without delay to Kyrgyzstan), as well as a loan of \$1.7 billion for the construction of the Kambar Ata-1 hydro-power plant, to be disbursed later. There was also a debt-for-assets swap, whereby Moscow agreed to cancel Bishkek’s \$193 million debt in exchange for a 48 per cent share in the Dastan naval munitions production plant that was attached to the torpedo test range in Issyk-Kul. On February 19, the Kyrgyz government formally called for the closure of the Manas base, to take effect within six months. The decision had almost unanimous parliamentary support and was signed into law in March. It was a serious blow for the Western-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, since they had already lost the base in Uzbekistan – closed in 2005 at the insistence of the Uzbek government.⁷¹ Consequently, Manas was now the main transit hub for NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition military forces in Afghanistan.

Western (and pro-Western Kyrgyz) commentators were quick to suggest that the decision to close the Manas base had been made under pressure from Moscow. Equally, Moscow (and pro-Russian commentators) insisted that there was no such a link. However, matters were by no means so clear-cut. Kyrgyzstan’s ambassador to Washington, Zamira Sydykova, explained that Bishkek’s decision to

⁷¹ For background to the closure of the Uzbek base see: John C. K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor and S. Frederick Starr, *Anatomy of a Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005* (Washington D.C. and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, Silk Road Paper, February 2006), esp. 44-53.

order the closure of the Manas base had indeed been influenced by Russian economic aid, which came at a time when, as she put it, her government was struggling with high levels of debt. Furthermore, she pointed out, the United States had failed to respond to Kyrgyzstan's offer to negotiate a new deal for U.S. military operations in the country.⁷² Thus, while it would be disingenuous to assume that the Russian aid package did not have some influence on the Kyrgyz authorities, it would be overly simplistic to regard it as the sole motivation for the decision to close the base. There was genuine popular anger over the problems that were associated with the base and this, too, was an important factor (for further discussion of Moscow-Washington tactics in this matter, see section on "Great Power Rivalry" below).

Bakiev's solution was to agree to the eviction of the Americans from Manas, but at the same time to continue negotiations with them. Thus, in June 2009, after months of brinkmanship, the Kyrgyz government concluded a one-year agreement whereby the U.S. would continue to use Manas, now redefined as a "transit center," in return for an increase in annual rent from around \$17 million to \$60 million. Additionally, Washington agreed to invest \$67m to upgrade Kyrgyzstan's air transport system and to fund programs to combat drug trafficking and terrorism. Some sources suggested that these deals were tied to U.S. support for Bakiev's re-election campaign.⁷³ Concurrently, however, Bakiev was also negotiating terms with Moscow over Kant, the CSTO airbase established on its territory in 2003.

On August 1, 2009, the CSTO summit was held in Bishkek. During this meeting, the Kyrgyz and Russian Presidents formally concluded an agreement (negotiated the previous year) setting out their mutual aims to "develop and enhance the bilateral legal base regulating the presence of Russian military forces on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic." Building on previous cooperation agreements, it covered the base at Kant, as well as three other Russian military facilities: a communications center at Chaldovar (Chui province), a seismic monitoring station at

⁷² Joe Tailgunner, "Kyrgyz envoy says Russia influenced base Closure," *Associated Press Report*, March 12, 2009, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2205562/posts>

⁷³ See Joshua Kucera, "Bakiev Can Be Bought: U.S. Embassy Tied Rent for Kyrgyz Air Base To President's Reelection," *Eurasianet.org*, January 5, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64797>

Mailuu suu (Jalal-Abad province) and the torpedo test range at Karakul, located at the eastern end of Lake Issyk Kul.⁷⁴ Under the new agreement, these facilities would operate for 15 years, to be prolonged automatically unless either side raised objections. In addition, this document proposed the establishment of a CSTO Rapid Reaction Force training base in southern Kyrgyzstan – a plan first mooted in 2005. The rationale for a base here (close to Osh or Batken) was its proximity to an area that was vulnerable to cross-border insurgencies and drug trafficking. It was also near the borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The U.S. reaction to the proposed new Russian base was calm, at least in public. As William Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, pointed out, any decision to open a new base was the sovereign right of Kyrgyzstan. The response from Tashkent was very different: on August 3, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement setting out its objections to the plan. These included the suggestion that such a base would hasten the militarization of the region, might aggravate ethnic relations and could become a target for extremist attacks.⁷⁵ It was a somewhat curious explanation, since these dangers were already present in the region and it did not seem likely that the proposed base would make the situation worse. Several Western commentators cast the Uzbek reaction in highly personal terms: Uzbekistan, frequently described as a “bully” in its relations with its neighbors, was now said “to be rattled,” or “fuming,” or “throwing a temper tantrum,” supposedly because it was being upstaged by Kyrgyzstan as the most strategically important state in the region. Asian analysts were more sober in their assessment; as an experienced Indian diplomat commented, “Uzbek foreign policy moves take place with deliberation,” avoiding knee-jerk responses.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ After Kyrgyzstan’s declaration of independence in 1991, Moscow and Bishkek signed a series of inter-governmental treaties on security cooperation; the present agreement was an extension of the 1997 protocols on the status of Russian military facilities and personnel in Kyrgyzstan. Russia’s acquisition of a large stake in the Dastan production plant earlier in 2009 was part of a separate, though related, deal.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Erkin Akhmadov, “Uzbekistan Concerned over Russian Military Base in Ferghana,” *CACI Analyst* 11, no. 15, August 19 (2009): 17-18.

⁷⁶ See particularly comments by Melkulangara K. Bhadrakumar (a former Indian ambassador to Uzbekistan), “U.S. steps up its Central Asian tango,” *Asia Times*, August 29, 2009, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/KH25Ag02.html

The thinking in Tashkent was in part shaped by its assessment of long-term Russian goals. Uzbek policy-planners feared that Moscow might emulate America's use of "lily pads" – small, flexible "cooperative security locations" that could provide the host nation with training in counterterrorism and anti-trafficking, but would also provide rapid access to crisis areas. The chief worry for Tashkent was that such a base could be used to send troops to protect the hydroelectric plants that were being constructed in Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. Thus, it would pose a serious threat to Uzbekistan's vital interests.⁷⁷ Also, with the memory of the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 still fresh in their minds, the Uzbeks feared that Moscow might try to establish a "safe haven" for ethnic Russians in southern Kyrgyzstan and that this would create instability in the region.

Other factors, too, no doubt influenced Uzbekistan's stance on this matter. In April 2008, at the NATO/EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) Summit in Bucharest, Uzbek President Karimov proposed re-launching the "Six plus Two" Contact Group with Afghanistan in a new format. The original project, initiated by Tashkent in 1999, comprised neighborhood states China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Russia and the United States. The updated version proposed that NATO be included, to create a "Six plus Three" grouping.⁷⁸ NATO/EAPC members welcomed the concept in principle, though there were no moves to implement it in practice. Uzbekistan was at this time still a member of the CSTO, but was increasingly frustrated by the Organization's inability to take effective action.⁷⁹ Thus, the most significant aspect of the "Six plus Three" proposal was that it unequivocally signaled Tashkent's belief that the conflict in Afghanistan could not be resolved without the participation of NATO. The

⁷⁷ Author's discussions with senior Uzbek security and defense analysts, conducted in 2010 and 2015 (names withheld for reasons of confidentiality).

⁷⁸ See Akiner, "Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11," esp. 184.

⁷⁹ As discussed above, Uzbekistan was one of the founder members of the Collective Security Treaty, signed in Tashkent in 1992 (informally referred to as the "Tashkent Treaty"). However, it refused to accede to the new Treaty in 1999, and did not join the Collective Security Treaty Organization, formed in 2002. In 2006, after the Andijan events and subsequent cooling of relations with the NATO Partnership for Peace Program, Tashkent joined the CSTO. Yet it was never an active member and in December 2012, finally terminated its membership. This was in line with its new Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in September 2012, the provisions of which included bans on the deployment of foreign military bases on its territory and as well as membership of military blocs. See further Farhad Tolipov, "Uzbekistan Without The CSTO," *CACI Analyst*, February 20 (2013).

emphasis on cooperation with NATO was accompanied by an improvement in Uzbekistan's relations with the United States, which had been derailed by the violence in Andijan in 2005.

In the light of these developments, the establishment of a Russian base in southern Kyrgyzstan could have been interpreted as a challenge to NATO, and by implication would have undermined the Uzbek strategy. On August 20, 2009, the head of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, had attended high-level meetings in Tashkent and signed an agreement on bilateral military contacts and training. The primary concern for both parties was the situation in Afghanistan. Rumors immediately began to circulate that Tashkent was about to allow a U.S. base to be re-established on its territory. Both parties categorically denied this. However, it was very likely that they discussed the proposed Russian/CSTO base in southern Kyrgyzstan – and assessed it negatively.

Meanwhile, Bishkek was still deliberating what action to take regarding this base. Negotiations were close to finalization when the Kyrgyz side suddenly announced that the site near Batken, previously offered to the Russians, had now been designated a Kyrgyz military training center. Moreover, it was to be developed in cooperation with the Americans, who pledged to invest \$5.5 million in the project. In addition, there was already U.S. involvement in other Kyrgyz military facilities, notably the training center for Kyrgyzstan's elite Scorpion Brigade in Tokmok in the north of the country. Bakiev publicly stressed the importance of these facilities for Kyrgyzstan's security. These projects could not but be regarded with concern in Moscow. However, all such plans were disrupted by the violent disturbances that broke out a few weeks later.

China

China's relations with Kyrgyzstan during this period were fairly low key. There was a lively cross-border flow of goods, but it was mainly informal "shuttle" or "suitcase" trade carried out by enterprising individuals (predominantly women) to supply local shops and bazaars in Kyrgyzstan. This eventually developed into a massive wholesale trade, making Kyrgyzstan the largest import-export entrepôt for Chinese goods in Central Asia. Yet the Kyrgyz remained suspicious of Chinese

intentions, as revealed by the 2002 Aksy protests against the Sino-Kyrgyz border delimitation agreement, discussed above. The Chinese, for their part, suspected that the U.S. Manas base was being used to spy on them. Nevertheless, in October 2002, under the aegis of the SCO, the Chinese and Kyrgyz armed forces held a joint anti-terror exercise on their common border – the first time the Chinese military had ever participated in joint maneuvers with foreign partners. That same year, China agreed to provide Kyrgyzstan with technical military assistance worth \$1.2 million. This cooperation continued in the following years, generally in the multilateral context of the SCO. Plans for trade and economic cooperation were discussed during President Bakiev's state visit to Beijing in June 2008. However, as in negotiations with all other partners, progress was halted by the events of 2010.

After the ousting of Bakiev, there was a marked change in Kyrgyzstan's relations with the United States and Russia, as well as with China and other emerging partners. These developments are discussed in Part IV: Post-Conflict Trends.

Part II: Conflict

From Public Anger to Protests to Deadly Clashes

The violence of 2010 did not erupt suddenly. Within months of Bakiev's first election victory in July 2005, the domestic situation, already fragile, began to deteriorate further. The new government tried to address the problems it had inherited from the previous administration by introducing a wide range of reforms. However, though such programs looked good on paper, they were rarely implemented effectively. One of the most critical areas was the energy sector. Under Akayev it had become a byword for corruption and mismanagement.⁸⁰ In 2006, the annual loss of revenue in this sector reportedly amounted to \$50 million. Consequently, the government (with the encouragement of international aid agencies such as USAID) decided to introduce a phased plan of price rises for electricity and other essential utilities. Unfortunately, the winter of 2007-2008 was one of the coldest on record, with temperatures in some places falling as low as minus 30 degrees centigrade. The country's frail energy system was unable to cope with the upsurge in demand for heating. As a result, there were long blackouts and power cuts, all of which caused great hardship for the population, especially in rural areas. The following year conditions were little better. Price rises were postponed while the government sought private sector investors. This added a new layer of corruption and did nothing to improve the situation.

President Bakiev won a second five-year term in July 2009, gaining over 76 per cent of the vote. There were numerous reports of intimidation, fraud and bribery. However, he had had some success in managing the economy; in particular, he had significantly reduced poverty levels, especially in the south, his natural

⁸⁰ See Engvall, *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*, 35.

power base.⁸¹ Thus, despite a reputation heavily tarnished by greed and corruption, Bakiev still commanded some respect and authority. Confident that he now had a mandate to carry through long-overdue reforms, he began by introducing radical administrative changes. In October, he reduced the number of ministries and brought agencies such as the National Security Committee under direct presidential control. His stated aim was to tackle economic problems and security threats more effectively, but many saw it as a ploy to increase his already very considerable powers. It also strengthened the culture of impunity that surrounded the president and his family. The gulf between Bakiev and the wider body politic was highlighted by the behavior of his son, Maxim, who not only embezzled large sums of aid money, but also seemed to be conducting an independent foreign economic policy during his trips abroad.⁸²

In protest at these developments, Prime Minister Igor Chudinov resigned, thereby triggering the resignation of the entire government. The pro-presidential party *Ak Jol* ("Open Road"), which held a large parliamentary majority, nominated Bakiev's chief of staff, 49-year old Daniar Usenov, to be the new prime minister. Having survived this crisis, President Bakiev announced the introduction of massive price hikes for heating, electricity and water, the first round to take effect in January, the second in July. According to some calculations, during the first few weeks of 2010, heating costs rose by 400 per cent, electricity 170 per cent, and

⁸¹ The findings of the "Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Poll. April 22 – May 9, 2009" (conducted by the International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys/Gallup Organization and USAID) show that in the south, satisfaction with the performance of the Bakiev government was markedly higher than in the north. Such surveys are of course not infallible guides, but the bodies that conducted the Kyrgyz project were experienced and generally well regarded, so their findings are worthy of attention. For poverty reduction data during these years, see World Bank Group, "Kyrgyz Republic Poverty Profile for 2013," May 21, 2015, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/10/08/090224b08313157d/2_0/Rendered/PDF/Kyrgyz0Republi0rty0profile0for02013.pdf, especially Section 2: Poverty Trends and Drivers of Changes.

⁸² He was on his way to Washington when the uprising began in April. He switched direction and eventually arrived, by private jet, in the U.K. He was given permission to remain, pending consideration of a request for asylum. In 2012, he was extradited to the United States to face questions on alleged involvement in fraud. Meanwhile, on March 27, 2013, a Kyrgyz court tried him in absentia and handed down a 25-year prison sentence for corruption. He was still in the U.S. however, and a month later, on May 10, the American authorities suddenly and without explanation dismissed the case against him. In Kyrgyzstan, the ruling was initially greeted with shock, but the public soon concluded that courts in the West were as corrupt as in Central Asia and that he had bribed his way out of trouble. See Asel Kalybekova, "Kyrgyzstan: Former "Prince" Dodges U.S. Prosecution," *Eurasianet.org*, May 15, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66958>

hot water 300 per cent.⁸³ The public was incensed. A wave of anti-Bakiev demonstrations soon followed. The situation worsened when Moscow raised tariffs on fuel exports to Kyrgyzstan on April 1 (see section on “Conspiracy Theories” below). Tensions mounted rapidly and exploded into violence within days. Below, the main developments are outlined. For a detailed chronicle of events during this period, see Annex 1.

April

The first phase of the conflict took place in early April, in the north of the country. On April 5, a prominent opposition figure was arrested and briefly detained by the authorities in Talas, in northwest Kyrgyzstan. Soon after, during the night of April 6, a wave of looting, arson and shooting broke out, mainly in Bishkek but with some disturbances in Talas. The following day, thousands of anti-government demonstrators gathered in the main city square in Bishkek. Marauders, some with firearms, continued to attack people and property indiscriminately. There were reports of victims being clubbed to death. The prosecutor-general’s office was set on fire, while the *Jogorku Kenesh* (parliament) and other government buildings were ransacked. Government troops opened fire on the crowd. Within some 24 hours, an estimated 89 people had been killed and more than 1,500 injured.

President Bakiev fled to the south of the county and on April 8, an Interim Government, headed by Roza Otunbayeva, was established. Curfews were imposed in Bishkek, also in the northern cities of Talas and Naryn. On April 16, Bakiev formally resigned and left Kyrgyzstan, going first to neighboring Kazakhstan, then to Belarus. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Janybek Bakiev, brother of the ex-President and former head of the presidential guard, who was accused of ordering troops to open fire on the crowd in Bishkek on April 7. Several pro-Bakiev officials were arrested. There were also physical attacks on representatives of the Mufitat who were thought to be too close to Bakiev. Mufti Jumanov himself

⁸³ See Liat Asman, “Kyrgyzstan: Utility Price Hike Squeezes Citizens,” *Eurasianet.org*, February 7, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020810.shtml>; also David Gullette, “Kyrgyz Government Confronts Power Problem,” *Eurasianet.org*, May 12, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61046>

was (by his own account) kidnapped and held *incommunicado* for several days; he was eventually released, but his position was untenable and he was forced to step down. Bakiev supporters had not entirely given up hope of re-instating Bakiev, at least as leader of the south; “hundreds” of CDs and leaflets calling for the establishment of a ‘South Kyrgyzstan Democratic Republic’ were clandestinely distributed to local residents.⁸⁴ However, once Bakiev had left the country the chances of his return in any leadership capacity were virtually nil. The supporters of the Interim Government were firmly in control and there was a degree if not of optimism, then at least of guarded confidence in the possibility of bringing about genuine reform in the country.⁸⁵

May

Less than a month later, the second phase of the conflict began. The action moved to the south where, on May 13, pro-Bakiev forces (reportedly ethnic Kyrgyz) seized control of public buildings in Jalal-Abad and expelled the local governor. The following day, armed Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, supporters of the Interim Government, attacked the pro-Bakiev insurgents, regained control of the buildings and re-instated the governor. Next, the Uzbeks marched to the nearby village of Teit, home of the Bakiev family, and set fire to the houses of his relatives, including that of his 90-year old uncle. These attacks were said to have been instigated by Kadyrjan Batyrov, a leading figure in the Uzbek community. Thus, the political struggle between pro- and anti-Bakiev activists was now cross-cut by an ethnic confrontation between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in the south, with the Uzbeks supporting the predominantly northern Interim Government against the predominantly southern Bakiev faction.

⁸⁴ See “CDs, Leaflets Call For Kyrgyzstan's Split Into Two Countries,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 28, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/CDs_Leaflets_Call_For_Kyrgyzstans_Split_Into_Two_Countries/2027077.html; also B. Pannier, “Future Kyrgyz Government Faces Traditional North-South Divide,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 26, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Future_Kyrgyz_Government_Faces_Traditional_NorthSouth_Divide/2025131.html

⁸⁵ See, for example, the assessment of the situation given in International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: A Hollow Regime Collapses,” *Asia Briefing* No. 102, April 27, 2010.

On May 19, a crowd of some 5,000-7,000 pro-Bakiev Kyrgyz demonstrators attacked the Peoples' Friendship University founded by Batyrov in 1999, and embarked on a spree of looting and arson. Firemen were apparently prevented from approaching the blaze, which burned out of control and left the building a charred ruin. The university was the focal point of the Uzbek community's cultural activities, so the damage to this institution was of great symbolic significance to both camps. At least three people were killed, and some 60-70 injured during these clashes. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Batyrov, but he escaped, reportedly to Dubai. Pro-Bakiev forces staged further protests in Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken, during which two more people were killed and dozens injured.

June

The third and most devastating phase of the conflict took place in southwest Kyrgyzstan, in a narrow band of territory along the border with Uzbekistan, stretching from Bazar-Korgon to Aravan. This was where the majority of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani population was located and it was here that the conflict lost all semblance of a political struggle, becoming instead an outright inter-ethnic confrontation. The epicenter of the conflict was Osh, but nearby towns and villages were also badly affected, particularly in and around Jalal-Abad. In many ways, it was like a re-run of the conflict that had taken place in this same area twenty years earlier, in 1990.

This new phase of the conflict was precipitated by what appeared to be a gang-related crime: on June 7, near Jalal-Abad, Oybek Mirsidikov, a local businessman and notorious drug baron, was assassinated, along with three of his associates. Mirsidikov, popularly known as "Qora ('Black') Oybek," was allegedly close to the Bakiev family. Two days later, on the night of June 9, there was a brawl between Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani youths in a casino in Osh. This instantly ignited a major confrontation, which soon spread to Jalal-Abad and the surrounding region. Almost immediately, it descended into a frenzy of bloodletting, rape and torture. Shops and bazaars were torched, homes looted and razed to the ground. Property was identified as "Kyrgyz" or "Uzbek" by graffiti scrawled on

the exterior in white paint. Basic public services ceased to function, power supplies were cut, and local transport stopped working.

Many of the victims were women, children and elderly people. The local residents were, for the most part, armed with little more than stones, spades and other domestic tools. Makeshift barricades of trees, overturned vehicles and whatever else came to hand were hastily erected, but offered little protection. There were numerous reports that the main assailants were young men wearing distinctive items such as white masks, black vests or special armbands. It was also repeatedly noted that Kyrgyz police and military took part in the attacks on the ethnic Uzbek community – in other words, they appeared to abandon all pretense of even-handed policing.

The Interim Government was initially overwhelmed by the crisis, but then took steps to regain control of the situation. On June 12, it issued an emergency decree granting the security forces the right to use lethal force. Other measures included the partial mobilization of the military and the formation of citizens' defense groups. There were numerous Kyrgyz casualties but most accounts confirm that the overwhelming majority of the victims were ethnic Uzbeks. Soon, thousands of the latter were streaming across the border into Uzbekistan. By June 14, some 75,000 refugees had arrived in Uzbekistan; this figure later rose to 100,000. Over 95 per cent of the refugees were women, children, the elderly and the injured; the majority of the able-bodied men remained behind to defend their property. The scale of the disaster, and the speed with which it was evolving, was a major challenge for the Uzbek government, placing a massive strain on its physical as well as professional resources. In all, within a period of some three days, around 400,000 people were displaced by the conflict. In addition to those who went to Uzbekistan, around 300,000 people, mostly Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, fled to other parts of Kyrgyzstan.

A week after the eruption of violence, the intensity of the conflict subsided, though there were still occasional clashes and some casualties. By this time, aid from international agencies and from donor countries had begun to arrive in the region, thereby alleviating the immediate refugee crisis. Increasing numbers of the refugees who had sought sanctuary in Uzbekistan were starting to return

home. The emergency security measures introduced in southern Kyrgyzstan on June 12 remained in force in Jalal-Abad until June 22, and in Osh until June 25. Sporadic violence continued into July, with occasional incidents in August. As before, most of the casualties were ethnic Uzbeks. There were also numerous reports of the police summarily arresting and abusing members of the ethnic Uzbek community.⁸⁶ In a strongly worded statement, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights claimed that the police were arbitrarily detaining large numbers of people in ways that not only demonstrated flagrant ethnic bias, but also broke fundamental tenets of both Kyrgyz and international law.⁸⁷

External Responses

The conflict, especially during the third phase, received very wide international media coverage. This was partly due to the violent nature of the assaults, but partly, too, because of Kyrgyzstan's strategic importance to the United States and Russia. There was also much speculation as to how the conflict might affect the stability of Central Asia as a whole, and in particular how Uzbekistan might react to the unrest on its borders.

Humanitarian Assistance

International humanitarian intervention was impressive in both the speed and the scope of its response to the crisis in Kyrgyzstan. The lead organization was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but other agencies also played a part in relieving the humanitarian crisis, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Children's Fund, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Food Program. The World Health Organization, too, mobilized a rapid response and provided urgent medical attention. A UN flash appeal was made for \$71 million in emergency aid

⁸⁶ Michael Schwartz, "In Southern Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks Become Targets of Police Abuse," *New York Times*, July 14, 2010.

⁸⁷ See United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Illegal Acts by Security Forces Threaten Fragile Peace in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Says UN Human Rights Chief, Geneva," July 20, 2010.

and within a very short period many countries gave substantial material and financial assistance. Private individuals and informal associations around the world also made generous donations of money, clothing and other provisions.

Evacuation of Foreign Nationals

Several hundred foreign nationals were stranded in the conflict zone in the south in May-June. They included Turkmens, Indians, Pakistanis, Turks and Chinese, as well as some EU and U.S. citizens. Most of the foreigners were students at Osh State University, but there were also traders and other entrepreneurs. When the violence erupted, the home governments of these various groups arranged the repatriation of their nationals. This took time to organize and most of the foreigners were still in southern Kyrgyzstan at the height of the rioting. Nonetheless, they were not attacked and with the exception of one Pakistani (out of a group of 250), there were no fatalities. On June 20, as a precautionary measure, the Israeli government airlifted 12 Jews out of the region; when they arrived in Tel Aviv, they were immediately offered Israeli citizenship. The foreign nationals were distressed by their experiences, especially by the violence they had witnessed. They also suffered considerable material discomfort owing to the lack of food, water and basic utilities. Yet the fact that they were not deliberately harmed is an indication of the specific ethnic focus of the hostilities in this area.

Regional Organizations

Kyrgyzstan was a member of several security organizations. None was able or willing to respond rapidly to the crisis. In theory, the one that was best able to provide assistance was the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a military-defense organization comprising the Russian Federation, Armenia, Belarus and all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan. The headquarters were in Moscow, but it had an air base at Kant in northern Kyrgyzstan. In the West, initial fears that the CSTO would use the conflict as a pretext to boost its presence in Central Asia turned to dismay when it failed to act to halt the violence.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Deirdre Tynan, "CSTO Indecisive on Kyrgyzstan Intervention," *Eurasianet.org*, June 14, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61294>

Yet active CSTO engagement was never likely. Firstly, there was a question of the legality of such an intervention: the mandate of the CSTO only permitted collective defense against an external threat, but the Kyrgyz conflict was an internal affair. Secondly, the status of the Kyrgyz Interim Government was unclear – it had seized power in a coup d'état and though it was widely recognized as legitimate, it lacked a solid legal foundation. Thirdly, the CSTO operates on a consensus basis and two members, Uzbekistan and Belarus, objected to such action (Belarus was hosting Bakiev and refused to accede to Kyrgyz requests for his extradition). Finally, there were strong doubts as to whether it was in the best interests of the CSTO to become embroiled in a confused internal *mêlée*. The feasibility of a joint peacekeeping response was discussed at a CSTO meeting in Moscow on June 14, but rejected. This was seen by some as an indication of the weakness of the organization. However, it was surely a wise decision to resist being drawn into what could easily become a prolonged civil war.

Kyrgyzstan also belonged to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; fellow members were China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Uzbekistan. The SCO had a security arm, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent. Its remit, though, precluded interventions in the internal affairs of other countries, so there could be no question of any form of SCO peacekeeping operation. The annual SCO summit meeting was held in Tashkent on June 11. Some commentators suggested that the flare-up in southern Kyrgyzstan had been timed to coincide with this event as an act of provocation, possibly with the aim of gaining support for Bakiev's return.⁸⁹ This did not seem very likely, but the conflict was obviously of prime concern to SCO members and was discussed at length. The outcome was a pledge to provide humanitarian assistance and help to stabilize the situation.

The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) was another body of which Kyrgyzstan was a member. An OSCE Centre had been operating in Bishkek since January 1999. Its mandate specified that, "Given the OSCE role as primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management

⁸⁹ Sanobar Shermatova, "Kyrgyzstan Unrest Timed to Coincide with SCO Summit," *Sputnik News*, June 15, 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20100615/159437812.html>

and post-conflict rehabilitation” there was to be “special emphasis on the regional context, in all OSCE dimensions, including the economic, environmental, human and political aspects of security and stability.”⁹⁰ A Field Office was established in Osh in April 2000, and in 2003, the OSCE Police Assistance Program for Kyrgyzstan (PAP) was launched, “to assist the Kyrgyz counterparts in preparing the ground for a comprehensive transformation of the Kyrgyz Police force into a modern Organization serving the needs and protecting the rights of the Kyrgyz people.” The activities implemented under PAP were said to have “improved the operational efficiency of the Kyrgyz Police in the selected fields, built a strong basis for further cooperation between the OSCE and the Ministry of the Interior, and created a basis for continued police assistance through the Interim Police Assistance Programme (IPAP).”⁹¹ Other projects in Kyrgyzstan included the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, with a curriculum that covered expert training and education in conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Yet extraordinarily, despite all these programs and activities, involving close cooperation with the Kyrgyz authorities and population, the OSCE failed to foresee the looming crisis and was unable to offer conflict prevention assistance. Fortunately chaired by neighboring Kazakhstan in 2010, the OSCE’s most useful contribution was to facilitate Bakiev’s departure from Kyrgyzstan after the April showdown. In June, in the wake of the violence in the south, Otunbayeva called for the deployment of an OSCE police force to assist in maintaining law and order. There was no immediate response, but in July, the OSCE agreed in principle to provide such assistance.⁹² Implementation was delayed by protracted arguments and objections, especially from the Mayor of Osh, Melisbek Myrzakmatov. Eventually, in November 2010, the OSCE decided to embark on a scaled-down project,

⁹⁰ See homepage for OSCE Centre in Bishkek, <http://www.osce.org/bishkek/>

⁹¹ OSCE Police Assistance Programmes for Kyrgyzstan, see <http://www.osce.org/bishkek/21916?download=true>

⁹² See “OSCE Votes To Deploy International Advisory Police In Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 22, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/OSCE_Approves_Deployment_Of_Police_Advisors_To_Kyrgyzstan/2106798.html

the Kyrgyzstan Community Security Initiative, which would employ international and local staff in approximately equal numbers.⁹³

Strategic Partners and Regional Neighbors

Since Russia and the United States both had military bases in Kyrgyzstan, there was much speculation as to how they would react. Some Western analysts mapped out fanciful scenarios involving Russian plans to re-conquer the region. In fact, keenly aware of the dangers of regional instability, the Russians eschewed opportunistic adventures and instead sought pragmatic cooperation with international partners. The United States also refrained from intervening in the conflict. Instead, they coordinated their efforts to stabilize the situation (see further “Conspiracy Theories” below). China was even more circumspect. Official statements were limited to expressions of sympathetic concern and hopes for a speedy resolution of the conflict; large quantities of emergency aid were also sent. Subsequently, Beijing welcomed the referendum and formation of the Kyrgyz new government, not because there was any expectation of a change of policy, but because it re-established legality and stability. This was important, as it was (and still is), a basic principle of Chinese foreign policy that it only has official dealings with legitimate state actors.

Uzbekistan, the most populous, and militarily the most powerful, of Kyrgyzstan’s Central Asian neighbors, was also the one with which Kyrgyzstan had the most fraught relationship. This prompted some commentators to suggest that Uzbekistan might take advantage of the conflict to invade the border zone of southern Kyrgyzstan. In fact, the Uzbek government responded in an unexpectedly restrained and constructive manner.⁹⁴ In early April, Uzbekistan closed its border with Kyrgyzstan, fearing a spillover of civil disorder and an increase in the smuggling of arms and drugs. The border remained closed until mid-June. By this time, southern Kyrgyzstan was engulfed in conflict, precipitating a panic-driven surge

⁹³ “OSCE Waters Down Police Mission to Kyrgyzstan,” *Eurasianet.org*, November 22, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62421>

⁹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Final Report on UNHCR Emergency Operations In the Republic of Uzbekistan,” July 23, 2010; see also “Refugee Crisis Poses Challenge for Uzbekistan,” *Eurasianet.org*, June 14, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61303>

of refugees towards the border. It was a formidable challenge for Uzbekistan to pull together, effectively within a matter of hours, the material as well as the human resources to absorb this sudden influx of vulnerable, traumatized people. The Uzbek government urgently appealed for international assistance, but hesitated to re-open the border, fearing a massive, disorderly influx of refugees. Nevertheless, it was impossible to prevent this: on June 12, the refugees began to cross on to Uzbek territory and by June 14 around 75,000 had arrived. Some 50 triage centers were rapidly set up in the border area. Most of the refugees were accommodated in these camps, but a few went to stay with relatives and friends. On June 14 and 15, with the refugee population numbering around 100,000 and care services strained to capacity, the Uzbek government again closed the border. Within less than a week, it had spent at least \$5 million on emergency aid.

The first consignments of relief aid from international organizations began to arrive on June 16; this provided much-needed additional tents, foodstuffs and medical assistance. Human rights organizations accused Uzbek officials of using force to keep the refugees in the camps. These claims were denied, but there were certainly security and humanitarian reasons for keeping the refugees together. During this period, Uzbek officials were in constant touch with counterparts in Moscow, Washington and the UN, as well as with the Kyrgyz Interim Government. When it became clear that there was international consensus on the need to hold the proposed referendum on schedule, on June 27 (see below) the Uzbek government facilitated the repatriation of virtually all the 100,000 refugees within a few days. This process was overseen by international observers. Human rights activists again voiced concerns that the refugees were being forced to return against their will, but Uzbek officials insisted that this was not the case. Rather, the refugees themselves were reportedly eager to be reunited with their menfolk, who had remained behind to protect family homes and property. Furthermore, in the days before the repatriation senior Kyrgyz officials, including the governors of Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, had visited the camps and given assurances that the returnees would be given protection and assistance.⁹⁵ When the repatriation

⁹⁵ Amnesty International, "Worrying Reports about Uzbekistan Expelling Refugees to Kyrgyzstan," June 24, 2010, <http://www.amnesty.org>

was complete, the Uzbek authorities transferred the remaining tranche of international humanitarian aid, worth some \$2.5 million, to Kyrgyzstan.

Tashkent's response to the crisis was effective on an organizational level, but of equal importance was its role in containing the conflict and preventing it from spreading across the border. Had the anger that was felt by many ordinary Uzbeks been allowed to crystallize into a generalized anti-Kyrgyz campaign, it would have been almost impossible to prevent spontaneous cross-border raids, which could then have flared into an inter-state confrontation. President Karimov was unequivocal in his insistence that the conflict must not be ethnicized; he stressed the deep bonds between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. He also categorically condemned impromptu acts of revenge, making it clear that they would not be tolerated, whatever the provocation.⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that Uzbek opposition leaders abroad (in Russia, Kazakhstan and the West) were more aggressive than the Uzbek government in disseminating an "Uzbek" version of the conflict; some went so far as to demand territorial autonomy for the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis.⁹⁷ This did not have an effect on Tashkent's policy, but it did feed popular anger and heightened the desire for Uzbeks to take revenge, making it more difficult to maintain calm, orderly cross-border relations.

Kyrgyzstan's other key Central Asian neighbor was Kazakhstan. Bilateral relations were cordial, notwithstanding occasional disagreements. Kazakhstan closed its border with Kyrgyzstan after the April disturbances for security reasons. This was a more serious blow to the Kyrgyz economy than the closing of the Uzbek border, since the country relied heavily on its trade with Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz bazaars were vast staging posts for the onward distribution of huge consignments of consumer goods from China. The closure of the borders meant that Kyrgyz import-export dealers were suddenly cut off from their customers. Consequently, they were left with piles of unsold goods, no income, and mounting debts. Many

⁹⁶ Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, "Bukhara statement by President of Uzbekistan on events in Kyrgyzstan," June 18, 2010, http://www.uzbekembassy.org/r/press_releases/13287/; also Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, "About the Briefing in Tashkent in the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan," June 15, 2010, http://www.uzbekembassy.org/e/press_releases/13210/

⁹⁷ Paul Goble, "Uzbek Opposition Party Calls for Uzbek Autonomy in Kyrgyzstan", *Window on Eurasia*, June 27, 2010, <http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.co.uk/2010/06/window-on-eurasia-uzbek-opposition.html>

were virtually bankrupted, as were those who provided the markets with ancillary services. Dordoi, the great bazaar in Bishkek, was worst hit since most of its trade was with Kazakhstan and Russia.⁹⁸ The border remained closed until mid-May, when Kyrgyzstan temporarily blocked cross-border irrigation channels. This move coincided with a crucial period in the Kazakh agricultural cycle. The Kyrgyz authorities claimed that the timing was accidental, but it certainly helped to focus Astana's attention on the urgent need to re-open the border and to allow cross-border traffic to be resumed. Nevertheless, the area was still unstable and sporadic shooting incidents continued for many weeks. Heightened security measures remained in place until late July. Even then, only very restricted border movement was allowed.

Counting the Cost

The conflict caused enormous physical as well as psychological harm. The most grievous consequence was the loss of life. In the immediate aftermath of the disturbances, it was impossible to establish a precise figure: the dead had often been buried hurriedly, without formal record. Moreover, in addition to those who had fled to Uzbekistan, there were some 300,000 internally displaced people; there were also many people who had disappeared without trace. By mid-July, the death toll was officially set at around 470, but unofficial estimates (by Roza Otunbayeva, amongst others) suggested a figure of up to 2,000.⁹⁹ The casualties (estimated at 1,900) included many people with serious injuries. It was difficult to estimate how costly it would be to treat them and how lasting would be the effects of their wounds. In addition to these problems, there was the cost to the families who had lost breadwinners and carers, as well as loved ones.

Some 2,800 buildings were totally destroyed and almost 200 more severely damaged. In human terms, this meant the loss of homes and personal possessions, as well as the destruction of business premises and offices, together with goods and equipment – people's entire livelihoods. Preliminary assessments of the cost of

⁹⁸ See "Bishkek Suffering from De-Facto Trade Embargo Following Upheaval," *Eurasianet.org*, May 3, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/60965>

⁹⁹ "Kyrgyz voters back new constitution," *Al Jazeera*, June 28, 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2010/06/20106272166146294.html>

the devastation were set at around \$71 million, but it was estimated that \$450-500 million would be needed for reconstruction.¹⁰⁰ It was not only the built environment that suffered. Many trees were cut down for use in barricades, leaving whole streets denuded of shade – and of the mulberry trees that fed the silkworms that were the basis of silk production. Other local industries, already struggling to survive, were also badly hit by the chaos and disruption. Commercial enterprises were unable to pay their taxes; hence, there was a massive shortfall in local government revenues. Tourists, traders and the thousands of foreign students who attended the local universities were frightened away, causing further damage to the economy. The cost of the psychological trauma that people endured was incalculable. So too was the harm that had been caused by the breakdown in community relations. Despite some acts of mutual help and support, the relationship between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani had been gravely compromised.¹⁰¹ The task of rebuilding trust and friendship would be far greater than the reconstruction of the physical fabric.

¹⁰⁰ "Kyrgyz Officials Put Cost Of Violence At \$71 Million," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 9, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyz_Officials_Put_Cost_Of_Violence_At_71_Million/2095760.html

¹⁰¹ Alisher Khamidov, "Uzbeks Leaving Southern Kyrgyzstan in 'Mass Exodus,'" *Eurasianet.org*, July 26, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61609>

Part III: Analysis

Victims and Assailants

A notable feature of the conflict was the way in which the predator/prey syndrome changed from one phase to another. In the first phase, centered mostly in Bishkek, the clashes were primarily intra-Kyrgyz. There were two distinct, but parallel strands. One was a crime wave, characterized by the ransacking of property and savage attacks, some lethal, on random victims; a few ethnic minorities were attacked, but the motive seems to have been mainly criminal. The second strand was an anti-government protest that, at least in intention, was peaceful. Almost immediately, these two strands merged: criminal elements mingled with the crowds and hijacked the political protest. The security forces panicked and opened fire, with predictable results. Some 90 people were killed, and over a thousand injured.

In the second phase, in the southern town of Jalal-Abad, the clashes incorporated ethnic, political and criminal rivalries. The Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community, led by Kadyrjan Batyrov, strongly supported the Interim Government, while a large proportion of the Kyrgyz population remained loyal to ousted President Bakiev, who was himself a native of Jalal-Abad province. Moreover, Bakiev's family held prominent positions in the local security services, administrative apparatus and commercial sphere. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of some recent appointees, local Kyrgyz supporters of the Interim Government were remarkable chiefly for their absence from the scene. Consequently, the political confrontation assumed an overtly ethnic aspect. The official death toll for this phase was low (below 10, with some 150 injured), but massive material damage was inflicted, overwhelmingly to Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani property, including important cultural and educational facilities.

The political sequel to this phase of the conflict reveals the fluidity of the situation. Within hours of the criminal assaults on Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani property, the Interim Government issued a warrant for Batyrov's arrest: ironically, it was he who had played the decisive role in re-establishing their control over Jalal-Abad. It was a clear signal that the Interim Government, scarcely a month old, was seeking to broaden its support base among the majority Kyrgyz community. This meant distancing itself from its Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani supporters. Batyrov was now a liability and therefore expendable.

In the third phase, the epicenter was Osh, but nearby towns and villages were also badly affected, particularly Jalal-Abad. The immediate and obvious manifestation of the conflict at this stage was inter-ethnic hostility. Unlike the earlier clashes, there were no political overtones. From the outset, the conflict here was characterized by extreme criminal behavior. It is clear that the violence had been premeditated and that in both communities there had been a stockpiling of arms. There were casualties on both sides, but the overwhelming advantage in terms of weapons, vehicles and control of key facilities undoubtedly lay with the Kyrgyz. Moreover, it is indisputable that the great majority of the victims – the dead and seriously injured – were Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis. The same was true of the 100,000 refugees and 300,000 internally displaced persons. During this phase, it seems clear that state employees sided with the Kyrgyz assailants. Whether this was the result of support (possibly tacit) from the regional administration, or whether it was the result of a catastrophic breakdown in discipline was not clear.

Salient Features of the Conflict

As time passed, there was a tendency to impose order and meaning on the conflict – to present it as a national struggle to overthrow a corrupt dictator. In fact, the closer one looks at the evolution of the conflict, the more it becomes apparent that it was a spontaneous eruption of pent-up anger and resentment, mixed with envy, greed and general frustration. The first stage of the conflict, played out almost entirely in the north of the county, was fueled, at least in part, by political discontent. Yet there was no evidence of a coherent, organized campaign to topple

Bakiev. Well-known opposition figures appeared at rallies and made impassioned speeches, but they did not have a united, coordinated agenda. Rather, it seemed as though the sudden breakdown in law and order, caused by the rioting, had created a power vacuum. This enabled a disparate group of opposition politicians (including many former allies of Bakiev) to take control of the situation almost by default. The public response was equivocal: there was little sign of the triumphant optimism that had greeted the overthrow of Akayev five years earlier. For some, the new collective approach was a welcome contrast to the overweening personality of Bakiev, but others regarded it as weak and indecisive and doubted its ability to plan and implement long-term policies.

The absence of a clear political direction was evident in the virtual absence of ideological slogans, chants, banners or other forms of crowd expression. The manifestations that were on show – and they were confined to the main demonstrations in April – were negative rather than positive, along the lines of “away with this,” “down with that,” “Bakiev out.” The statements of the opposition – which subsequently became the Interim Government – spoke of the need for democratic reform. In practical terms, though, this had little meaning for the broad mass of people whose priorities were jobs, homes, a safe environment, and welfare services that functioned. Consequently, there was little sense of connection between the politicians and the people on the streets.

A third salient feature was the manner in which the conflict evolved. In April, it was characterized by random acts of hooliganism against individual persons and property. In May, there were crowd attacks against selected targets. In June, gang warfare merged with underlying inter-ethnic grievances, as reflected in the vicious attacks on neighborhood communities. At each stage, the clashes flared up without warning, and then equally suddenly subsided. However, the peak period of violence lasted slightly longer each time – around two days in April, five days in May, and six days in June. In between the peaks, there was an on-going current of small, but occasionally lethal, clashes. The frequency of these smaller incidents increased when the violence moved to the south. There was also a noticeable rise in the level of brutality. In Bishkek, most of the personal violence took the form of beatings, a few of which were fatal. In May, people were burnt to death in arson

attacks. In June, there were widespread reports of sexual attacks, torture, mutilation and agonizing forms of execution.

Finally, when compared with previous conflicts, it was noticeable that the “honeymoon period” was shrinking. Between 1992 and 2010, the volume of accusations (and no doubt, the incidence) of corruption, nepotism and other abuses of public office did not seem to alter greatly. What did change was the length of time that people were prepared to wait for a perceptible improvement. During the Akayev administration, protests became vocal and widespread after approximately ten years. Under Bakiev, the period of grace was less than a year. With the Interim Government, accusations of corruption and incompetence began to surface within a month after the April events. Public confidence was not increased by the defection of some senior members of the Interim Government, who complained that the new administration was no better than the previous one.¹⁰² By early June 2010, the overthrow of Bakiev was already beginning to seem like a routine change of the cast list, not a change of the production.

Conspiracy Theories

There were two main strands to the “conspiracy theories”: one viewed the events of 2010, especially the first (April) phase, through the prism of a Cold War-style dual between Russia and the United States, while the other focused on the role of regional insurgents, vaguely described as the “third force.” Initially, the strategic rivalry between Russia and the United States attracted most attention. Later, greater emphasis was placed on the “third force” explanation. This coincided with growing fears of regional terrorist attacks and insurgencies and thus became the preferred explanation within Kyrgyzstan, as well as in the neighboring states, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

¹⁰² For example, Edil Baisalov, chief of staff of the Interim Government, resigned on June 7, complaining that “nothing had changed,” see “Senior Kyrgyz Interim Government Official Quits Post, Creates Own Party,” June 7, 2010, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, http://www.rferl.org/content/Senior_Kyrgyz_Interim_Government_Official_Quits_Post_Creates_Own_Party/2064281.html

Great Power Rivalry

Some Western analysts, as well as pro-Western Central Asians, believed that Russia had instigated the April disturbances in an attempt to “subvert a U.S. ally,” or to “punish” Bakiev for his pro-Western flirtation.¹⁰³ Yet these narratives presented a partial view, oversimplifying what was in reality a highly complex situation.¹⁰⁴ The fundamental premise of these accounts – that Bakiev was a “U.S. ally” – was surely a case of wishful thinking. His record while in office, especially in 2009, showed that Bakiev was only Bakiev’s ally. He was as fickle a partner for Moscow as he was for Washington; to secure his “favor” meant taking part in a bidding game that had no limits and no rules. In March 2010, after Bakiev had again changed his position on the question of the bases (see above), Moscow’s patience ran out: instead of quietly raising the stakes by improving on the offers made in early February, it decided that a red line had been crossed. Russian officials were relatively restrained in their comments, but the Russian press now felt free to publish lurid exposures of the corruption and other illegal activities of Bakiev and his circle.¹⁰⁵ The Kyrgyz government made a formal complaint to the Russian embassy in Bishkek and tried to block these media channels, but to no avail – the negative reporting was pervasive.

One of the issues that particularly riled the Russian commentators was the misuse of aid and development funds. A case in point was the package of loans and credits that had been allocated to Kyrgyzstan in February 2009. It included a sum of some \$450 million earmarked for the support of low-paid teachers, doctors, police officers and judges. Yet instead of using it for the specified purpose, the Kyrgyz

¹⁰³ See, for example, Stephen Blank, “Moscow’s Fingerprints in Kyrgyzstan’s Storm,” *CACI Analyst*, April 14 (2010); also Simon Shuster, “Kyrgyzstan: Did Moscow Subvert a U.S. Ally?,” *Time*, April 8, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1978590,00.html>

¹⁰⁴ A different and broader perspective is given by Wojciech Górecki, “Russia’s position on the events in Kyrgyzstan (April – June 2010),” *OSW Commentary*, April 27, 2010, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2010-07-27/russias-position-events-kyrgyzstan-april-june-2010>.

¹⁰⁵ The Regnum news agency, for example, did not take part in the negative reporting, but many of the heavyweight newspapers and broadcast channels did. See further David Trilling, “Kyrgyzstan: Russian Press Bashing Bakiyev,” *Eurasianet.org*, March 29, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav033010.shtml>

authorities established a Central Agency for Development, Innovation and Investment, headed by Bakiev's son Maxim, which loaned out these funds on lucrative commercial terms, with no benefit to the needy sectors of the population. Kyrgyz opposition activists, as well as some Western scholars and NGOs, had frequently drawn attention to the misuse of donor funds and other such abuses. U.S. officials, however, were reluctant to criticize the Bakiev government, presumably so as not to jeopardize America's geopolitical interests. Thus, ironically, it was the Russians who, in the eyes of the general public, now seemed to be on the side of free speech, justice and good governance, while Washington's representatives continued to support a coterie of corrupt politicians, on the grounds that they were "our allies." The reputational damage inflicted by this policy within Kyrgyzstan as well as the wider neighborhood was considerable.

Nevertheless, most of the leading Kyrgyz oppositionists were well disposed towards the West. They included Roza Otunbayeva, a popular and highly successful ex-ambassador to London, and Ismail Isakov, former defense minister, whose son was studying at a U.S. military academy. In December 2008, a delegation of Kyrgyz opposition figures, nominally headed by Omurbek Tekebayev, visited the United States and gave presentations at a number of prestigious institutions in Washington D.C. and New York. They were outspoken in their criticism of the Bakiev government and, judging by their comments, appeared to be contemplating some form of coup.¹⁰⁶ Their American hosts listened politely, but did not offer any support. Back in Kyrgyzstan, together with members of other political parties, the group formed the United People's Movement. However, plagued by internal disputes and under constant pressure from the government, they failed to mount an effective challenge to Bakiev. Meanwhile, at around this time there were a number of vicious (and in some cases deadly) physical attacks on ethnic Russian journalists in Kyrgyzstan. One of the victims was Alexander Knyazev, who had previously written about the role of Western-funded NGOs in plotting

¹⁰⁶ Erica Marat, "Kyrgyz Opposition Plans Spring Revolt," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 4, January 8 (2009), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34317#.VynG8IQrKJB

“color revolutions.” There was no firm evidence as to who was behind these attacks, but in the fractious, suspicion-laden atmosphere, rumors spread that they were an attempt to silence criticism of Bakiev and his Western patrons.

In early 2010, individual Kyrgyz opposition politicians (including some of those who had previously travelled to the United States) made trips to Moscow. Middle-ranking officials generally received them, but Temir Sariev (a future prime minister) had a meeting with then-Prime Minister Putin, which suggested a degree of sympathy for the opposition movement. By contrast, when Kyrgyz Prime Minister Usenov went to Moscow at the end of February to request the release of funds for the Kambar Ata hydro power plant (as agreed the previous year), his reception was brusque and the bilateral discussions unproductive.

On April 1, Russian gasoline and diesel exports to Kyrgyzstan were suspended; they were restarted the following day, with duties of \$193.5 per ton (see above “From Public Anger to Protests to Deadly Clashes”). This was not entirely unexpected. Over the previous ten years, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia had been developing the necessary legal and institutional foundations for establishing a single economic space based on a free trade regime with unified tariffs and regulations. The Customs Union was launched, as scheduled, on January 1, 2010. Kyrgyzstan had opted out of this process; nevertheless, during the preparatory period, Moscow had continued to supply oil products at preferential rates. This concession was abused by well-placed Kyrgyz officials, who profited from the arrangement by fraudulently selling these supplies on to the U.S. Manas base at international rates; annual profits from such transactions were estimated at between \$35 million and \$50 million.¹⁰⁷ Members of the Customs Union were not prepared to tolerate this situation any longer, hence the tax hike in April. This led to price rises in Kyrgyzstan, which in turn sparked mass protests in many parts of the country.

¹⁰⁷ David Trilling and Chinghiz Umetov, “Kyrgyzstan: Is Putin Punishing Bakiyev?,” *Eurasianet.org*, April 5, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav040610a.shtml>

On April 7, Bakiev fled Bishkek; the next day, Roza Otunbayeva announced the formation of an Interim Government, headed by her. Moscow immediately recognized Otunbayeva as acting head of state; it also provided emergency aid, as well as deliveries of gasoline and diesel for the spring harvest. The initial official U.S. reaction was more cautious, limited to a telephone call between Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and Roza Otunbayeva. A week later, Washington did offer its support, as conveyed by the visit of a senior American official to Bishkek on April 14.¹⁰⁸ Some Western commentators, however, underestimated the strength of public anger towards Bakiev. They dubbed Otunbayeva's government the "self-proclaimed new leadership" and interpreted the toppling of Bakiev as a coup against a "U.S. ally."¹⁰⁹ Equally, some of those who were now in power in Bishkek resented U.S. support for Bakiev and were, for a while, reluctant to accept Washington's friendly overtures. Subsequently, the ex-president was sentenced in absentia to 24 years in prison; some of his relations and close associates also received long sentences.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, at the international level, relations between Moscow and Washington were blossoming. In Prague, on April 8, Presidents Medvedev and Obama signed the historic "New START" arms reduction pact that committed both states to reduce their stockpiles of strategic nuclear weapons and to introduce new verification procedures. The two presidents reviewed various security issues, including the situation in Kyrgyzstan. U.S. officials were keen to emphasize the cordial mood of the relationship between the two presidents. Michael McFaul (Director for Russian and Eurasian affairs on President Obama's National Security Council, subsequently U.S. ambassador to Russia), dismissed the idea that either Moscow or Washington was behind the Kyrgyz revolt: "This is not some anti-American coup, that we know for sure. This is not some sponsored-by-the-Russians coup.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew E. Kramer, "U.S. Signals Support for New Kyrgyz Leaders," *New York Times*, April 14, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/world/asia/15kyrgyz.html?_r=0

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, "New Kyrgyz rulers hail Russia, aim to shut US base," *Reuters*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE63628P>; also Stephen Blank, "Moscow's Fingerprints in Kyrgyzstan's Storm," and Simon Shuster, "Did Moscow Subvert a U.S. Ally?"

¹¹⁰ Joldosh Osmanov, "Kyrgyzstan's Former President Sentences to 24 Years In Jail," *CACI Analyst*, February 20, 2013.

There's just no evidence of that."¹¹¹ Prime Minister Putin also insisted that Moscow had not been involved in the ousting of Bakiev.¹¹² Moreover, Roza Otunbayeva personally assured Hillary Clinton that previous commitments would be respected and that the Manas base would continue to function according to the terms already agreed. In the following weeks, Russia and the United States cooperated with the OSCE (chaired by Kazakhstan) to facilitate Bakiev's peaceful departure from Kyrgyzstan. Neither side intervened in the subsequent clashes in May and June.

The "Third Force"

The incoming government naturally blamed the Bakiev faction for the violence. State security officials likewise accused the ex-President of orchestrating the conflict. This interpretation of events was given apparent credence by tapped telephone conversations, anonymously posted on the Internet, which mentioned a plot to bring down the Interim Government.¹¹³ Bakiev strongly rejected these accusations. The speed with which his relations and associates (including two ex-premiers) were charged with crimes that ranged from mass murder to abuse of power, corruption and embezzlement suggested revenge rather than due process of law. However, these measures may also have been designed to deter Bakiev sympathizers from undertaking any form of counter action.

There were several other candidates for the role of "third force." One version was that they were Islamist militants. It is not impossible that Islamist groups, foreign

¹¹¹ Paul Reynolds, "Future of US base in Kyrgyzstan in question," *BBC News*, April 9, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8611141.stm>. McFaul was appointed U.S. ambassador to Russia at the end of 2011; in 2013, he accused Moscow of "bribing" Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas base (see relevant section in "The Changing Geopolitical Environment" below).

¹¹² Omur Tekebayev, an opposition politician, insisted that "Russia played its role in ousting Bakiev," citing in evidence nothing more substantial than Russia's "joy at Bakiev's departure." See "New Kyrgyz rulers hail Russia, aim to shut US base," *Reuters*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE63628P>. Tekebayev had been a member of the delegation that went to the United States in December 2008, seeking (but not receiving) support for their own anti-Bakiev coup. This may well have influenced his views.

¹¹³ "A Recording Coup," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 26, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/A_Recording_Coup/2053550.html

or local, played some part in the disturbances, but no concrete evidence was produced to substantiate the claim.¹¹⁴ Criminal gangs were certainly involved but again, there was no evidence to indicate that their actions were coordinated or directed towards some specific goal. Rather, their involvement would appear to have been opportunistic, aimed at settling old scores and gaining whatever advantage they could from the situation.

Ethnic rivalries were also blamed for the violence. As discussed above, the unfettering of ethno-nationalism during the Bakiev period resulted in the marginalization of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community. Yet Bakiev himself reputedly had close ties with Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani business circles, as well as with powerful Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani drug cartels. Thus, there was no clear ethnic cleavage in these circles. In the wider Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community, there was little (open) support for autonomy. Rather, the great majority hoped that grievances could be resolved by dialogue and negotiation. At first, the Interim Government seemed to favor such an approach, but it soon became clear that this was an illusion, as was shown by the treatment of Batyrov. This was a blow to the aspirations of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community and it led to some renewed sympathy for Bakiev. However, this did not find expression in political action.

The factor that was almost entirely absent missing from all these conjectures was a discussion of the identity of the actual assailants. Talk of “hidden forces” and “secret funding” obscured the fact that it was individuals who carried out the atrocities – and individuals with local accents. The one constant feature throughout the conflict cycle, in the north and the south, was that the predators appeared to have been local young men. Possibly, they were from a rural background; possibly, too, they were unemployed – or maybe they were a mixed pack of bored, angry, alienated youths who reveled in the mayhem and the thrill of violence. It is almost irrelevant whether they were paid to go on the rampage: the fact is that they were willing (indeed, enthusiastic) agents. That there should be hundreds of

¹¹⁴ See, for example, “Top U.S. Official Warns Of Islamic Extremist Threat To Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 27, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Top_U.S._Official_Warns_Of_Islamic_Extremist_Threat_In_Southern_Kyrgyzstan_/2111509.html; also “Russian leader warns against radicals taking power in Kyrgyzstan,” *News.Az*, June 18, 2010, <http://news.az/articles/russia/17672>

able-bodied youths who were beyond the reach of any restraining influences indicated a profound malaise in society. Moreover, it was not a new phenomenon: there had been similar outbursts of violence in 1990 and in 2005. That, surely, was the real “third force” – and arguably the most disturbing and unwelcome explanation.

Civil Society, Media and Rumor

Kyrgyzstan prided itself on the vibrancy of its civil society, symbolized by a huge array of NGOs (estimated to number around 4,000 by the late 1990s) and a relatively free press.¹¹⁵ Yet during the 2010 conflict, Kyrgyz civil society was strangely silent. There were no mass protests about the violence in the south, no mass demands for it to stop, no convoys of volunteers going down to the south to try to protect the local communities, no expression of basic human solidarity. The reasons for this lack of engagement become clearer when one looks at the nature of Kyrgyz civil society at the time.

A large segment of the NGO community consisted of crypto-government organizations. They were closely linked to senior state officials and were often headed by their family members – in effect, they constituted an additional source of influence, status and income for the elite. There were some independent NGOs, but these were usually small, poorly managed and often existed on paper rather than in reality. A third group of NGOs was funded by overseas sponsors and, in part at least, run by foreign staff. They followed the agendas set by the donor agencies, which were not always in step with local concerns. For example, in March 2005, on the eve of the violent clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan, it was proudly announced in the Kyrgyz press that the USAID-supported NGO “Oasis” was about to open a center for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals (GLBT) in Osh, to support a sexual minority comprising some 3,500 people. This was no doubt a

¹¹⁵ Erkinbek Kasybekov, “Government and Nonprofit Sector Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic,” in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, eds. M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), esp. 71-84.

worthy cause, but it sat oddly with the lack of concern for the growing suppression of the cultural rights of ethnic minorities.¹¹⁶

The Kyrgyz press, often praised for the variety and independence of its reporting, was constrained by a range of social, political and economic factors. Thus, while journalists might have been outspoken on certain issues, on others they were silent: in other words, they understood the unofficial boundaries that hedged their freedom. During the conflict, the Kyrgyz print and broadcast media largely restricted commentaries to a portrayal of the clashes as an ethnic confrontation. There was very little attempt to analyze the situation in a more nuanced manner. Moreover, as the press was only permitted to use the two official languages – Kyrgyz and Russian – this, deliberately or not, gave the reporting a predominantly pro-Kyrgyz slant.¹¹⁷ The lack of a convincingly independent press meant that far more credence was given to rumors than to any form of media coverage. Consequently, unsubstantiated rumor became a powerful tool for the manipulation of public opinion.

The one aspect of Kyrgyz society that did prove to have real vitality and commitment was the least acknowledged sector: the traditional neighborhood communities. There were several reports of Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis helping each other with food, shelter and protection, even at risk to themselves. There were also reports that the elders of both communities tried to calm the situation by talking to the youthful gangs of marauders and urging them to stop the violence.¹¹⁸ Members of the different ethnic communities were accustomed to meeting in the same teahouses, eating and chatting together. There was a rootedness and a connectivity in these traditional structures that was lacking in the newer, more “progressive” civil society formations. The elders did support their own

¹¹⁶ Bakyt Ibraimov, “Problemy seksual’nykh men’shinstv na yuge Kirgizii budut reshat’sya,” *Fergana News*, March 16, 2005, <http://www.fergananews.com/m/articles/3547>

¹¹⁷ Farangis Najibullah, “Is Kyrgyz Media Providing the Whole Picture?,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 31, 2010 <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/2114927.html>

¹¹⁸ Author’s personal observations, also discussions with colleagues in Bishkek, 2010-11. See also Paul Fryer, Elmira Satybaldieva, Jeremy Smith, and Joni Virkkunen, “Indirect fall-out from the June 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan, the case of Kara-Suu,” *EUCAM Commentary No. 14*, June 2011, http://aei.pitt.edu/58478/1/Commentary_14.pdf

communities, but usually by inference rather than by hostile actions or aggressive statements against the others.

Citizen Militias

Formal responsibility for maintaining order lay with the Ministry of the Interior and its organs, especially the police force. Military units and other security forces could be deployed if required. There was universal conscription for the entire male population, whatever their ethnic origin, from the age of 18 years old. The professional army was small, and dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz. The same was true of the police force. All the security forces were poorly paid, poorly trained and generally regarded as venal and corrupt. In the 2010 conflict, they proved to be incapable of controlling the streets in the north, or quelling the violence in the south. This was partly owing to a lack of basic professional competence, but there was the added problem in the south of ethnic bias. In June, the security forces, particularly the police, were widely reported to have become combatants instead of impartial officers of public law and order.¹¹⁹

The security vacuum was filled by the rise of informal civilian militias. In the wake of the April disturbances, local citizens in Bishkek set up neighborhood defense groups. Their original goal was to protect their own homes, but soon they began to expand their operations. The best known of these formations was "Patriot," which attracted thousands of volunteers. By May, it was already patrolling the area around the parliament, central government buildings, and other key facilities. Similar groups sprang up all over the country, in the north as well as the south. Their members, drawn from the local community, were said to include people of all ages.¹²⁰ They claimed to support the interior ministry forces, not to replace them. The Interim Government recognized their contribution to law and order and on June 12 issued a decree "On the Formation of Citizens' Defense Groups," thereby formalizing their role. Yet it was not clear what their remit

¹¹⁹ Clifford J. Levy, "Army's Hand Suspected in Kyrgyzstan," *New York Times*, June 16, 2010.

¹²⁰ "Kyrgyz Civilian Patrols Expand Security Role," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 17, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyz_Civilian_Patrols_Expand_Security_Role/2044778.html.

would be, or what form of supervision or oversight there would be. This raised fears that they would become private armies in the service of local leaders.¹²¹

Official Reports and Reactions

Several official reports on the violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 were published in the following year. The most comprehensive of these was the *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010*.¹²² The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) was established at the request of President Roza Otunbayeva; the terms of reference were agreed in consultation with all the international humanitarian agencies that had provided aid and support during the crisis. As the title of the report indicated, the remit of the Commission was limited to an inquiry into the events in the south of the country in June 2010. Furthermore, the Commission (chaired by Kimmo Kiljunen, a Finnish Member of Parliament and Special Representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for Central Asia) was not mandated to conduct a criminal investigation: this, it was acknowledged, was the responsibility of the state authorities. Given these limitations, the main contribution of the KIC Report was that it amassed a substantial body of information, founded on documentary evidence and interviews with those who had experienced the conflict at first hand.

The report was officially released on May 2, 2011, and received strong support from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.¹²³ The aim had been to present an objective account, free of ethnic or political bias. However, despite its efforts to be even-handed, and its circumspect use of language, the Commission could not avoid

¹²¹ Ulan Temirov, "Voluntary Militias in Kyrgyzstan May Become Political Players", *Eurasianet. Org*, July 12, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61515>

¹²² For project report see Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan," June 2010, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_490.pdf

¹²³ See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, "Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission releases final report," May 3, 2011, <http://www.oscepa.org/parliamentary-diplomacy/special-representative-visits/94-news-a-media/press-releases/2011/614-kyrgyzstan-inquiry-commission-releases-final-report>

noting that the ethnic Uzbeks had, on occasion, been subjected to unfair treatment.¹²⁴ The Kyrgyz government disagreed and immediately published its own commentary on the report. It accepted that there had been some shortcomings on the part of the state authorities, but insisted that the report was marred by “serious deficiencies.”¹²⁵ Specifically, it did not provide “sufficient evidence to conclude that the events of June in the city of Osh can be considered as crimes against humanity”; moreover, “there was no thorough analysis of the circumstances and reasons which preceded the conflict and where its roots lie.” Other issues of concern raised by the Kyrgyz authorities included the allegedly inaccurate chronology of events, the lack of objectivity in analysis, and the biased use of language.

Criticisms of the KIC report were not confined to Kyrgyz officials and commentators. A report published by the European-based monitoring body EUCAM pointed to some of the weaknesses of the KIC findings.¹²⁶ Similarly, a report by Human Rights Watch, while acknowledging the importance of the KIC investigation, called for greater emphasis to be given to human rights abuses, particularly those committed by the authorities.¹²⁷ These strictures were mostly directed at procedural failings. The “elephant in the room” – the animosity between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani communities – was downplayed.

However, the subsequent actions of the Kyrgyz parliament brought these tensions to the forefront of the debate. The official Kyrgyz commentary on the KIC report contained a curious qualifier: it was said to have been backed by the government – defined as the “executive and the judiciary” – and “formulated by a

¹²⁴ The report notes that: “Kyrgyz and Uzbek defendants have received disparate sentences for similar offences. The weakness of presented evidence and the speed of both trials and appeals of Uzbek defendants also raise concerns. Every judge who has heard a case arising from the events is Kyrgyz. While the KIC does not suggest that this fact alone founds an allegation of bias against Uzbek defendants ... it would have been preferable if the bench had been comprised of members from different ethnic groups” (paragraphs 298, 299).

¹²⁵ For the full text of the Kyrgyz government response, see: <https://www.ndi.org/files/KG-comments-final-ENG.pdf>

¹²⁶ Jeremy Smith, “International Report on Kyrgyz June Violence Released,” *EUCAM Commentary* No. 12, May 2011.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2012 - Kyrgyzstan.”

working group in accordance with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and by virtue of a presidential decree.”¹²⁸ There was no mention of the legislature. In fact, the parliamentary deputies were fiercely critical of the Commission. Some went so far as to accuse Kimmo Kiljunen not merely of bias, but of taking bribes from Uzbek separatist leaders – charges that he categorically denied.

On May 26, the Kyrgyz parliament formally rejected the KIC report. They followed this up with a vote to declare Kimmo Kiljunen *persona non grata*; the motion was carried by a majority of 95 to 24, with one abstention.¹²⁹ There was no reaction from the President (Roza Otunbayeva) or the government (a weak coalition headed by Almazbek Atambayev). Thus, the validity of the *persona non grata* sentence was not clear – since it did not have the full backing of the state, did it have any standing in international law? If so, would it only remain in force for the life of the current parliament? Finnish legal experts were puzzled by the ambiguity of the ruling. There was no further discussion of this issue, but what it did reveal was the deep rift between the executive and the legislative bodies; each branch of power felt able to act independently, to the point of adopting diametrically opposed positions. The result was incoherence at the heart of the policy-making apparatus.

The KIC report aroused such strong emotions among the Kyrgyz population because it drew attention to the devastation inflicted on the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community. In public, as well as in private, the Kyrgyz majority rejected any suggestion that the ethnic Uzbeks had suffered discrimination or victimization. Instead, openly or covertly, they held them responsible for the violence.¹³⁰ The Uz-

¹²⁸ See explanatory note 1 in the Kyrgyz government response, <https://www.ndi.org/files/KG-comments-final-ENG.pdf>

¹²⁹ See *Reuters*, “Kyrgyz MPs seek to ban author of violence report,” May 26, 2011, <http://news.trust.org/item/20110526143500-byjqs?view=print>.

¹³⁰ The most active proponent of this antagonistic attitude was the Mayor of Osh, Melisbek Myrzakmatov (in office, January 2009-December 2013), who detailed his version of the events of June 2010 in his book: *V poiskakh istiny. Oshskaya tragediya: dokumenty, fakty, intervyu, obrashcheniya i zayavleniya* (Bishkek: Turar, 2011). Megoran, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan,” examines Myrzakmatov’s policies in detail, 22-25.

bek-Kyrgyzstani community was mostly ignored in ceremonies of public mourning, since the proceedings were conducted exclusively in Kyrgyz and Russian.¹³¹ The explanation was that these were the official languages of Kyrgyzstan. Yet given the high number of Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani losses, compassion as well as political acumen might have suggested that some of the proceedings should have been held in Uzbek. This lack of empathy underlined the weakness of civic identity in Kyrgyzstan: ethnic loyalties took precedence over other considerations. This has remained a sensitive issue. Attempts to delve into the causes of the conflict are liable to be treated as criminal offences; foreigners who raise such issues risk deportation.¹³² This has effectively closed down further discussion of the subject. By implication, it absolves Kyrgyz society from any complicity in the violence.

There have been some attempts to introduce a more constructive approach to community relations. In March 2013, the government adopted the Concept for National Unity, as proposed by the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan. It was conceived within the framework of the United Nations Peace building Fund (established in 2006 by the UN Secretary General), which was designed to offer financial and professional assistance for such projects. Accordingly, a Kyrgyz national agency for Local Self-governance and Interethnic Relations was established, with responsibility for drafting and implementing a plan of action.¹³³ On paper, it looked promising. Yet as so often before, it proved difficult to translate good ideas into action; thus, despite the best of intentions, implementation was poor and as of 2016, there were few perceptible results.¹³⁴ Efforts to bring about

¹³¹ Judith Beyer, "Kyrgyzstan: referendum in a time of upheaval," *Open Democracy*, June 26, 2010,

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/judith-beyer/kyrgyzstan-referendum-in-time-of-upheaval>

¹³² In March 2015, Umar Farooq, an American freelance journalist who discussed these issues with a local NGO, was interrogated by the Kyrgyz security services and then deported; see Roy Greenslade, "US journalist deported from Kyrgyzstan after interrogation," *The Guardian*, March 31, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/mar/31/us-journalist-deported-from-kyrgyzstan-after-interrogation>

¹³³ See "Kyrgyzstan adopts new conception for national unity and interethnic relations," *Fergana News*, March 23, 2013, <http://enews.fergananews.com/news.php?id=2519>; also United Nations, "Kyrgyzstan's Peacebuilding Priority Plan," September 13, 2013, <http://www.unpbf.org/wp-content/uploads/Kyrgyzstan-Priority-Plan-2013-2016-and-PBSO-approval-letter.pdf>

¹³⁴ Erica Marat, "Prospects for Pluralism," presents a more upbeat, optimistic assessment of this and other such initiatives to build a plural society; see esp. 9-10.

reconciliation and national unity were still mostly symbolic, confined to official declarations and exhortations.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ See, for example, "Kyrgyz Leader Calls for Unity Five Years after Ethnic Bloodshed," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-ethnic-violence/27063824.html>.

Part IV: Post-Conflict Trends

Renewing the Political Process

The most unexpected sequel to the 2010 conflict was the speed with which the political process was renewed. On June 27, 2010, scarcely a fortnight after the violence had reached its peak, and while large numbers of people were still displaced, the Interim Government held a referendum to approve amendments to the constitution. The aim was to replace the presidential system with a mixed parliamentary system. Given the ongoing instability in the country, many commentators, in Kyrgyzstan and abroad, believed that this move was premature. Nevertheless, despite some organizational shortcomings, the referendum was not only held on schedule, but there were no disturbances and no allegations of fraud or mismanagement. It was, at least on the surface, a success. Some 72 per cent of the electorate took part, of which just over 90 per cent supported the proposed changes. Observers from the OSCE and other international bodies gave a highly positive assessment of the proceedings, endorsing the view that “the will of the people had been clearly and honestly expressed.”

Only Moscow sounded a note of caution, pointing out that the foreign monitors were relatively few in number and had been deployed only in “safe areas.” Furthermore, as noted in the OSCE/ODHIR Mission report, in the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community there was a “pervasive atmosphere of fear and intimidation, compounded by arrests of prominent public figures”; not surprisingly, voter participation in the south was lower than in the rest of the country.¹³⁶ Also, it was clear from local interviews that the overwhelming majority of the voters did not understand what they were agreeing to, but were giving their assent in the hope

¹³⁶ For the report, see Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “The Kyrgyz Republic Constitutional Referendum,” OSCE/ODHIR Limited Referendum Observation Mission Report, June 27, 2010, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/70938?download=true>

that it would bring stability to the country.¹³⁷ It is noteworthy that the results of the 2010 referendum vote were very similar to those of the 1996 referendum, for which there was a 96 per cent turnout, with 94.5 per cent of the votes favoring the amendments proposed by President Akayev.

Elections

The first post-conflict parliamentary elections were held on schedule, in a mostly calm environment. On October 10, 2010, over 3,000 candidates from 29 parties contested the 120 seats in the new unicameral legislature (mandated by the June 2010 referendum). The political situation was still tense and the turnout was low (around 55 per cent). Yet despite numerous accusations of electoral fraud, the proceedings were generally deemed to have been well organized and reasonably fair. Five parties gained sufficient votes to secure parliamentary seats, though none secured a large enough majority to form a government.¹³⁸ This was not surprising, since there was little to distinguish the parties. As a Kyrgyz political analyst put it, they were unable to conceive a genuinely new political vision and so attempted to fool “the electorate with numerous ‘programs’ and promises that shamelessly duplicated each other.”¹³⁹ The lead party by a narrow margin was *Ata-Jurt*, a nationalist party with a strong southern following; reportedly, some of its members still supported Bakiev.¹⁴⁰ This called into question the basic assumption that the country was united against the ex-president. Whether or not this was so was, in a sense irrelevant, since political issues were soon brushed aside as the

¹³⁷ Judith Beyer, “Kyrgyzstan: referendum in a time of upheaval.”

¹³⁸ *Ata-Jurt* “Homeland” (8.47% – 28 seats), Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (7.83% – 26 seats), *Ar-Namys* “Dignity” (7.57% – 25 seats), *Respublika* “Republic” (6.93% – 23 seats), *Ata-Meken* “Fatherland” (5.49% – 18 seats). For a full report see OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic Parliamentary Elections,” OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission Report, October 10, 2010, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/74649?download=true>

¹³⁹ Anvar Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan* (Washington D.C.: and Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Silk Road Paper, July 2013), 52. As he points out, this was not unique to the 2010 elections; all post-Soviet political leaders in Kyrgyzstan, including Akayev and Bakiev, used virtually identical rhetorical tropes.

¹⁴⁰ “Pro-Bakiyev party bids for power,” *Al Jazeera*, October 9, 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2010/10/20101091034010960.html> See also “CDs, Leaflets Call For Kyrgyzstan's Split Into Two Countries,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 28, 2010, cited above, on the distribution of pro-Bakiev leaflets etc. The *Ata-Jurt* party leader, Kamchybek Tashiev, appeared to support Bakiev, but only off record – he shifted his position and equivocated when challenged in public; see David Trilling, “Tensions Rise as Kyrgyzstan Closes in on Vote,” *Eurasianet.org*, October 6, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62094>

familiar struggle for lucrative official posts resurfaced. In late December 2010, after much acrimonious wrangling, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), allied with Ata-Jurt and Respublika, formed an uneasy coalition government. It was the first of several weak coalitions.

The first presidential election under the new constitution was held in October 2011. The list of candidates who sought registration for the contest provided an intriguing insight into the expectations of the general public regarding qualifications for the highest office in the land: 83 individuals put their names forward, among them farmers, businessmen, teachers and unemployed people – in other words, anyone and everyone felt able to “have a go.” The number of would-be contestants was whittled down to 16 by polling day. As expected, the winner was 56-year-old Almazbek Atambayev, former leader of the SDPK and former prime minister (he resigned both posts in September, in order to stand for president), who gained some 63 per cent of the vote. Roza Otunbayeva, the Interim President, then stepped down, as promised. This, the country’s first peaceful transfer of power, was a signal achievement. Yet although it brought stability and a degree of predictability at the leadership level, the political situation within parliament remained fraught. Two days after the presidential inauguration ceremony, the government resigned in protest over proposed reforms. Shortly thereafter, the speaker also resigned “in order to maintain stability” – though it was rumored that his departure was linked to serious allegations of criminal ties. A new coalition government was formed a few weeks later, but it did not last long. This set the pattern for the next few years. Crippled by internal divisions, successive governments were unable to implement a coherent program of reforms; consequently, little was done to address the country’s urgent socio-economic problems.

Post-2010, the number of political parties mushroomed. By the time of the parliamentary elections in October 2015, there were 203 registered political parties – for an electorate of scarcely 3.5 million.¹⁴¹ The apparent multiplicity of choices, however, was illusory. As in previous elections, party programs were cloned, slogans and headline phrases almost identical. Party mergers, splits and defections were

¹⁴¹ For a full report, see OSCE, “Kyrgyz Republic – Parliamentary Elections,” International Election Observation Mission, October 4, 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/189401?download=true>

common, as votes and influence were traded in return for personal favors, benefits and bribes. As previously, it was evident that:

parties may build alliances ... [but] the relationship between these allies is not determined by any common strategic interests or by any shared moral and political views. Typically, this refers to political leaders with their own financial or political interests and ambitions, which, they hope, can be realized within the framework of the chosen political alliance.¹⁴²

The analyst Mars Sariev put it more bluntly: "The people in the parties are local oligarchs. Parliament is the place for resources to be divided up."¹⁴³

The voting system was based on proportional representation; to make this function more effectively, lists of party candidates were drawn up. It was no secret that in order to secure a place at the top of the party voting lists, and thus to have a better chance of being elected, candidates were prepared to pay bribes amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the larger and more ambitious political parties were prepared to spend around \$1 million on their election campaigns.¹⁴⁵ This would not be regarded as excessive in Western societies, but in a country as poor as Kyrgyzstan, these sums revealed the disconnect between the political elite and the public at large. The international observers noted that there were "hundreds" of reports of electoral fraud, but nevertheless, they enthusiastically endorsed the conduct of the elections.¹⁴⁶ They praised the range of choices, but seemed not to have noticed the similarities between the various party manifestos. There was a turnout of around 58 per cent. Out of the 14 parties that

¹⁴² Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan*, 52.

¹⁴³ Mars Sariev, cited by Jack Farchy in the *Financial Times*, "Voters celebrate Kyrgyzstan's democratic experiment," October 4, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7b833598-6a82-11e5-aca9-d87542bf8673.html#axzz4Cy7Ht9Oo>

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. It was rumoured that a place near the top of a party list cost between \$500,000 and \$1 million. This was by no means an isolated allegation. Such incidents were widely reported in the local media, giving details of names, places and sums of money.

¹⁴⁵ "Political parties spend over \$4 million since start of pre-election campaign in Kyrgyzstan," *AKI Press*, September 8, 2015, <http://www.akipress.com/news:564766/>

¹⁴⁶ "Social Democrats Leading In Closely Watched Kyrgyz Vote," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 4, 2015, <http://www.rferl.mobi/a/kyrgyzstan-elections-unpredictable-democracy/27285940.html>

contested the elections, the SDPK secured 38 seats (12 more than in the 2010 election), followed by the opposition alliance of Respublika and Ata-Jurt, which together gained 28 seats. The remaining seats were shared between four other parties.¹⁴⁷

In broad terms, these results reflected a preference for stability, continuity and the status quo. Beneath the surface, however, there was the same old struggle for personal power. Soon after the inauguration of the new parliament, a number of elected deputies resigned their seats. Some left in order to pursue business interests; others withdrew under a cloud of scandal; some were pushed out because they did not gain enough votes to justify their place on the party lists. The process of appointing replacement deputies was anything but transparent, thus making a mockery of the election proceedings.¹⁴⁸ Scarcely six months after the formation of the new government, Prime Minister Sariev – the 28th holder of the post in the 25 years of independence, and the 13th since the fall of Bakiev in 2010 – resigned.¹⁴⁹ He was forced out of office amid a swirl of bribery and corruption allegations linked to the Chinese project to build the Balykchy-Korumdu road (the so-called “alternative southern route” along the northern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake). He was succeeded by Sooronbai Jeenbekov, who was elected almost unanimously by the Kyrgyz parliament. An agricultural economist and former deputy head of the presidential administration, the 58-year old Jeenbekov was an ethnic Kyrgyz from Osh province, and a member of the pro-presidential SDPK. The new Speaker, Chynybay Tursunbekov, elected shortly after, was also a member of the SDPK. Thus, the three most powerful offices of state were now all held by the SDPK, prompting concerns amongst opposition activists that the party had “usurped power.” This was, naturally, denied by SDPK members.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ “Central Election Commission announces final election results, distributes mandates among 6 winning parties,” *AKI Press*, October 15, 2015, <http://www.akipress.com/news:566767/>

¹⁴⁸ “Murky Deals Remain Norm in Parliament,” *Eurasianet.org*, March 24, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/77936>

¹⁴⁹ These numbers include acting as well as elected prime ministers; Almazbek Atambayev held the office for three brief, non-consecutive spells before becoming president.

¹⁵⁰ See interview by Elvira Temir, “Chynybay Tursunbekov: I can not say that Social Democratic Party has usurped power,” *24 News Agency*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/vlast/180418-news24.html>

New Constitution, Old Tensions

The 2010 constitutional amendments addressed the structure of government, but ignored its primary purpose – the need to deliver policies to resolve the country's deep, and potentially explosive, social and economic problems. The new political leaders believed that all the ills of the past had arisen because the presidential system had allowed Akayev and Bakiev to accumulate too much power. Consequently, they argued, if the system were changed, "good governance" would surely follow automatically. Thus, the reformed constitution was designed to curb the power of the president by creating an equally powerful role for the prime minister. In theory, this might have seemed a reasonable solution. In the highly personalized, corrupt environment of Kyrgyz politics, however, it often resulted in gridlock; with no firm leadership, one weak coalition followed another, and a succession of prime ministers came and went. Thus, the political establishment, distracted by infighting and jockeying for position, failed to create a government of national unity that could concentrate on a crisis program of reconstruction and reconciliation.

The long-running saga of the Kumtor gold mine demonstrated the difficulty of implementing a coherent policy in these circumstances. This joint venture, established in 1992 between the Kyrgyz government and Canadian partners, was the country's most important economic asset, accounting for some 11 per cent of its GDP, 50 per cent of its industrial output, and up to 50 per cent of its exports; it was also a major contributor to the state budget.¹⁵¹ However, accusations about its supposedly poor environmental record were soon intertwined with political opposition to the venture. In 1998, an environmental accident triggered mass protests that, according to some accounts, were instigated by anti-government factions.

¹⁵¹ A thorough analysis of this project is presented by Roman Mogilevskii, Nazgul Abdrazakova and Saule Chalbasova, "The Impact of Kumtor Gold Mine on the Economic and Social Development of the Kyrgyz Republic," *Working Paper* no. 32, Graduate School of Development, University of Central Asia, Bishkek, 2015; see also "Kyrgyzstan Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, Report on Factual Findings For the year ended 31 December 2012," <https://eiti.org/files/Kyrgyzstan-2012-EITI-Report.pdf>

In 2013, the mine again became the focus of violent “spontaneous” demonstrations and on this occasion, the state security service produced evidence to show that local officials were trying to extort a bribe of \$3 million from the Kumtor management in return for calling off the protests. This incident coincided with official negotiations on a new agreement on the equity structure of the mine, which would give Kyrgyzaltyn, the national gold company, and Centerra, the Canadian partner company, a stake of 50 per cent each. Opposition politicians wanted the mine to be nationalized and blocked parliamentary approval of the deal; at the very least, they demanded a national share of 67 per cent. Disruptions to this one project cost Kyrgyzstan an estimated \$65 million in lost revenue in 2014. Relations between the government and the Kumtor management continued to deteriorate; in May 2016, the Kyrgyz authorities raided the Kumtor headquarters in Bishkek, as part of a corruption probe.¹⁵² The positions of both parties became more entrenched and as of mid-2016, there was no sign of a mutually acceptable outcome. Disputes such as these caused serious damage to the country’s economy. Yet the troubled history of the Kumtor project was not unique: other mining projects encountered similar problems, whether the partners were Russian, Chinese or Kazakh.

Weak governance also resulted in a failure to address social grievances and tensions. Such problems were not new: as discussed in Part I, conflictogenic factors were embedded in the fabric of society long before the 2010 conflict. Post-2010, they did not disappear but acquired new characteristics and, in some cases, gained greater intensity. The fractured nature of society was still a serious risk factor. The axes of the main fault lines were, as previously, the north-south geographic divide; and the ethnic divide between the Kyrgyz majority and the minorities, notably the Uzbeks (by far the largest group), but also the Tajiks, Uighurs, Dungans, Meskhetian Turks and others. President Atambayev hinted at the potential threat that this posed in his 2011 inaugural address, when he called

¹⁵² In April 2015, Kyrgyzstan’s prime minister suddenly halted efforts to renegotiate the share structure of the venture in favor of maintaining the arrangements that were already in place. This did not resolve the issues and in 2016, the Kyrgyz government hardened its position. See further “Kyrgyzstan: How Will Kumtor Game of Chicken End?,” *Eurasianet.org*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78626>

on the population to unite as a single Kyrgyzstani nation.¹⁵³ Yet in practice, little attempt was made to draw communities together. Meanwhile, the social, political and economic gulf between the north and the south continued to widen. In 2014, Baktybek Beshimov, an opposition leader from the south, warned that regional tensions were now so intense that Kyrgyzstan could become the next Ukraine.¹⁵⁴ Similar unease was expressed by several other commentators, though in somewhat less provocative language.¹⁵⁵

All the ethnic minority communities suffered some degree of marginalization; occasionally, too, friction with the majority Kyrgyz population exploded into armed clashes, usually involving small groups of young people.¹⁵⁶ Such incidents did not often receive much coverage either within Kyrgyzstan or abroad. More obvious, and more widely publicized, was the marginalization of the ethnic Uzbeks in the south. After the 2010 conflict, this community became more isolated. They no longer had vocal political or cultural leaders – some, such as Batyrov, had sought asylum abroad, others had been imprisoned. In parliamentary and presidential elections, they were significantly under-represented on party lists, even by comparison with the much smaller Russian and Ukrainian minorities.¹⁵⁷ They received no support from the government of Uzbekistan, since Tashkent had made clear

¹⁵³ For text, see “Vystupleniye Almazbeka Atambayeva na tseremonii ofitsial'nogo vstupleniya v dolzhnost' Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki,” Official Site of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, December 1, 2011, http://www.president.kg/ru/news/vystupleniya_obrascheniya/229_vyistuplenie_almaz_beka_atambaeva_na_tseremonii_ofitsialnogo_vstupleniya_v_doljnost_prezidenta_kyrgyzskoy_respubliki/

¹⁵⁴ Bakyt Beshimov and Raskeldi Satke, “Kyrgyzstan: The Next Ukraine,” *The Diplomat*, March 3, 2014. Beshimov was regarded by some, especially in the West, as a visionary political crusader and fearless critic of those in high places. Others saw him as a divisive figure, offering little that was constructive. Staunchly anti-Russian, he was the only parliamentarian openly to oppose the closure of the U.S. base at Manas. He failed to attract much support within the country and in 2009 sought refuge in the United States, claiming that if he remained in Kyrgyzstan his life would be at risk.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: An Uncertain Trajectory,” *Europe and Central Asia Briefing* No. 76, September 30, (2015).

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Erica Marat, “Teenage fight sparks violence between Dungan and Kyrgyz villagers,” *CACI Analyst* 2, no. 8 (2006).

¹⁵⁷ Ryan Weber, “Minority Representation Paltry in Kyrgyzstan’s New Parliament,” *Eurasianet.org*, November 30, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62463>

its intention not to meddle in the internal affairs of Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵⁸ Uzbek-language education was steadily curtailed as the few remaining Uzbek schools began to be closed.¹⁵⁹ With no way of making their voices heard, the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis were edged out of the public space and became largely invisible. In private, ethnic Kyrgyz frequently expressed views along the lines that if the ethnic Uzbeks wanted to remain in Kyrgyzstan, they would have to “behave themselves.”¹⁶⁰

However, the situation was still being monitored – and criticized – by human rights organizations. This was highlighted in 2015, when the U.S. administration bestowed the Human Rights Defender Award on the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani civil rights activist Azimjan Askarov. It evoked a furious response from the Kyrgyz government (see below). Yet international support did little to help inter-ethnic relations, and may in fact have made the situation worse. As Boris Petric, a French anthropologist with long experience of the region, pointed out some years ago, international actors inadvertently exacerbated inter-ethnic animosities because they failed to understand the subtle local dynamics: in their efforts to secure more equitable treatment for the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, they merely succeeded in antagonizing the majority Kyrgyz population.¹⁶¹ This heightened existing tensions by

¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, fear of Tashkent’s intervention in southern Kyrgyzstan continued to be cited as a reason for Kyrgyz suspicion of the local ethnic Uzbek population. See Marat, “Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism,” 46; also Sam Khan, “Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbeks Say ‘Our Voices Are Not Heard’”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 22, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyzstans_Uzbeks_Say_Our_Voices_Are_Not_Heard/2079281.html.

¹⁵⁹ Uzbek parents insisted that there had been no consultations on this matter. See: “Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek-Language Schools Disappearing,” *Eurasianet.org*, March 6, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66647>. In the early days of the Atambayev administration, it seemed as though the Kyrgyz government, understanding the sensitivity of the issue, was determined not to allow this to happen (Megan, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism,” 21-22). However, the local authorities appear to have proceeded on their own initiative.

¹⁶⁰ Author’s private conversations with ethnic Kyrgyz and with Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis in 2015. See also International Crisis Group, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South,” *Asia Report* No. 222, March 29, 2012.

¹⁶¹ Boris Petric, “Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh: Just Another Local Interethnic Conflict?,” *Fergana News*, June 20, 2010, <http://enews.fergananews.com/articles/2642>. A perceptive discussion of the grievances felt by each community towards the other is given by Megan, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism,” 7-8 and 17-20. See also Open Society Foundation, Neil Melvin, *Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence*, Central Eurasia Project, Occasional Paper Series No. March 3, 2011.

nurturing feelings of resentment and injustice on both sides. The risk of further communal violence remained.

Another potential source of conflict was the widening gulf between the (comparatively) affluent “haves” and the poverty of the “have-nots.”¹⁶² Despite national and international projects to encourage local entrepreneurship, there was little real improvement in the job market within Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, labor migration offered the best chance of a better life. In 2015, it was estimated that up to 1 million Kyrgyz were working abroad, primarily in Russia (over 90 per cent); most of the remainder found employment in Kazakhstan. The hardships that confronted the migrants, such as racial discrimination and physical abuse, were widely reported in the media (and similar to problems faced by labor migrants in many parts of the world). Less commonly noted was the fact that the migrants were paid far higher wages abroad than they could earn at home. Often, too, they acquired advanced skills in trades such as construction or industrial work.¹⁶³

The personal cost was high, since the migrants were away for long periods, and this put a huge strain on family relationships. However, the monthly remittances that they sent home (estimated at \$200 to \$500) made a significant contribution to the standard of living of their families in Kyrgyzstan; this in turn benefited the local and the national economy. Moreover, when the migrants finally returned, they had often accumulated enough capital to start their own businesses. There were also risks: when the Russian and Kazakh economies went into recession (as happened in 2015), there was less need for imported labor. This greatly reduced

¹⁶² World Bank “Poverty Mapping in the Kyrgyz Republic,” April 2013, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/04/16/000445729_20130416152925/Rendered/PDF/766900WP0P12200ty0Map0Apr4020130ENG.pdf

¹⁶³ E. Vinokurov, “The Art of Survival: Kyrgyz Labor Migration, Human Capital, and Social Networks,” *Central Asia Economic Paper* no. 7, April 2013, CAP, George Washington University.

the flow of remittances.¹⁶⁴ It also meant that opportunities for absorbing Kyrgyzstan's superfluous labor force were likely to be curtailed in the future.¹⁶⁵ If the downturn in the economies of Russia and other Eurasian Economic Union member states continued for a prolonged period, it would have severe consequences for the Kyrgyz economy. This would increase levels of poverty, thereby fueling popular anger against the government. Such grievances could be manipulated by ambitious politicians for their own ends – with dangerously unpredictable results.

Islamist Radicalization

After the upheavals of 2010 (which included the ousting of the supposedly pro-Bakiev Mufti Juman-uulu), there were hopes that the Muftiat could overcome the problems of the past and provide leadership and guidance for the Muslim community. This did not happen: there was a rapid succession of muftis – one resigned for “health reasons,” another was accused of tax evasion and a third of sexual misconduct. Each change of leadership resulted in new animosities, as different groups supported different candidates – often making their views known through belligerent public demonstrations. In 2014, further controversy was caused by the election of Mufti Maksat-aji Toktomushev, graduate of a Pakistani madrassah and reportedly sympathetic to Tablighi Jamaat (and possibly a covert member). By this time, the movement enjoyed considerable popularity among a powerful section of the Muslim community, particularly in the south of the country; some political figures were also said to be sympathetic to the movement. However, in official circles there were growing doubts about the nature of Tablighi Jamaat's activities and affiliations. One of the challenges that the Mufti faced was the need to retain the confidence of the government and at the same

¹⁶⁴ In 2013, remittances to Kyrgyzstan accounted for some 32% of GDP, the second highest rate in the world after Tajikistan (World Bank, “Migration and Development Brief” No. 23, October 6, 2014: 5). The flow declined slightly in 2014, but the big shock came in 2015, when remittances fell by 28.3 %, “About 544,000 Kyrgyz citizens work in Russia as of today,” *24 News Agency*, February 16, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/evraziasoyuz/179324-news24.html>

¹⁶⁵ After Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, the number of migrants to Russia rose significantly as regulations governing the stay and conditions of employment were improved. As of January 2016, some 553,900 Kyrgyzstanis were working in Russia, i.e. just over 13 per cent of the working age population of Kyrgyzstan. See “Number of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia grows by 2 percent for a month,” *24 News Agency*, January 16, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/evraziasoyuz/178857-news24.html>

time to manage the factional divides amongst the Muslims themselves in the face of changing attitudes towards religion. As of 2016, it was too soon to judge whether he would have the personal skills and the religious credibility to accomplish these tasks.

By this time, Islam was playing an increasingly prominent role in public life. The young in particular were starting to observe Islamic rituals and precepts more assiduously. Some lawmakers wanted to change the day of rest from Sunday to Friday, in line with Muslim custom. This proposal was rejected, but other demands for official recognition of the requirements of Islamic practice were more successful. In 2011, an official Muslim prayer room was opened in the Kyrgyz parliament. Practicing Muslims deputies welcomed the decision, but it was strongly criticized by non-devout deputies and representatives of civic organizations, who regarded it as a violation of the principle of the division between state and religion. For some, these developments were disturbing. In 2015, Prime Minister Temir Sariiev announced that there were more mosques than schools in the country and described this as a “dangerous trend.”¹⁶⁶ President Atambayev expressed similar sentiments.

Concerns about the growing emphasis on public expressions of Islamic culture and piety were related to fears that this would make society more vulnerable to radicalization, which in turn would create a pathway for to extremism and acts of terrorism. The linkage between radical movements and terrorism was by no means unique to Central Asia: in virtually every part of the Islamic world, whether in the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, East Asia, South East Asia, or Africa, there was evidence that the rise of radicalized movements represented a clear and present danger. Such groups were also a threat to the non-Islamic world, as witnessed by terror attacks in Europe and the United States. Given this context, it would have been extraordinary if Central Asia, an integral part of the

¹⁶⁶ According to Sariiev, there were by this time 2,669 mosques and 67 madrassahs, compared to 2,027 schools and 52 higher educational institutions; see Paul Goble, “Kyrgyzstan Now has More Mosques than Schools,” *Window on Eurasia*, September 18, 2015, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/kyrgyzstan-now-has-more-mosques-than.html>

world of Islam, with close personal as well as institutional ties to the global Muslim community, should have been immune to such influences. The likelihood of such cross-border contagion was all the greater as militant radical groups were firmly entrenched in a swathe of neighborhood states – in Afghanistan, China, India, Pakistan and Russia.

In fact, as discussed above, such links had already been established during the late Soviet period by groups such as what became the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. This trend continued in the 1990s, encouraged and supported by links with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Hence, it was not surprising that subsequently, the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS, i.e. *Daesh*) should attract a following in Central Asia.¹⁶⁷ According to official estimates, by 2015 some 350 Kyrgyzstani citizens (of all ethnic groups) had gone to the Middle East to enlist in ISIS.¹⁶⁸ This was a tiny proportion of the total population and some analysts argued that it did not represent a serious threat. However, the danger for Kyrgyzstan – as for many other states – was not that these men and women might launch mass operations in their home country, but that small groups of returnees might form grassroots terror cells, or that individuals might carry out “lone wolf” attacks.

Nevertheless, some commentators – mostly Western or Western-educated – insisted that the radicalization of Central Asia was a “myth.”¹⁶⁹ According to this

¹⁶⁷ Tatyana Dronzina, a Bulgarian expert on terrorism, carried out field research on this topic in Kyrgyzstan in January 2015, “Pochemu Kyrgyzstantsy yedut ne chuzhuyu voynu?,” *Vremja Vostoka*, February 19, 2015, <http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/pochemu-kyrgyzstantsy-edut-na-chuzhuyu-voynu/9143>. See also: International Crisis Group, “Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia,” *Europe and Central Asia Briefing* No. 72, January 20, 2015; and “Kyrgyz Nationals Join IS In Syria For Many Different Reasons, Expert Says,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 2, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-syria-kyrgyz-recruits-reasons/26826208.html>

¹⁶⁸ “More Than 330 Kyrgyz Said To Be Fighting Alongside IS In Syria, Iraq,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 21, 2015 <http://www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-kyrgyzstan-fighters/26969666.html>

¹⁶⁹ The polemical nature of this debate was demonstrated in a widely circulated study by J. Heathershaw and D. W. Montgomery, *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics*, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, London, November 2014. The paper was published simultaneously in English, Russian and Chinese – highly unusual for academic publications of this nature. It led Central Asian scholars to speculate that the report was backed by foreign democracy promotion organizations, who wanted to use this issue to promote their own agenda. The dangers of radicalization are similarly downplayed by Agnieszka Pikulicka Wilczewska, “Islamic State in Kyrgyzstan: a real or imagined threat?,” *Open Democracy*, October 1, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/agnieszka-pikulicka-wilczewska/islamic-state-in-kyrgyzstan-real-or-imagined-threat>

narrative, the governments of the Central Asian states were using the fear of “radicalization” as the excuse to oppress their own populations. The basic problem in this debate was the difficulty – indeed, the impossibility – of establishing an objective assessment of the situation. Probing questions about religious beliefs, practices and doctrinal knowledge are sensitive issues in most societies and doubly so in situations where religious allegiance is already under scrutiny. Moreover, the difficulties of penetrating beyond “safe,” conventional answers are compounded if the interviewer is an outsider, and of a different (or no) faith.

These obstacles can perhaps only be overcome by establishing personal trust and understanding – a process that requires time and engagement with the socio-religious life of the community. Even then, the information that is provided may not tell the whole story. In recent years, there have been many instances in Western societies where the close relatives and friends of those who have committed acts of terrorism have been genuinely ignorant of the extent to which the culprit had been radicalized. If it is so hard to recognize such developments within one’s own circle, how much more difficult is it to identify such trends in a very different society. It is equally difficult to know how to address the problem of radicalization – no country and no society has yet devised a successful response. Few who know Central Asia well would doubt that attitudes to Islam have changed significantly over the past two decades. Extremist movements are now present and active in the region. How one assesses the influence of such groups is a subject for debate in some circles. Yet for Kyrgyzstan, as for the other Central Asian states, this is not an academic issue but a matter of national security. Given the existing economic, social and political tensions, the conflict potential should not be underestimated.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ A well-documented study of radicalized terrorist networks in Central Asia, including several lesser-known groups, is provided by the Kazakh analyst Erlan Karin, *The Soldiers of the Caliphate: The Anatomy of a Terrorist Group* (Astana: Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016). See also Aidai Masykkanova, ‘Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan is No Myth: Kyrgyzstan’s slow arc towards islamization and radicalization’, in *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/radicalization-in-kyrgyzstan-is-no-myth/> It is noteworthy that one of the terrorists who attacked Istanbul airport on June 28, 2016, was allegedly an ISIS recruit from Kyrgyzstan; see *Reuters*, June 30, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-blast-raids-idUSKCN0ZG0RM>

To summarize the points raised in this section regarding post-conflict trends within Kyrgyzstan, the swift renewal of the political process in mid-June 2010 was encouraging. However, this was a society still struggling to find an appropriate form of governance. As ideals clashed with reality, the public became increasingly disillusioned with politics and politicians. The allegations of corruption and shady deals that surrounded the 2015 parliamentary elections deepened people's distrust of the system. Prime Minister Sariev was forced out of office in April 2016, but the emerging anti-Atambayev faction refused to be silenced and there were attempts to hold major protest rallies in the south of the country as well as in Bishkek. Apparently "seditious" telephone conversations between opposition politicians were posted on the Internet; some well-known figures (including ex-ministers) were arrested, accused of trying to overthrow the government. Atambayev responded with a "surreal tirade" against them.¹⁷¹ He had previously used equally forceful language against the Kyrgyz press, whom he blamed for frightening off investors by painting such a dire picture of corruption in Kyrgyzstan that it seemed worse than an African state.¹⁷² In May 2016, distrust of the media prompted a group of parliamentary deputies (headed by members of the SDPK) to propose a bill to bolster "information security," aimed at limiting the proportion of non-local funding for news organizations and banning foreign ownership.¹⁷³

The situation was taking on an air of *déjà vu*. Individually, such incidents did not signify the existence of a serious threat to Atambayev. Taken together, however, they were an indication that, firstly, criticism of him was becoming more widespread; secondly, that he was reacting so fiercely because he was feeling the mounting pressure. To add to the sense of unease, in May, at very short notice

¹⁷¹ See "Kyrgyzstan: President Trash-Talks Opposition Following Coup Arrests," *Eurasianet.org*, May 15, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78781>; also "Three Kyrgyz politicians charged over alleged plan to overthrow government," *Asia Plus*, May 13, 2016, <http://news.tj/en/news/three-kyrgyz-politicians-charged-over-alleged-plan-overthrow-government>

¹⁷² Anna Yalovkina, "Atambayev vizit SMI v korrupcionnom imidzhe Kyrgyzstana," *Jashtar.kg*, October 27, 2014, <http://jashtar.kg/policy/21416-atambaev-vinit-smi-v-korrupcionnom-imidzhe-kyrgyzstana.html>

¹⁷³ See "Kyrgyzstan: MPs Introduce Bill to Increase Control Over Media," *Eurasianet.org*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78806>

and without explanation, he “indefinitely postponed” an official visit to Dushanbe. The purpose of this trip had been twofold: to hold talks with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, and to participate in the launch of the trans-boundary hydropower project CASA-1000.¹⁷⁴ Newly appointed Prime Minister Jeenbekov went in his stead. Overall, President Atambayev’s position was still strong and he was still determined to push ahead with reforms – but there was no room for complacency.

The Changing Geopolitical Environment

Post-2010, Kyrgyzstan’s geopolitical environment was changing. Previously, the country’s foreign relations had been dominated by the competing interests of Russia and the United States, with occasional interjections from Uzbekistan. After the conflict, there was a reconfiguration of the relative influence of these two big powers. In June 2010, the United States and Russia were both seeking new basing rights. Negotiations were disrupted by the conflict, but resumed immediately afterwards – with very different outcomes. Atambayev was conciliatory, but firm and usually more consistent than Bakiev.

Kyrgyzstan’s relations with other Central Asian states were generally positive. Trade with Kazakhstan expanded and bilateral negotiations on the delimitation of the border with Tajikistan continued, albeit haltingly and punctuated by local clashes in disputed areas. Ties with Turkmenistan were cordial, underpinned by energy cooperation (including supplies of Turkmen electricity to Kyrgyzstan, and the proposed construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan to China via Kyrgyzstan), but as of 2015 the ban on Turkmen students studying in Kyrgyzstan, imposed during the disturbances, remained in place. The relationship with Uzbekistan remained tense. In the wider geopolitical environment, the major difference was the growing importance of Asia – primarily owing to the rise of China, but also to the emergence of East Asian “middle powers” such as South Korea. Ties

¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, some Kyrgyz analysts suggested that Atambayev had decided not to go to Dushanbe because he no longer supported the CASA-1000 project. However, the visit had been planned some time in advance and it was remarkable that he waited until the very last minute before announcing his change of plan. See Anastasia Bengard, “Official visit of Kyrgyz President to Tajikistan indefinitely postponed,” *24 News Agency*, May 12, 2016 <http://www.eng.24.kg/vlast/180386-news24.html>

with South Asia and the Middle East likewise began to assume a new significance. President Atambayev responded to these developments by pursuing a foreign policy that looked beyond established relationships to form new partnerships in Asia. This “pivot to Asia” was a recognition that the world was no longer bi-polar, but multipolar. Ties with Asian states brought more investment to the country, but they also gave the Kyrgyz government a broader range of foreign policy options.

Uzbekistan

In the aftermath of the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, the Kyrgyz leadership openly expressed its gratitude for the restrained and constructive manner in which the Uzbeks had responded to the crisis. It seemed as though a new level of trust and friendship had been established between the two countries. Soon, however, long-standing disagreements and resentments resurfaced. One of the most sensitive set of issues related to border regimes. At the official level, slow but steady progress was made with the process of demarcation and delimitation (including the status of the exclaves with negotiations over possible territorial exchanges). However, small-scale local skirmishes over border violations continued. The sudden flare-up between Uzbek and Kyrgyz forces that took place in March 2016 was of a different order. It began when Uzbek civilian personnel crossed into Kyrgyz territory to carry out scheduled maintenance at the Ortotokoy reservoir, located close to the common border in the Ferghana Valley, Naryn province. There was nothing remarkable about this, except that on this occasion, the Bishkek authorities claimed that the Uzbeks had already been refused permission to go to the reservoir; consequently, the Kyrgyz border guards had the right to detain them.¹⁷⁵

By accident or design, this action coincided with the start of the spring holiday festivities, just as the Uzbek authorities, in accordance with their usual procedures, were temporarily strengthening border surveillance. Thus, on March 18, a small (40-strong) detachment of Uzbek troops was deployed along this section of

¹⁷⁵ The incident received international media coverage, reflecting the geostrategic importance of the region. For a good report on the background to these events, see “Kyrgyzstan: Uzbeks Pull Back Troops, But Questions Remain,” *Eurasianet.org*, March 26, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/77966>

the border. The Kyrgyz government immediately mobilized its own troops and called for a special session of the CSTO; road access to Uzbek exclaves in Kyrgyzstan, especially to Sokh, was temporarily blocked. This response was an extraordinary dramatization of what was a routine event. It was certainly true that relations between the two countries were sometimes strained, reflecting Bishkek's almost paranoid suspicion of Uzbekistan's supposed intention to annex southern Kyrgyzstan (despite the fact that no such moves were made in 2010). On this occasion, however, it is likely that the incident was inflated in an attempt to distract attention from the Kyrgyz government's domestic problems – as discussed above, this included alleged anti-government plots. Prime Minister Sariev was forced out of office for alleged corruption, but some of his critics accused him of secretly acknowledging that the Uzbeks had a legitimate claim to the reservoir – an assertion which was obviously denied officially.

Meanwhile, the border standoff with Uzbekistan was resolved peacefully within less than a week and talks on border delimitation were resumed. It did not prevent the Kyrgyz authorities from unilaterally taking control of other Uzbek facilities on their territory (inherited from the Soviet period), such as high voltage power lines and holiday resorts. These actions further aggravated tensions between the two states. Both sides remained on the alert in the border zone. Out of necessity, they continued to cooperate in bilateral and multilateral formats, but there was a perceptible undercurrent of distrust. President Atambayev's announcement that he might not attend the SCO fifteenth anniversary summit, due to be held in Tashkent on 23-24 June, seemed to indicate displeasure with Uzbekistan, but perhaps it also signaled nervousness about his own position. In fact, he did participate but, judging from media reports and photographs of the event, with a patent lack of enthusiasm.

United States

Looking beyond Central Asia, the first major challenge for the new Kyrgyz government was to reshape its relationship with the United States. In 2009, the Kyrgyz parliament had voted to close the U.S. base. After the overthrow of Bakiev, the Interim Government agreed that it should remain open for another year.

When Almazbek Atambayev took office in 2011, he agreed to a further extension, but set July 2014 as the final deadline for closure. One of the stated reasons for this was that the American presence in Manas might attract retaliatory attacks from militant Islamist groups – a reflection of the growing nervousness about this issue. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta visited Kyrgyzstan in March 2012, hoping to re-negotiate the contract, but there was no visible softening of the Kyrgyz position. American indignation at Bishkek's intransigence was evident in the comments of Michael McFaul, then U.S. ambassador to Russia; breaking the polite conventions of diplomacy, he publicly accused the Kremlin of "bribing Kyrgyzstan" to make it throw the U.S. military out of Central Asia.¹⁷⁶ He later apologized for his remarks, but he was only saying openly what most Western and pro-Western commentators were saying in private. Their indignation was no doubt fired by recollections of how, three years earlier, the U.S. embassy in Bishkek had skillfully "managed" Bakiev.¹⁷⁷ These accusations and allegations illustrated the highly competitive nature of Washington's relationship with Moscow. However, they also highlighted the fact that by 2012, the U.S. no longer had the same regional leverage as before.

The exodus of foreign troops from Afghanistan, which had begun in July 2011, was well underway by this time; thus, the political justification for retaining the Manas base no longer carried as much weight as before. In July 2013, the Kyrgyz parliament formally reiterated its demand for the eviction of U.S. forces from the Manas base within a year. Economically, the decision to terminate the lease was risky, since it would mean the loss of \$60 million in rent, as well as an estimated \$145 million of related payments and investments. The parliamentarians, however, were not swayed by such considerations. Accordingly, the U.S. military began to re-deploy personnel and as much equipment as possible (a considerable quantity was left behind) from Manas to an alternative base in Romania. In June

¹⁷⁶ See Tony Halpin, "US Ambassador to Moscow upsets Putin with 'Kyrgyzstan bribes' speech," *The Times*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article3429814.ece>; also Piotr Smolar, "Key U.S. Base in Central Asia Faces Closure after Kyrgyz MPs Vote," *The Guardian*, July 16, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/16/us-base-closure-kyrgyzstan-manas>

¹⁷⁷ See Joshua Kucera, "'Bakiyev Can Be Bought': U.S. Embassy Tied Rent for Kyrgyz Air Base To President's Reelection," January 5, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64797>

2014, a month before the final deadline, U.S. troops finally vacated Manas. They also withdrew from the training center in Tokmok, which now passed under the control of Kyrgyzstan's armed forces. Less than a year later, in April 2015, this base was hosting an SCO training exercise, with the participation of Russian and Chinese troops.¹⁷⁸

The manner in which American officials handled the negotiations over the Manas base revealed that they did not always appreciate the importance of local sensitivities. This was demonstrated again in 2015, when the State Department bestowed the 2014 Human Rights Defenders Award on the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani civil rights activist Azimjon Askarov (see Biographical notes, Annex 2). The decision caused huge offense in Kyrgyzstan, where Askarov was serving a life sentence for crimes allegedly committed during the clashes in 2010. As a mark of its displeasure, the Kyrgyz government lodged a formal protest and terminated the 1993 agreement on cooperation with the United States. To cancel this agreement, which had been designed to facilitate the provision of U.S. humanitarian and technical economic assistance (amounting to nearly \$2 billion since the country's independence), was a gauge of the outrage that was felt in Kyrgyzstan at the perceived insult to national pride.

Yet nothing in Kyrgyzstan was ever simple: political divisions quickly surfaced, with the pro-West camp insisting that Moscow was behind the termination of the agreement; others sought to drive a wedge between President Atambayev and recently appointed Prime Minister Sariev, accusing the latter of having acted on his own initiative and calling for him to be punished for exceeding his authority. It was impossible to predict how the situation would evolve in the long run, but the immediate priority for Bishkek and Washington was to minimize the damage to bilateral relations. As U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry pointed out when he visited Bishkek on October 31, 2015, the two countries had common interests and concerns. This was underlined during his participation in the ceremonial opening

¹⁷⁸ Joshua Kucera, "SCO Special Forces Train At U.S.-Funded Base In Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasianet.org*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73146>

of the splendid new U.S. embassy in Bishkek and the new campus for the American University of Central Asia. Not surprisingly, nationalists and pro-Russian supporters claimed that under cover of the construction works, the United States was smuggling in espionage equipment and other materials to foment an anti-government uprising. Rumors such as these reflected the deep distrust between the various factions, and likewise of the gulf between the pro-U.S. and pro-Russian camps.

However, the Kyrgyz government remained committed to improving relations with Washington. The inaugural meeting of the "U.S. plus Five Central Asian States," held in November 2015, was highly successful and regarded as an important step forward.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, by February 2016, a new U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral cooperation agreement was under consideration.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, although Bishkek still rejected any criticism of its treatment of Azimjon Askarov, there was, nevertheless, some gradual softening of the Kyrgyz position on this matter.¹⁸¹

Russia

In parallel with the American efforts to retain the Manas base, the Russians were seeking to bolster their own military presence in Kyrgyzstan. In 2010, after the overthrow of Bakiev, it was assumed by many that plans for a Russian base in southern Kyrgyzstan had been abandoned, successfully blocked by Uzbekistan's *démarche*. In fact, once the Interim Government was in place, negotiations were unobtrusively restarted.¹⁸² However, there were no immediate results. During President Putin's visit to Bishkek in September 2012, agreements were concluded to strengthen economic and military cooperation. Moscow agreed to a phased

¹⁷⁹ See U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation by the Five Countries of Central Asia and The United States of America," November 1, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249050.htm>

¹⁸⁰ "Kyrgyzstan and the United States to work out new cooperation agreement," *24 News Agency*, February 10, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/politic/179233-news24.html>

¹⁸¹ "Supreme Court Signals Possible Shift on Askarov," *Eurasianet.org*, April 25, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78476>

¹⁸² Andrew Osborn and Richard Orange, "Russia plans second military base in Kyrgyzstan," *The Telegraph*, June 25, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kyrgyzstan/7852226/Russia-plans-second-military-base-in-Kyrgyzstan.html>

cancellation of the Kyrgyz debt (amounting to some \$500 million). In return, Russia was allowed to retain use of its military facilities until 2032; as in the 2009 agreement discussed above, this included the Kant airbase and three other facilities.

From the start of his term in office in 2011, Atambayev had stressed that Russia was a “strategic partner” – but it was by no means a smooth relationship. There were complaints that Moscow was seriously in arrears with rent payments for Kant. Consequently, in 2013, the agreement governing use of this facility was renegotiated, on terms that were much more favorable to Bishkek; additionally, Russia pledged to supply weapons and other military equipment worth over \$1 billion, as part of a bilateral armed forces assistance program. Russian Gazprom’s acquisition of Kyrgyzstan’s national gas network for the nugatory sum of one dollar was another contentious issue. Public anger was only appeased when it was announced that Gazprom had agreed to assume the company’s debts (estimated at \$40 million) and undertook to invest over \$500 million to upgrade the network’s infrastructure.

Plans to establish a Russian military facility in Osh appeared to have been dropped. Indeed, in 2012 President Atambayev had openly stated that he did not see the necessity for such a base. Yet in July 2015, it was officially announced that, in view of heightened instability in the region, Bishkek had “invited” Russia to install a base in the south (presumably in Osh). It was stressed that although this was to be a long-term agreement, the arrangement was temporary and would eventually be terminated. It was a sign of the changing times that the response from Tashkent was now very different to what it had been in August 2009. On that occasion, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs had immediately published a strong statement listing its objections to the establishment of a CSTO/Russian base in southern Kyrgyzstan. In 2015, by contrast, Tashkent refrained from public comment.

This was not surprising, as there had been a marked improvement in Uzbek-Russian relations since then. In June 2012, the two states had concluded a Strategic Partnership Enhancement Declaration which, building upon the 2004 and 2005

cooperation treaties, had enlarged the scope of cooperation and strengthened bilateral defense commitments. This rapprochement was evident in the cordiality and mutual respect that characterized President Putin's visit to Uzbekistan in December 2014. One of the outcomes was the intergovernmental agreement on deepening economic cooperation, which outlined priority areas for 2015-2019. Other important developments included Moscow's decision to cancel over \$860 million of Uzbek debt, in return for Tashkent renouncing its claim to a share of the Soviet-era "Diamond Fund" (State Fund of Precious Stones, established in 1922); in the commercial sphere, Russian LUKOIL announced that it would be making major investments in Uzbek energy projects.¹⁸³

During the Russian leader's visit, the two presidents discussed the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. President Karimov stressed that Russia had a vital role to play in stabilizing Afghanistan, a view that he reiterated even more strongly when he made an official visit to Moscow in April 2016. There was, however, a difference of opinion between the two leaders on the question of modalities: President Putin regarded the SCO (and thus the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, headquartered in Tashkent) as an appropriate vehicle for this engagement, while President Karimov was adamant that the SCO should not participate in such activities.¹⁸⁴ This was in keeping with Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Concept (adopted in September 2012), which banned membership of any military bloc. If the SCO were to intervene in the conflict in Afghanistan it would risk becoming embroiled in combat operations; this would lead to the militarization of the organization, and consequently, Uzbekistan would have to annul its membership – a far from desirable outcome.

These objections did not apply to the bilateral agreement between Moscow and Bishkek to deploy Russian troops in southern Kyrgyzstan. The strategic context

¹⁸³ See "Uzbekistan, Russia to Cement Strategic Partnership," *Uzbek National News Agency*, December 11, 2014, <http://uza.uz/en/politics/uzbekistan-russia-to-cement-strategic-partnership-11-12-2014>; also The Kremlin Official website, The President of the Russian Federation, "Rossiysko-uzbekistanskiye peregovory," December 10, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47212>

¹⁸⁴ Joshua Kucera, After Putin-Karimov Meeting, Disagreements On Afghanistan Remain," *Eurasianet.org*, April 26, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78511>; also "Uzbek President Says Russia Should Take Part In Afghan Peace Talks," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 3, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-karimov-russia-afghan-peace-talks/27699545.html?ltflags=mailer>

was the resurgence of the Taliban and growing ISIS involvement in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's southern border was fast becoming the frontline in this conflict.¹⁸⁵ NATO had formally ended combat operations on December 28, 2014; on January 1, 2015, a much smaller, non-combat mission ("Resolute Support") was launched to provide training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, there were fears that the United States was losing interest in Central Asian security.¹⁸⁷ It also seemed as though Washington no longer regarded the Central Asian states as essential components in neighborhood security arrangements. This was highlighted by the launch, in January 2016, of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁸ In many ways, it resembled Uzbekistan's "Six plus Three" proposal with the significant difference that the new body did not include either the Central Asians or Russia and Iran. This encouraged regional states to pursue their own policies, including informal negotiations with the Taliban.

It was against this background that some Uzbek officials privately suggested that, from their perspective, the proposed Russian base was the best available option to strengthen regional stability.¹⁸⁹ The worry now, however, was not that the Russians would stay, but that they would be so crippled by the ongoing economic

¹⁸⁵ See Bruce Pannier, "A Knock At Uzbekistan's Southern Door," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-taliban-afghanistan-termez-rocket-fire/27715404.html>

¹⁸⁶ At the 2012 Chicago Summit, NATO and its partners agreed to provide financial support for the Afghan forces until the end of 2017, possibly to 2020. In 2015, after the combat mission had ended, there were still some 9,800 U.S. forces in Afghanistan and it was likely that they would remain there for the immediate future (leaving open the possibility that troop numbers could be boosted rapidly, if needed). See "Standing by Afghanistan: the strategic choice," *NATO Review*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/afghanistan-defense-nato-support/EN/>

¹⁸⁷ From 2012 onwards, there had been a considerable decline in U.S. assistance for anti-drug projects in Central Asia, likewise in funding from the Pentagon and other branches of the Executive for "peace and security" programs. George Voloshin, "US Downsizes Military Ties With Central Asia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* II, no. 138, July 29, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42682&cHash=1e5e3a2f4d2c477687e0ed50a8310875#.VyiHOYQrKJA. This did not, however, mean that Washington had completely abandoned Central Asia – there was still substantial military cooperation (see report by Catherine Putz, "Does CENTCOM Care About Central Asia?," *The Diplomat*, April 2, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/does-centcom-care-about-central-asia/>)

¹⁸⁸ See statement of the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Joint Press Release of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation," January 11, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/01/251105.htm>

¹⁸⁹ Confidential discussions with senior Uzbek political analysts in 2015-16; such views became increasingly common after President Karimov's visit to Moscow in April 2016, discussed above. For growing

crisis (the fall in the price of oil, Western sanctions against Russia and so on), that they would be unable to implement the promised deployment. In Kyrgyzstan, there were already complaints that Russian state and private sector projects were not being realized as agreed. For example, the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Bank, created in 2015, was criticized for its reluctance to support local enterprises. There was also frustration over delays in Russian investment in two key power plants (the Upper Naryn and the Kambar-Ata-1 hydropower plants). Russian and Kyrgyz partners blamed each other for the lack of progress, but in January 2016, the Kyrgyz parliament decided to terminate these deals and to seek new partners in China. Meanwhile, in the background, historical grievances were resurfacing: 2016 marked the centenary of the Tsarist government's brutal suppression of the Central Asian revolt, in which many Kyrgyz were killed; thousands fled to China in a mass exodus known as *Urkun* ("the Exodus"). Some nationalists regarded this as genocide and wanted to use the commemoration ceremonies, scheduled for August 2016, as an excuse to voice anti-Russian sentiments.¹⁹⁰

Russian-Uzbek security cooperation, see also "Uzbekistan Would 'Cooperate With Russia' To Combat Domestic Security Threat By IS," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-islamic-state-cooperation-russia/26952999.html>; and Raj Kumar Sharma, "Will Afghan instability inundate Central Asian republics?," *Asian Review*, May 25, 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Viewpoints/Raj-Kumar-Sharma-Will-Afghan-instability-inundate-Central-Asian-republics>. Some Western analysts still doubted whether the Uzbeks were really prepared to countenance a Russian/CSTO base in southern Kyrgyzstan. However, Tashkent was well aware that it did not have any jurisdiction over its neighbor's territory and would thus be unable to prevent such a deployment – even if had it wished to do so, which was not evident from public statements on this issue.

¹⁹⁰ In August 1916, Russia was suffering terrible losses in the war with Germany. The Tsarist government's attempt to introduce military conscription in Central Asia provoked a rebellion, particularly among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. The episode was glossed over during the Soviet period but after independence came to be seen by some historians as a liberation struggle. See further Chris Rickleton, "Kyrgyzstan Risks Riling Russia with Tribute to Historical Tragedy," *Eurasianet.org*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73961>; also Bruce Pannier, "Remembering The Great Urkun 100 Years Later," *Eurasianet.org*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78571>. Radio Azattyk, the Kyrgyz branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, set up a website documenting the events of 2016, <http://rus.azattyk.org/section/national-uprising/5246.html>. It is worth noting that there were similar uprisings in other parts of the colonial world at this time, likewise brutally suppressed. Interpretations of these events changed with time, as did attitudes to commemorating them. See, for example, debates in Ireland as to how to mark the 1916 Easter Rising against the British government – a topic as emotionally charged and as historically controversial as the uprising in Central Asia. See also attitudes in the Middle East to the 1916 Arab Revolt, and in Turkey to the Armenian tragedy.

Nevertheless, despite these rumblings of discontent, the mood in Kyrgyzstan was tilting towards Russia. This was not surprising given that over half-a-million Kyrgyz citizens were working there at this time.¹⁹¹ The parliamentary elections in October 2015, as anticipated, produced a largely pro-Russian government, indicating that a substantial majority of the population favored close ties with Moscow. It was also in line with the re-emergence of more conservative social attitudes in Kyrgyzstan, as evidenced by the rise in extreme expressions of homophobia and transphobia.¹⁹² Western influence was blamed for encouraging “deviant” behavior. Similar trends were to be observed in Russia and in other Central Asian states; they were also in line with the teachings of radical Islamist groups. It was against this background that there was strong popular support for the introduction of Russian-style anti-gay legislation, and scrutiny of foreign-funded NGOs. After lengthy debate, the so-called “foreign agents” bill was rejected.¹⁹³ The “anti-gay” bill was still under discussion at the time of writing, but homophobic attacks were rising.¹⁹⁴

Kyrgyzstan’s relations with Russia were strengthened by Kyrgyzstan’s entry into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in August 2015. Despite some last minute wavering in Bishkek (and doubts in Moscow about the stability of the Kyrgyz economy), joining the EEU was the logical outcome of Kyrgyzstan’s participation

¹⁹¹ “About 544,000 Kyrgyz citizens work in Russia as of today,” *24 News Agency*, February 16, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/evraziasoyuz/179324-news24.html>

¹⁹² The most notorious incident was a Kyrgyz parliamentarian’s call for the public execution of homosexuals, “Kyrgyzstan MP Calls For Public Extermination Of All Homosexuals: VIDEO,” *Towleroad*, January 9, 2015, <http://www.towleroad.com/2015/01/kyrgystan-mp-calls-for-extermiation-of-homosexuals-video/>

¹⁹³ The bill requiring NGO organizations that received money from abroad to register as “foreign agents” had popular support, but in May 2016, under considerable pressure from international donors and NGOs, it was rejected by parliament (46 votes for, 65 against) in the form in which it was presented. See report by Reid Standish, “NGOs Avert Russian-Inspired Restrictions in Central Asia’s Only Democracy,” *Foreign Policy*, May 12, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/12/ngos-avert-russian-inspired-restrictions-in-central-asias-only-democracy-kyrgyzstan-foreign-agents/>; also “Parliament of Kyrgyzstan rejects bill on foreign non-profit organizations,” *AKIPress*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.akipress.com/news:576990/>

¹⁹⁴ See Stephen Snyder, “Russian-style anti-gay legislation has inspired homophobic attacks in Kyrgyzstan,” *PRI*, May 11, 2016, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-05-11/russian-style-anti-gay-legislation-has-inspired-homophobic-attacks-kyrgyzstan>. Accusations that such attacks were “Russian-inspired” were rooted in an idealized vision of a tolerant, democratic Kyrgyzstan; the growing influence of puritanical, anti-Western Islamist groups was ignored.

in earlier stages of the project.¹⁹⁵ This body, which already encompassed Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, aimed to facilitate the movement of people, goods, capital and services between member states. There were some who believed that membership of the EEU would harm Kyrgyzstan's economy and infringe its political independence. It certainly curbed its lucrative trade with China. Others welcomed the benefits of integration, arguing that it would boost trade and investment, and create new job opportunities. However, this was a long-term project and it was premature to rush to judgment so soon after it had been launched. On the political level, membership of the EEU helped to improve Kyrgyzstan's ties with the other members. In particular, it facilitated the resumption of diplomatic relations with Belarus, which had been compromised when Minsk gave asylum to ex-President Bakiev and family. The Kyrgyz government continued to demand the extradition of Kurmanbek Bakiev and his brother, Janybek (former head of the State Security Service), but this was no longer the main issue on the bilateral agenda.

Bishkek's Pivot to Asia

Relations with the European Union, especially with Germany, were important for Bishkek, likewise its links with Turkey. However, post-2010 the Kyrgyz government began to consolidate ties with Asian states. It was a mutually beneficial process: it allowed Bishkek to expand its range of foreign policy options, and at the same time offered these partners access to a strategic location in the heart of Eurasia; it also gave them access to Kyrgyzstan's reserves of rare metals, important for nuclear and electronics industries. Competition for these benefits meant that Kyrgyzstan became the focus of a new set of rivalries – between China and other regional states – which, though less openly confrontational than relations between the United States and Russia, nonetheless required careful balancing. The

¹⁹⁵ In 1996, Kyrgyzstan became one of the signatories of the "Quadripartite Treaty" between Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, avowedly the first stage towards closer integration and the eventual formation of a customs union; Tajikistan joined the body in 1998. In October 2000, this became the Eurasian Economic Community, the forerunner of the EEU. However, neither Kyrgyzstan nor Tajikistan joined the Customs Union when it was launched in 2010.

broader context for these developments was the region-wide rise of a sense of a shared Asian/Eurasian identity.

The key player was, without question, China. As soon as a new government had been installed in Bishkek, China began to strengthen its relations with Kyrgyzstan. President Atambayev made his first official visit to Beijing in 2012. In September the following year, Bishkek hosted the annual summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. President Xi Jinping used the occasion to set out his vision for regional economic cooperation and cross-border infrastructure development, encapsulated in the “One Belt One Road” Initiative. He also called for closer cooperation on security issues, especially in the fight against the “three evils” of terrorism, extremism and separatism. These ideas were subsequently institutionalized with an explicitly “Asian” slant. In May 2014, at the summit meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia,¹⁹⁶ President Xi proposed the creation of a multilateral Asian security structure to enable “Asian problems to be solved by Asians”; a few months later the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was launched to support regional connectivity projects. China’s relationship with Kyrgyzstan developed within this strategic framework. In 2012, President Xi offered the Kyrgyz government credits of over \$3 billion, much of which was earmarked for construction of a 225 km-long gas pipeline from Kyrgyzstan to China – the so-called D Branch of the network of pipes carrying gas from Turkmenistan to China. This project remained under discussion but as of 2016, implementation had been indefinitely postponed, for financial reasons as well as the political concerns of Central Asian partners. Nevertheless, Chinese investment in Kyrgyzstan’s mining industry was increased, likewise in manufacturing plants. There were also plans to relocate selected production facilities from China to Kyrgyzstan. These proposals, part of a comprehensive cooperation program, were welcomed by some, but opposed by those who

¹⁹⁶ The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) was developed out of a proposal put forward by Kazakh President Nazarbayev in 1992; conceived as an Asian counterpart to the OSCE, CICA’s first summit meeting was held in 2002. By 2014, it had 26 member states (including Kyrgyzstan), 7 observer states and 4 observer organizations, <http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?lang=1>

feared that an influx of Chinese workers would harm the country's economy and infringe its independence.¹⁹⁷

The most ambitious joint project was the construction of a railway from China to Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan. This was to be part of a major transport corridor, stretching from China to the Gulf via Central Asia and Iran. The idea had first been proposed some ten years previously, but at that time, Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations were too tense for it to be feasible. By 2015, however, Tashkent was eager to enhance connectivity with China and to be part of this transregional artery. In Kyrgyzstan, by contrast, the project was not universally welcomed. Firstly, it was argued, the economic advantages of the rail link would be heavily weighted in favor of China and Uzbekistan, while Kyrgyzstan would receive little more than meager transit fees. Secondly, the line would only benefit the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, since the route would run from Kashgar to Kara-Suu, then cross the border into Uzbekistan to reach Andijan. Consequently, all the associated trade and employment opportunities would be concentrated in this area. This would encourage closer cross-border links between southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, deepening divisions between the north and south of the country and undermining national unity.¹⁹⁸

As usual, some believed that these arguments had been dreamt up by Moscow to prevent Kyrgyzstan escaping from its sphere of influence. Yet according to informed Chinese sources, the real obstacle was the Kyrgyz government. The business plan proposed by Beijing in 2012 called for concessions to develop four mineral deposits in order to fund the project. Bishkek rejected this plan.¹⁹⁹ One of the reasons for this was that the Kyrgyz authorities hoped to tie the construction of

¹⁹⁷ See assessment by Bakyt Ibraimov, "Kyrgyz Worried about Unrestricted Travel from China," *Silk Road Reporters*, December 22, 2015, <http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2015/12/22/kyrgyz-worried-about-unrestricted-travel-from-china/>

¹⁹⁸ Merim Ibrayeva, "Pluses and minuses of China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway construction," *Kabar*, January 20, 2016, <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/analytics/full/3192>; also Catherin Putz, "Can China Fix Central Asia's Soviet Rail Legacy?," *The Diplomat*, January 14, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/can-china-fix-central-asias-soviet-rail-legacy/>

¹⁹⁹ See "Kyrgyzstan not to build China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway in exchange for its fields," *Trend News Agency*, April 9, 2012, <http://en.trend.az/business/economy/2012329.html>; also Myles G. Smith "China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway project Brings Political Risks," *CACI Analyst*, July 3, 2012.

the railway to the rehabilitation of the Bishkek-Osh road. This critical north-south highway had been badly maintained in recent years and in its present state, could not be used as a regional artery. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) had initiated remedial work on the road in 1994; however, despite technical and financial assistance from several international development agencies, progress was slow and by 2012 had not been completed.²⁰⁰ In 2014, the Eurasian Development Bank (under the aegis of the Eurasian Economic Union) agreed to co-finance Phase IV of the Bishkek-Osh road rehabilitation program in conjunction with the ADB.²⁰¹ The Chinese were prepared to help fund road projects that connected with the Chinese network (e.g. via Torugart), but were reluctant to underwrite the Bishkek-Osh road, which they regarded as an internal EEU/Kyrgyz highway.²⁰² Meanwhile, Beijing was developing other east-west routes through Kazakhstan (including a possible Urumqi-Almaty-Tashkent link), and north-south routes through Pakistan. Kyrgyzstan was an important element in the projected networks, but it did not have the strategic importance that the American and Russian bases had possessed. Thus, by procrastinating, the Kyrgyz government risked isolating the country from emerging regional transport corridors.

India could not compete with China in terms of investment, but it soon emerged as a strong partner in the military-security sphere. This was not an entirely new relationship, since the Indian navy had started to acquire equipment from Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s, but cooperation was stepped up after Minister of Defense A.K. Antony's visit to Bishkek in July 2011. The stated objective was the joint fight against terrorism and extremism. India undertook to provide training for the Kyrgyz armed forces and to collaborate in joint military research and development projects. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kyrgyzstan in 2015, it was agreed that in addition to bilateral economic and cultural projects, military activities should also be expanded. The "Khanjar 2015" joint exercises held that year

²⁰⁰ For project evaluation see, http://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2008_KYR-P3_4.pdf

²⁰¹ The preliminary agreement was signed in 2012; the formal agreement took two years to negotiate, see: http://efsd.eabr.org/e/projects_acf_e/Bishkek-Osh/

²⁰² Author's discussions with senior Chinese analysts in 2015, during a "Silk Roads" conference in Xian. Beijing's focus on its own priorities was evident in other cooperative projects.

were deemed to have been so successful that they were slated to become an annual event, paralleling similar exercises with the CSTO and SCO troops.

The Indians were also eager to gain control of the torpedo test range at Issyk Kul, previously used by the Russians; likewise, they wanted to take over the adjacent Dastan torpedo plant, which produced the Russian navy's most advanced high-speed supercavitating Shkval torpedo. In 2009, as part of the debt-for-assets swap agreed with Bakiev (see above), Moscow had acquired a large stake in the Dastan plant. However, this deal was called into question after Bakiev's fall. Negotiations were restarted under Atambayev, but by 2015 appeared to have been abandoned, thereby opening the way for India to take control of the plant.²⁰³ Such a move, along with closer military cooperation, strengthened India's presence in the region. These developments, however, were not so much a challenge to Russia, but a way of countering China's influence in the region. Similarly, India's links with Kyrgyzstan provided symmetry with Pakistan's burgeoning military and economic cooperation with neighboring Tajikistan.

Japan also started to revitalize its involvement with Kyrgyzstan at this time. In the 1990s, Japan had been among the earliest foreign countries to engage with Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan, although one of the smallest and poorest states in Central Asia, soon became a favored partner for Tokyo, since it was regarded as the most open and democratically-minded state in the region. Senior Japanese officials visited Kyrgyzstan in 1992. The following year, President Akayev made the first of several visits to Tokyo. Strong personal ties were established between officials of the two countries; the expertise of Japanese economists was especially welcome (Professor Tatsuo Kaneda was Akayev's economic advisor for four years). By 1994, Japan was the largest individual donor of overseas development aid to Kyrgyzstan. Training programs and joint cultural projects further enhanced these ties.²⁰⁴ In 1997, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto launched his "Eurasian

²⁰³ See: Joshua Kucera, "Russian-Kyrgyz Negotiations Over Torpedo Plant Break Down," *Eurasianet.org*, February 20, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/72191>

²⁰⁴ See further Reinhard Drifte, "Japan's Eurasian Diplomacy: Power Politics, Resource Diplomacy or Romanticism?," in *The Caspian: Politics, Energy, Security*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 278-94; also Christopher Len et. Al., eds., *Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy: Paving the*

Diplomacy” and the closely linked “Silk Road Diplomacy.” This was widely seen as Tokyo’s attempt to counteract the growing influence of India, and more especially of China, in Central Asia. Moreover, it complemented other areas of Japan’s foreign policy (its standing in the United Nations, its position in East Asia, its relationship with the U.S. and other such considerations). This policy was characterized as “Open-minded Asianism” – in other words, it rejected, by implication, the Chinese concept of “Asia” as a closed, exclusive zone of influence.²⁰⁵ The Japanese stance chimed with President Akayev’s own vision, as set out in his “Silk Road Doctrine,” published in 1999.

The friendly tenor of this relationship was abruptly disturbed by the kidnapping of Japanese geologists in the Batken region in 1999 (see above). Although it was not stated publicly, it is likely that they were prospecting for rare earths. China was the main global producer of these minerals and in a prudent attempt to diversify supplies for its key high-tech industries, Tokyo was seeking other possible partners. However, the Batken episode revealed the practical dangers of working in this region. Technical aid to Kyrgyzstan was immediately suspended and direct Japanese engagement in the country was reduced. Japan continued to work with other Central Asian states, however, and in 2004 established the multilateral “Central Asia Plus Japan” dialogue, in which Kyrgyzstan participated. President Bakiev visited Tokyo in 2007, but the internal situation in Kyrgyzstan was too difficult for there to be much possibility of closer cooperation at that time.

After 2010, a number of Kyrgyz ministers visited Japan, seeking investment and technical cooperation from the public as well as the private sector. The car manufacturer Toyota opened its first office in Kyrgyzstan in 2012; Japanese mining companies also hoped to secure contracts to exploit Kyrgyzstan’s rare earths. President Atambayev raised the relationship to a new level when he made an official visit to Tokyo in 2013. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a reciprocal visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2015, an event that he described as “a landmark in the history of

Road Ahead (Washington D.C. and Stockholm, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008).

²⁰⁵ Uyama Tomohiko, “Japan’s Diplomacy towards Central Asia in the Context of Japan’s Asian Diplomacy and Japan-U.S. Relations,” in *Japan’s Silk Road Diplomacy: Paving the Road Ahead*, 101-20, esp. 116-18.

relations between the two countries.” The Japanese premier was accompanied by a delegation that included the heads of 36 major private companies. The two sides issued a joint statement on bilateral solidarity and the partnership of democracies, vowing to strengthen cooperation in politics and economics as well as in human and cultural interactions. They also agreed to work together to upgrade Kyrgyzstan’s transport infrastructure, specifically highlighting “roads of international importance” (presumably alluding to the Bishkek-Osh highway) and the modernization of the Manas international airport.

In tandem with Kyrgyzstan’s relations with Japan, the Republic of Korea was also developing its ties with Kyrgyzstan. In November 2007, Seoul organized the first Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum. All the Central Asian states attended and it became an annual event, hosted in turn by the participating nations. There were some 300,000 Koreans in Central Asia (victims of Soviet-era deportations). The majority lived in Uzbekistan (close on 200,000) and in Kazakhstan (just over 100,000), hence these states were initially the focus of Seoul’s attention. Engagement in Kyrgyzstan (home to around 19,000 Koreans) was at first limited to small-scale development projects; bilateral trade in 2008 stood at a mere \$3 million.

This changed dramatically in 2011, when the trade turnover leapt to \$142 million. The reason for this was not the situation in Kyrgyzstan – though it certainly helped that by this time peace and stability had been restored – but a crisis in the global supply chain of rare earths. These minerals have unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties and are essential components in many electronic, optical and magnetic applications. For decades, China had dominated the international market in rare earths, producing over 90 per cent of world supplies. In 2010, though, Beijing suddenly decided to reduce its rare earth exports from 29,000 tons to 8,000 tons.²⁰⁶ This created near panic in countries such as South Korea and Japan, which had high-tech industries that could not function without these minerals. New suppliers were urgently needed. Kyrgyzstan was seen as a potential source: it had important deposits of rare earths, but they had been not

²⁰⁶ Peter Foster, “Rare Earths: Why China is Cutting Exports Crucial to Western Technologies,” *The Telegraph*, March 19, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/8385189/Rare-earths-why-China-is-cutting-exports-crucial-to-Western-technologies.html>

been developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Seoul immediately began to cultivate its relationship with Bishkek and in January 2011, announced that it would start to prospect for rare earths there.²⁰⁷ Bilateral trade increased rapidly, predominantly owing to Kyrgyz imports of heavy electrical equipment and machinery from South Korea.

In October 2013, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye launched her “Eurasia Initiative.” Under the slogan “one continent, creative continent, and peaceful continent,” the project envisaged a unified system of transport, energy, and trade networks stretching across the Eurasian landmass. Seoul did not seek to compete with the Chinese or the Russian Eurasian projects but to interact with them and to “fill in the gaps.” The geopolitical goal was to avoid being trapped in a strategic competition between the United States and China: the focus on “Eurasia” gave Seoul more space to maneuver. Central Asia, located between Russia, China and India, was an integral part of this vision. President Atambayev welcomed the Korean initiative. He had first visited Seoul in 2007; he returned in November 2013, to take part in the Kyrgyzstan-Korean investment forum. Documents relating to economic cooperation, expansion and protection of investment were signed. Agreement was also reached on the reduction and restructuring of Kyrgyz debt to South Korea, incurred during the Akayev period. Both sides aimed to expand business ties.

In the Middle East, too, friendly relations were cemented. A notable development was the improvement in the relationship with Iran. The U.S. presence in Manas had been seen as a threat in Tehran and it was not until it was confirmed that the United States would vacate the base that Iran sought to develop cooperation with Kyrgyzstan.²⁰⁸ In September 2015, Atambayev cancelled his scheduled visit to New York, where he was due to attend the UN General Assembly, in order to travel to Tehran. He was warmly greeted by President Rouhani, who publicly referred to the closure of the Manas base and spoke approvingly of Kyrgyzstan’s

²⁰⁷ Balbina Hwang, “A New Horizon in South Korea-Central Asia Relations,” *Korea Compass*, December 2012, http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/kei_koreacompass_template_balbinahwang.pdf

²⁰⁸ See “Kyrgyzstan Terminated Military Base Deal with US over Iran’s Concerns: Envoy,” *Tasnim News Agency*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/04/13/1047966/kyrgyzstan-terminated-military-base-deal-with-us-over-iran-s-concerns-envoy>

adoption of an independent policy. High-level ministerial meetings had already started in 2012; Iran had expressed willingness to invest over \$1 billion in short-term projects and more than \$10 billion in long-term projects in Kyrgyzstan. After the lifting of UN sanctions against Iran in January 2016, a number of deals were concluded. The main areas of common interest were energy supplies, engineering projects and the development of transcontinental transport corridors, including arteries from China via Kyrgyzstan to the Gulf. Also, as with Kyrgyzstan's other regional partners, one of the key issues was the common fight against terrorism.

New links were gradually being forged with the Arab world, notably with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The most proactive partners were the Qataris. In February 2012, a large Qatari delegation visited Bishkek and held exploratory discussions on investment and cooperation in such sectors as agriculture, mining and energy supplies. The Qataris proposed the formation of a joint Kyrgyz-Qatari investment fund, with capital of at least \$100 million. Negotiations gathered momentum in September 2015, when high-ranking Qatari officials arrived in Bishkek for more focused negotiations on potential joint projects. In December that year, President Atambayev made a working visit to Doha, where he had a meeting with the Emir. Saudi Arabia, too, was showing interest in cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and the chambers of commerce established a Kyrgyz-Saudi business forum. The Saudi authorities were already providing support for some social projects, such as the construction and renovation of schools, but both sides were eager to expand the cooperation "in all directions," including the fight against terrorism and organized crime. In January 2016, a delegation from Kyrgyzstan visited Saudi Arabia for meetings with senior Saudi figures. Unusually, the leader of the Kyrgyz delegation, parliamentary speaker Asylbek Jeenbekov (brother of the next prime minister), commented that there was full parlia-

mentary support for Saudi-Kyrgyz cooperation; this was borne out by the composition of the Kyrgyz the delegation, which included representatives from all the major parties.²⁰⁹

Bishkek's "pivot to Asia" was significant, but it was still largely aspirational. Apart from China and to some extent India, Kyrgyzstan's relations with other Asian states were at a relatively early stage of development. Moreover, all these states, to a greater or lesser extent, were suffering from the effects of the global recession, with the result that economic growth was slowing down throughout the region. However, these were long-term trends and the projects that were envisaged would be realized only gradually. The construction of transcontinental transport networks was seen as crucial preparation for the anticipated growth in trade and economic cooperation in the future. The extent to which Kyrgyzstan would be able to participate in these projects depended on its ability to overcome internal divisions, political squabbles, and occasional xenophobic outbursts. In general, Asian partners were not greatly encumbered by ideological baggage; hence, they tended to drive tougher bargains than their Western counterparts. They were also more pragmatic, focused on practical results and eager to maximize returns on their investments – the sooner the better – and hence less tolerant of delays. For the Kyrgyz, this introduced a new, and at times uncomfortable, dynamic into working relationships. This, too, was part of a long-term process of adaptation and mutual accommodation.

²⁰⁹ "Parliament ready to support economic cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Saudi Arabia," *24 News Agency*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/parliament/178886-news24.html>

2010: A Turning Point – or Not?

The way in which the events of 2010 are assessed has changed with time. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, there was little expectation that the situation in Kyrgyzstan, or indeed, in Central Asia as whole, could be stabilized. Reports published at the time spoke of the region as a “tinderbox” about to explode.²¹⁰ These gloomy prognoses reflected the very real problems that Kyrgyzstan faced. Against this background, the peaceful conduct of the June 2010 referendum was an extraordinary achievement; so, too, were the parliamentary elections held in 2010, and the presidential election in 2011. As individuals, Presidents Otunbayeva and Atambayev “broke the mold” of Kyrgyz politics, reaching beyond their natural constituencies in the north to attract substantial support in the south.²¹¹ Moreover, during their tenure neither was openly accused of abuse of office, nepotism, or other forms of corruption. President Otunbayeva left office at the end of her appointed term, in accordance with constitutional procedures, and there was every expectation that President Atambayev would do the same in 2017. All of this was in marked contrast to the record of the first two presidents. To this extent, the constitutional reforms introduced in 2010 were a success.

Yet this was only one aspect of the political system. The redrafting of the constitution had been carried out in haste and the new version created as many prob-

²¹⁰ For example, Charles Recknagel, “Ferghana Valley: A Tinderbox for Violence,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 17, 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/Why_Is_The_Ferghana_Valley_A_Tinderbox_For_Violence/2074849.html; also Louise Arbour, “Kyrgyzstan: the Void in Asia’s Heart,” *The Guardian*, August 25, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/25/kyrgyzstan-implosion-central-asia-threat>; and Anna Matveeva, “Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism,” LSE Development Studies Institute, *Crisis States Working Papers Series* no.2, September (2010).

²¹¹ For an assessment of regional voting patterns in the 2011 presidential election, see Elmira Satybaldieva, “The Kyrgyzstani Presidential Elections: Atambaev’s Challenges,” *EUCAM Commentary* no. 21, November (2011).

lems as it solved. The amendments were aimed at creating a more equitable balance between the power of the president and that of parliament. However, in a situation in which the political arena was regarded as the place where personal power and financial gain could be acquired, enhancing parliamentary power merely created more opportunities for corruption. As described above, this produced a chaotic environment in which it was virtually impossible to have constructive parliamentary debates, orderly decision-making and long-term planning. In other words, the government was unable to function effectively. This prompted calls for further constitutional change.

Some, including Roza Otunbayeva, firmly believed that if the parliamentary system was strengthened, a new political culture would automatically emerge and that people would vote for ideas and programs, not for individuals. Moreover, they argued, a parliamentary system would overcome such negative phenomena as regionalism, "tribalism" and the accumulation of power and wealth by a single clique, as had happened under Akayev and Bakiev. Others rejected such arguments. As one political leader put it: "we want to have a strong presidential power. We are not mature enough to have a parliamentary form of government. That form of government does not meet the requirements of our time." In the words of another: "Kyrgyzstan is not ready for parliamentarianism. The most important thing in a parliamentary form [of government] is not the number of parties but the level of their culture."²¹²

President Atambayev was one of those who advocated a shift from the mixed, "half-way house" system that the 2010 constitution had instituted to a full parliamentary system.²¹³ However, his motives were not necessarily disinterested. Under the 2010 constitutional arrangements, he would have to relinquish his post in 2017 and was barred from standing ever again. Under a fully parliamentary system, the majority party would have a leading role. Since that would very likely

²¹² Omurbek Suvanaliev and Ednan Karabayev respectively, quoted by Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan*, 105.

²¹³ "Kyrgyzstan: President Supports Change to Constitution," *Eurasianet.org*, November 6, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75936>

be his own SDPK, he would continue to have influence even after he had left office. The new constitution specified that no changes could be introduced for ten years from the time of its adoption. An attempt to challenge this provision was made in 2015, when a controversial “test case” proposal was put forward to widen the powers of the central government; the motion was dropped after protests from local groups as well as international organizations. However, it was clear that this was merely a tactical retreat: the process of amending the 2010 constitution had been delayed, but not abandoned.²¹⁴ Once the precedent had been established, other changes could follow, including amendments that would allow presidential incumbents to retain their position – or return to office repeatedly.

These debates focused on how power should be divided up, not on the basic tasks of government – delivering policies that would serve the common good. This disconnect was reflected in people’s frustration that politicians were not addressing their urgent concerns – rising prices, unemployment, increases in electricity tariffs and so on – yet at the same time, they were proud of Kyrgyzstan’s efforts to build a democratic state. The fact that the system, as implemented, was dysfunctional was less important than their belief in the ideology. Steadfast devotion to this ideology gave them a sense of moral superiority: their Central Asian neighbors might be more richly endowed with natural resources but they, the Kyrgyz, were “better” because their political system was more enlightened, more progressive – altogether of a moral higher order.

International donor agencies and Western analysts fostered this image, depicting Kyrgyzstan as a “beacon” of democracy in a benighted region. The label was enthusiastically embraced by the pro-Western camp in Kyrgyzstan, who insisted that what mattered was to have the right concept. If, in the pursuit of this goal, there was civil disorder and occasional conflict, it was unfortunate but unavoidable – that was the price of progress.²¹⁵ Thus, there were two very different reali-

²¹⁴ See report on “Kyrgyz Constitutional Change Delayed, Not Dropped,” July 3, 2015, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-constitutional-change-delayed-not>; also “Kyrgyzstan: Constitutional Changes Afoot?,” *Eurasianet.org*, April 20, 2016, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/78391>

²¹⁵ These comments are based on the author’s discussions with Kyrgyz academics and government officials, particularly in 2014-2015.

ties: one was the pursuit of an ideological/political ideal; the other was the struggle to survive in a deteriorating socio-economic environment. As Ednan Karabayev, a former foreign minister, observed in 2011, “we have long lived with double standards and talked about democratic values, at the same time strengthening radicalism. Then the riots of the hungry masses were interpreted as the growth of public consciousness and the outcome of a popular movement.”²¹⁶

Karabayev’s comments highlighted the fact the political reforms had not brought about a material improvement in the lives of the great majority of the population: this was still a fragmented society, crosscut by social tensions and economic disparities; corruption was rampant and the police and prison services were as brutal as ever.²¹⁷ Trust in state institutions and state officials was so low that people routinely found ways of bypassing them – either by giving bribes or by seeking help from private organizations, often linked to religious movements. According to World Bank assessments, poverty levels declined steeply in 2003-2009 (especially in the last two years of the Bakiev administration), largely thanks to remittances from labor migrants. From 2009-2013, however, it stagnated or rose slightly.²¹⁸ In 2014, over 30 per cent of the population of Kyrgyzstan was unable to meet its basic food and non-food needs.²¹⁹ There were considerable regional, demographic and urban-rural variations. The poorest, likewise most populous, provinces were in the south, in Jalal-Abad and Osh.

²¹⁶ Bugazov, *Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan*, 75.

²¹⁷ The problems of reforming the system are perceptively analysed by Reina Artur-kyzy, “Lessons of the OSCE Police Assistance in Central Asia, with a Case study of Kyrgyzstan,” OSCE Academy, *Central Asia Policy Briefs* no. 18, Bishkek, January (2015), esp. 10-19. See also report by Anna Lelik, “Kyrgyzstan: Government Report Exposes Scale of Prison Torture,” *LobeLog Foreign Policy*, May 2, 2016, <http://lobelog.com/kyrgyzstan-government-report-exposes-scale-of-prison-torture/>

²¹⁸ See World Bank, “Kyrgyz Republic Poverty Profile for 2013,” May 21, 2015, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/10/08/090224b08313157d/2_0/Rendered/PDF/Kyrgyz0Republi0rty0profile0for02013.pdf. Particularly relevant is Section 2: Poverty Trends and Drivers of Changes.

²¹⁹ For an overview, including health education and infrastructure statistics, see “Poverty: Kyrgyz Republic 2014,” World Bank, “Poverty Kyrgyz Republic 2014,” http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2016/03/24/090224b08422f160/1_0/Rendered/PDF/Kyrgyz0Repub0lic02014.pdf

The scale of the economic challenge was enormous. Yet the picture was not entirely bleak. Young entrepreneurs were resilient and adventurous, eager to embrace new ideas and opportunities, particularly relating to the creation of a greener economy. The state was beginning to support public-private partnerships in this and other key sectors. There were also some successful local and national initiatives (notably in health care and education), implemented with technical aid and financial support from international donor agencies. However, these ventures, though important, were too fragmentary to make much impact on the country's inherent social and economic problems.

The situation was further complicated by the regional and global economic recession. The fall in price of gold, Kyrgyzstan's main export commodity, coupled with the disagreements with Kumtor and other mining companies, led to a sharp fall in Kyrgyzstan's GDP. These problems prompted President Atambayev to address one of the country's major economic weaknesses – its over-reliance on foreign aid. He called for Kyrgyzstan “to learn living without grant assistance, using our own capabilities.” Costly populist projects that were of little benefit to the country should be rejected. In a startling departure from conventional Kyrgyz rhetoric, he spoke approvingly of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, “which build railways and hydroelectric power stations at their own expense,” indicating that this was a model which Kyrgyzstan should emulate.²²⁰ The completion of long-delayed transport infrastructure projects was flagged as a particular priority. The government introduced a comprehensive anti-crisis program in March 2016. It was acknowledged that there would be a rise in unemployment, but the state authorities insisted that the socio-economic situation was stable and that public order was under control.²²¹ It was too soon to tell whether this confidence was justified.

Meanwhile, significant changes were taking place in Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations. Political opinion was still largely divided between pro-Moscow and pro-Washington camps. However, post- 2010 the pro-Moscow camp began to move

²²⁰ Nargiza Osmonova, “Almazbek Atambayev: Next two years we have to learn living without grant assistance, using our own capabilities,” *24 News Agency*, November 6, 2015, <http://www.eng.24.kg/politic/177880-news24.html>

²²¹ “Kyrgyz Government presents anti-crisis program of 87 points,” *24 News Agency*, March 14, 2016, <http://www.eng.24.kg/parliament/179648-news24.html>

into the ascendancy. Given the country's strong historical, cultural, economic and demographic bonds with Russia, it was not surprising that this was the choice of the majority of the population. President Atambayev reflected this preference. Yet the real challenge for him, as for other serious politicians, was not the choice between Moscow and Washington, but the need to establish a robust system of governance. This did not signify a drift towards authoritarianism, but it did mean creating a system in which the executive, legislative and judicial branches were able to cooperate more effectively. This was not only vital for addressing the country's internal problems, but also for dealing with evolving external relationships. As Kyrgyzstan expanded its ties with China and other Asian states, it was confronted with a new range of strategic choices as well as new great power rivalries. It was also exposed to different models of governance and development. The decision-making environment was more complex, and there was a need for greater nuance – this was another of the challenges that faced the Kyrgyz leadership.

Was 2010 a turning point? The bloodletting had been so shocking that it seemed that nothing could ever be the same again: lessons would surely be learnt. Soon, however, the historiography of 2010 changed. The emphasis shifted away from the lethal June clashes to focus on the positive aspects of the April uprising. The official interpretation of these events now portrayed the overthrow of Bakiev in April as something akin to a national liberation struggle that marked the end of criminal misrule and the advent of a bright democratic future. In 2016, President Atambayev underlined this message by declaring April 7 a national holiday to celebrate the anniversary of the "Day of the People's April Revolution." The authorities constructed a memorial complex outside the capital where mourners could gather to commemorate the victims of the April clashes. The internecine conflict in June that year (when many more people were killed, and far more damage inflicted, than in April) was skimmed over with rhetorical calls for national unity.

Despite the hopes of the politicians, though, this was still a fractured society, riven with tensions. Acrimonious protest demonstrations were a regular occurrence.²²² The country was still at risk of serious political instability as opposition groups intensified their calls for the resignation of the government.²²³ However, on the positive side, there had been no deadly clashes (as of mid-2016). In an almost fatalistic way, people got on with their lives, making the best of whatever opportunities were available in education, in business or in other forms of employment. There was very little attempt to confront the “conflictogenic factors” that had prepared the way for the explosion of communal violence in 2010. Yet for all its shortcomings, the constitutional amendments had set in motion a process of reflection and analysis regarding the nature of governance. At least some political leaders were coming to appreciate the need to address basic, practical problems, through prudent management of the national economy and genuine reform of public administration. There was also evidence of a broader, more balanced foreign policy. If these efforts could be carried forward, and if stability could be maintained, then the country would truly be set on the path to realizing its rich potential, and 2010 might indeed come to be seen as a turning point – if not, the year would mark another sad date in Kyrgyzstan’s recent history.

²²² According to official statistics, in 2013 alone there were 782 protest meetings. Aida Djumasheva, “MVD oglasilo statistiku aktsiy protesta za 11 mesyatsev,” *Vecherni Bishkek*, December 31, 2013, http://www.vb.kg/doc/257000_mvd_oglasilo_statistiky_akciy_protesta_za_11_mesiacev.html. Other estimates suggested a figure well over 1,000. However, it was noted that the following year the number of such incidents had fallen – not because conditions were better, but because people were disillusioned with politics; see Institute for War and Peace Reporting, “Kyrgyz Public Bored by Politics,” *RCA 787*, May 11, 2016, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-public-bored-politics>

²²³ See assessment by Michael Laubsch, “Kyrgyzstan still faces threat of political instability,” *Trend News Agency*, April 15, 2016, <http://en.trend.az/casia/kyrgyzstan/2520387.html>; also “Kyrgyz security service accuse opposition of planning mass riots,” *Reuters*, March 23, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-opposition-idUSKCN0WP0XA>

Annex 1: Chronicle of Events, January-July 2010

1 January

- Big price hikes for heating, electricity and hot water.

17 March

- Anti-Bakiev demonstrations in many places.

1 April

- Moscow terminates preferential customs duties on gasoline and diesel exports to Kyrgyzstan (now reserved for members of the Customs Union); Kyrgyz population experiences massive price rises for fuel.

3 April

- U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits Bishkek, makes speech stressing need for protection of human rights; widely interpreted as support for demonstrators.

5-6 April

- Arrest of Bolot Sherniyazov and other opposition leaders in Talas (northwest); mass demonstrations in Talas; widespread civil disorder overnight in Bishkek; Omurbek Tekebayev and Almazbek Atambayev arrested.

7 April

- Disturbances in Bishkek continue. Marauding and looting by unidentified individuals; random armed attacks on civilians and law enforcement agents. Chinese shops torched, other businesses also attacked.
- Mass political demonstrations in front of Bishkek "White House" repelled by stun grenades and live ammunition; crowd consists largely of young people.
- Casualties (official estimate): 89 killed, around 1,500 injured.
- Riots spread to Naryn, Chui, Talas and Issyk-Kul regions; public buildings attacked.

- Curfews imposed in Bishkek, Talas and Naryn.
- Informal civil defense group "Patriot" formed in Bishkek.
- President Bakiev ousted, goes to home base in Jalal-Abad.
- Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China close borders with Kyrgyzstan.

8 April

- Roza Otunbayeva announces that Bakiev government has resigned; Interim Government (IG) under her leadership created.
- Otunbayeva announces that rates for water, electricity and heat are to be reduced to previous level.
- There will be full compliance with international agreements; there will also be no immediate change to the status of the Manas base.

14 April

- Roza Otunbayeva announces that President Bakiyev, ministerial allies and relatives to face trial over deaths of protesters.

15-16 April

- Bakiev leaves for Kazakhstan; issues resignation statement.
- Arrest warrant issued for his brother Janybek, former head of presidential guard, on charge of ordering troops to fire on protesters on April 7.
- Arrests of other Bakiev allies, including ex-defense minister.
- Moscow recognizes IG, offers \$300 million in immediate stabilization aid (apparently part of \$2.15 billion package previously promised to Bakiev).

17 April

- IG announces U.S. lease on Manas Transit Centre to be extended for one year.

19-21 April

- Roza Otunbayeva officially appointed Interim President.
- Belarusian President Lukashenko offers asylum to Bakiev and close family.
- Bakiev retracts resignation.

- Kyrgyz looters attack multi-ethnic Mayevka village (outskirts of Bishkek); main targets Kyrgyzstani Meskhetian Turks; government troops given orders to use lethal force if necessary.
- Casualties (official estimate): at least 5 killed.

20-28 April

- Scheduled meeting of Council of *Alim* (Muslim scholars) cancelled amid fears that Mufti Juman-Uulu (reputedly pro-Bakiev) has been kidnapped.
- Murataaly-Hajji Juman-Uulu reappears, steps down “voluntarily”; Abdushukur Narmatov elected to replace him, but resigns almost immediately. Suyun-Hajji Kuluyev appointed interim mufti.

30 April

- IG launches corruption investigation into six companies allegedly owned by Maxim Bakiev, son of ex-President

4 May

- Bakiev stripped of presidential immunity, liable for arrest and prosecution.

13 May

- Public buildings in Jalal-Abad seized by pro-Bakiev forces.

14 May

- Armed Uzbeks, headed by pro-Interim Government Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani leader Kadyrjan Batyrov, recapture occupied buildings. Casualties: 3 killed, 60-70 wounded.
- Arson attacks on houses in Teit, Bakiev’s home village (outskirts of Jalal-Abad); local Kyrgyz population blame Batyrov.

19 May

- Around 3,000 people (reportedly all Kyrgyz) gather at Jalal-Abad hippodrome, demonstrate against regional IG representative and call for arrest of Batyrov.
- Crowd, now numbering 5,000-7,000, converges on Jalal-Abad’s People’s Friendship University, seat of Uzbek Community Centre, and sets it on fire;

firemen prevented from approaching the conflagration. Casualties: 3 killed, 60-70 injured.

- IG issues warrant for Batyrov's arrest; Batyrov escapes to Ukraine, allegedly via Dubai.
- Disturbances continue in Mayevka, 6 reportedly dead, 40 injured.
- IG imposes curfew in Jalal-Abad
- Roza Otunbayeva, head of IG, confirmed as President until December 31, 2011; presidential election postponed until October 2011.
- Kazakh-Kyrgyz border re-opens (after 6 weeks closure).

20 May

- Bishkek court quashes conviction for financial mismanagement handed down on March 16 against Alikbek Jekshenkulov, ex-foreign minister.
- IG publishes new draft Constitution.
- Otunbayeva officially quits the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, in accordance with decree stating that the interim President cannot be a member of any political party.
- IG announces pay increases of 50%-80% for police and military.

21 May

- Pro-Bakiev (Kyrgyz) forces stage protests in Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken.
- Casualties: 2 killed, dozens injured.

Mid-May

- Leaked telephone conversation between senior IG figures Azimbek Beknazarov and Temir Sariev, allegedly discussing embezzlement of \$1 million. Official rebuttal, transaction said to be covered by secret regulation of IG for special operations in the south.
- Leaked conversation between IG officials Azimbek Beknazarov and Almazbek Atambayev, allegedly discussing corrupt deals.
- Leaked telephone conversation, allegedly between Bakiev's son and brother, discussing plan to bring down IG.

1 June

- Uzbek security forces (from Uzbekistan) sent to Sokh, an Uzbek exclave in Kyrgyzstan, in response to Kyrgyz residents' demand for protection.

3 June

- Edil Baisalov, senior IG official, confirms blocking of operations of fuel sub-contractors to Manas Transit Centre.
- U.S. military confirms that it has suspended flights of KC-135 refueling aircraft, negotiations with IG ongoing. Transit flights continue.

6 June

- Interim Mufti Suyun-Hajji Kuluyev severely beaten by unknown assailants.

7 June

- Edil Baisalov, IG head of staff, disillusioned with new administration, resigns in order to form party of his own.
- Bakiev, along with his relatives and associates, formally charged with abuse of power, corruption, mass murder and embezzlement
- Decree to nationalize AsiaUniversalBank, formerly controlled by Maxim Bakiev and business partner.
- Oybek Mirsidikov, Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani drug baron/local businessman killed, along with three companions, near Jalal-Abad.

9-10 June

- Overnight outbreak of mass violence in southern Kyrgyzstan; allegedly triggered by fight between rival youth gangs, escalates into pogrom against local Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis.

10 June

- Widespread arson, looting, brutal attacks and murders in Osh; violence spreads to Jalal-Abad and surrounding region. Victims overwhelmingly Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis.
- Ruslanbek Jumagulov (previously *kadi* in northern Kyrgyzstan) elected mufti.

11 June

- In Osh electricity and gas supplies cut, public transport not functioning, bazaar and many buildings on fire; Uzbek-language media outlets suspended. Reports circulated of “young men in white masks” marauding, looting shops, offices and houses, then setting them on fire. Panic among Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani population.
- Otunbayeva declares curfew in Osh from 8.00 pm to 6.00 am. Makes first of several appeals to Russian government for help to quell violence.
- SCO summit meeting held in Tashkent; delegation from Kyrgyzstan attends (minus head of state); SCO joint declaration stresses the importance of Kyrgyzstan for regional stability; member states declare willingness to provide essential support and aid.

12 June

- IG issues emergency decree “On granting the use of lethal force to security forces.”
- IG issues decree “On the formation of citizens’ defense groups”; resolves to “form a uniform system of voluntary national teams of the Kyrgyz Republic.”
- Partial mobilization of military; armed soldiers flown from Bishkek to Osh; all units of armed forces ordered “to assume wartime posture.”
- IG appeals to retired police and army officers to go to Osh to prevent ethnic clashes.
- Curfew imposed in Jalal-Abad and surrounding area.
- Roads between Osh and Jalal-Abad province almost completely closed.
- Kyrgyz military open corridor to allow Uzbek women, children and the elderly to escape across the border to Uzbekistan.
- Otunbayeva formally appeals to Russian government for help to resolve the conflict.
- Around 200 ethnic Uzbeks demonstrate in Moscow, call for Russian intervention in conflict.

13 June

- In Jalal-Abad gun battles continue, hospital and banks set on fire, renewed attacks on university premises.

- Casualties (official estimates): 83 people killed in Osh, 14 in Jalal-Abad; 1,243 wounded.
- Russia airlifts paratroop reinforcements to air base at Kant.
- Maxim Bakiev lands in UK and is detained on Interpol warrant. Applies for asylum, granted permission to stay while application is assessed.
- Ashgabat authorities begin to evacuate Turkmen students from Osh region.

14 June

- Looting and arson attacks in Jalal-Abad and adjacent areas; Osh mostly calm.
- Kyrgyz official accuses Bakiev supporters of hiring ethnic Tajiks to foment violence.
- Local communities (Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani) start turning in weapons.
- Authorities confirm that 75,000 Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, mostly women, children and the aged, cross into Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan; 45,000 officially registered.
- Uzbekistan closes its frontier at the end of the day.
- Refugees speak of “state-sponsored genocide,” claim that Kyrgyz police and military took part in attacks; allegations of Kyrgyz medics refusing treatment to Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis.
- International humanitarian aid requested to help cope with situation.
- Kyrgyz situation discussed at meeting of CSTO.
- China and Turkey send planes to evacuate their nationals in Kyrgyzstan.
- UN Security Council calls for calm and a return to the rule of law.
- EU sends representative to region.
- Casualties (official estimates): 113 killed, 1,292 wounded.

15 June

- Russian President reiterates order to send humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan, but declines to undertake military intervention. Kyrgyz request for military intervention rescinded.

16 June

- Start of three days of national mourning to commemorate victims of the conflict.
- Food shortages in Osh and Jalal-Abad as most of the bazaars and shops remain closed, looted and damaged by arson attacks.
- International aid begins to arrive in region.
- EU pledges €5 million in aid.
- Pakistani students and traders stranded in southern Kyrgyzstan airlifted home. Indians moved to Bishkek for safety.

17 June

- Casualties (official estimates): 189 killed, 1,900 injured.
- 400,000 Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis forced to flee their homes; 100,000 refugees have now arrived in Uzbekistan.
- 80,000 refugees lodged in schools, public buildings and camps in Andijan province, Uzbekistan.
- United States donates \$32.6 million in aid for Kyrgyzstan.

19 June

- Mayor of Osh, Melisbek Myrzakmatov (Kyrgyz), demands immediate removal of defensive barricades erected by Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis.
- Meeting in Bishkek between Otunbayeva and senior U.S. State Department official Robert Blake.

20 June

- State of emergency in Jalal-Abad to remain in force until 22 June.
- State of emergency in Osh extended to 25 June.
- Increasing numbers of Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani refugees in Uzbekistan return to Kyrgyzstan.
- Jews evacuated from southern Kyrgyzstan flown to Tel Aviv, offered Israeli citizenship on arrival.

21-23 June

- Total casualties in south (official estimates): 208 killed, 2,101 injured; unofficial estimates: 2,000 deaths.
- Kyrgyz forces conduct raids in the south, allegedly attacked in Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani district; casualties: 2 killed, 23 wounded.
- Uzbek women helping to organize referendum briefly held hostage in Osh.
- Chinese humanitarian aid (22 tons) airlifted to Kyrgyzstan.

22 June

- In Osh, troops clearing barricades meet with resistance; Jalal-Abad remains tense.
- Governor of Jalal-Abad Region and other Kyrgyz officials visit camps in Uzbekistan and tell refugees that everyone must return to Kyrgyzstan by 25 June.
- France allocates €1 million in assistance for Kyrgyzstan.

24 June

- Kyrgyz officials accuse Bakiev family of hiring Islamist militants to organize unrest in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

25 June

- Soldiers cast votes before referendum, to be free to ensure security on the day.
- State of emergency in Osh lifted.
- Bakiev nephew Sanjarbek arrested near Jalal-Abad, accused of organizing ethnic clashes.
- CSTO Secretary General Bordyuja visits Kyrgyzstan, announces formation of working group with representatives of all CSTO member states, to be stationed in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

27 June

- Referendum on Constitution conducted on schedule. Around 70% of registered voters take part, just over 90% support amendments.
- Conduct of referendum positively assessed by OSCE; 25 observers monitor the vote, but none based in Osh or Jalal-Abad.

29 June

- Transportation of injured refugees from Uzbekistan to medical institutions in Osh begins.

30 June

- Prosecutor General's office files 758 criminal cases in connection with Osh riots.

3 July

- Inauguration of Roza Otunbayeva as President.

14 July

- Kyrgyz "technical" (caretaker) government formed.

16 July

- UNHCR High Commissioner states 75,000 people still displaced in southern Kyrgyzstan.
- Allegations of abuse and physical assault on Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis continue.
- Many people still missing.

17 July

- OSCE meeting on Kyrgyz situation held in Kazakhstan.

22 July

- OSCE representatives meet in Vienna, formally agree to send multinational force of 52 unarmed police officers to help restore peace in southern Kyrgyzstan.

27 July

- International donors' conference held in Bishkek, representatives of 14 countries and 15 international organizations pledge \$ 1.1 billion in aid.
- Exodus of Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis to Russia and other destinations continues.

10 October

- Parliamentary elections

Annex 2: Biographical Profiles

Akayev, Askar

Born November 10, 1944, Chui Province, northern Kyrgyzstan. Aged 17 years old, began work in local factory; subsequently studied at the Leningrad Institute of Precision Mechanics and Optics, graduated with an honors degree in 1967; remained at the Institute until his return to Kyrgyzstan in 1977, where he continued his scientific career at the Frunze Polytechnic Institute. In 1989, became President of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. On October 27, 1990, elected by the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet to serve as the country's first president. Re-elected by popular vote twice (1995, 2000), but was increasingly unpopular. On March 24, 2005, in the wake of fierce protests and demonstrations throughout the country, he fled to Kazakhstan. Subsequently granted asylum in Russia; formally resigned on April 4, 2005. Thereafter resumed his academic career in Moscow.

Askarov, Azimjan

Born 1951, Jalal-Abad province; Uzbek Kyrgyzstani. Studied arts and crafts in Tashkent, worked as a painter-decorator. Post-independence became a civil rights activist. In 2002 founded the group *Vozdukh* ("Air") to monitor conditions in Kyrgyz prisons, especially in southern Kyrgyzstan; publicized instances of police brutality. During the 2010 conflict, Askarov recorded killings and arson attacks, distributed videos to international media outlets. Arrested by the Kyrgyz authorities on June 15, 2010; claims that he was beaten and tortured while in police custody were denied by the authorities. He was later tried and handed down a life sentence. In prison, his health rapidly deteriorated. Numerous international organizations took up his case, including Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, People In Need, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Amnesty International. In 2015, the United States conferred the 2014 Human Rights Defender Award on Askarov. In response, the Kyrgyz government terminated the 1993 agreement on cooperation with the United States.

Bakiev, Kurmanbek

Born August 1, 1949, Jalal-Abad province. Graduated from electrical engineering faculty, Kuibyshev Polytechnic Institute, 1972; military service in Soviet army 1974-76. Thereafter returned to engineering; working mostly in southern Kyrgyzstan. Began political career in Communist Party in 1990, active in local politics in southern Kyrgyzstan 1995-97. Held senior administrative post in northern province of Chui 1997-2000; December 2000 to May 2002 served as Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan. In 2004, became chairman of the "People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan." In July 2005, after ousting of Askar Akayev, Bakiev was elected President, gaining 89% of the vote. In 2007, he founded the party *Ak Jol* ("White Path"). During his presidential tenure, family members held prominent positions in the government and allegedly profited from lucrative commercial contracts. Forced from office in April 2010, granted asylum in Belarus, where he later acquired citizenship. In February 2013, Kyrgyz military court sentenced him in absentia to 24 years in prison, with confiscation of all his property. Some of his relations and close associates also received long sentences. The Kyrgyz government repeatedly called for the extradition of Bakiev and other individuals wanted on criminal charges, but as of mid-2016, the Belarusian leadership showed no sign of acceding to these requests.

Batyrov, Kadyrjan

Born March 9, 1956, Jalal-Abad city; Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani. After military service in the Soviet army (1974-76), he worked in various enterprises in Kyrgyzstan, then entered the Andijan (Uzbekistan) Institute of National Economy. After graduating in 1990, he developed extensive business interests in Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Played a prominent role in the cultural affairs of the Uzbek-Kyrgyzstani community in southern Kyrgyzstan and was reported to have invested some \$6 million in educational initiatives in the region. The Kyrgyz authorities accused him of inciting violence in Jalal-Abad in May 2010; he denied the charges and fled abroad, first to Ukraine, then to Sweden, where he was granted asylum. He was tried in absentia in Kyrgyzstan; the court handed down a life sentence.

Beknazarov, Azimbek

Born 1956, Jalal-Abad Province, Aksy region. Served in Soviet armed forces, graduated from Tashkent Law Technical College in 1984, and worked in legal departments in various places (1991-99). In 2002, criticized President Akayev for giving up land to the Chinese (Sino-Kyrgyz Treaty); called for impeachment of President. Arrested in January 2002 on charges of abuse of office; freed a few months later after public demonstrations in his defense. Member of Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs in 2000-05. In September 2005 (under Bakiev), appointed Procurator General of Kyrgyzstan; April 2008, chairman of *Asaba* ("National Rebirth") party; January 2008, launched anti-Bakiev "Revolutionary Movement of Kyrgyzstan"; December 2008, joined "United People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan"; 2010, became member of Interim Government.

Beshimov, Baktybek

Born September 13, 1954, Osh region. Graduate of the Kyrgyz State University. President of the Osh State University 1992-98. Held senior positions in UNDP programs and Aga Khan Foundation regional initiatives. Briefly worked in the administration of Askar Akayev (1991-92), then became disenchanted and joined the opposition. Served as Kyrgyz ambassador in the Indian sub-continent in 2000-05. Supported the "Tulip Revolution" (2005), but soon became critical of Bakiev. Vice-President of the American University of Central Asia (2005-07). Leading member of the parliamentary opposition group of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (2007-09). In 2009, fearing for his safety, he left Kyrgyzstan to take up visiting posts in the United States.

Jeenbekov, Sooronbai

Born November 16, 1958, in Kara-Kuldja district, Osh province. Graduated from the Kyrgyz Agricultural Institute in 1983. Thereafter employed in teaching and administrative positions, also in Communist Party work. Parliamentary deputy, with special responsibility for agrarian issues, in 1996-2000. Deputy parliamentary speaker 2000-2005. Appointed Minister for Agriculture, Water and Processing Industries in 2007 under Bakiev. Joined the Social Democratic Party. Appointed governor of Osh province in 2010, under the Interim Government. Elected Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan April 2016. Jeenbekov's younger brother

Asylbek (b. 1963), also a prominent politician, and parliamentary speaker since 2015, resigned when Sooronbai became prime minister, since family members were barred from holding government posts simultaneously.

Jumanov (Juman-uulu), Murataly-ajy

Born May 1, 1973, Osh province. In 1990-92 saw military service in armed forces of Kyrgyzstan, then entered Hazrat Usman madrassah in Osh province. In 1996-99, deputy *qazy* (Muslim cleric) in Osh province; in 1997-98, studied at Islamic Institute in Ufa (Russian Federation). In 2002, unanimously elected Mufti of Kyrgyzstan by the Council of Ulama; in 2003 graduated from Law Faculty of Osh State University. In April 2010, kidnapped and held captive for a few days (according to his own account, by gangsters); shortly thereafter he was removed from his post, apparently due to his links with Bakiev. Appointed Rector of the Islamic University, but in July 2010, at the age of 37, died of a heart attack.

Karabayev, Ednan

Born January 1, 1953, Talas city. Graduate of the Kyrgyz State University. Member of the *Komsomol* and active in Communist Party work (1981-90). In 1990-92 served in the Akayev administration. Minister of Foreign Affairs 1992-94; re-appointed under Bakiev in 2007-09. Travelled extensively during his ministerial terms of office. In 2012, he became special advisor to the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan.

Kulov, Feliks

Born October 19, 1948, Frunze (Bishkek). Trained at advanced educational institutions of the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs; held senior ranks in Soviet, then Kyrgyz security forces. In 1991-92, Minister of Internal Affairs in Kyrgyzstan and in 1992-93, Deputy President of Kyrgyzstan. In December 1993 resigned amid allegations of fraudulent dealings linked to launch of Kyrgyzstan's national currency, but soon appointed head of the state administration of Chui Province. In 1997-98 served as Minister of National Security in Kyrgyzstan, and in 1998-99, Mayor of Bishkek. In 1999, founded *Ar-Namys* ("Dignity") party. In 2000, arrested on charges of abuse of office and incitement to violence; given custodial sentences

by civil and military courts (7 and 10 years respectively); stripped of rank of Lieutenant General, property confiscated. Freed after 2005 “Tulip Revolution” and subsequently cleared of all criminal charges. September 2005 to January 2007 served as Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan under Bakiev. In February 2007 became leader of the opposition bloc “United Front for the Worthy Future of Kyrgyzstan.” Later that year charged with inciting anti-Bakiev protests. Post-2010, remained active in party politics, but mainly involved in raising finance for developmental projects.

Myrzakmatov, Melisbek

Born April 18, 1969, Osh Province. In 2007, joined Bakiev’s *Ak Jol* party, held parliamentary seat until 2009. From January 2009 to December 2013, Mayor of Osh; unsuccessfully contested mayoral election in January 2014. Known as an outspoken Kyrgyz nationalist.

Otunbayeva, Roza

Born August 23, 1950, Frunze (now Bishkek).²²⁴ Studied at Moscow State University; after graduation (1972), taught in the Kyrgyz State University. Political career began in 1981, when she became an official in the Communist Party; in 1986-89, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz SSR; in 1989-91, served in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and headed the Soviet delegation to UNESCO. In 1992 she became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan; in 1992-2004, held prestigious diplomatic posts abroad. In December 2004, was one of the founders of the *Ata-Jurt* (“Fatherland”) party; in 2006, co-chair of *Asaba* party (with Beknazarov). In 2008, she held a parliamentary seat on the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) ticket, later became leader of the SDPK parliamentary group. On April 7, 2010, following demonstrations against Kurmanbek Bakiev, she was chosen by the opposition group to head the Interim Government. A week after the nationwide referendum on constitutional amendments on 27 June 2010, she was sworn in as President. When her term expired on

²²⁴ According to some sources, she was born in Osh.

December 31, 2011, she stood down, in accordance with constitutional procedure. Since then she has been engaged in inter-governmental humanitarian initiatives.

Sariev, Temir

Born June 17, 1963, in the Chui province, he graduated from the economics faculty of the Kyrgyz State University in 1989. From 1991 to 2000, worked in the financial sector. In October 2006, he became one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Movement. In 2007, the Kyrgyz authorities detained him on charges of smuggling, but the case was soon dropped. After the ousting of Bakiev in April 2010, Sariev was appointed Minister of Finance Minister in the Interim Government. In December 2011, under the Atambayev administration, awarded the economics and anti-monopoly ministerial portfolio. He was elected Prime Minister in April 2015; a year later, forced to resign because of alleged corruption.

Toktomushev, Maksat-aji

Born August 9, 1973, Osh province. In 1991-95 followed courses in the local Agricultural Institute; concurrently, he studied Islamic law privately with local scholars. In 1998-2005, he studied Islamic law in Pakistan, at the Deobandi-oriented "Arabiya" Madrassah; on his return to Kyrgyzstan, in 2005-13 he taught at a local madrassah and served as imam and *qazy* at various mosques; unanimously elected Mufti in 2014.

Author Bio

Dr. Shirin Akiner has long firsthand experience of Central Asia and has written and lectured widely on the region. In 2006 she was awarded the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal by the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, and in 2008 was awarded Honorary Fellowship of the *Ancien* Association of the NATO Defense College. In 2013, she received the International Chingiz Aitmatov Award. She has held research and teaching posts at the University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies and University College); and visiting professorships at European and U.S. universities. She has presented numerous papers at international conferences and high-level seminars in leading think tanks, international organizations and universities in some 20 countries. Her publications include seven monographs and over 75 scholarly articles on such topics as Islam, ethnicity, political change and security in Central Asia. Her work has been translated into 10 languages (French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Kazakh, Russian, Turkmen and Chinese). She is the founder and general editor of the long-running Routledge book series “Central Asia Research Forum,” and was *Rapporteur* to the UNESCO project “Integral Study of the Silk Roads” (1988-97).