

Kyrgyzstan

A Risk Assessment Brief

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT

The current tensions in Kyrgyzstan can be traced back to the legacy of Soviet rule in Central Asia. In the early 1920's, Moscow attempted to fortify its centralized power in the region by curbing potential ethnic nationalist movements. To achieve this objective, the Soviet regime delineated borders across ethnic lines, thus creating ethnic enclaves throughout the region (particularly evident in the Ferghana Valley). To fuel the Soviet Union's centralized economy, economic and transportation links between the republics became highly interdependent. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, the region became faced with innumerable social, political and economic obstacles. The crises that ensued culminated to create the Osh uprising in 1990 between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz inhabitants living in southern Kyrgyzstan. The Osh confrontation has been sited by some as laying the foundation for lingering tensions in the Ferghana Valley. Despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan implemented some of the most liberal economic and political reforms in Central Asia after its independence, the state that was once referred to as the "Island of Democracy", is now characterized by persistent poverty, unemployment, political repression, and inter-state tensions over borders, security, and resources.

TIMELINE (FAST, 2001)

Date	Event
1990 June	Ethnic clash erupts between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz inhabitants of Osh, near the border of Uzbekistan, in which a disputed 300-1000 people were killed.
1990 Oct.	Supreme Soviet designates Askar Akaev as President of Kyrgyzstan.
1991 Aug. 31 st	Kyrgyzstan declares its independence from the Soviet Union.
1991 Dec. 21 st	Kyrgyzstan and 11 other sovereign states sign the Protocol to the agreement establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), affirming a commitment to cooperation in various fields of external and internal policies.
1995 Dec.	Kyrgyz voters confirm President Akaev for another five-year term.
1998 Dec. 23 rd	Akaev dismisses the entire Kyrgyz government.
1999 Aug.	Armed incursion by Tajikistan-based terrorists and unsanctioned air attack by Uzbekistan on a target in Kyrgyzstan.
1999 Feb.	Bomb blasts in Tashkent by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).
1999 Oct. 3 rd	Uzbek air force bombs positions of the IMU in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
2000 Mar. 14 th	Mass demonstrations (est. 8,000 people) in Bishkek against parliamentary elections
2000 May 10 th	Trial of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) ["Party of Liberation"] members charged with inciting religious, racial, and ethnic hostility.
2000 May 17 th	Opposition politician, Daniyar Usenov, receives three-year suspended sentence.
2000 June 14 th	Kyrgyz police arrest and brutally beat several opposition activists during a demonstration in Bishkek, including the leader of the demonstration.
2000 Aug. 1 st	Kyrgyz police arrest six people for distributing subversive HT-authored literature during a mass protest (est. 6,500 people) in Djalalabad Oblast. The protest was organized to demand Akaev's resignation and the release of a jailed parliamentarian.
2000 Sep. 11 th	Kyrgyz military units attack rebel formations on the border with Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz troops kill several rebels. The rebels in turn kill two Kyrgyz soldiers and wound another two.
2000 Oct. 30 th	Akaev wins the Kyrgyz presidential elections with an estimated 73.4 % of the vote, amid widespread accusations of irregularities.
2001 Mar. 16 th	Kyrgyzstan puts its troops on red alert as it anticipates a possible invasion by groups of religious extremists.
2002 March	Kyrgyz police shoot five demonstrators protesting against Akaev in Jalal-Abad province.

Ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan Ethnic Minorities in the Region (CIA World Factbook 2001)

Kyrgyz	52.4 %	Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan	220,000
Russian	18.0 %	Russian-speaking community in the region	200,000 – 240,000
Uzbek	12.9 %	Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan	700,000
Others	16.8 %	Uzbeks in Tajikistan	1.5 million

KEY PEACE INDICATORS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Main Indicator Categories	Specifics
Internal Political/Security	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Reforms 	- Akaev proposed “The Country Of Human Rights” to Parliament in May 2002; also proposed a “Comprehensive Development Framework” (implementation 2001-2010).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Society Development 	- Relatively well-organized civil society, consisting of numerous opposition groups and local NGO’s; the latter has helped stabilize the situation and both have attracted domestic and international scrutiny of Akaev’s repressive regime.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular Religious Movements 	- Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), an increasingly popular Islamic movement in southern Kyrgyzstan, advocates non-violent goal-achievement.
External Political/Strategic/Security	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Cooperation 	- The growing regional threat of Islamist militancy has motivated Central Asian states to establish cooperative regional security structures (e.g. the CIS Collective Security Treaty and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Linkages 	- International pressure for democratic political and economic reforms in Kyrgyzstan has increased since September 11 th , 2001. - External security alliances have aided in wide-scale violence containment. - The bombing in Afghanistan weakened the Taliban-supported IMU’s infrastructure. - INGOs and donor countries have invested in energy and poverty alleviation projects, contributing to the stabilization of the region.

KEY CONFLICT INDICATORS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Main Indicator Categories	Specifics
Internal Economic	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty Levels 	- One of the greatest threats to political stability remains public discontent with the economy (est. over 60% of the population lives below the national poverty line (ICG, 28 Aug.01, i).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unemployed Youth 	- Lacking opportunities and faith in the Kyrgyz government, unemployed youth have become particularly attracted to radical religious movements such as HT. It is estimated that 24.5% of the able-bodied inhabitants over 18 in Khodjent, Tajikistan were unemployed in 1999. There were similar numbers of unemployed youth in Kyrgyzstan’s and Tajikistan’s parts of the Ferghana Valley (Fewer, Dec./01, 5). While official Kyrgyz data suggests a 3% unemployment rate for the entire republic, annual surveys cited by multilateral agencies suggest that actual unemployment might be as high as 20% of the workforce (EIU, Aug.02, 13).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geography 	- Landlocked and largely mountainous, Kyrgyzstan is isolated from global markets, thus making the republic vulnerable to the dynamics and policies of its more powerful and sometimes antagonistic neighbours (e.g. Russia, China, Uzbekistan).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market Size 	- A small internal market size (population 4.985 million – EIU, .02, 13) prevents the emergence of a diversified and efficient economy in the absence of international partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor Infrastructure 	- Kyrgyzstan lacks energy transmission and social service infrastructure which could aid in economic development and civil strife alleviation.
Internal Political	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Policies 	- Akaev’s regime increasingly uses undemocratic, repressive policies to curtail civil liberties and silence opposition politicians, as well as critical journalists, creating intense unrest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corruption 	- Pervasive corruption and cronyism at all government levels continues to disaffect population and detract FDI.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radicalization of Opposition 	- Deteriorating economic conditions and increased suppression of religious movements and opposition parties is further radicalizing their behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnic Tensions 	- Poor economic conditions, widening resource disparities between the North and South, and political exclusion based on ethnicity have fueled ethnic tensions in the country (e.g. per capita income in the rural areas of southern Kyrgyzstan was 32.1 soms (below U.S.\$2), whereas the average per capita income for the entire republic was 84.3 soms (below U.S.\$5) (Fewer, Dec.01, 5).
External Military/Strategic/Security	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “War on Terror” 	- The international community’s eagerness to fight terrorism has given Central Asian countries the

	excuse to repress even moderate, non-violent dissent in their populations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Militarization of the Sub-Region 	- The Ferghana Valley is becoming one of the most militarized sub-regions in Central Asia. This military posturing has increased crime rates, the arms trade, and forceful dispute settlement, thus aggravating civilian strife and inter-state tensions. Kyrgyzstan's defence budget doubled from U.S.\$14 million in 1999 to U.S.\$29 million in 2001 (ICG, 4 July.01, 11). Despite this increase in defence spending, Kyrgyzstan's military remains ill equipped and is thus heavily dependent on external military support e.g. from Russia and Uzbekistan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource/ Border Issues 	- Friction between Kyrgyzstan and its CIS neighbours over unresolved border disputes and resource issues (e.g. water, oil, land) is exacerbating economic and political instability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migration 	- Uzbekistan's visa regime and tightened border controls have created social tensions within the Ferghana Valley and increased corruption among border control officials.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug Trade/ Refugee Flows 	- The growth of drug trafficking has contributed to further destabilization in the region (e.g. much of Afghanistan's drug production flows to Europe through the Ferghana Valley). Instability in Afghanistan and Tajikistan has also created fears of refugee flows into the other CIS states.

ACTORS

Primary Stakeholders	Objectives/Interests
<p>1. President Akaev, his government, and pro-government parties: <i>Adilet</i>; <i>Birimdik</i>; <i>Moia Strana</i>; <i>Democratic Women's Party of Kyrgyzstan</i>; <i>My Country</i>; <i>Party of the Veterans Of War In Afghanistan</i>; and the <i>Agrarian Labor Party</i> (ICG, Aug.01, 19).</p>	The primary stakeholders seek to safeguard their <i>nomenklatura</i> interests i.e. domination and control of the political and business spheres.
<p>2. Mainstream opposition groups: the <i>People's Patriotic Movement</i>, consisting of an alliance of 10 opposition parties; <i>Ata-Meken/Al-Namyr</i> (Felix Kulov); <i>Social Democratic Party/Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan</i> (has one of the largest social bases in the state) (ICG, Aug.01, 19).</p>	All of these parties pursue the same political goal i.e. to drive Akaev and his presidential advisors out of power. Most of them, however, do not have sound political platforms, legislative agendas, and/or effective grassroots structures (ICG, Aug.01, 20). Their tactics and strategies, therefore, diverge.
<p>3. Islamic opposition groups: IMU and HT.</p>	<p>a. The IMU is a regional, radical, Islamic organization with links to the Taliban and al-Qaeda network. The IMU's official political goal is to overthrow - <i>by military jihad</i> - the Kharimov regime in Uzbekistan and replace it with an Islamic state governed by <i>Shari'a</i> (Islamic law).</p> <p>b. The HT pursues a more utopian aim of urging the peaceful overthrow of governments across the region and the unification of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim World (inc: Central Asia, China's Xinjiang Province).</p>
Secondary Stakeholders	Objectives/Interests
<p>1. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and China</p>	<p>a. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan are concerned about the contagion of Kyrgyz social unrest/political instability; hence, they want Akaev to repress his political opposition.</p> <p>b. China seeks to: develop Central Asia's economic market potential; contain U.S. military influence in the region; create friendly relations with the republics to decrease Chinese forces deployed along its borders; and quell the activities of Muslim Uyghur separatists seeking independence for China's Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (ICG, Aug.02, 13).</p>
<p>2. Russia and the United States</p>	<p>a. Russia seeks to: keep the Central Asian states within its sphere of influence; preserve regional stability (via military intervention/diplomatic/technical support); secure its access to energy resources (e.g. oil and gas); and stem the spread of Islamic extremism (already engaged in hostilities in Chechnya).</p> <p>b. U.S. seeks to: track down terrorists and destroy terrorist cells allegedly responsible for the September 11th, 2001 attacks; exploit energy resources; and reduce the region's orientation towards Russia.</p>

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Best Case Scenario

- Akaev attempts to institute meaningful democratic reforms by allowing the free operation of opposition parties, the restoration of civil liberties, the establishment of an independent, effective judiciary, and the development of a free, independent media in Kyrgyzstan.
- Akaev resumes the implementation of liberal economic reforms, focusing on poverty alleviation, socio-economic infrastructure building, and employment generation throughout the republic.
- Akaev initiates effective accountability measures to reduce nepotism and corruption within the government. These measures result in the recruitment of ethnic minorities currently excluded from the political system, reducing ethnic frustrations with the government.
- There is continued international support for beneficial economic and political reforms in the country.
- The military presence of the Central Asian republics and external powers in the region act to contain widespread violent conflict.
- Akaev resumes support of local NGOs and INGOs.
- In the interest of preempting violent conflict and reducing tensions with southern Kyrgyzstan's Islamic community, constructive dialogue between the Kyrgyz government and Islamic movements, such as HT, is established.
- The Central Asian states improve regional cooperation on issues of resource sharing, border dispute resolution, immigration mobility, anti-terrorism, and drug trafficking.
- There is no mass movement of people throughout the region.

Worst Case Scenario

- Akaev's authoritarian, repressive policies further radicalize opposition parties and religious movements.
- Pervasive socio-economic conditions in Southern Kyrgyzstan provokes mass civil disobedience, pitting citizens against government forces, thereby triggering violent outbursts throughout the rest of the republic.
- Radical Islamic movements resort to violent measures to achieve their goals, thereby prompting Uzbekistan to intervene militarily in Kyrgyzstan.
- The mass displacement and exodus of peoples from the Central Asian republics to neighbouring states exacerbates political and economic instability throughout the region and surrounding states.
- The increased economic and political instability in the region attracts increased external military intervention by major global powers e.g. U.S., European Union, Russia and China.

Most Likely Scenario

- Akaev continues to tighten his grip on the country via maintenance of his repressive policies.
- Poverty and unemployment will continue to fuel ethnic tensions and political discontent with Akaev.
- There will be an increase in southern population recruitment in HT, and to a lesser extent, IMU, as poor economic conditions, political exclusion, ideological differences, and the diminishing respect for government persists.
- HT will resort to violent measures as a result of constant government repression.
- Regional cooperation remains hindered as inter-state tensions persist over limited resources, border disputes, and security issues.
- There will be continued international financial and military support for anti-terrorist initiatives in the region.
- There will be increased labour migration out of the Ferghana Valley into surrounding states e.g. Russia and China.
- Foreign direct investment and international development assistance in Kyrgyz infrastructure and capacity building will remain low due to political instability, a weak legal system, and rampant corruption.
- There will be sustained geopolitical rivalry among secondary actors for power and influence in the region.
- Akaev will maintain limitations on freedom of speech and an independent media.
- International support continues for beneficial economic and political reforms in the republic.
- Efforts of local NGOs and INGOs continue to aid in the stabilization of the region.

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