

Promoting a Stable and  
Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan:  
Overcoming the Causes  
and Legacies of Violence

**Neil Melvin**

Central Eurasia Project

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# About the Author

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# Acronyms

CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EU	European Union
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
IFIs	International financial institutions
KDM	Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

# Summary

During the evening of June 10, 2010, a series of violent confrontations broke out in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan. The violence spread rapidly through the city, into the neighboring rural areas and across the south of the country, and took on an ethnic character as Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups clashed. Within a short time there were over 400,000 displaced persons with approximately 100,000 crossing as refugees into Uzbekistan. By the time the violence subsided, official sources reported over 400 dead, with 2,500 injured and houses and businesses across the region extensively damaged, notably in the urban centers of Osh and Jalalabad.<sup>1</sup> Unofficial estimates put the number of dead at closer to 2,000.

In the days and months following the June events, a considerable number of theories have been advanced as to the causes of the violence. Several authoritative accounts have been published drawing upon interviews with eyewitnesses and based upon detailed field research.<sup>2</sup> Evidence presented in these reports together with research conducted in connection with this paper points to a dynamic ethno-political process as lying at the heart of the violence. This process links the relations between the ethnic communities of Kyrgyzstan to wider political, economic, and social disputes in the country; that is the emergence of a broad conflict that has involved the steady erosion of the already weak state institutions in Kyrgyzstan and the growing use of mass popular mobilization and violence in political struggles.

These findings suggest that seeking to remake Kyrgyzstan as a stable and peaceful society after a summer of violent conflict will be no easy task. The challenge goes beyond reconciliation between the country's ethnic communities to the very heart of Kyrgyzstan's future as a state. Indeed, there is a real possibility of a repeat of violence unless the causes of the conflict and the legacies of violence are addressed urgently. In a region that is experiencing increased instability as a result of underdevelopment, decades of authoritarian rule, and a rise in extremist movements, the prospect of a return to violence is more than

ever a matter of serious concern. The situation is made more worrying by the prospect of the intersection of instability in Kyrgyzstan, with the worsening situation in Tajikistan and a rise in violence in northern Afghanistan.

All of this points to the need to develop a clear and strategic approach to Kyrgyzstan. During the summer of 2010 and in the immediate aftermath of the conflict in the south, the response of the international community has been wanting. While there has been substantial work to provide humanitarian relief and to begin the process of rebuilding, efforts to promote political reconstruction and postconflict stability have been seriously lacking.

The shortcomings in this area have been perhaps most clearly symbolized by the failure to deploy the modest Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) police mission immediately following the violence—when it was most needed. There is a clear need for the international community to learn from this experience and begin contingency preparations for a possible deployment of a preventive peace operation in the event that violence threatens to return to Kyrgyzstan.

On October 10, 2010, Kyrgyzstan went to the polls to elect a new parliament on the basis of the new Constitution adopted by national referendum in the immediate aftermath of the summer violence. The peaceful election of the parliament with greatly enhanced powers offers the chance for a fresh start for Kyrgyzstan. The elections will not, however, resolve the legacy of the summer violence on their own nor address the sources of conflict in the country. Indeed, the election of a parliament with significant Kyrgyz nationalist flavor suggests that interethnic relations will continue to be tense in the country and that developing a new approach to the challenges of a multinational Kyrgyzstan will become even more urgent.

For this to be achieved, Kyrgyzstan requires the establishment of a stable political order—including the election of a new president in the autumn of 2011—and the adoption at an early stage by the new government of a clear and comprehensive program to promote stability and interethnic integration. While the government and parliament must lead this process, the international community can and should make an important contribution. Indeed, it will be practically impossible for political forces in Kyrgyzstan to address the difficult issues that must be tackled in order to promote postconflict stability and reconciliation without support, assistance and, on occasion, constructive pressure from the international community.

As Central Asia faces an ever more uncertain future, it is nonetheless vital for Kyrgyzstan to undergo such a process and critical for the region that it be successful.



# Ethno-Politics and Violence in Kyrgyzstan

In August 1991, following the failure of the coup plot against the Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, Kyrgyzstan gained independence. This independence came in the aftermath of a turbulent period for the country. In June 1990, ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz surfaced over land issues in an area of Osh Oblast where a sizeable Uzbek community is located.<sup>3</sup> Violent confrontations ensued, and a state of emergency and a curfew were introduced. Order was not restored until August 1990, when hundreds were already dead.<sup>4</sup>

In the aftermath of the Osh violence Kyrgyzstan experienced a political revolution. During the *perestroika* period of the late 1980s, the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement (KDM) had developed into a significant political force with support in parliament. In an upset victory, Askar Akaev, the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, was elected to the presidency in October 1990. Following his election, Akaev faced the delicate task of helping to reconcile the country following the summer of violence and also giving expression to the newly independent nation of Kyrgyzstan, including the majority Kyrgyz population.<sup>5</sup>

The national identity of the new country was strongly linked to the “titular” community, including Kyrgyz history, culture, and language. Kyrgyz was declared the state language in September 1991. Soviet-era names were replaced with Kyrgyz ones—for example Frunze became Bishkek. The violence in the south and the new prominence given to the ethnic Kyrgyz created, however, anxieties amongst ethnic minorities. Concern within the substantial Slavic community about their future in the country prompted a large-scale emigration of Russian-speakers. In this situation, President Akaev sought to balance the drive to “restore” the titular population’s position in the country with the protection of the national minorities.

At the symbolic level, this approach was embodied by the official slogan “Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home,” while at an institutional level the creation of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan provided a venue to discuss the concerns of minority communities—although in a carefully structured and limited fashion. The president’s policies were reinforced by the quiet diplomacy of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), initially Max van der Stoep and then Rolf Ekéus.

This approach to the national question allowed Akaev to appeal to the majority population through a set of policies designed to redress the perceived repression of Kyrgyz identity during the Soviet era—the popularization of the Manas epic as a story of Kyrgyz statehood, an official position for Kyrgyz language as the state language (with the president required to be able to speak Kyrgyz, which also served as a way to block alternative candidates from the Russian-speaking community—notably the former mayor of Bishkek, Felix Kulov), periodic initiatives to promote the state language, and official celebrations of the Kyrgyz character and history of the country (for example the 3,000 year anniversary of the city of Osh in 2000). At the same time, there was an effort to reassure minorities of their position in a multiethnic Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, for minorities there were some advances during this period. In December 2001, the Russian language was given official status through a constitutional amendment. There were also notable new opportunities created in the area of higher education.

Despite the positive discourse of these years and the protection accorded to national minorities, the Akaev era policies fell well short of an effort to promote a genuine integration between the different ethnic communities of the country. There were clear limits on how far minorities could advance in Kyrgyzstan, what could be discussed (language rights for Uzbeks were taboo), and the leading role of the titular nation was unquestionable.

Behind the symbolic aspects of state nationalities policy during the Akaev era was a more complex political situation that placed ethnic relations at the heart of the political life of the country. The unexpected election of Akaev, an academic, in 1990 by the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet on the back of a democratic movement and the Osh conflict marked a break with previous political arrangements in the country. Akaev was not part of the ruling political networks operating through the Communist Party—although he was a member of the Party. He was also from the Russian-speaking, urban community of the north of the country—specifically Bishkek—with little in the way of a constituency in the south of Kyrgyzstan, which had been the political center of gravity for the country in the late Soviet period.<sup>6</sup>

In these conditions, the Uzbek community—predominately concentrated in the south of Kyrgyzstan—became a key ally of the president in his efforts to secure political support (especially during elections). In an unwritten deal, the Uzbek community provided loyalty to the authorities in return for protection. The Uzbeks became vital to

the president's efforts to extend his control in the south and to block the rise of powerful challengers to his rule from southern political figures, who were predominately ethnic Kyrgyz with support drawn from the rural areas.

In return, the Uzbek community was largely left alone, notably to promote business interests and the Uzbek language as the de facto working language in southern urban centers and areas with large Uzbek populations. Representatives of the Uzbek community were present in the national parliament and even on occasion in government. Akaev cultivated a loyal Uzbek leadership—while at the same time ensuring that there was no single figurehead or unified Uzbek movement that might be able to promote stronger claims. He advanced symbolic projects, such as the Uzbek-Kyrgyz University in Osh, which also supported key allies in the Uzbek community.

In this way, interethnic relations in the south became interlinked with the struggle for power in Kyrgyzstan through an interaction of north-south, rural-urban, patronage (clan) and ethno-political elements. The informal balancing of Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities practiced under Akaev was not a static system and was affected by the country's broader politics. The longer that Akaev stayed in power the greater grew the political struggle around him, which was essentially confined to an inter-Kyrgyz struggle. At the elite level, the Akaev regime became reliant on the president's family, relatives, friends, and representatives of his home region in the north. The opposition looked to mobilize local connections and groups to challenge the Akaev regime, notably in the south.

The result of the ongoing struggle for political power was that the position of the Uzbek community came under pressure as competing Kyrgyz groups sought to ensure their control of key political posts. At the same time, the deterioration of Kyrgyzstan's economy and growing rural to urban migration saw posts in the public sector increasingly blocked for minorities as ethnic Kyrgyz recruitment and patronage networks grew. The security forces became largely closed for non-Kyrgyz, reflecting concerns about national security and also the corruption that had grown in the sector.<sup>7</sup>

By the start of the new century, interethnic relations had become more difficult. While many of those guilty of crimes during the 1990 conflict had been put on trial and subsequently jailed, the issues that had led to the violence had not been addressed and new problems had arisen. Local grievances continued to have a significant interethnic character. In the south, there was little interaction between large parts of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. In some places these groups came to live as "segregated communities" even while continuing to espouse the rhetoric of fraternal cooperation and development.<sup>8</sup>

Political instability had also begun to unsettle Kyrgyzstan's ethno-politics. In 2002, the Ak-Sui events—when police fired on protestors killing six during demonstrations triggered by a dispute between a local deputy (Azimbek Beknazarov) of the national parliament and the president over a decision to cede land to China—and the efforts by Akaev to

contain growing opposition to his rule served as the catalyst for a tense political confrontation between the presidential regime and emerging opposition forces from the south of the country.<sup>9</sup> The confrontation also saw interethnic relations return openly to the country's politics, together with the re-emergence of localized violence and skirmishes among ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz.<sup>10</sup>

With Kyrgyz groups employing increasingly nationalistic rhetoric and protesting in front of Jalalabad's regional court on June 25 against the arrest of Beknazarov, the local Uzbek community also began to mobilize and to set out its own agenda. This consisted of an intensification of demands for political rights and representation in the government. The Uzbek community sought, among other things, a constitutional amendment that would recognize the Uzbek language on a par with the Kyrgyz and Russian languages. President Akaev's government, however, remained wary of such claims, reflecting concerns that the emergence of an openly political set of demands from the Uzbek community could lead to calls for autonomy and an escalation of ethnic tension in the south.<sup>11</sup>

The political activism that emerged around the Ak-Sui events thus had an important impact for interethnic relations in the south. Distinct ethnic agendas emerged openly and the Uzbeks began to question their passive support for the president. Indeed, for all their outward show of loyalty to Akaev, Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks exhibited the frustrations with the status quo that were also being voiced by the ethnic Kyrgyz opposition. A 2003 poll conducted by the Osh-based Uzbek Cultural Center found that more than 60 percent of 1,436 ethnic Uzbek respondents thought that the government did not do enough for them. Over 79 percent called for the formation of an Uzbek political party, and 78 percent believed that the Uzbek language should be given the status of an official state language.<sup>12</sup>

As the confrontation between President Akaev and the opposition grew starker after 2002, the leaders of the Uzbek community opted to continue their support for the president—despite frustrations with the growth of corruption and the stagnating economy, and a strong sense that the Akaev regime was not advancing their interests. The support for Akaev increased as Uzbeks grew concerned about the overtly nationalist agendas advanced by leading members of the opposition, including criticism of the Uzbeks, notably by parliamentary deputy Adakhan Madumarov and Omurbek Tekebaev, a former presidential candidate and leader of the opposition group *Ata Meken* (Fatherland). The continuing loyalty to the president was also driven by a desire to protect the economic gains that had been made by the Uzbek community during Akaev's tenure.<sup>13</sup>

Several Uzbek community leaders joined the pro-presidential movement *Alga, Kyrgyzstan!* (Forward, Kyrgyzstan!). At the time, however, the Uzbek leadership was itself split with those based in Osh closer to the president and less confrontational, while the Jalalabad leaders adopted a stronger set of demands that included minority rights.

# Conflict and Ethnicity

## The Tulip Revolution

The Tulip Revolution of 2005, which swept away the Akaev regime, did not involve the Uzbek community directly, although many were likely sympathetic to the anti-corruption agenda advocated by elements of the opposition movement. With Akaev gone, the rhetoric of Kyrgyzstan as a “common home” disappeared and the brittle arrangements to manage interethnic relations that the former president had instituted and manipulated collapsed. Many of the new political leaders who had overthrown Akaev were from the south and openly advocated strongly Kyrgyz nationalist views, causing considerable disquiet amongst national minorities.

Ethnic violence also marred the postrevolution experience. Early in February 2006, interethnic clashes broke out in the predominantly Dungan village of Iskra, 70 kilometers from Bishkek. Twenty people were injured and 30 homes destroyed. There were also incidents of violence involving Meskhetian, Uighur, and Kurdish communities. The political turmoil and uncertainty around the Tulip Revolution thus served to bring interethnic relations back into the politics of Kyrgyzstan.

The emergence of President Kurmanbek Bakiev’s regime and the shift of political power to groups with strong roots in the south of the country marked a new situation for the Uzbeks. Bakiev did not need the support of ethnic Uzbeks. Indeed many around him were in direct political and economic competition with ethnic Uzbeks across the south. As the corruption and criminality associated with Bakiev’s rule spread, including within the police and security forces, Uzbek communities and businesses came under pressure from semi-legal criminal groups seeking extortion or expropriation. There was further pressure on Uzbeks within the state sector and the representation of Uzbeks in a number of key areas of employment declined. In this context, tensions between the Uzbek community and the Bakiev regime began to grow.

The Tulip Revolution and its legacy had two important and interrelated effects on the Uzbek community. Firstly, it led to a growing willingness amongst some sections of the Uzbek community to break with their passivity during the Akaev era and to advocate actively on key issues. Secondly, the Tulip Revolution served as the catalyst to bring forward a more assertive generation of younger Uzbek leaders intent on protecting their interests. This group was based around the person of Kadyrjan Batyrov, a wealthy Jalalabad-based entrepreneur and a prominent Uzbek community leader in the region.

In August 2005, Muhammadjan Mamasaidov, a prominent elder Uzbek leader and Akaev supporter, was forced out as head of the Republican Uzbek National Association. With the change among the Uzbek community leaders, Batyrov emerged as a central figure. He increasingly sought to advance many of the Uzbeks' long-standing demands, including the designation of Uzbek as an official language, greater political representation for the Uzbeks, and implementation of a far-reaching anticorruption campaign.<sup>14</sup>

In the year following the Tulip Revolution, many in the Uzbek community grew alarmed by the nationalist rhetoric employed by Bakiev administration officials. The new president demonstrated little interest in continuing the Akaev line on interethnic relations, and the People's Assembly lost much of its former influence. In 2006, the rift between the Bakiev regime and the political grouping around Batyrov became overt, with demonstrations organized by his movement Homeland (Rodina ) against the government.

On May 27, 2006, at a rally in Jalalabad, Batyrov expressed the frustration shared by many Uzbeks: "We are always asked [by the Kyrgyz authorities] to have patience because there are lots of other problems in the country," Batyrov said. "There are lots of problems and that they all will be solved is all we are told, but they [officials in Bishkek] never do anything to solve them."<sup>15</sup> After expressing concern with growing "Uzbekophobia" among local law-enforcement agents, Jalalabad activists called for Uzbek to be declared an official language.

The Jalalabad protest drew an estimated 700 participants and marked a radical turn for Uzbek community leaders in their efforts to be heard in Bishkek.<sup>16</sup> The Jalalabad protest was the first time Uzbeks took their grievances to the streets since interethnic clashes rocked southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990. Uzbek rights activists had previously limited their activities to the drafting of resolutions and petitions. A congress of Uzbeks held in January of that year, for example, had adopted an appeal to Bakiev to adopt "a clear policy stance" on minority rights issues. The appeal also noted that the Uzbek community faced "harassment launched by fiscal bodies, law enforcement agencies, and executive power structures that live on the taxes we pay" and that "There is among representatives of the titular nation a tendency of incitement of hatred with regard to Uzbeks and other ethnic groups."<sup>17</sup>

Rising Uzbek discontent was also linked to a breakdown of informal channels of communication among Kyrgyz government officials and Uzbek community leaders. While

some Uzbek leaders had maintained close personal ties to Akaev, following the March revolution none of the Uzbek leaders had a strong relationship with Bakiev. Anvar Artykov, an ethnic Uzbek who was Bakiev's ally during the Tulip Revolution, was dismissed in early December as the governor of the Osh region.

The government's unwillingness to curb corruption was also a source of concern, not least because corruption was increasingly affecting the business sector where Uzbeks have traditionally played a leading role. Indeed, the March 2005 overthrow of Akaev unleashed a wide-ranging struggle over property, which occasionally turned violent,<sup>18</sup> and which appears to have been a particularly powerful influence on the mobilization of the Uzbeks and the rise of a new community leadership.

## Ethno-politics in the Bakiev Era

The emergence and victory of the movement that overthrew Akaev marked an important shift in the politics of Kyrgyzstan. Notable in this respect was the stronger reliance on Kyrgyz nationalist rhetoric and a new style of political mobilization, especially focused on the government's base in the south of the country.

In the years prior to the Tulip Revolution many analysts pointed to a struggle between various informal groups (often termed "clans") built on family, friends, and career networks—which served as the basis for patronage relationships—as defining the political life of the country. In the south, during this period concerns grew that the region was largely outside these arrangements and missing out on the patronage of the presidency.<sup>19</sup>

Akaev's policy of appointing political protégés and rotating them through the key post of governor of Osh Oblast caused widespread resentment in southern Kyrgyzstan. Southerners were quick to point out that the Osh region's leaders during the Akaev years hailed from the northern part of the country. This grievance provided a powerful means to promote political mobilization in the south but grievances were not enough—political organization was also required.

From the late 1990s, leading political figures increasingly sought to mobilize opposition to the ruling regime through local vertical networks based upon informal patronage networks and kinship ties.<sup>20</sup> Thus the movement that emerged to topple Akaev was based upon a fragmentation and deinstitutionalization of politics in the country, with political organization provided via top down groups using local networks, including through payments for protesters.<sup>21</sup> These networks were overwhelmingly composed of ethnic Kyrgyz.

Once in power, the opposition movement quickly broke apart and Bakiev emerged as the leading political actor. He sought to consolidate his rule through extending the reach of his patronage and familial networks. Observers noted a growing criminalization

of the state during the Bakiev era.<sup>22</sup> Pressure increased for economic resources within the country to come under the president's wide network, including energy resources and key local markets. The International Crisis Group has gone so far as to suggest that the security agencies were employed to pursue this agenda and that top members of the ruling regime, mostly connected to the police or security structures, were playing a major role in protecting narcotics shipments passing through Kyrgyzstan.<sup>23</sup>

In an effort by the Bakiev regime to consolidate control, presidential elections were brought forward to July 2009. Bakiev achieved a clear electoral victory in the elections, which the OSCE judged as failing to meet key international commitments. The election paved the way for a strengthening of presidential power—which was advanced under the slogan of building “Consultative Democracy.”

A key person within the Bakiev network was the president's son Maxim. During this period, restrictions on the media were strengthened and corruption spread, notably in the energy sector—with many believing that the provision of fuel supplies to the U.S. airbase at Manas a part of these corrupt practices. Following the 2009 presidential elections, Maxim was seen to be strengthening his power and economic position. There were also changes to the security agencies with the National Guard, Kyrgyzstan's elite military force, disbanded in December 2009. In February 2010, it became known that the guard had been merged with the Presidential Guard, headed by Janysh Bakiev—the president's brother.

## The Overthrow of Bakiev

By 2010, the Bakiev regime began to face popular discontent, notably as a result of rising utility prices, anger over corruption, and a strengthening of the political opposition. By this point the Bakiev regime had created a “bankrupt state hollowed out by corruption and crime.”<sup>24</sup> Kyrgyzstan faced a renewed period of political instability as opposition gathered force, led by many of the same persons who had spearheaded the Tulip Revolution against President Akaev five years earlier.

Demonstrations started in Naryn in the north of the country in February and continued through to April. During this period there was a gradual increase in demands from the protesters until they began to call for the removal of Bakiev. In April the confrontation between government and opposition came to a head. Large crowds descended on the capital and violence broke out between the protesters and the government forces. The Provisional Government later claimed that Janysh Bakiev, as head of the presidential guard, authorized the shooting that killed dozens of protesters.

While the confrontation in April resembled the Tulip Revolution in terms of the actors involved and the means of mobilizing protest groups, it was marked by extreme



violence, including the death of over 80 persons and widespread destruction in the capital. Observers noted that the crowds that arrived in Bishkek were largely young males from rural areas. A significant proportion appeared intent on exploiting opportunities to use the confrontation for looting. Faced with the violence and unable to resist the opposition, Bakiev and many of his relatives fled on April 7 to Jalalabad in the south.

As with events in 2005, this was essentially an intra-Kyrgyz political struggle and the minorities, notably the Uzbeks, remained on the sidelines.<sup>25</sup> But just as with the Tulip Revolution, the collapse of central authority led to violence against minority communities. In early April in the northern town of Tokmok antigovernment protests turned into pogroms against ethnic Dungans and Uighurs.<sup>26</sup> On April 19, hundreds of squatters attacked Meskhetian Turks living in nearby villages, reportedly seeking to take over farm plots. In the village of Maevka, locals said that 28 out of 80 Meskhetian homes were attacked, some burned to the ground. The violence claimed at least 5 lives and left 28 injured.<sup>27</sup>

## May 2010 Violence

During the Bakiev era, formal relations with the minorities—especially the Uzbeks—were largely ignored. The Akaev era policies for interethnic relations were neglected or abandoned and it was the security services and the police that increasingly became the main instruments for managing minority issues. Relations were notably difficult with Kadyrjan Batyrov's Rodina political movement.

Despite the opposition to Bakiev from Batyrov and Rodina, the Uzbek political groups did not participate in the April confrontation and kept a low profile during the political struggle. With the flight of Bakiev from Bishkek, political attention shifted to the south and to the region of Jalalabad in particular. It was at this point that the ethnic component of the wider conflict gathered force.

With the April ouster of Bakiev, Batyrov and other Uzbek leaders felt that the time was right to provide clear political support for the Provisional Government and to seek ways to improve the position of the Uzbek community in the country. Looking to consolidate its fragile hold on power, the Provisional Government was anxious to secure support and entered into discussions with Batyrov and his leading supporters. The main focus of their efforts were negotiations to ensure that there were Uzbek representatives within the government and that the new constitution then being drafted reflected the rights and aspirations of Uzbeks, including in the areas of language, education, and representation. Representatives from the Uzbek community subsequently joined the constitutional commission, although they failed to have their demands for minority rights, including the issue of the status of Uzbek language, included in the new draft constitution.

In May, supporters of Bakiev initiated a series of actions designed to swing political control back to the former president. Hundreds of supporters of the ousted president, many armed, seized regional government buildings, notably in Osh and Jalalabad, and took Jalalabad's newly appointed governor hostage. Prior to the occupations, it was reported that leaflets were distributed in southern Kyrgyzstan calling for the formation of a "southern Kyrgyz democratic republic." A body calling itself the "committee in defense of ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev" told reporters that 25,000 people in the south were ready to march on Bishkek and "deal with the Provisional Government."<sup>28</sup>

Faced with the situation in the south, the Provisional Government called upon Batyrov and his Uzbek movement to move beyond political support for the Provisional Government to active resistance to the Bakiev group and its efforts to seize control in the south. On May 14, groups supporting the Provisional Government and members of Rodina expelled the Bakiev supporters by force from government buildings. They then proceeded to Bakiev's nearby house, which they set on fire.<sup>29</sup>

In an interview broadcast on the Uzbek language channels Mezon TV and Osh TV Batyrov is reported to have said, "The time when the Uzbeks sat still at home and did not participate in state building has passed. We [Uzbeks] actively supported the Provisional Government and must actively participate in all civil processes... If there were not Uzbeks, the Kyrgyz and members of the Provisional Government would not be able to resist Bakiev in Jalalabad when he tried to conduct his activity against the Provisional Government."<sup>30</sup> He was also reported to have criticized strongly the security forces and police for their loyalty to Bakiev and called for the creation of a joint Uzbek-Kyrgyz militia to hunt down Bakiev supporters.

The mass mobilization of ethnic Uzbeks and their involvement in violence was taken negatively by many ethnic Kyrgyz in the south of Kyrgyzstan who saw the destruction of Bakiev's house as an Uzbek attack on the Kyrgyz. Bakiev still had many Kyrgyz supporters and relatives not only in Jalalabad but also in Osh and across the south. Batyrov's TV comments further served as a catalyst for a mobilization of ethnic Kyrgyz with meetings convened around Jalalabad and other southern areas.<sup>31</sup>

On May 19, a mob attacked the People's Friendship University in central Jalalabad, an institution that Batyrov had founded and headed. Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups in major settlements, including Osh, were reportedly organized into self-defense units and armed with clubs and brickbats.<sup>32</sup> The violence left two dead and 71 injured and led to the introduction of a state of emergency by the Provisional Government.

Under pressure from Kyrgyz protesters, acting Defense Minister Ismail Isakov said on May 20 that the authorities had opened a criminal investigation against Batyrov. In a statement published by the news site Ferghana.ru on May 20, Jalalabad Uzbek community

members said, “We demand an end to efforts in the media that create a public image of Batyrov and Uzbeks as enemies among the Kyrgyz population.”

For many in the Kyrgyz community, the events in Jalalabad in May confirmed that the Uzbeks were acting finally to seek revenge for the violence of 1990. This view was expressed in the days following the violence at the university and the settlements by leading southern political figures, including the mayor of Osh. Rumors about what Batyrov had stated in his TV interview circulated widely (notably that he had called for “autonomy in the south”—code for secession of Uzbek populated areas), fostering tensions and a growing sense of confrontation.<sup>33</sup>

# Elements of Conflict

## Structural Factors Affecting Inter Ethnic Relations

The growing tension around interethnic issues accompanying the rising political confrontation in the country took on an increased significance because of the important frictions created by the structural foundations of interethnic relations in the country. Historically, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic communities had formed on the basis of differing economic activities—pastoral nomadism as opposed to sedentary agriculture and urban-based crafts and trade.

The relationship that formed between the communities was generally one of cooperation and mutual benefit, but there is also a history of localized conflagrations for over a hundred years, focused on competition for natural resources resulting from the use of the same territories, commercial tensions, and trading imbalances at market places. In this way, alongside the longstanding dominant relationship of peaceful coexistence and interaction is a history of periodic animosity between rural and urban economies interlaced with ethnic frictions. It is this latter shared past that is recalled and given undue prominence at times of tension.

The Russian and Soviet approaches to ethnicity, national identity, and the administration of Central Asia have also left a difficult legacy whereby ethnic differentiation has been reinforced. A process of territorial delimitation launched by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s began to divide the region into national republics on the basis of putative ethnic identities. In fact, ethnic and national identities were only weakly developed at that time and had to be reinforced by nearly 70 years of Soviet led nation-building programs. Just as important was the reality of complex ethnic mixing, economic interdependence, and social networks that straddled the newly created republican boundaries. The Soviet era division of the region thus often ran contrary to the society on the ground, established networks of commerce, and historical forms of rule.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent states in Central Asia transformed almost overnight what had been conceived as administrative divisions into international borders. Not only has this development created a plethora of practical problems for residents of the area who now have to negotiate an international border that in some cases divides villages and runs through backyards, it has also raised a series of questions about the relationship of ethnicity to the new states. Critically, the establishment of independent states has raised the question of whether so-called titular populations should have a leading role in these new political orders and the place of minorities. In Kyrgyzstan, these tensions have in turn exacerbated rural and urban tensions by reinforcing their ethnic dimension.

Economic issues also provided an important backdrop to the growing political crisis in Kyrgyzstan from the late 1990s. The struggle for control of property and businesses has been a key motivation for elites and masses, both in the overthrow of Akaev and Bakiev, and in the subsequent struggles for power. In 2010, economic interests also proved an important factor in violent confrontation between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south with the April unrest and collapse of central control triggering a renewed competition over resources in the south.

Since independence, all sectors of Kyrgyzstan's economy have suffered but the rural sector has been particularly hard hit. Kyrgyzstan has undergone an extensive program of economic reforms. Land has been privatized, Soviet era collective farms broken up, imports have grown, and subsidies have been reduced. There has been a liberalization of commodity prices, and cuts in state expenditure. Together, these changes have reduced much of Kyrgyzstan's agriculture to something close to subsistence farming.

For many of the rural population, primarily composed of ethnic Kyrgyz, migration has become the only way to escape the grinding poverty. While some sought to travel to Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation as migrant workers, many simply moved to towns and cities where they sought better wages and prospects. In Bishkek, sizeable shantytowns developed to house migrants. With the overthrow of Bakiev, some members of these communities took the opportunity to grab land to which they felt they were entitled. Land held by minorities, such as the Meskhetians and Dungans, was particularly vulnerable to seizure under the slogan "Kyrgyz land for the Kyrgyz!"<sup>34</sup>

In the south of the country the situation was equally desperate. Given the small allocation of land that each family received in the 1990s, most farmers struggle to eke out a living, and are unable to absorb family labor, resulting in rural unemployment and underemployment. The financial crisis in 2009 and early 2010 created further pressure on the rural economy. Labor migrant remittances started to decline as the Russian economy slowed down. Utility prices were hiked at the start of 2010. Then on April 1, Russia announced a sharp increase in fuel prices to Kyrgyzstan—an action connected

to accusations that the Bakiev regime was profiting from the lower Russian pricing—causing many people to fear further economic hardship and a strained relationship with the country’s major economic partner.

Since ethnic differentiation in the south is reinforced by the organization of the economy, with Uzbeks dominant in the urban economy and the Kyrgyz in the rural sector, the growing economic pressures increasingly came to bear at ethnic contact points, the town, markets, and in competition over land and employment in the urban economy.<sup>35</sup>

## The Bakiev Clan and Criminal Groups

Almost immediately following Bakiev’s ejection from power, the Provisional Government began to claim that the former president and his supporters were planning to seize back power from their base in the south. On May 14, following the violence in Jalalabad, Iskhak Masaliev, former parliament member and head of Kyrgyzstan’s Communist Party, and Usen Sydykov, the former chief of President Kurmanbek Bakiev’s office were arrested on the basis of a recorded telephone conversation purportedly between the two in which they discussed how to organize unrest in the south.<sup>36</sup>

On May 19 a recording of a conversation allegedly between the former president’s son Maxim, and Janysh Bakiev, the president’s brother and former head of the Presidential Guard, was posted on YouTube. The conversation focused on the organization of a coup to seize back power ahead of the June 27 referendum on the new constitution. In the recording, the two conspirators make clear though that “the Boss”—presumed to be former president Bakiev—is not interested in this scenario.<sup>37</sup>

A further factor promoting the instability during this key period was the breakup of the Bakiev networks and in particular the struggle for power and property unleashed by the fall of the former president. One of the most difficult elements to determine in this respect are the actions of criminal and semi-criminal groups associated with the Bakiev regime in this struggle and their subsequent role in the violence in the south.

There is widespread agreement that the Tulip Revolution unleashed an expansion of criminal activity in Kyrgyzstan and that the Bakiev regime was closely associated with this development—perhaps even leading it. Some experts believe that the breakdown of state authority in the months leading up to the June violence destroyed a fragile balance among criminal groups established during the Bakiev era and created a power struggle, which, in turn, played a key role in inciting broader interethnic violence.

At the same time, in an environment where the political struggle is often about gaining control of the state in order to use its distributive functions to strengthen

patronage networks and where violence has become a tool for many different groups, it is not always straightforward to distinguish simply between legality and illegality. During the Bakiev era some of these informal groups seem to have merged with the ruling regime and with law and order agencies and to have become engaged in a redistribution of property in their favor.

In Kyrgyzstan, and especially in the south, there have been in recent years reports of the growth of organized groups operating autonomously and engaged in the narcotics trade, prostitution, racketeering, and extortion. Generally organized around the numerous “sports” clubs that have sprung up in the south, these groups are often composed of young unemployed men, although reports indicate that some groups were ethnically mixed while others were composed exclusively of individuals from one ethnic group.

The ousting of Bakiev threatened many of the advances these groups had made in previous years and called into question their relationship to power. A key development was the June 7 assassination of Aibek Mirsidikov—a drug lord also known as Black Aibek. Mirsidikov was believed to have played a role in fomenting protests in May together with Bakiev loyalists. Specifically, he is said to have been involved with the effort to replace Bektur Asanov, the Jalalabad governor appointed by the Provisional Government.<sup>38</sup>

One of the reasons that this attempt failed was the involvement of the Uzbek community, led by Kadyrzhan Batyrov. At one level then the May violence was also a confrontation between key Uzbek figures struggling to control local economic resources—Batyrov a businessman who had made his fortune by largely legal means during Akaev’s regime and Mirsidikov from local criminal circles whose position had advanced under Bakiev. With Bakiev’s removal their conflict became overt and violent. A Jalalabad based criminal group reportedly killed Mirsidikov, to neutralize his gang. His death is believed to have sparked a violent struggle for power and property among criminal groups.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, some officials have faced allegations of involvement with criminal elements. Timur Kamchibekov and Bakyt Amanbaev, two former senior officials in Osh’s municipal government, have accused Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov—a Bakiev appointee—of maintaining links with criminal gangs.<sup>40</sup>

While elements of the former Bakiev regime may well have been involved in the onset of the violence in June, notably through the engagement of “violence specialists” capable of provoking tension between communities, little evidence has been presented to support claims of a coordinated conspiracy.<sup>41</sup> The plotting of Bakiev loyalists and the Provisional Government’s response seem rather to have been important in further promoting the sense of lawlessness and the feeling that the country was on the edge of chaos and possible civil war.<sup>42</sup> In this context, tensions rose considerably and criminal groups appear to have perceived this as a time of threat and to have engaged in violence, which contributed to the growing confrontation.<sup>43</sup>

A number of observers have also suggested that once violence was underway, criminal gangs simply used the interethnic clashes as cover for their own actions, which were aimed at altering the local criminal balance-of-power. Thus some of the violence and the seizure of property in June reflected the presence of illegal groups using the opportunities provided by the wider conflict.

## The Role of Islamism

Shortly after the June violence, Kyrgyzstan's intelligence chief Keneshbek Duishebaev claimed that Islamist groups had been closely involved in the violence. He suggested that relatives of deposed president Bakiev met in Dubai with Islamist militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union and paid the latter up to 30 million dollars to destabilize southern Kyrgyzstan. These claims are repeated in the report of the National Commission of Investigation into the June events, citing Kyrgyzstan's intelligence security agencies. Later warnings about the threat of extremism by UN Special Envoy Miroslav Jenca and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake helped to reinforce the view that Islamism played a role in the unrest.

Bakiev's rule was characterized by increasing repression against practicing Muslims. The murder of popular imam Muhammad Rafik Kamalov in Karasu in mid-2006 raised many questions, while arrests of real and more often alleged members of the pan-Islamist party Hizb Ut-Tahrir, and the crackdown on a public celebration of Islamic festivals created tensions with the Islamic community. The formation of an alliance between Islamist groups and the former ruling regime is thus difficult to imagine.

Lacking evidence, many local people are skeptical about a possible role for Islamist groups in the violence.<sup>44</sup> Experts also point to a lack of previous efforts by the region's Islamist movements to foment interethnic violence and instead have suggested that Kyrgyzstan's security forces may have been seeking to shift the blame for the violence onto religious groups as justification for future crackdowns.<sup>45</sup>

On December 5, imams were removed from their posts in Osh because they were accused of leaving their mosques without supervision during ethnic clashes in mid-June and for "propagating nontraditional Islam."<sup>46</sup> This followed a raid by the security services in Osh that left four dead. The security operation was reportedly aimed at members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and part of wider actions against terrorist groups including some pursuing "separatist goals."<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, Kyrgyzstan has intensified security operations against alleged "radical" Islamist figures, the majority of whom are ethnic Uzbeks.<sup>48</sup> There is a widespread view in Kyrgyzstan that (Uzbek) mosques played a role



in the organization of the June violence—notably through sending a signal (via fireworks and a call of prayer) to launch the violence (this accusation is repeated in the report of the National Commission to Investigation the June Events).

# The June 2010 Violence

The onset of violence on June 10 remains contested although considerable attention is given to this issue. The eventual confrontation came after the complete failure of the Provisional Government to address the growing tensions in the south from mid-May or to improve the security situation.

For many in Kyrgyzstan, determining who initiated the violence has become synonymous with assigning blame for the whole conflict. Human Rights Watch has identified the June events as an interethnic conflict. On the basis of numerous interviews with eyewitnesses, Human Rights Watch presents a narrative of the violence that commences when ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz mobs clashed in a series of incidents that quickly escalated on the evening of June 10.<sup>49</sup>

In the initial phases of the violence, the initiative is identified as lying with the groups of Uzbeks who turned on the urban Kyrgyz population. Later, a mass mobilization of the rural Kyrgyz in surrounding areas, possibly with the participation of elements of the Kyrgyz authorities and of the Kyrgyz security forces, saw the balance shift as Uzbeks in Osh and later in other locations across the south came under attack.<sup>50</sup>

The report on the violence from the International Crisis Group presents a similar version of the initial violence, within the context of the wider political crisis in the country. The report raises the possibility that the violence may have started spontaneously and then escalated as a result of rumors of atrocities—initially unfounded—and against the background of tense relations. As the violence spread across the south, the report notes that it was almost exclusively ethnic Kyrgyz who controlled the streets and that the mobs were “well organized.”

While determining the involvement of individuals in the June violence is vital, not least as a part of the process of bringing justice and criminal prosecutions, it is important that the issue of the onset of violence is not disassociated from the wider conflict processes in Kyrgyzstan. Determining which particular individuals or groups

initiated violence on the evening of June 10 is not the same as offering a full account of the causes of violence and to how the country reached the point where whole scale violence could be initiated.

This is not simply an academic point. Determining the sources of conflict in Kyrgyzstan is central for developing preventative strategies and actions for the future. This debate is also crucial in regard to the months following the June events when conflict that included violence continued, and when assigning blame narrowly for the summer violence has become a key political tool in reshaping the balance of power in the country.

Research undertaken for this report indicates that the June events were not an ethnic conflict. Rather they should be seen as an incident of ethnic violence within a broader conflict in Kyrgyzstan. The sources of this conflict are temporally and substantively wider than the clash of ethnic groups in June and involve a wider range of political forces and social groups. Nevertheless, the scale of violence in June brought the country close to full ethnic conflict.

## Conflict Dynamics

Whatever the sparks that initiated the fighting, it is apparent that once violence started it began to take on its own dynamics. It should be noted that many eyewitnesses and analysts suggest that in the second phase of the violence—as the fighting moved from chaotic clashes to more comprehensive armed violence across the south—there is clear evidence from eyewitness accounts and satellite imaging of property damage of an asymmetry in violence and in the spread of the fighting. Ethnic Uzbeks, their property, and places of residence were disproportionately attacked and destroyed.<sup>51</sup> This pattern is likely to reflect the interaction of six factors:

- *Targeted and Organized Violence:* The evolution of the violence suggests a degree of preparation and mobilization (by both ethnic communities) and the engagement of parts of the local administrations and the security forces. This seems to have particularly been the case in the city of Osh and to a lesser extent in other parts of the south. Evidence to support this has been presented in the reports by Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, and the report of the National Commission to Investigate the June Events.
- *Ethnic Violence:* While the origins of the violence that erupted in Osh lay in the wider conflict processes of Kyrgyzstan and a part of the pattern of the June violence is explained by deliberate and organized actions, once fighting started ethnicity became a defining factor of the violence—spontaneous and bottom up violence

emerged alongside organized actions. This development was greatly aided by the easy local availability of weapons that were seized by mobs or may have been distributed by members of the security forces.<sup>52</sup>

Individuals, properties, and settlements were targeted on the basis of perceived ethnic identities. The targeting that took place is evident in the daubing of graffiti on buildings indicating the ethnicity of inhabitants and from personal testimonies about the nature of the violence.

- *Pre-emptive Strikes:* Widespread reports of the violence as it developed point to broad networks of communication (principally via the phone network) through which information was passed about what was happening. Those at the center of the Osh violence warned relatives, friends, and colleagues in other parts of the south about the violence and its spread. On the basis of this information, a large-scale evacuation was organized amongst the ethnic Uzbek community so that there were far fewer deaths when violence did break out in Jalalabad and other locations.

There is also evidence that once the violence had started in Osh, different communities (Kyrgyz and Uzbek) engaged in preemptive violence against neighborhoods, villages, and settlements of the other community out of fear and in anticipation of being attacked themselves. In this context, ethnic identities became vital markers both in terms of targeting for possible attack but also as a means for developing collective defense.

- *Revenge:* Revenge appears to have been a strong motivation for those involved in the violence from its inception. Revenge operated on the basis of individual actions in respect to violence (real or perceived) that was directed at a relative or friend and on the basis of violence committed against a national community. Rumors played a strong role in respect to the latter. In the early hours of June 10, a rumor—which has subsequently been found to be false—about the rape of a Kyrgyz girl in a university dormitory by Uzbeks served as a powerful means to mobilize ethnic Kyrgyz.
- *Opportunistic violence (rape and other sexual violence, torture, assault and physical humiliation, hostage taking):* While much of the attention on the violence has been on the deaths, the physical damage, and the refugees and IDPs, there was also considerable violence that fell short of killing. Much of this violence may have been organized as part of an effort to terrorize and humiliate communities and stemmed from the anger and revenge generated around interethnic forms of violence. It also seems to be the case that individuals and small groups took advantage of the breakdown of order to become involved in opportunistic violence.<sup>53</sup> An anthropologist who studied the violence in 1990 noted that this form of violence was also present during the unrest in June 2010.<sup>54</sup>

- *Looting and economic crimes:* Eyewitness accounts identify the appearance of “marauders” during the early phases of the violence. In some cases, whole neighborhoods were systematically looted and destroyed. Many of those involved in the violence for political or personal reasons (such as revenge) may have become involved in looting. It is also likely that some participants in the violence were there simply to undertake looting—a phenomenon that was also evident in the April 2011 violence in Bishkek.
- *Patterns of Violence:* While there is considerable evidence of the interethnic aspect of the violence in June, it should be noted that ethnicity does not offer a complete explanation of the pattern and nature of violence. In this regard it is important to note two significant developments:
  - There were important instances of interethnic cooperation throughout the period of violence. There are numerous reports of cases in which neighbors, friends, and colleagues hid, protected, and evacuated individuals or groups of persons from other ethnic groups, often at great personal risk.<sup>55</sup>
  - The distribution and intensity of violence is uneven. Within Osh, not all districts were attacked evenly. Some Uzbek neighborhoods were destroyed, others hardly damaged. This may be an indication that the attacks were aimed to cause fear rather than eliminate the Uzbek community—perhaps designed to displace Uzbeks from key areas as part of plans to redevelop the city (discussed below). It may also indicate complex patterns of interethnic cooperation, resistance, and collaboration with the perpetrators of the violence.

It should also be noted that in some areas of significant ethnic Uzbek settlement, notably Uzgen (which was the epicenter of the violence in 1990), there was relatively minor violence while the small town of Bazar-Kurgan experienced intense violence. This suggests that further work is required to understand the local dynamics of violence.

# The Legacy of Violence

By June 16, the intensity of the violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan had begun to abate.<sup>56</sup> At this point attention shifted to humanitarian assistance and aid. Yet while the killings and mass violence had largely ceased, the conflict continued in different forms. Within a few days of the cessation of widespread and intense violence, reports began to emerge from international aid agencies of continuing violence, committed primarily against members of the Uzbek minority. The violence at this stage concerned:

## Sporadic and Low Level Violence

During the second half of June, the international humanitarian and medical aid organization Medecins Sans Frontieres reported violence in southern Kyrgyzstan on a daily basis.<sup>57</sup> It noted the fear and distrust that existed between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities.

This situation fostered lawlessness in many parts of the region. Uzbeks reported that their businesses were subjected to increased pressure to pay “taxes” to Kyrgyz groups and that their property was subject to expropriation. Corruption intensified, notably around the security checkpoints established outside Uzbek residential areas.

Despite the continued violence, Uzbeks were afraid to visit public institutions as they feared that they would be subject to further attacks. Notable in this regard were hospitals and clinics. Medecins Sans Frontieres reported: “Every day, in our mobile clinics and health facilities with which we collaborate, our medical teams treat patients who recently suffered heavy beatings or who even show signs of torture. Many people, especially from the Uzbek community in Osh, told us they are not going to a public medical facility as they are afraid of being arrested.”<sup>58</sup>

This situation of ongoing violence meant that for many in the south, especially the ethnic Uzbek community, there was a continued lack of security for months after the main

violence ceased. The increased presence of the police and army did little to change the situation, indeed, for the Uzbeks it was precisely the agencies of law and order that were perceived as the main threats to their security.

Beyond the assaults and everyday intimidation, there were also reports of more serious violence. Notable in this regard were indications from local human rights groups that there were significant numbers of violent rapes, particularly targeting Uzbek women, in the months following the June violence. In some cases these violent sexual attacks involved prolonged periods of detention. The scale of this problem was difficult to assess due to cultural stigmatization of the crime and fear of reporting incidents to the police.<sup>59</sup>

## Detentions, Torture, Trials, and Land Grabs

In the immediate aftermath of the June violence, reports soon emerged of widespread detentions of ethnic Uzbeks by the Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies.<sup>60</sup> Although there was already overwhelming evidence that the Uzbek communities had experienced the main brunt of the violence, it was this ethnic group that appeared to be blamed disproportionately for what had happened.<sup>61</sup>

The security forces reportedly used heavy handed and violent actions in the detention of those accused of playing a role in the violence. Information about the torture of detainees also emerged.<sup>62</sup> Following strong criticism from international agencies of the actions of the security agencies, President Roza Otunbaeva acknowledged that Kyrgyz security forces had abused the rights of minority Uzbeks in the wake of deadly riots.<sup>63</sup>

The detention of the Uzbeks was the prelude to a series of trials officially intended to bring those involved in the June violence to justice. Major questions were raised however about the fairness of these trial processes and about the ethnic imbalance among those on trial.<sup>64</sup> There was widespread skepticism about the speed by which the authorities had apparently investigated so many cases. One report suggested up to 2,316 cases had been determined within three months of the June violence.<sup>65</sup> A strong impression was also created that the investigation of the violence was being directed away from examining who was involved in instances when ethnic Uzbeks were killed with the focus instead on the Kyrgyz victims and lesser crimes, further exacerbating ethnic tensions.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the trials seemed often to serve more as an opportunity for scapegoating and revenge. In many cases, those on trial and their lawyers were subject to intimidation and violence from relatives of the deceased, crowds inside and outside the courthouses, and the security forces.<sup>67</sup>

As concern grew over the situation surrounding the trial of ethnic Uzbeks, the government decided to postpone some of the trials.<sup>68</sup> The problems of the trials continued into

December. The growing confrontation and violence around the trials process led national human rights organizations to call for protection for their work and that of the lawyers.<sup>69</sup>

The redistribution of property, which has been closely involved in the ethnicization of Kyrgyzstan's political conflict, took the form of open land grabs in the months following the June violence. Reflecting the state of lawlessness that continued in southern districts nearly five months after the summer violence and the ever-present pressure for land created by rapid population growth, ethnic Kyrgyz squatters began to occupy land formally owned or rented by ethnic Uzbeks. With the local authorities struggling to tackle this issue, it risked feeding into the ethnic polarization that remains acute in the region.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, some have suggested that the issues of demography and communal conflict are being exploited by political and economic forces—notably the Osh local authorities.<sup>71</sup>



# Confrontation with Domestic Political Forces

In the months following the June violence, Kyrgyzstan frequently seemed to be on the verge of a further fragmentation of political power. The Provisional Government's position continued to be weak with political forces from the south—some of which were also part of the Provisional Government itself—and these forces were able to resist efforts by the president to impose her authority on the south. Once again interethnic relations seemed imperiled by a political power struggle taking place amongst the ethnic Kyrgyz community.

## The OSCE Police Assistance Mission

In the immediate aftermath of the June violence, the focus for the political competition in the country became the drive by President Otunbaeva to assert central control over the southern regions, notably Osh, and the resistance of key political forces, including figures in the Provisional Government, to this agenda. The initial focus for the power struggle was the proposal to deploy an OSCE police assistance force to the south.

Following the violence, the international community sought a means to address the lack of security in the region. In mid-July, the OSCE and Kyrgyzstan agreed on the principles and modalities for an OSCE Police Advisory Group, to consist of 52 unarmed police officers to be deployed in the south. The prospect of an international police mission soon attracted strong opposition in Kyrgyzstan, notably from politicians from the south and in the country's security institutions.

Public protests were organized in Osh, with the mayor of Osh—Melis Myrzakmatov—taking a leading role in opposing the OSCE mission. While protesters claimed the mission would “cause another Kosovo,” many observers suggested those involved with the

June violence were anxious to avoid any independent presence in the south that might collect evidence about crimes committed during June but also curtail the local security forces in their actions against the Uzbek community.

Following the initial public protests, a variety of national politicians lined up to oppose the OSCE mission, citing popular discontent with the proposed mission. Many of the politicians intending to run in the October 10 parliamentary elections argued against the OSCE's presence.<sup>72</sup> In early August, the secretary of Kyrgyzstan's Security Council, Alik Orozov, spoke out against the mission.<sup>73</sup>

Eventually the OSCE was informed by the president that she could not guarantee the safety of the police officers if deployed and the mission deployment was postponed until after the October 10 parliamentary elections. It was finally agreed that a reduced mission would be deployed in early 2011. The mission would primarily have a training mandate and be dispersed across the country.

## The Mayor of Osh and Postconflict Reconstruction

The failure to deploy the OSCE police mission when it was most needed exposed the ongoing struggle for political power in Kyrgyzstan and the inability of the Provisional Government to impose its authority in the south. A key figure to emerge in the context of this struggle was the mayor of Osh, who had been appointed by former president Bakiev. The strong suspicions among the Uzbek community that the Osh mayor had been involved in orchestrating the summer violence, coupled with the mayor's role in the opposition both to the OSCE police mission and city redevelopment proposals, helped propel Myrzakmatov to the center of politics in Kyrgyzstan and highlighted the continuing risks of political fragmentation in the country.

In the weeks after the violence, the Osh authorities announced a radical initiative to redevelop the city following the summer of fighting, which the authorities claimed was simply an extension of existing plans from January 2010. The proposals included a far-reaching resettlement of communities from central Osh and the location of the traditional Uzbek *mahallas* (neighborhoods) into new high-rise apartments on the edge of the city.

The mayor claimed that this form of ethnically mixed housing would prevent future violence and that the narrow streets of the Uzbek *mahallas* had prevented firefighters from deploying their equipment during the June fighting. Plans were also unveiled to relocate the lucrative Osh market from the center of the city to a suburb.

The reconstruction plans were viewed with considerable suspicion among the Uzbek community who saw a plan by the city authorities to take advantage of the postconflict situation to break up Uzbek communities, to move them to the margins of the city, to take the

valuable land in the center of the city, and to seize control of the Osh market.<sup>74</sup> The concern that town planning was being used as a cover to marginalize the Uzbek community was strengthened when the Jalalabad authorities announced plans to widen an already broad central road, which it was argued would necessitate the destruction of the People's Friendship University, which has been founded and supported by Batyrov.

As tensions escalated, the southern political elite demonstrated their support for the mayor when the local parliament awarded him the honorary title of "Hero of the Kyrgyz People," along with Kursan Asanov, the city commandant, and Askar Shakirov, a Kyrgyz deputy in the parliament who perished during the June violence.<sup>75</sup> In an interview with the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, the mayor underlined his opposition to the deployment of the OSCE mission, confirmed himself a "nationalist," outlined his view that the June violence had been an attempt against Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty by the Uzbeks, and indicated that the "decrees of the Provisional Government did not have legal force in the south."<sup>76</sup>

The mayor's actions and public comments underscored the limits of President Otunbaeva's authority, and made clear how hard it would be to restore confidence among Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek population and rebuild the country's south. With calls coming for Myrzakmatov to be removed, the president attempted to dismiss the mayor.<sup>77</sup> Kyrgyzstan security forces failed, however, to detain Myrzakmatov when he flew to Bishkek in mid-August, and he subsequently returned to Osh. At a public meeting on August 20, Deputy Prime Minister Azimbek Beknazarov, who had been sent by the president to remove the mayor, appeared on a makeshift podium alongside Myrzakmatov and held the mayor's arm aloft to frenzied cheers from the crowd.<sup>78</sup>

Facing growing international concern about the proposals to use international aid to redevelop Osh, Myrzakmatov eventually softened his position and a rebuilding effort to house the victims of the violence in the area of their former residences was initiated. In early September, the mayor announced he would step down for a two-month period of leave, thereby reducing the tensions. This move did not, however, solve the political challenges in Kyrgyzstan as the issues surrounding the June violence carried over into the context of the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 10.

# The International Community and Conflict in Kyrgyzstan

The violence in Kyrgyzstan represented a major challenge for the international community. As Kyrgyzstan teetered on the brink of civil war, the Provisional Government called for direct outside military intervention. Despite the loss of life, the real possibility of the break up of Kyrgyzstan, and the potential for the spread of conflict to neighboring countries, the international community proved unable or unwilling to respond effectively to the violence and instead focused on the provision of humanitarian aid.<sup>79</sup>

## International Organizations

The OSCE has primary responsibility for conflict prevention and management in the region and has field missions throughout Central Asia—including in Kyrgyzstan, a special representative for the region, and dedicated conflict prevention mechanisms—notably the HCNM. With its mandate, expertise, and local capacity, the OSCE has been closely engaged in previous crisis situations in Kyrgyzstan and has worked hard in the area of conflict prevention, interethnic relations, and strengthening stability.

As the conflict unfolded in 2010, the OSCE performed poorly. As early as May it was criticized for its underwhelming response to the developing situation in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>80</sup> Despite its dedicated functions, the OSCE failed to respond effectively to the rising tensions. With the eruption of violence in June, the organization proved unable to deploy a peace operation, or act as an effective postconflict stabilization force. The HCNM made a strong statement to the Permanent Council warning of his concerns about the situation in Kyrgyzstan on May 6.<sup>81</sup> Eventually the commissioner issued an official early warning only on June 12, two days after the violence had begun.

With the end of the intense violence of early June, the OSCE turned to addressing the type of postconflict support that might be provided to Kyrgyzstan. After considerable discussion, the participating states could only achieve consensus on the modest proposal to deploy 52 unarmed police officers to engage in training and support activities—which was later further watered down.<sup>82</sup>

With the OSCE failing to respond effectively, other international organizations sought to play a role. The United Nations, through the secretary-general, the special representative of the secretary-general, Miroslav Jenča, and representatives of other specialized agencies raised concerns about the developing situation in Kyrgyzstan and about the aftermath of the violence. The UN has, however, been unable to develop a more active role in Kyrgyzstan beyond humanitarian relief and reconstruction, with the Russian Federation, among others, blocking substantial discussion of Kyrgyzstan's challenges in the Security Council.<sup>83</sup>

## The Russian Federation

For over a decade, the Russian Federation has pursued a policy that Moscow should lead on conflict and security issues in Eurasia, including through the Russian dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). In March 2010, the UN signed a cooperation agreement with the CSTO, thereby providing recognition of the CSTO as a leading regional security organization.<sup>84</sup> Ahead of the signing of the agreement, the Russian representative to the United Nations underlined the opportunities for cooperation in the area of peace operations to justify the closer relationship.<sup>85</sup>

As the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan spun out of control in June, the Provisional Government appealed for international intervention to stem the fighting. The acting president called in particular on Russia to intervene militarily but was met with a direct refusal from Moscow. A spokeswoman for Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was reported as saying that Russia was not prepared to send troops to Kyrgyzstan under the circumstances, but would send humanitarian aid.<sup>86</sup>

Not only was Russia not ready to commit to an intervention but the Moscow-led CSTO also proved unprepared to intervene.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, Russia agreed to provide some military equipment, humanitarian aid and reinforced the security of its military facilities in Kyrgyzstan. Russia also appeared to restrict the involvement of the international community in the Kyrgyzstan crisis, both in the UN context and that of the OSCE.<sup>88</sup>

## The United States

The United States was equally unprepared to promote an intervention and stabilization mission in Kyrgyzstan. During the Bakiev era, the United States became involved in a narrow political engagement in Kyrgyzstan focused on ensuring the continued use of the Manas airbase to supply military forces in Afghanistan. As a result, the United States supported the status quo of the presidential regime and failed to protest against the ongoing deterioration of political and human rights in Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. priority of securing Manas drew Washington into agreeing to nontransparent fuel contracts with the Bakiev regime, following similar nontransparent deals with the Akaev regime, which strengthened the opposition's concerns about corruption in the country.<sup>89</sup>

With the ousting of Bakiev in April, the United States readjusted its political relationship to focus on the Provisional Government but did not shift its priority from the Manas base. Following the June violence, the United States cancelled plans to construct an antiterrorism center in southern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>90</sup> The United States backed the Provisional Government's proposal to create a parliamentary system in Kyrgyzstan, provided humanitarian assistance, publicly supported the idea of an international commission of inquiry, called for and provided some assistance to improving the professional capacity of the police, and supported Kyrgyzstan with increased levels of aid.<sup>91</sup>

## The European Union

With some fanfare, the European Union (EU) announced in 2007 its Strategy for Central Asia. The strategy put considerable emphasis on issues of democracy and human rights but in practice issues of energy and security have dominated the EU's political engagement in the region. Reflecting these priorities, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, gave Kyrgyzstan little attention prior to and during the April–June 2010 crisis.

Following the June violence and under pressure from some member states, the EU has intensified its support for Kyrgyzstan and strengthened its political reporting capacity through the office of the EU Special Representative. The EU has increased its financial assistance to Kyrgyzstan and indicted its support for the OSCE police mission, and an international commission of inquiry—although the EU was not prepared to lead this process.<sup>92</sup> The EU position has, however, clearly been not to go beyond increasing humanitarian aid and expressions of concern in regard to threats to peaceful and democratic developments in the country.<sup>93</sup>

# The Republic of Uzbekistan

During the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990, Tashkent came under strong domestic pressure to intervene and there was a significant popular mobilization to support relatives and coethnics in districts in Uzbekistan bordering Kyrgyzstan. Anxious to avoid a similar situation, in the two decades after the first Osh violence President Karimov has taken an extremely cautious line on Tashkent's responsibilities in respect to ethnic Uzbeks outside of Uzbekistan.

During the confrontation in April 2010, the Uzbekistan Foreign Ministry issued a statement indicating the matter was an internal one for Kyrgyzstan, but expressing concern about the possibility of instability spreading to the regional level.<sup>94</sup> As the violence grew in June, demands were voiced from inside Uzbekistan for Tashkent to participate in a military intervention.<sup>95</sup>

In response to the deteriorating situation, the Foreign Ministry issued a further statement on the situation in Kyrgyzstan. The statement expressed concern about the violence in Osh but clearly supported the line of Kyrgyzstan's Provisional Government that the situation was of an "organized, managed and provocative character" designed to "provoke interethnic confrontation" and so did not constitute an ethnic conflict.<sup>96</sup> Careful efforts were made to limit information available to the population of Uzbekistan about what was happening in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>97</sup>

As the violence intensified and large numbers of ethnic Uzbeks sought refuge in Uzbekistan, a dangerous situation built up at border crossings with Tashkent initially reluctant to admit large numbers of refugees. Eventually, the crossings were opened and over 100,000 refugees were permitted to enter and received accommodation and support from the government of Uzbekistan. Following the decline of violence, the refugees were quickly removed from Uzbekistan—in many cases before they were ready to return. This action reinforced the view that President Karimov was anxious not to create a precedent for Uzbeks to move to Uzbekistan, especially when they came from a country with a more open political and media system and where Islamist groups such as Hizb-ut Tahrir were active.

In subsequent statements, President Karimov has restated the view that the June events were not an ethnic conflict but rather were planned to provoke ethnic confrontation, that the actions were designed to draw Uzbekistan into a conflict with Kyrgyzstan, and that the UN should support an international inquiry into the violence.<sup>98</sup>

## Kazakhstan

At the time of the 2010 crisis, Kazakhstan held the chairmanship of the OSCE and thus found itself on the frontline of the international response to events in Kyrgyzstan. Astana responded by dispatching envoy Zhanybek Karibzhanov to help defuse tensions and assisted in brokering a deal that enabled former president Bakiev to leave Kyrgyzstan in April. As the violence in the country escalated from May through June, however, Kazakhstan was unable to develop an appropriate and effective response beyond providing humanitarian assistance.<sup>99</sup> Many in Kyrgyzstan are critical of Kazakhstan's decision to close its borders during the April crisis.

At key OSCE events, notably the OSCE Tolerance and Non-discrimination Conference on June 29–30 and the OSCE Summit in early December, Astana was unable to bring forward substantial measures designed to promote stability and postconflict development in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, Kazakhstan tended to focus on promoting its own “model” of interethnic tolerance.

Relations were also strained between Kazakhstan and President Otunbaeva's Provisional Government. The Astana authorities disapproved of Kyrgyzstan's effort to promote a parliamentary form of government—perhaps afraid it might succeed and lead to a questioning of Kazakhstan's own hyper-presidential system.



# Investigation of Violence

Following the June fighting, there were widespread calls for an independent investigation of the violence and its sources. The Kyrgyzstan Provisional Government established the National Commission of Investigation into the June Violence.<sup>100</sup> The commission soon ran into difficulties, however, as leading civil society figures resigned and the head of the commission appeared to prejudge the conclusions of the group by announcing that the leaders of the Uzbek community had initiated the violence.<sup>101</sup>

In January 2011, the commission released its findings and presented them to the parliament.<sup>102</sup> The final report was uneven in its quality. It did make a number of important, strong points. The report was clear that the roots of the summer violence were deep in Kyrgyzstan and stretched back to a failure to learn the lessons of the 1990 violence. The authors of the report acknowledged areas of injustice in the country—notably in terms of the under representation of ethnic Uzbeks in the institutions of law and order. The authors also noted the weaknesses of the Akaev era approach to interethnic issues and the deterioration of the situation under Bakiev.

The report is clear on the shortcomings of the Provisional Government and Kyrgyzstan's security forces in failing to respond effectively to the deteriorating situation in the south of the country. Individuals responsible for this failure are identified. In testimony to the parliament, the commission chairman called for the responsibility of these persons to be investigated. While focusing extensively on the role of the Uzbek leadership as a source of the conflict, the report's authors note that there is no evidence they made calls for "autonomy." The report also contains some important recommendations, notably the need for the authorities to create a clear policy to manage interethnic issues and to establish the necessary institutions and resource base to implement the policy.

The shortcomings of the report are, however, significant and ensure that the overall account of the sources of the violence is unbalanced. At the heart of this imbalance is the absence of serious attention to the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism and the involvement of

representatives of all levels of Kyrgyz society in the run up to the June violence, the violence itself, and the postconflict violence. The report seems especially blind to the involvement of the security forces and elements of local and national government. There is also a failure to examine the way in which violence has continued after June and the lack of impartial postconflict justice.

The report seeks to locate the blame for the onset of violence with the former leaders of the ethnic Uzbek community—principally Batyrov—and members of the Bakiev regime.<sup>103</sup> There is little or no attention to the influence of the wider political struggles in Kyrgyzstan on the interethnic situation, notably how issues related to the Kyrgyz ethnic community have become a key force in national politics. As a result of these shortcomings, the sources of conflict in Kyrgyzstan are misrepresented and the report's findings can, at best, only offer a partial account of the why the June events occurred.

The account of the National Commission can be compared to an unofficial and unattributed report—reportedly prepared by nongovernmental organizations from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with the support of an organization based in Tashkent—that has been partially reproduced on the website [www.ferghananews.com](http://www.ferghananews.com).<sup>104</sup> Here the perspective is that of the minority—with little attention to the role of the Uzbek community in the violence. The authors note the unchallenged rise of aggressive nationalist rhetoric in Kyrgyzstan's media—notably the Kyrgyz language press, which published incendiary comments by government ministers and leading politicians about minority communities.

The report also points to the role of Kyrgyz nationalist youth in the onset of violence in Osh. Serious and concrete questions are raised about the nature of the violence against ethnic Uzbeks, the actions of the security forces and local authorities, and abuses experienced by the Uzbek community after the June violence such as property and land seizures, attacks, detentions, and imprisonment. The failure of the National Commission to reflect adequately the perspective of the Uzbek community in the country within its report suggests that, at best, their work can offer only a partial account of the events.

The efforts to establish an international investigation faced considerable obstacles. On July 21, President Otunbaeva wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon asking for UN participation in an international commission of inquiry to be headed by Finnish member of parliament Kimmo Kiljunen, a longstanding colleague of the president. In fact, the international community was reluctant to support such a commission, reflecting concerns about its terms of reference, independence, and the way it had been established.

Eventually the investigation was downgraded to a research-based inquiry under the broad umbrella of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and involving consultations with international organizations and fieldwork in southern Kyrgyzstan. Although more modest in scope than a full international inquiry, this report nevertheless offers a unique opportunity for presenting the authorities and people of Kyrgyzstan with an impartial and properly

researched account of the sources of conflict and violence during 2010. The report can also identify individuals and organizations that should be held accountable for concrete actions, including through criminal prosecutions. It is vital that this report reflects a balanced view, taking account of the perspectives of the majority and minority communities in order to form the basis for a properly informed debate in Kyrgyzstan about the June violence.

# The Future of a Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan

During 2010, Kyrgyzstan appeared to be on the edge of becoming a failed state and at times seemed even threatened with civil war. In the months following the summer violence a fragile peace emerged in the country. The successful holding of the constitutional referendum at the end of June and the October parliamentary elections helped to restore a relative normalcy. These positive political developments should not, however, be seen as evidence of a return to stability in the country.

Kyrgyzstan continues to be affected by a set of conflict processes that produce violence on a daily basis. Since June 2010, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed a series of show trials, acts of daily intimidation and random violence, the forcible seizure of land and property,<sup>105</sup> the exclusion of minorities from public employment, and a climate of fear and lawlessness around the actions of the agencies of law and order. These conditions could easily return the country to widespread violent confrontation.

The country's politics remain marked by a high degree of fragmentation and volatility. Many of the fundamental difficulties at the heart of the political order—the relations between the center and the regions and the north-south balance, the chronic economic situation, the widespread corruption and criminality, and the tendency to use state office as a means to build patronage networks—remain unresolved. Reestablishing something approaching a functioning state will be a major challenge.

Following the parliamentary elections, the drawn out process of fashioning an effective and stable coalition as the basis for creating a government caused concern. The establishment of a governing coalition in early 2011 was an important step forward in rebuilding stability. The new government has set out a strong agenda of reform that will test the unity of the coalition. The presidential elections scheduled for the autumn of 2011 will also be an important test for the political resilience of the country and may well pit some the coun-

try's leading political figures against each other. The contest may reintroduce the ethnic question into the country's electoral politics as candidates seek to position themselves to attract ethnic Kyrgyz and minority voters.

The government and new president must face one challenge that is likely to prove particularly difficult and painful, namely the key issue of nation building. The violent confrontations of 2010 have left a strong imprint on Kyrgyzstan's politics, accelerating the already rising nationalist sentiments, as signaled in the rhetoric of the recent election campaign.<sup>106</sup> Care must be taken that aggressive nationalism does not emerge as the basis for efforts to build stability in the country.

Kyrgyzstan's electoral rules have led to the rise of parties elected by relatively small numbers of votes and therefore linked to narrow constituencies. The new parliament will have an overwhelmingly ethnic Kyrgyz character. Moreover, while the parliament is new, most of the key political figures have been involved in the country's politics since the Akaev era and many are implicated in the violence of 2010.

The parliamentary elections brought to the fore openly nationalist Kyrgyz parties such as Ata-Jurt, led by former Bakiev era officials and describing itself as a national-patriotic movement, but all of the parties in the parliament reflect the new nationalist mood to some degree.<sup>107</sup> President Otunbaeva has acted as a moderating force and has sought to rebuild interethnic relations, noticeably though the initiative to development the Concept of Ethnic Policy and the Consolidation of Kyrgyzstan's Society.<sup>108</sup> The forthcoming Presidential elections may result in the emergence of a more nationalistic figure. There is thus a real risk that Kyrgyzstan's new politics may be characterized by a further ethnopolitical polarization in the country, a situation that already de facto exists in many southern districts.<sup>109</sup> Nation building and state building are thus intricately interlinked in the country as never before.

As the events of May and June demonstrated, interethnic relations now stand at the epicenter of the conflict processes in Kyrgyzstan, although they are not the root cause of conflict in the country. Over the last decade the growing political confrontation, which has been essentially an intra-Kyrgyz dispute, has steadily eroded the state in Kyrgyzstan and promoted confrontation and even violent mass politics.

At key points, such as in 2005 and April 2010, this form of politics has led to the collapse of central authority. It is at these moments that interethnic issues have been linked to the wider political struggle. In May, following the overthrow of the Bakiev regime, the Provisional Government encouraged the already mobilized Uzbek community to support them in the intra-Kyrgyz political battle and to become apart of the violent struggle in the country.<sup>110</sup> From then on, ethnicity became a central part of conflict in the country.

It will be an enormous challenge to rebuild a peaceful and stable multiethnic Kyrgyzstan. The legacy of the summer of violence is a bitter one on all sides. The relations

between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south, but also across the country, have been fundamentally harmed.

The Uzbek community now finds itself in an especially vulnerable position. The Uzbek leadership has been scattered or jailed. Uzbekistan has made clear that it will not provide a permanent shelter to Kyrgyzstan's ethnic Uzbeks nor come to their aid when they face major violence. The international community has also demonstrated its inability to protect lives and promote security when confronted with violence. Kyrgyzstan's government has failed to win the confidence of its Uzbek minority and many Uzbeks feel that there is no future for them in Kyrgyzstan.

In fact, the widespread view is that the situation is likely to become worse.<sup>111</sup> The perception of a lack of prospects and fears over security are driving a significant emigration of Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan. In the period following the violence, between 32,000 and 120,000 ethnic Uzbeks are reported to have left the country.<sup>112</sup> But emigration is not straightforward and for those unable to escape the situation is bleak. The Uzbek community is demoralized, feels trapped, and may retreat further into isolation. In this situation, there is a concern that more radical and violent movements, nationalist and/or Islamist, may emerge and become part of a further deterioration of the country.

Within the ethnic Kyrgyz community, north and south, the view is frequently expressed that the summer events were something of a victory against an Uzbek insurrection.<sup>113</sup> At all levels, many are seeking to take advantage of the situation to effect a rebalancing of political, commercial, and cultural power away from the Uzbek community. As a result of the events of the summer, the Soviet concept of the leading role of the "titular" nation has been reinforced as the basis of nation building far above that of citizenship and rule of law. Issues such as the role of the Kyrgyz language, the dominance of ethnic Kyrgyz in important positions in the country, and the place of specifically ethnic Kyrgyz history and culture in the identity of the country—reflected in the areas of education, the media, and representation in state institutions and the public life of the country—are likely to be key in the years ahead.

The Kyrgyzstan crisis has exposed the security vacuum that has opened up in Central Asia with none of the leading security organizations in a condition to respond to the challenge.<sup>114</sup> The international community has failed to develop an effective response to the Kyrgyzstan crisis that recognizes the contemporary socio-economic and political dynamics in the country. A harmful geopolitics in Eurasia between a Russian-led group of countries, on one side, and Europe and North America, on the other, has served to create deadlock in the OSCE, and in this case to prevent a substantial response from the best-placed international security organization. During the spring and summer, international actors were reduced to the role of spectators, even as the violence spun out of control and threatened to spill into neighboring Uzbekistan.

In the postconflict situation, the international community has chosen to focus on the provision of aid rather than addressing the critical security and political challenges that face Kyrgyzstan and its neighbors. While aid is vital in rebuilding the physical damage and providing those who suffered with basic housing and subsistence, it is no answer to the problem of state decay and rising nationalist politics in Kyrgyzstan.

A comprehensive stabilization initiative must be based on a new approach to interethnic relations that can promote a genuinely integrated national community in Kyrgyzstan. An approach to integration that both recognizes the rights of the majority and the minority communities is needed. This will involve a clear articulation of national policies to promote integration in the key areas of education, language policy, political representation, the institutions of law and order, and the media, as well as the provision of the necessary human and financial resources to implement these policies.

The aim of this program should be to provide the incentives, opportunities, and support for all the citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin, to integrate into society in Kyrgyzstan through knowledge of the state language, active participation in the public life of the country, employment in all sectors, and equal access to education. At the same time, minority communities should be able to protect and develop their cultural identities, including through the use of their own languages in public and private, and to enjoy security as equal citizens of the country.

The initiative launched by President Otunbaeva to draft a new national concept for interethnic relations is an important step in the right direction. This initiative needs international support as well as domestic support from the government, parliament, ministries, and the country's ethnic majority and minority communities. It is important that the ethnic Uzbek community, in particular, has the opportunity to engage in this initiative. Finding national consensus on a concept that can be the basis for forging a new positive relationship between Kyrgyzstan's ethnic communities will be a delicate political task. With President Otunbaeva stepping down from the presidency at the end of 2011, it is vital that work to develop and implement the concept continues in the years ahead.

The adoption of a program to promote national integration will be an important signal of the intent of the political authorities in Kyrgyzstan but the impact of such an approach is only likely to be felt in the medium and long term. The immediate challenges of a multiethnic Kyrgyzstan require a process of reconciliation, which can bring the country's communities closer together and help to identify the truth of the events of the summer and the actions that led to the violence.

Following the Osh violence of 1990, an independent process of prosecution and jailing of those involved functioned as an important element in rebuilding interethnic relations and reestablishing stability. In 2010, the ethnic imbalance of those accused by the authorities of participating in the violence, concerns about the investigation and

trials process, and continuing violence and intimidation has called into question the whole concept of postconflict justice in Kyrgyzstan.

Establishing a transparent, independent, and fair process for investigating and punishing all of those involved in the violence is an urgent priority. Such a process would do much to promote a sense of security in the south of the country and move toward reestablishing confidence in the institutions of law and order in the country.

The pursuit of genuine postconflict justice will need, however, to be balanced with the equally pressing need to promote political dialogue between the country's ethnic communities, notably the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz. Finding ways to rebuild the engagement of the ethnic Uzbek community within society in Kyrgyzstan is particularly urgent.

Since independence, the country's authorities have pursued an ambivalent approach to the Uzbek community. At best there was a toleration of the Uzbeks and a limited acceptance of their position in society. The political leadership of the Uzbeks was allowed to express their concerns, but only indirectly and through consultative mechanisms. As the political situation in Kyrgyzstan deteriorated over the last decade, these weak mechanisms of coexistence broke down and the Uzbeks became involved in public protests against their growing marginalization and the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism. These developments contributed to the emergence of violence in the country.

Today there is a need to rebuild the means by which the Uzbek community can ensure its voice is heard in key debates in the country in order to ensure that there are safeguards to protect the community and opportunities to allow for its further development. This also points to the necessity of encouraging the development of an authoritative and prointegration leadership for the Uzbek community and of drawing this group into the political life of the country as soon as possible.

Inevitably such an approach will involve difficult decisions and while it is clear that Kyrgyzstan's government and parliament will have to take the lead in developing and implementing interethnic reconciliation and integration, it will not be possible to advance this process without significant engagement by the international community. At key moments, the majority and minority communities will need to be given incentives to advance the process of integration and face pressure, and even sanction, if they oppose or obstruct it. The international community will need to have a political and strategic engagement in Kyrgyzstan and not rely on an approach based solely on aid and projects.

Over the last fifteen years, it has been the OSCE that has led in situations of postconflict reconstruction and stability and the organization uniquely has the tools to approach this task. For the OSCE to perform effectively it will require renewed support from key international actors, notably Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, the United States, and the European Union. The OSCE will also need close cooperation with other international organizations, notably the UN and possibly emerging actors such as the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.



# Recommendations

The preceding analysis leads to a set of recommendations for actions that should be taken by institutions and groups within Kyrgyzstan, neighboring states, and the international community.

## Kyrgyzstan

### The Government of Kyrgyzstan

- Ensure significant representation of national minorities, including ethnic Uzbeks, in the new government.
- Adopt, on the basis of broad consultation—including with representatives of national minorities—a program for the long-term peaceful integration of society in Kyrgyzstan. This program should include clear policies on language, education, and the participation of national minorities in the public life of the country (notably the agencies of law and order and the media). The program should be supported by timetables for achieving the goals of the initiative and an indication of funding for the program.
  - One program component would be the elaboration of a clear strategy to promote the widespread knowledge and use of the state (Kyrgyz) language. This could include providing free of charge and easily available state language training (for ethnic Kyrgyz and national minorities) and providing positive incentives for learning the language (for example salary increases). These steps, together with measures to guarantee minority language rights—especially in areas of compact minority settlement—could be an initial focus for a long-term integration effort.

- A review of the agencies of law and order (notably the police and judiciary) should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. The aim of the review should be to set out a path to create institutions appropriate to the policing and protection of a multiethnic society based upon the rule of law. Issues to be addressed include the representation and recruitment of minorities, corruption, issues of racism, policing in crisis situations, community policing, and language training.
- The government should ensure that *all those* responsible for crimes during the May and June 2010 violence, irrespective of ethnic identity, are subject to prosecution, and that trials to address these crimes conform to international standards of justice and are subject to international monitoring.
- Promote a broad dialogue with national minorities, notably the ethnic Uzbek community, in order to foster a generation of minority leaders representative of their communities and fully integrated within Kyrgyzstan's political life. This dialogue should not be restricted to national-cultural questions nor marginalized within institutions such as the Assembly for the People of Kyrgyzstan.
- The government, working with civil society, should initiate a process of postconflict reconciliation aimed at providing *all* individuals affected by the violence the opportunity to talk about their experiences.
- The presidency could play an important symbolic role in Kyrgyzstan as representative of *all* of society in Kyrgyzstan. The president should seek to promote an inclusive public language when talking about a multiethnic Kyrgyzstan with an emphasis on citizenship, shared history, and the value of building an integrated society that can reflect the full range of talents, languages, cultures, and experience within the country. The president should ensure the appointment of prominent representatives of national minorities within the executive office.
- The government of Kyrgyzstan should take steps to ensure the security of human rights and civil society groups and work closely with civil society in developing and implementing a long-term integration program.

### Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan

- Local human rights organizations in Kyrgyzstan have played an important and brave role in documenting the violence in the south of the country and monitoring the postviolence judicial process; it is important that this work continues in secure conditions.

- The successful elaboration and implementation of a long-term integration program will require the active engagement of Kyrgyzstan’s civil society. At the same time, civil society groups need to ensure that they are setting a positive example by ensuring the participation of minorities, notably from the south of the country, and by campaigning against nationalist and racist views and policies.
- Civil society can take the lead on building bottom up processes of reconciliation and also focus on putting in place local conflict prevention and management projects—which existed in many areas during the 1990s but were stopped as interest and funding in interethnic issues waned.

### The Uzbek Community in Kyrgyzstan

- A key challenge for the Uzbek community will be to avoid retreating into a defensive and ghettoized position in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, it should seek to develop a community organization based on transparency and accountability that can engage with the wider society in Kyrgyzstan.
- The Uzbek community should seek, with the assistance of the government and the international community, to challenge and correct negative stereotypes about Uzbeks and Uzbek society in Kyrgyzstan. For example, through explaining in public the nature and historical development of the *mahalla* and through encouraging people to visit such areas. The elaboration of a distinct history of Uzbeks as part of Kyrgyzstan’s society and history is an important task to underline the positive contribution that the community has made to the country.
- Uzbek community leaders have a responsibility to challenge publicly separatist and violent views within their community and to engage in dialogue with the government as well as initiatives to promote the peaceful integration of minorities, including through knowledge of the state language. Working with the young generation is especially important.
- At the same time, Uzbek community leaders should be clear publicly and in discussions with the government about the rights of ethnic Uzbeks as national minorities and citizens of the country and about the responsibilities of the government to respect and support their rights.

# The International Community

The international community has a significant responsibility for supporting measures to promote stability and peaceful integration in Kyrgyzstan, given the weakness of the state and a strong security interest in ensuring that such measures are successful. Responsibility and interest should provide the basis for a renewed and reenergized multilateral cooperative approach to the challenges faced by Kyrgyzstan. The international community should ensure that its engagement to promote stability in Kyrgyzstan is designed to enhance government institutions and also the country's civil society organizations.

## The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

- Within the OSCE, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) should take the lead in working with government authorities and national minorities in Kyrgyzstan to develop a comprehensive, long-term program of integration, drawing on the considerable experience and expertise that the HCNM has in these areas.
- The HCNM should prioritize Kyrgyzstan within his office and in terms of his own commitment.
  - The focus of the HCNM engagement should be to facilitate political dialogue between the authorities and the Uzbek community. The HCNM should give particular attention to assisting in the reconstitution of Uzbek leadership in Kyrgyzstan that is capable of advancing concrete and realistic proposals for the development of their community within Kyrgyzstan's political, social, and economic life.
  - The HCNM, through quiet diplomacy, should seek to ensure that improving interethnic relations remains an active issue within Kyrgyzstan and should be firm in challenging those who advance ethnic exclusion, on one side, and separatism, on the other.
  - The HCNM should seek the support of key players—the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, the United States, and the EU—so that the commissioner's engagement may have political leverage that can also be brought to bear when necessary.
- The OSCE mission in Kyrgyzstan, including the field office in Osh, should support the engagement of the HCNM together with the Conflict Prevention Center.
- The Chairman in Office and Secretariat should facilitate the HCNM's engagement and the independence of the institution should be respected within the framework of the confidentiality of the mandate.

- The OSCE Police Assistance Mission should be reinforced with the focus of its work in the south of the country and its mandate expanded from training to monitoring policing issues in the area.
- In the event of a further deterioration of the stability in the country and the prospect of a return to violence, the OSCE should be prepared to deploy a preventive peace mission to Kyrgyzstan, which could include a military component.
- The final report of the investigation into the June violence conducted under the umbrella of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should be published in full, including naming those identified as responsible for violence, and made readily available to the general population.

### The United Nations

- The UN should continue its important work to provide humanitarian assistance and support reconstruction work in areas affected by violence.
- The UN should continue to monitor the trial processes underway in Kyrgyzstan and to report on violations of international principles of justice.
- The UN Preventive Diplomacy Center can strengthen international monitoring and early warning in respect to possible future conflict. The political engagement of the UN should be to reinforce the activities of the OSCE.
- The UN Security Council should monitor closely the situation in Kyrgyzstan and be prepared to endorse the deployment of an OSCE led preventive peace operation if necessary.
- The UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations should render technical assistance in contingency planning for the deployment of a peace operation.

### The Russian Federation

- The Russian Federation has asserted a special right in the sphere of providing security in Eurasia. This assertion brings with it responsibilities that now need to be met in respect to Kyrgyzstan.
  - Russia should adopt a constructive and cooperative approach to initiatives to strengthen the role of the OSCE (notably the engagement of the HCNM), the UN, and other relevant international organizations in Kyrgyzstan.
  - Russia should participate in contingency planning with the OSCE for the possible deployment of a preventive peace operation in Kyrgyzstan—perhaps in cooperation with the CSTO.

- Russia should provide financial assistance to strengthen education in Kyrgyzstan—notably through the training of bilingual and multilingual teachers (Russian-Kyrgyz-Uzbek).

### The United States

- The United States should take the lead, in partnership with Russia, in developing a political approach to the crisis in Kyrgyzstan. This will involve moving beyond concerns about the future of the Manas airbase and providing material assistance to Kyrgyzstan’s police force.
- The United States should be clear about the international interest in stability in Kyrgyzstan, not least as part of ensuring regional stability that is vital to the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan.
- U.S. political engagement and diplomacy should be focused on ensuring that peaceful integration is a priority for Kyrgyzstan’s new government and providing assistance to support such a program.
- U.S. leadership, together with Russia, Uzbekistan, and the EU, bilaterally and within multilateral formats (OSCE, UN) will be central to the prospects of developing a coordinated international response to the Kyrgyzstan crisis, including contingency planning for a possible preventive peace operation, perhaps through the creation of a “Friends of Kyrgyzstan” informal group.

### The European Union

- The EU needs to enhance its political and diplomatic engagement in Kyrgyzstan with a focus on preventive diplomacy. As a relatively neutral power in Central Asia, the EU should focus on developing and supporting dialogue as serious political tensions emerge—while closely coordinating with specialized institutions such as the HCNM.
- Within the framework of the EU’s Strategy for Central Asia, particular assistance should be focused on the rural sector in Kyrgyzstan, labor migration, primary and secondary education, and reform and strengthening of the judicial process.

### International Financial Institutions (IFIs)

- IFIs such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank should ensure that their programs in Kyrgyzstan include sensitivity to interethnic issues—ensuring that minorities are also able to participate in and benefit from assistance projects.

- Resources should be made available to support the national long-term integration program, on condition that it commands international support (notably activities that are endorsed by the HCNM).

## Uzbekistan

- Uzbekistan is widely regarded as being a responsible and effective actor during the June violence. It is important that Tashkent builds upon this positive experience.
  - Tashkent should support the leading role of the HCNM in Kyrgyzstan and be willing to engage in a dialogue with the HCNM about the rights of ethnic Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan.
  - Tashkent should continue to support the integration of ethnic Uzbeks into Kyrgyzstan on the basis of citizenship and the observance of their rights and to condemn separatist views.
  - Uzbekistan should reexamine its border policies with a view to reducing the frictions generated by the militarization of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border and the widespread corruption that has grown around the policing of the border.
  - Tashkent should provide financial and technical assistance to support initiatives aimed at encouraging the integration of ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan—for example supporting the training of ethnic Uzbek teachers in Kyrgyzstan, including in knowledge of the state language.
  - Uzbekistan should participate in international contingency planning for a possible future crisis, including the deployment of a preventive peace operation.

# Notes

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