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KYRGYZSTAN IN CRISIS: PERMANENT REVOLUTION AND THE CURSE OF NATIONALISM

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Crisis States Research Centre

Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism

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Kyrgyzstan is a small Central Asian country situated on borders of China and Kazakhstan. It is mostly known to the world as a host to both US and Russian military bases; but also offers the possibility to explore the interrelationship between the weakening of the state and the rise of politicised ethnicity. This led to massive clashes in June 2010 in the South, in which an estimated two-thousand people died[1] and hundreds of thousands were displaced. This was the most dramatic, but not the only occasion of political turbulence. Kyrgyzstan has been the only post-Soviet country that has survived two forceful regime changes since independence. Other countries that experienced 'colour revolutions' in the 2000s – Ukraine and Georgia − achieved a certain degree of stabilisation, while Kyrgyzstan suffered the worst interethnic clashes at a time when it seemed that the period of rampant nationalism, characteristic of the former Soviet republics in the early 1990s, was over. As a result, from a 'Switzerland of Central Asia' it emerged as its Bosnia: a volatile place, which its neighbours fear, as Kyrgyzstan became transformed from an international development success into a complex emergency, which would require considerable humanitarian assistance.

This paper follows the political trajectory of the state, which entered a crisis and shows few signs of stabilisation. It deals with this from two perspectives, from within the analytical framework of the Crisis States Research Centre: as a fragile state; and with the rise in politicised ethnicity, through an exploration of nationalism (Helling 2009). The study is based both on available written sources, and the author's interviews and field observations carried out in Kyrgyzstan in 2009 and from May to July 2010.

The political state in Kyrgyzstan[2]

Most of today's Kyrgyz Republic was ceded to Russia through two treaties with China's Qing Dynasty, and was formally incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1876. The Russian takeover was met with revolts against Tsarist authority, and the suppression of the 1916 rebellion in Central Asia caused some Kyrgyz to migrate to western China. Following a brief period of independence after the 1917 Revolution, Soviet power was established in the region in 1919, and the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was created within the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. The term 'Kara-Kyrgyz' (black Kyrgyz) was used until the mid-1920s by the Soviets to distinguish the modern Kyrgyz from the Kazakhs, as both belong to the same ethnic and linguistic Kyrgyz group. In 1936, the territory of Kyrgyzstan achieved

[1] Casualty figures vary considerably: from 393 officially confirmed dead by 19 August, to 893 claimed by Azimbek Beknazarov in an interview to *Kommersant Daily*, to 2,000 originally estimated by the Interim President, to 7,000 claimed by Uzbek sources.
[2] The official name of the country is 'The Kyrgyz Republic,' but the geographical term of 'Kyrgyzstan' will be used throughout the paper.

the status of a Union Republic, and the borders were redrawn several times since then. Like the other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991.

The population, according to 2009 UN statistics, is estimated at 5.6 million people in a territory of 199,900 square kilometres. Its capital is Bishkek (population 819,000 officially, but estimated actually to be 1 million). About two thirds live in rural and one third in urban areas; and it is considered that around 90 percent of the population is Muslim. In 2009 Kyrgyzstan scored 6.04 in the Freedom House democracy score, categorising it as a 'consolidated authoritarian regime' (Freedom House 2009). Socio-economic development remains low, and in 2008 43 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. In 2008, GNI per capita stood at US$790, and in 2007 the Kyrgyz Republic occupied 120th place in the Human Development Index out of 182 countries surveyed.

Kyrgyzstan's formal economy consists of subsistence agriculture, extraction industries (mostly gold), hydroelectric power and international payments for military bases, loans and aid. The informal economy carries a considerable weight and is made up of labour migrants' remittances, proceeds of drug trafficking and smuggling of goods to and from China. In 2008, remittances constituted over $1 billion, which roughly equalled the state budget (*Deutsche Welle*, August 18, 2009), and up to one million people have migrated to work. In recent years, nascent tourism has started to develop, but political violence in 2010 dealt it a severe blow. According to the World Bank (2010), the economy is projected to shrink by 3.5 percent in 2010; and output per capita is expected to fall from the pre-crisis projection of US$943 to US$826.

Roots of political crisis

President Askar Akayev ruled the republic from 1991 and was deposed from power by protests against the falsified parliamentary elections of February 2005. He fled and found sanctuary in Moscow. As the uprising was largely a grassroots people's movement, no political force could lay an obvious claim to power. This opened the door for coalition politics, creating an uneasy 'tandem' – an alliance between Kurmanbek Bakiyev from the South and Felix Kulov from the North.

This regional divide matters, as the identities of the North and the South are distinct. Geography works to increase the gap, as the Alatoo and Ferghana ranges of *Tyan Shan* mountains separate the two parts, precluding intense social interaction. This is as much a geographical divide as a cultural split within the Kyrgyz group. The South is perceived as more traditional and more religious, while the 'northern identity' is closer to that of the neighbouring Kazakhs. Parties and business groupings tend to have their strongholds in one part of the country or the other.

The Soviet system had been aware of historical rivalry between northern and southern Kyrgyz, and ruled Kyrgyzstan in such a way that neither group fared too badly. The position of the Communist Party First Secretary (the chief executive of a Union Republic) rotated between the two halves. This pattern seems to continue: the last Communist Party chief Absamat Massaliyev originated from the South and Askar Akayev, his successor, was a northerner. Typically, representatives of a president's region are expected to do well during his time in office, while the others are aware that their chances will be limited. In the last decade people from the South, where birth rates are high and jobs are deficient, have been moving to the capital and into the more developed Chui Valley in the North in search of a better life, creating resentment against the newcomers among the native population.

As the South played a leading role in the 2005 protests and Akayev stayed in power for fourteen years, it appeared fair that supreme authority should rotate in favour of the South. In the elite bargain that was reached, the previously hardly prominent Bakiyev came out on top, while northerners in the government were meant to create a counterbalance. Felix Kulov and Kurmanbek Bakiyev pledged not to run against each other in the June 2005 presidential elections, fearing a split of the country along regional lines: Kulov became prime minister while Bakiyev was elected president. Both had been government members before losing their positions and joining the opposition.

Within a year the bargain no longer held. Bakiyev's clansmen – including his six brothers and two sons − were in key positions, with access to state assets.[3] Southerners were promoted into security and justice appointments in the North, while northerners had to vacate their jobs in favour of the newcomers. By doing this, the Bakiyev regime sought to maximise political control and obtain financial gain (International Crisis Group 2010). Protest rallies occurred, and several demonstrations in 2006 were sizeable enough to extract concessions from the leadership. However, by 2007 'democracy' was largely over. The president seemingly controlled all levers of power. The parliamentary elections of December 16, 2007 and presidential elections of July 23, 2009 unfolded according to the government-designed script and were assessed as having failed to meet key OSCE commitments.

Bakiyev employed two main tactics in dealing with his political opponents: cooption and suppression, with the latter becoming more prominent as challenges mounted. There were a number of high-profile assassinations of opposition politicians and journalists in 2010, with arrests and sentencing of others.[4] Trusting in the loyalty of the security forces, staffed largely by southerners and supervised by his relatives − his brother Janysh was the commander of the presidential security forces − Kurmanbek Bakiyev appeared strangely oblivious to the deteriorating popular mood.

Unpopular government measures, and the mixture of grassroots organisation and resentment against southern domination in the North, culminated in the '7th April events'. Protests started in Naryn in February and rallies were held in Bishkek in March. In April, local disturbances in Talas got out of hand, turning very violent. These were triggered by detention of an Ata Meken opposition politician and the lack of response to an ultimatum of the *Kurultai* (people's assembly) of March 17 in Bishkek. Opposition supporters demanded cancellation of the new tariffs for electricity, heating and mobile phones, return of the *Kyrgyztelecom* and *Severelectro* companies to national ownership, abolishment of the Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation headed by the president's son, Maxim Bakiyev, and withdrawal of other presidential relatives from official positions.

The protests quickly spread to Bishkek and culminated in the ouster of Bakiyev, who after an unsuccessful attempt to escape to Kazakhstan, was hosted by Belarus. He signed his resignation on April16, after prominent human-rights activists Aziza Abdurasulova and Tolekan Ismailova visited him in his native Teyit village in the south. A mixture of opposition

[3] Janysh headed state security, Marat supervised the judicial system, Ahmat ruled over Jalalabad province.

[4] Concerns over civil liberties were heightened by the murder of prominent journalist Gennady Pavluk in December 2009 and the imprisonment of former defence minister-turned-opposition figure Ismail Isakov in January 2010. On March 13, 2010, Medet Sadyrkulov, an influential politician and former head of the presidential administration who joined the opposition, died in a car accident under suspicious circumstances.

politicians came to rule the country, having established a 'government of the interim period' with Rosa Otunbayeva as the leader.

Perspectives on April Events

The '7th April events' can be interpreted in various ways. Firstly, they can be regarded as a 'revolution' that fundamentally altered the nature of power, property rights and the civic contract. The arguments in favour of this are that the provisional government came across as more ideologically driven than its predecessor. It offered the citizenry a change of political relations through transfer of more powers to the parliament from the presidency, paving the way for coalition building, power sharing, and checks and balances in the system. Property relations were also changing, as the government announced nationalisation of assets owned by Bakiyev's family and of others, illegally privatised during his rule. The new politicians also promised that public views would matter, that they would act more transparently, and be responsive and committed to free and fair elections.

A second interpretation is that this was merely a *coup d'etat*. Individuals changed, but little altered in the way politics are done. Several provisional government figures had served under previous presidents and left under a cloud. They resorted to the same dubious means of conducting politics, as publication of the records of telephone conversations between senior politicians demonstrated.[5] The provisional government was not immune to using criminals to achieve short-term political ends and in asset grabbing. Public expressions of disunity and spiteful arguments among key politicians did not present them in a good light to the public.

Thirdly, the April events could signify a process of removal from power of an unwanted government − which in many countries is done by voting − by other means than elections. Bakiyev served his country for five years, which coincides with a typical presidential term, and citizens felt that it was time for a new team to try. Deposing a president by voting him/her out of office was almost never possible, since most elections were controlled by the executive. Expelling a leader by force was becoming a 'normal' way of conducting politics in Kyrgyzstan.

Fourthly, the events may reflect an irreconcilable contradiction between the North and the South: weakness of an overarching national identity and different ideas of statehood held by two identity groups. Popular sentiment has favoured this interpretation. Although several members of the provisional government had their roots in the South, the sense that the power equation changed in favour of the North gave joy to some and disappointment to the others, implying that the regional rivalry only deepened.

The events of 2005 and 2010 have some common traits. Both were barely organised social movements that united different forces that participated for different reasons. They brought into power a conglomerate of politicians, for whom transition from opposition into government was unexpected, and there was no single coherent group united by a common agenda. Power change had a short run up, and appeared barely possible a month before it had happened. Protests had a similar credo: grievances against usurpation of power by a ruling

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[5] Deputy Chairs of the Provisional government Azimbek Beknazarov and Almazbek Atambayev argued about crossing each other in job selling (records of mobile phone conversation between Beknazarov and Atambayev, May 22, 2010, http://gazeta.kg/articles/2010/05/22/stenogramma-telefonnogo-razgovora-mezhdu-beknazarovym-i-atambaevym, accessed July 19, 2010). Beknazarov and another deputy chair, Temir Sariyev, discussed how to take $1 million from the state budget, without leaving a trace (http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:n7fheZa7y8sJ, accessed July 19, 2010).

group, control over lucrative assets by the presidential entourage, corruption, clan politics and lack of economic development outside of the two big cities. Looting and marauding in the capital occurred on both occasions, although order was restored sooner on the first occasion than on the second.

However, notable differences exist. If the ouster of Akayev, although beginning in the South, had features of a national protest, Bakiyev's fall had a more divisive effect. It was regarded in the South as a victory of the North, where many sighed in relief that 'southern domination' was over. In the aftermath of Akayev's demise few regretted that the president was gone, which was not the universal sentiment in 2010.

In 2005, women played a prominent role in protest activity, which arguably was an indicator that they were unlikely to turn violent. In 2010, young men in their teens and early twenties were at the forefront of very violent action, including severe beatings, burnings and random destruction. Eyewitness accounts suggest that many were under the influence of alcohol and drugs. The new government's designation of April's victims as 'heroes', in the memory of whom the new Constitution was written, painfully resonated in the South, which saw the heroes as villains.

The role of the security forces also differed. Askar Akayev is believed to have given orders not to shoot at the crowds that besieged the presidential building. His motives might have been noble – he did not want to go down in Kyrgyzstan's history as having shed the blood of his own people − but he may also not have trusted his armed forces to fulfil their orders. Security officials had a reason not to trust Akayev, thinking that if things went wrong they could be made scapegoats. During March 2002 protests in the Aksy region of Jalalabad province in support of the detained opposition MP Azimbek Beknazarov (later deputy chair of the provisional government), who campaigned against the transfer of some territories of Kyrgyztan to China as a part of the border-delimitation process, police opened fire on demonstrators, which resulted in six deaths. Akayev held the police to blame.

While Akayev fled quietly, Bakiyev's family, by contrast, was not going to go without a fight and played a notable role. Altogether 86 people died in the 'April events', although it is unclear how many were shot by Bakiyev-instructed snipers and how many died in the ensuing raids.[6] The main protagonists – President Kurmanbek and his younger son Maxim − did not participate directly in the defence of the regime, as the father fled and the son was visiting the US. Presidential brothers Janysh and Ahmat, and his elder son Marat, were in charge of defending the regime.[7]

[6] On the day of the unrest in Bishkek, 17 people were killed and 180 were wounded. On April 15, 2010, the number of dead increased to 84, and the wounded reached 1,651, according to Ministry of Health. The buildings of the General Prosecutor's Office and Pervomaiskiy tax agency were burned. The White House was completely smashed, some parts were partially burned. During the night of April 7, looters smashed some principal supermarkets (Beta Stores, Vefa Center, Narodnyi, Caravan, Dordoi Plaza, 7 Dney, Lion), as well as the markets of Goin and Madina, and petrol stations, shops and bank machines. The estimated damage was US$7 million (Dykanova 2010).

[7] When the regime was toppled, the new government submitted a formal request to Interpol to assist in arresting Kurmanbek Bakiyev, charging him, his brother Janysh and his eldest son Marat with mass murder. Maxim was wanted for alleged financial crimes, suspected of embezzling over US$70 million during his father's tenure. Altogether the Prosecutor General's Office filed about a hundred criminal cases against friends and relatives of the Bakiyev' family.

After the fall, interception of telephone conversations between Maxim and his uncles indicated that they were plotting revenge. While Bakiyevs' loyalists mostly consisted of his own clan members in Jalalabad province, they also had funds to hire more people for protest action. Ahmat Bakiyev stayed in their native Jalalabad province despite orders to detain him, while others dispersed abroad.[8] Presidential nephews continued with their jobs in the prosecutor's offices.

'Revolutionary' Politics

The politicians who came to power offered the prospect of a 'return to democracy'. They declared that 'the aim of the government was to return the country to democratic governance and the rule of law and to overcome cronyism and tribalism in the public administration system' (Delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic 2010). The provisional government abolished the Constitutional Court and dissolved parliament, removing safeguards against its sole rule. The Party of Communists offered a way out of the legal vacuum, proposing to convene the old parliament, which would confirm the provisional government in power for a set period, call the pre-term parliamentary elections and dissolve itself. The new power holders rejected this option, being reluctant to become associated with political constructs of the Bakiyev epoch and to receive a blessing from the old parliament, whose legitimacy they did not recognise. They felt that a clear break was needed.

The first initiative was to give the country a new constitution, intended as a forward-looking project after violent power change. The constitution was a long-held aspiration of the Ata Meken party and its leader, Omurbek Tekebayev − deputy chair of the provisional government. He was committed to a parliamentary form of government as the best guarantee against 'usurpation' of power, seeing it as well-suited for the country's diversity. The draft, elaborated by Ata Meken for five years in opposition, was offered to the Constitutional Council as a basis for discussions.

The Council, assembled in haste, nevertheless worked in a transparent manner, considering public requests for amendments. It designed a 'semi-parliamentary' form of democracy in which powers were to be more equally shared between the president and the parliament, and the government formed out of the winning party or parties. The parliament is to have 120 members, but the winning party can have no more than 65 seats. 'The majority party will have to co-operate and hold consultations with other parties,' the interim president Roza Otunbayeva explained to prospective voters in Issyk-Kul province on May 29.

How this complicated system will work, only time will tell. However, it will require a great deal of coalition building and tactical policy-making alliances, which may be problematic given the acute rivalry between political actors. The question many have asked is whether the country needs a new constitution – the fourth since independence − or whether amendments to the 2007 text might be sufficient.[9]

A constitutional referendum took place on June 27 and included three questions packaged as one, which required a single answer. Parties affiliated with the provisional government maintained that the proposed political reorganisation should be voted in as a single package, otherwise the reforms would lose consistency. The referendum had an additional significance

[8] Maxim Bakiyev sought political asylum in the UK in June 2010.
[9] The first constitution of independent Kyrgyzstan was adopted under Akayev in 1993, and two different constitutions (2006 and 2007) were adopted under Bakiyev.

because the fundamental question of power – whether the government stayed and the political order legitimised − still needed to be decided.

The referendum was not only – or even mainly − about the choice between systems of governing, but about legitimisation of the new order through symbolic means (Matveeva 2009). By conducting the referendum, the government performed an important ritual, in which the citizens were reminded of the existence of the central state and publicly expressed their compliance with it. Elite pontificating about manipulation of the referendum question had little resonance in mainstream society, which attached a different meaning to it:

> 'The referendum is about all the good things in life. It is about that everything that would be OK. The referendum is our happy childhood and our protected old age. I also personally like that the president is a woman.' (Interview, referendum commission member, Toktogul, Jalalabad, June 27, 2010)[10]

It is doubtful that the majority of citizens fully realised what they were voting for, as the results of the opinion polls and the referendum hardly match. According to the poll conducted on the eve of the referendum, 43 percent thought that Kyrgyzstan should have a presidential form of government (abolished by the new constitution), 29 percent supported a mixed presidential/parliamentary system, and 18.5 percent were for a parliamentary one (*Agrumenty i Fakty*, June 30-July 6, 2010). Nevertheless, the government received their desired result: the referendum delivered a 90.55 per cent of 'Yes' votes cast, with a turnout figure of 72.24 per cent (OSCE 2010).

Crucially, the 'April events' had the effect of weakening the state, already undermined by the personnel policies of the previous president. Perhaps inevitable after a violent power change and familiar from the early Bakiyev's period, thus far the process shows little tendency towards improved state resilience.

Firstly, the power change unleashed acute competition and fragmentation. From the beginning, the provisional government projected an image of discord. Party leaders competed against each other for supremacy, making conflicting appointments of their loyalists to the same jobs.[11] The decision to choose a woman as interim leader was made on the grounds that she would not compete against men, but rather play a moderating role in their struggles. The government members represented five different political parties, while others, not affiliated with any party, pursued stances of their own.[12] Politicians in the government showed no willingness towards consolidation into blocs, while unaffiliated individuals indicated a desire to establish parties of their own.[13] The mushrooming of parties was fostered by the new

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[10] Prominent Uzbek analyst Alisher Khamidov told the author (June 27, 2010) that when he interviewed voters in Osh and told one woman who had casted a 'Yes' vote that she just voted for a new constitution, she could hardly believe it.

[11] Kasym Isayev, former deputy chief of staff, shared his impressions of the performance of the provisional government: 'In the space of just one day, the post of head of the country's customs office was occupied by several individuals, each of whom had been appointed by one or another provisional government official' (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 26, 2010).

[12] Several opposition figures served as deputy heads of the provisional government, including: Almazbek Atambaev responsible for economic affairs (chairman of SDPK and former prime minister); Temir Sariev responsible for financial issues (chairman of Ak-Shumkar party, former member of parliament); Omurbek Tekebaev responsible for constitutional reform (chairman of Ata Meken party, former speaker of parliament); and Azimbek Beknazarov responsible for security and justice issues (former General Prosecutor and former member of parliament).

[13] For example, Edil Baisalov, former prominent NGO activist and ex-chief of staff of interim president, resigned from the government to establish his party Aikel El'; Azimbek Beknazarov, former chairman of Asaba

constitution, which made the parliament a desirable arena for competition. By June 1, 2010, 115 parties were registered in the Ministry of Justice, and 145 by August 1.[14]

Most parties tend to act as vehicles for personality politics. The parliamentary system based on party lists encouraged the growth of newcomers. The lists offer few guarantees to individual politicians that they would become MPs even if their party obtains votes, unless their names are very close to the top. Having a party of his own, a politician can mobilise his clansmen and regional associates to vote for it. In this sense, there is little change from the system that was in place under Askar Akayev, when MPs stood as individuals in single-mandate constituencies. In a society where patronage acts a powerful driver of political mobilisation, this would be used to minimise the risks, no matter how the system was modified.

Secondly, the regional government got into disarray. The arrival of the new rulers was characterised by the change of public officials at all tiers of administration in the regions. This was possible because officials are nominated from the centre rather than elected locally, thus a change of power at the top causes expulsions at provincial and district levels. It also opens up a space into which power struggles move in, when a leader either confirms that 'people support him' and therefore he should stay under the new government, or other groupings overpower him. Local administrators frequently rotate, depending on whose grouping gets on top, even if temporarily. In one of the districts of Naryn province heads of the district administration changed seven times in three months.[15]

Thirdly, parts of the elite that were in power under the previous regime became ostracised. Some were moved to make room for the newcomers, while others resented politicians in the government on ideological or, more often, personal grounds. As a result, elites got split along many lines that no longer followed coherent patterns and made coalition building problematic. The economic power of the elites mostly derives from their political power, since it is based on access to positions that bring control over assets. During previous regimes members of the elite used clientalism to minimise risks (Hierman 2010), but this was no longer valid in the time of turbulence. Thus, elite fluidity prevented effective bargaining, as bargains were failing as quickly as they were concluded (Di John 2008).

The most discontented were those segments of the southern elite who were put into power by the Bakiyev family, often into key jobs in the regional administrations and the security sector. They had either already lost their positions, or expected this to happen. However, few challenged the new government directly, while many did not cooperate either, expecting that the provisional government would descend into arguments within itself and they would deal with whoever came out on top.

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party, went out to chair previously unknown BEK party, only to step down a few days later to hand over the chairmanship to his son.

[14] http://www.paruskg.info/2010/08/01/29311 (accessed August 14, 2010).

[15] Power struggles in Naryn province continued non-stop. On June 2 protesters gathered in front of the Naryn Provincial Administration building, demanding that the mayor of Naryn city, Almazbek Kulmatov, and 186 members of the Naryn Provincial Administration resign. Following a meeting with the protestors arranged by the acting governor of Naryn province, Adyl Esenbekov, Kulmatov resigned. The resignation did not appease the protestors, who demanded further resignations and threatened to continue protesting and start a hunger strike if their demands were not met. The head of the Naryn district administration, Ishenbek Medetov, tendered his resignation a week earlier.

Fourthly, the role of crime in politics has also changed. In the previous period crime linchpins, such as Bayaman Erkinbayev in the South or Ryspek Akmatbayev in the North, played a major role in the 2005 'revolution', actively participated in the political process through the parliament,[16] and often steered top politicians in the direction that suited their interests. Most of them perished in the subsequent struggles (Lewis 2008: 149-52). The Bakiyev regime itself acted in a mafia style: grabbing assets, raiding businesses, directly assassinating crime barons who did not want to cooperate and using others to intimidate competitors. By 2010 the equation altered: politicians used criminals for their own ends, rather than the other way round, and had no quibbles about disposing of them thereafter.[17]

In Central Asia serious crime benefits from a stable but corrupt state, with which it can find inroads into and do business with. There is little violence associated with drug trafficking, which is the main source of illegal income. Chaos and constant change make large-scale criminal operations more hazardous and costly. Bakiyev's rule was conducive to criminal interests, having even abolished the Drug Control Agency − built up with international aid and widely viewed as a key success. After the April power change crime bosses were watching with apprehension how the regime would shape up in order to work out a strategy of cooperation with the new people in office.

Fifthly, the social chaos and permissive atmosphere that followed the April events gave boost to nationalism and resentment against minorities, already gaining momentum under Bakiyev. In April 2009, pogroms occurred against Kurds in Petrovka village in the Chui Valley, reportedly involving eight-hundred rioters (AKI-Press, April 27, 2009); and in 2006, against Dungans in Iskra village. Previous violence involving Chechens had a distinct criminal undertone.

Such attitudes were especially prominent among male youth who felt their power after the role they had played in ousting the old regime. In April, violence unfolded against Meskhetian Turks in Maevka village,[18] in which six Turks were killed by Kyrgyz youth. The police did not react, despite desperate pleas from the villagers who witnessed groups of males loitering on the outskirts for a few days before the attack happened. It seemed that the youth got a taste for blood and could not stop, while older authority figures could not or would not intervene.

Violence unfolded over an attempt to grab land from the Turks, who were seen as having 'too much' and getting 'too rich'. The Turks' argument was that they accumulated wealth through hard labour and good farming practices. Land repossession may not be a sufficient explanation for the attack, as it was unlikely that the state would have allowed the invaders to keep the land taken by force (Interview, Raya Kadyrova, Bishkek, June 1, 2010). The awakening of nationalist sentiment was a more likely cause. The attack was associated with appalling atrocities, far exceeding the level of resistance the unarmed farmers put up.

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[16] Erkinbayev was an MP himself, while Akmatbayev had his brother in the parliament, who was killed on his visit to prison by a rival gang.

[17] For example, 'Black Aibek' Mirsidikov, believed to be Ahmat Bakiyev's associate, who was killed on June 6, 2010 under mysterious circumstances after he gave a fateful interview, claiming Kadyrjan Batyrov as his adversary.

[18] Meskhetian Turks, or Meskhetians, were deported from Georgia to Central Asia under Stalin 'for their own safety' during the Second World War. They were subjected to ethnic violence in Uzbekistan, from where they were airlifted by the Soviet troops. Small communities still live in northern Kyrgyzstan.

Sixthly, the security sector got into disarray. In the North it showed its inability to defend itself during the April events, when dozens of police officers were brutally beaten, stripped and burnt by crowds of youths in Talas, and the Interior Minister Moldomusa Kongantiev barely survived.[19] The uprising and subsequent looting showed a near-paralysis of a demoralised police force, and problems with the command and control structure. Police in the South accepted allegiance to nobody. Their stance was that they owed no loyalty to Bakiyev, who did little to improve their well-being, only pressurising police to extract bribes from the population to pass money to the top. They also had little respect for the provisional government, as, in their view, it involved people who were responsible for the clashes in Talas, in which wanted criminals participated (Interview, Raya Kadyrova, Bishkek, June 1, 2010).

Police in Jalalabad (South) sympathised with the old minister, Kongantiev, despite awareness of his wrongdoings, such as ordering political assassinations. The new interior minister, Bolotbek Sherniyzov from the former Ata Meken opposition, enjoyed little respect.[20] When he visited Jalalabad in May to meet with the provincial police corps, Shernyazov said that those who were loyal to Kongantiev would be fired. In response the new minister was roughed up by three women who emerged from the crowd, amidst cheers by police officers who added their 'touch' as the minister was taken away (Interview, local NGO activist from Jalalabad, Bishkek, May 2010). Following this episode it was obvious to the new government that it could not rely on the police to defend its power.

The security sector was overwhelmingly made up of representatives of the titular group. At the senior level it was staffed by many southerners appointed under Bakiyev, whose loyalty was split, while their comrades-in-arms from the North did not trust their colleagues. The rank-and-file of the army was comprised of conscripts from the poorest background, as in Kyrgyzstan it is legally possible to get a buy-out from national service, which well-off families tend to do for their sons. More enterprising young men leave for labour migration to Russia. The resulting conscript bulk is often the undernourished, poorly educated peasantry.

Paralysis of the security apparatus showed to political actors and the general public that reliance on the state to provide security may be naive. Establishment of armed detachments by political parties, sometime disguised as 'youth wings', already underway under Bakiyev, received a boost, with parties being open about the need to maintain groups to 'protect' law and order (Interview, Mars Sariyev, Bishkek, June 26, 2010). Proliferation of arms became a visible trend. Many weapons were stolen from police stations and from members of the armed and security forces. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (May 26, 2010) wrote that 'in the event of popular disturbances, there is a tendency for the authorities to divert policemen from the way of protesters and demonstrators, so that the crowds do not seize their automatic weapons.'

[19] According to an eyewitness: 'After the protesters seized the police department and weapons (more than 732 units), and released 73 detainees from the detention centre, I got to the room, a type of stockhold, where there were four policemen. Minister of Internal Affairs M. Kongantiev was among them. At this time a group of young people were looking for him ... I coated his face with the blood of one of the wounded policemen and tied it with a cloth. The protesters entered and placing fragments of broken bottles to the throats of policemen, started to shout: 'Whom to kill? Where is the Minister? Where is the Congo?' At this time someone broke a window and pulled the Minister out to the street. After that I did not seen him. They began to beat us...' ('Conclusions of an independent public commission on investigation of the tragic events of April 6-8, 2010 in Kyrgyzstan,' 29 April 2010). Reportedly, Kongantiev was bought out by Talas youth who were paid $40,000 by his wife in a deal facilitated by the Horse Polo Association, which Kongantiev chaired.

[20] Bolotbek Sherniyazov changed his name into 'Bolot Sher' for an added coolness, as *Sher* means lion in Kyrgyz, but was quickly nicknamed *Kolbasa* (sausage) since Sher Company is a sausage producer.

Lastly, a sense started to emerge both among the elites and ordinary people that poverty alleviation and decent standards of living may be easily achieved not by hard labour, entrepreneurial activity or public service, but by acquisition of power, which allows asset raiding. Trust in politicians fell very low: 80.7 percent of opinion-poll respondents said that they 'trust nobody', while the provisional government achieved 3.4 percent trust (*Argumenty i Fakty*, June 30-July 6, 2010).

Interethnic conflict

Historical overview

The Kyrgyz Union Republic was a multiethnic formation (Akiner 1997) and still has a substantial presence of minorities despite emigration (Table 1):

Table 1: Ethnic breakdown of population, Kyrgyz Republic, 2009
Source: National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009 data, http://www.stat.kg/rus/part/census.htm

Ethnic Group	% of Population
Kyrgyz	69.2%
Uzbeks	14.7%
Russians	8.3%
Dungans	1.2%
Uyghurs	1.0%
Tatars	0.7%
Turks	0.7%
Ukrainians	0.5%
Koreans	0.4%
Germans	0.2%
Other nationalities	2.9%

The largest minority, the Uzbeks, live predominantly in the South, in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken provinces. Unlike European minorities oriented towards eventual emigration − the share of Russians diminished from 21.5 per cent in 1989 to 8.3 per cent in 2009 − Uzbeks are indigenous to the land and are determined to stay. Both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school and have no significant religious differences.

Interethnic violence in the South in 2010 had its roots in the Soviet and Kyrgyzstan's new history. The creation of the 'Kyrgyz nation' out of nomadic people belonging to a larger 'Kyrgyz group' that migrated across most of the territories of modern Kyrgyzstan, closely followed Stalin's definition of a nation (Stalin in Hutchinson and Smith 2000: 20):

> 'A nation is a historically constructed, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.'

When the 'nation' was created, works were commissioned to demonstrate its historical roots. 'Stable community' was ensured by allocation of republican status. A separate language was formed on the basis of one dialect of the Kyrgyz language group,[21] and provided with a

[21] See Kyrgyz tribal tree at Program for Culture and Conflict Studies at

written script. Territorial borders of the new republic were defined, and industrial facilities were established to provide economic foundations for it. 'Psychological make-up and common culture' were left for the Communist Party appointees and for national intelligentsia to work on.

Nevertheless, the new nation was vulnerable. The Kyrgyz are a small group squeezed in-between the larger neighbours of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and China, with relations with each of these becoming problematic following independence. In the argument as to 'who-has-been-on-this-land-first', the Kyrgyz are on weak ground. Being historical nomads with no urban centres, it is more difficult for them to claim the territory as 'theirs,' while sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks have had their settlements established for centuries.

The South of Kyrgyzstan inherited a complex ethnic composition. In the 1890s, the Russian imperial conquest brought peasant settlers, who were to act as a second echelon of the Russian army in case of revolts of the native population. The turn of the twemtieth century witnessed extensive Russian farming settlement in the fertile lowlands of Osh and Jalalabad provinces. In 1909, the Ferghana statistics committee registered 29,433 Russians (Alexeenkov 1927: 10). By the turn of the twenty-first century no trace was left of that, and few mostly older generation Russians remain in urban areas. Nevertheless, Russian has a status of official language in Kyrgyzstan, while Kyrgyz is the state language. Official documents and forms are available in both, as well as access to educational opportunities, mass media, street signs and posters.

The Uzbeks alongside the Kyrgyz are indigenous to the Ferghana Valley, which the South of Kyrgyzstan belongs to. They constitute a majority in the neighbouring part of the valley that lies in Uzbekistan (Andijan, Namangan and Ferghana provinces), and a minority in Sough province of Tajikistan. The Uzbeks were a sedentary people and traditional urban dwellers. The Kyrgyz were predominantly nomadic, migrating with their herds on pasture lands, and those who were settled lived in villages in the mountainous countryside.

When the cities of Osh and Jalalabad, with a predominantly Uzbek population, were allocated to Kyrgyzstan as an urban base in the South, a policy of moving ethnic Kyrgyz into cities was adopted. The Soviet idea of nation building involved promotion of the titular group as the main pillar of the new 'nationality', and intended to create an indigenous professional cadre, industrial labour force and national intelligentsia from among the Kyrgyz through access to education and job opportunities. Rural Kyrgyz moving into the city could see that the Uzbeks had better living conditions and lucrative jobs compared to what they had in their homelands. Thus, a stereotype was created that 'the Uzbeks are rich and privileged'.

While promoting the Kyrgyz, the Soviet system sought to ensure that the composition of authority and privileged jobs reflected the ethnic make up of the population of a given area. It understood the power of ethnicity and used it to relieve pressures in society. If, say, the population of an area was a roughly equal Kyrgyz/Uzbek mix, the first party secretary would be a Kyrgyz and his deputy would be an Uzbek. In more 'Uzbek' areas their ethnic kin would be in power. Senior cadres were rotated through a system of all-republican or all-Union appointments to weaken a person's loyalty to their clan or region. Balancing measures at the elite level were supplemented by those aimed at society at large − e.g. internationalist

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http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCs/Docs/Tribal%20Trees/Kirghiz.pdf, (accessed on August 2, 2010).

upbringing at school and university, ethnic balance in the workplace, propaganda concerning the culture of interethnic relations' and severe punishments for inciting ethnic hatred.

This system worked, but only up to a point, as underlying tensions, resentment and negative stereotyping persisted in both communities. The Kyrgyz believed that the Uzbeks were more privileged in what they saw as 'their' republic, while the Uzbeks feared increasing encroachment of the Kyrgyz from the countryside, making them a minority in 'their' historical cities. These tensions came into the open during the *perestroika* of the late 1980s, when liberalisation and subsequent weakening of authority allowed expression of grievances that the system could no longer control. Land competition served as a trigger for interethnic riots in Osh and Uzgen during the 1990s, in which at least six-hundred people died − although final numbers were never established. The spread of violence was halted by deployment of Soviet paratroopers from Russia.

Times of Independence

Politicians at the time drew some lessons out of the conflict. When elected, President Akayev was committed, at least publicly, to a 'Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home' ideology of a multiethnic society. Nevertheless, independence turned nationalism into a political principle, which holds that the political and the national units should be congruent (Gellner 1983), thus creating tension. Hostile policies of the Uzbekistan government − such as border closure, and prohibition of free trade and transit − did not help either, as ethnic Uzbeks served as scapegoats for the hardship inflicted by Tashkent upon citizens of Kyrgyzstan.

Nationalist sentiment was boosted by modern politics, where the new state was perceived as the political extension of the nation (Connor 2000: 39). At the beginning of independence, President Akayev offered to his country a forward-looking project of 'island of democracy' and 'Switzerland of Central Asia.' When it was clear that imported liberal market reforms were not bringing the desired fruits, he had nothing to replace it with. The 2005 'revolution' became an 'expression of Kyrgyz statehood' resurging against an internationalist Akayev, who listen too much to foreign recipes (Schatz 2009). Nevertheless, the problem was that nationalism offered a narrow, conflict-laden legitimation for political community, which inevitably pitted cultural communities against each other (Smith 1991: 18). The rise of nationalism in this period was largely overlooked by western scholarship.

The situation of the Uzbek minority deteriorated during Bakiyev's rule, which unleashed nationalist rhetoric and exclusive personnel policies in the South. The Uzbek grievances centred around their access to power on all levels of government, participation of Uzbek minority in law enforcement, the security sector and judiciary, the status of Uzbek as a regional language in areas of compact Uzbek settlement in the South and of access to media. Moreover, they were aggrieved by the taking over of assets belonging to Uzbek businessmen through a practice of 'corporate raiding', in which Bakiyev family members were involved.

Igor Savin describes the process of politicisation of ethnicity in a way that ethnicity emerged as the main social category, defining 'the one' and 'a stranger', which formed the cornerstone of political ideologies of the CIS countries with the exception of Russia. Ethnicity became the main characteristic, which determined social status, an acceptable level of claims, and access to administrative and economic resources. Moving from the Soviet to post-Soviet times, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz from 'culturally divergent' became 'social alien', as common civic affiliation could not overcome differences in political status and in social resources.

The fundamental tension that lies in the ethnically-based ideology served as a source of resentment and feeling of injustice, experienced differently by the two sides. Kyrgyz could not comprehend how Kyrgyzstan could be 'our common home', while 'we have Kyrgyzstan and they have their own home – Uzbekistan.' Uzbeks doubted the sincerity of the slogan, because all constitutions since independence stressed the special role of the Kyrgyz in 'their' country. The Kyrgyz could not see why Uzbeks were unhappy with personnel appointments, as no formal barriers prevented them from joining the civil service. However, as recruitment was non-transparent, in practice each supervisor sought to employ people from his own group. As state employment diminished, interaction between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the workplace declined, and shared social spaces where the two ethnic groups interacted narrowed down. As a result ethnic communities came to live in different social worlds with little contact (*Fergana*, June 23, 2010).

The Issues of Contention

1. Language

One of the main issues of contention was the status and use of the Uzbek language. Olivier Roy (2007: 174) stresses the importance of the relationship between nationality and language in Central Asia:

> 'there [were] two possible solutions to bridge "nationality" and "citizenship": either accept the multiethnic nature of the new republics (in other words returning to the Soviet frame of reference) or reserve full citizenship for the dominant nationality. By pursuing the promotion of the national languages, countries are encouraging an identification of nationality with a dominant ethnic group.'

In Soviet times, multilingualism was supported by the state. Schools with Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian languages of instruction were maintained, with obligatory classes in Kyrgyz and Russian. Media and cultural facilities were available in all three languages depending on prevalence of a particular community. These facilities survived into independence, but support for Uzbek language was in decline.

Pressure from the Kyrgyz majority that 'Uzbeks should learn our language' intensified and fewer concessions were made for minority language rights. Bakiyev's period in office witnessed actions determined to reduce its use and visibility in the public sphere. For example, official documents were no longer available in Uzbek, and posters and signs in areas of compact Uzbek settlement and even inside Uzbek-language schools could not be displayed in Uzbek.[22]

The minority also complained about the lack of textbooks in Uzbek. In Soviet times, Uzbekistan was responsible for producing textbooks for Uzbek-language schools. Following independence, it switched to the Latin alphabet, while Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan continued to use Cyrillic script as was previously the case, and could not use textbooks from Uzbekistan anymore. Moreover, interpretation of national history was different, and it was hardly appropriate to use Uzbekistan's version.

The new government made steps to rectify the situation. On May 31, the government announced that it would circulate 1.5 million copies of the draft constitution in Russian,

[22] This happened, for example, at Uzbek-language school no. 8 in Jalalabad, where the school authorities were fined for keeping signs in Uzbek inside the building (Interview, Abdulmalik Sharipov, Spravedlivost' NGO, Jalalabad, June 7, 2010).

Kyrgyz and Uzbek and started to put this into action. Ten-thousand copies were printed in Uzbek, financed by the EU/ UNDP project, when pressure against translation of the draft into Uzbek began to mount.[23] Several elders suddenly appeared on a state TV channel in a live broadcast and protested against the Uzbek draft. Youth groups remonstrated on June 3, as the youth wing of one of the government's parties, Ak Shumkar, issued a statement, saying that 'if the Uzbek brothers want to read the constitution, they should publish it at their own expense and not at the expense of the state' (24.kg news agency, June 3, 2010),

An acute row unfolded over the Uzbek draft. Why seasoned oppositionists in the provisional government became so scared of seemingly marginal groups was unclear, but they did. Temir Sariev, deputy chair of the government and head of the Central Electoral Commission, vehemently denied to the international community that any copies in the Uzbek were ever – or would be − produced.

2. Policies of exclusion in personnel appointments

The Soviet practice of ethnically-balanced appointments was already eroded under Akayev. In the 1990s, exclusion from professional jobs was directed mainly against Russians and other European minorities, and they were leaving the country. Uzbeks were also targeted, mostly in the security sector, where a signal was sent down the system that 'Uzbeks could not be trusted with security'. This mainly applied to the newly-created military and security agencies, as previously these structures were the domain of the central state administered by Moscow. The Interior Ministry had been a republican structure and had Uzbeks in its ranks since Soviet times. Some of them managed to keep their jobs after independence.

Although under Akayev the key public administration appointments were in the hands of the Kyrgyz, still some had Uzbek deputies; there were ethnic Uzbek district heads and members of local councils. The unwritten rule was that the 'number two' positions would go to minorities, mostly Uzbeks, while in Bakiyev's time the Uzbeks could claim 'number three' jobs, if they were lucky.[24] For instance, no appointments of new judges from the Uzbek community in Osh were possible, despite qualified candidates approved by their professional supervisory body.[25]

The new government began addressing the imbalance. Several Uzbeks were appointed into administration jobs, even if not into positions of high visibility. The overwhelmingly Uzbek Aravan district of Osh province got an Uzbek first deputy head. In Jalalabad province one newly-appointed deputy governor and one deputy city mayor were Uzbeks. A three-month

[23] It is unclear what exactly happened, as prior to the violence the authorities claimed higher numbers, showing that at least intentions were good. Osh governor Sooronbai Jeenbekov (Interview, Osh, June 8, 2010) claimed that 20,000 copies of the Constitution draft in Uzbek language had been distributed and 100,000 more were expected shortly. The Deputy Governor of Jalalabad stated that the print run of the Uzbek-language newspaper *Jalalabad Tangy* was increased at state expense to publish the text of the Constitution. 5,000 copies of the draft in Uzbek language were to be distributed in Suzak, Bazar-Kurgan, Ala-Buka and Nouken districts (Interview,,Kadyr Jakypov, Ata Meken, June 7, 2010).

[24] In Osh province only three districts − Kara-Su, Nouken and Aravan – had Uzbek deputy heads.

[25] Appointment of two new Uzbek judges from Osh was approved by the four-party council, consisting of members of the Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice, Parliamentary Committee on Security and Justice Affairs and civil society representatives. Candidatures were presented to President Bakiyev for endorsement, which was typically a formality. On this occasion the president personally deleted the two Uzbeks on the list. Alisher Sabirov, the ethnic Uzbek MP from the then ruling Al-Jol party and head of parliamentary committee, pleaded with the president on behalf of these candidates, who met all professional requirements, but Bakiyev's response was that no Uzbeks could enter the judicial corps (Interview, Alisher Sabirov, Bishkek, February 2009).

civil-service training course was introduced, into which 70 percent of those enrolled were Uzbeks. They could subsequently join the civil service on condition that they had proficiency in the Kyrgyz language. Nevertheless, the new administrators saw the people they came to govern as 'us' and 'them' rather than as equal citizens: 'they [Osh Uzbeks] should not complain about the lack of media access, they have Osh and Maison TV; it is us [Osh Kyrgyz] who are discriminated in the media here' (Interview, Sooronbai Jeenbekov, Osh, June 7, 2010).

3. Nationalists in the government

Ideological stance was increasingly disturbing to minorities in the South who were not sure what to expect out of the charged rhetoric. 'National consciousness, as a kind of self-locating device for navigating the social world, does not in and of itself point a given nation in any particular direction. What gives it direction is the various uses to which it is put (Hale 2009: 24).' Nationalist discourse gained momentum in Bakiyev's time as politicians from the South − such as Azimbek Beknazarov, Adakhan Madumarov, Kamchibek Tashiev − joined the government. Views that were previously articulated in the margins were transmitted by state media channels, sending a message to the public that the leadership was sympathetic to the nationalist sentiment.

Some members of the provisional government who came to power in April, such as Roza Otunbayeva and Omurbek Tekebayev, were committed to the values of a multiethnic society, but others were not. This prevented the new rulers from projecting a coherent stance on the 'Uzbek issue'. Public statements by several key government figures alienated minorities further.[26] Deputy Chair of the provisional government responsible for security, Azimbek Beknazarov, explained in an interview to *Kommersant Daily* (July 10, 2010) that Uzbeks were 'responsible for violence in the South as they demanded additional rights for themselves as for a national minority. They wanted to make Uzbek a state language.' Emil Kaptagayev (Interview, June 25, 2010), Head of Staff of the provisional government, lamented that the 2010 Constitution was a law of a western society that did not state explicitly that the state was an expression of statehood of the Kyrgyz and the special role of the Kyrgyz people was not stressed enough. Topchubek Turganaliyev even proposed to deprive the Russian language of its official status and declared that only Kyrgyz would be used in the Environment Protection Agency, which he had been appointed to head.[27]

Nationalist leftovers from the previous regime still continued and aligned with like-minded members of the provisional government. The mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov − a Bakiyev cadre and a committed nationalist − enjoyed considerable power in the city, supported by up to five-hundred sportsmen and local thugs such as Kursant and Almanbet. The government did not have any leverage over him, while Myrzakmatov boasted that he was a *de facto* boss of Osh and even President Otunbayeva could not dismiss him. Provisional government members Azimbek Beknazarov and Defence Minister Ismail Isakov were on good terms with the mayor (Interview, Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdurasulova, Bishkek, June 25, 2010).

[26] For example, Topchunbek Turganaliev, Head of Environment Protection Agency and chairman of the Erkendik party stated (Interview, Bishkek, June 2010) that 'senior Kyrgyz officials of Bakiyev and Akayev periods had been bribed by Uzbekistan and tricked into receiving control over cafes, restaurants and businesses in exchange for making concessions for the Uzbeks who live in the country. Davran Sabirov [Uzbek ex-MP] insulted Kyrgyz people by airing his video clip on Osh and Maison TV.'.

[27] The interim president countered him by saying that there was no need to ban Russian to let the Kyrgyz language develop (24.kg news agency, April 23, 2010), but statements directed against Uzbeks were left without reaction from key political figures.

Opposition politicians from the South were no better. Kamchibek Tashiev, ex-Emergencies Minister and one of the Ata-Jurt party leaders, believed that Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan must show greater respect to Kyrgyz history, language and culture, and could not hold leadership positions (Interview, Kamchibek Tashiev, Bishkek, June 9, 2010). Adakhan Madumarov, leader of Butun [United] Kyrgyzstan party maintained that the Uzbeks had no problems in Kyrgyzstan. Simply, different groups have different capacities and inclinations: the Uzbeks, for example, are more suited for hard labour, especially in agriculture, while it is not possible to imagine that the Kyrgyz would be happy to do the same. They are better matched to other pursuits (Interview, Adakhan Madumarov, Bishkek, June 3, 2010).

4. Popular moods

These sentiments were fed by the attitudes coming from mainstream Kyrgyz society in the South, shared both by qualified professionals and ordinary community members. Offices of international agencies, unless they had an explicit policy of multiethnic recruitment − as did several US NGOs − were staffed by ethnic Kyrgyz. National NGOs were composed along ethnic lines: if the NGO leader was a Kyrgyz, the organisation most likely had no Uzbeks,[28] while NGOs headed by minority representatives had multiethnic composition.

The intelligentsia played its role in promoting nationalism (Smith 1971). Uzbek intellectuals had been noting that there was little solidarity from the majority community, and that a united front of intelligentsia against nationalism never appeared (Interview, Mahamadjan Khamidov, June 2009). Many educated Kyrgyz showing critical reasoning in other matters could not see that Uzbeks may have problems in Kyrgyzstan.[29]

5. Uzbek community in their bubble

The Uzbek community felt increasingly alienated, seeing that the state would not work in its interests. It was retreating into a secluded and segregated existence. The information space was filled by channels from Uzbekistan. In the areas close to the border either there were no Uzbek-language broadcasts or no coverage from Kyrgyzstan at all. Children who grew up in such areas called Islam Karimov 'our president', to the dismay of their Kyrgyz neighbours. As put by an international aid practitioner, 'Uzbeks lived in their own bubble', trying to demand from the state as little as possible.[30]

The main avenue for public participation for the Uzbeks was via their national cultural centres, which in Hierman's view performed a gate-keeping role. Analysing developments under Bakiyev, he argues that 'Uzbek politicians invest in ethnic organisations (cultural centres and a university) as a means to increase entry costs for rival Uzbek politicians' (Hierman 2010: 249). This paper offers a simpler explanation: cultural centres were the only legitimate arena open for participation and debate. *Rodina* party, with a majority Uzbek membership, always balanced on the edge of being closed down by the authorities, was excluded from the 2007 parliament, while in other parties and institutions the minority could play only a low-key role.

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[28] A notable exception is IRET Foundation in Osh.

[29] The following stance was very typical: 'Uzbeks do not have any demands and have no problems. Uzbek schools function, and they hold many "'number three"' positions. When anti-government protests occurred, only Kyrgyz people participated. Uzbeks never take the risk and stay at home' ('Interview, party representative, Jalalabad, June 7, 2010).

[30] Author's observations while working for UNDP in the Ferghana Valley.

The April power change gave new hopes to the Uzbek community. Civil society groups in Osh − such as OO Golden Goal led by Alisher Mamajanov and 'Citizens Against Corruption' led by Alima Sharipova − raised the issue of representation of Uzbeks in power and the use of the Uzbek language (Interview, Gulgaky Mamasalieva, Interbilim, Osh, June 8, 2010). *Kurultais* (community meetings) were widely held to debate the constitutional change. The Uzbek community sent four representatives to participate in the Constitutional Council, to advocate inclusion of four proposals promoting minority rights: the changing of the phrasing in the introduction from 'Kyrgyz people' to 'people of Kyrgyzstan', in whose name the new Constitution was written; changing the name of the country from ethnically-charged 'Kyrgyz Republic' to the geographical title of 'Kyrgyzstan'; introduction of quotas for Uzbeks in political power and in representation in the justice and security sectors; and language rights in the public sphere and access to the mass media in their own language. Only the first proposal was accepted. The new constitution provides fewer guarantees for minorities when compared to the 2007 version, as it prohibits the creation of political parties on an ethnic basis, thus giving grounds for parties representing minority interests to be banned.[31]

The April events gave impetus to stratification among the Uzbek political elite. At the time, many community people, especially younger ones, were coming to regard the 'old' Uzbek establishment (Muhammadjan Mamasaidov, Alisher Sabirov) as too loyal to the regime. According to this view, they were 'token Uzbeks,' whose loyalty had been bought out by the power holders. They were more interested in protecting their own interests than community rights. Kadyrjan Batyrov − former MP and a chairman of *Rodina* party − rose to prominence as a strong Uzbek leader in Jalalabad. His emergence presented the traditional Osh elite with a difficult choice of whether to support him or not.

Historically, Osh Uzbeks had always been in the lead, but now Batyrov from the peripheral Jalalabad acted more radically than the cautious Osh establishment would have liked (Interview, Almaz Ismanov, Osh, June 6, 2010). Professional groups felt apprehensive of him, being in favour of launching demands that they felt were realistic. Ordinary community members, especially the young ones, believed that Batyrov was a genuine leader who could not be bought, as he entered politics not to grab assets − he was already wealthy − but to stand up for their rights.

Political debate was gaining momentum in the community. Apart from the amendments to the constitution, the issues discussed were to abolish mentioning of ethnicity in passports and to establish autonomy for the Uzbeks in the South (Interview, Janna Saralayeva, Bishkek,June 4, 2010). However, respondents from *Rodina* party and the University of People's Friendship sponsored by Kadyrjan Batyrov claimed that they wished to be integrated in Kyrgyzstan and did not demand autonomy, but were misunderstood by the majority constituency.[32]

Makings of the crisis

The major problem was that after April the writ of the state did not reach far into the South. The provisional government started by replacing the old administrators, but in some places this was met with strong and successful resistance, such as in Osh where the mayor refused to

[31] Article 4.4, 2010 Constitution.

[32] Meeting with Mamura Abdulhafizova, Rodina party, Roza Kuzmenko, deputy rector for civil education, Shafkat Turakulov, Rodina party, assistant to Kadyrjan Batyrov, Alimajan Saliev, Lubov' Maximenko, Ozodbek Karamatov, Rector, University of Friendship of Peoples, Jalalabad, June 7, 2010.

go. Where the new appointees took their jobs, some did not enjoy the support of local elites and public, such as in Jalalabad. Central government politicians barely ventured into the South − dropped from a helicopter to attend a party rally at a safe distance out of town, but not spending more than a few hours. After floods in Suzak in May no senior official visited, while Roza Otunbayeva and her ministers did so when natural calamities happened in the North in Talas (Interview, Nurkan Koichumanova, Jalalabad, June 7, 2010). The sentiment of many ordinary people was that 'the government does not acknowledge us. We are not to blame that Bakiyev comes from here, this is not the reason to completely neglect us' (Interview, Janna Saralayeva, Bishkek, June 4, 2010)

The new leadership failed to articulate its policy towards the South, despite the deteriorating situation throughout May. Local experts and NGOs urged that priority be given to the region, and for it to be seen and heard. These calls were not listened to. In the words of Almaz Ismanov (Interview, Osh, June 2010):

> 'Inaction led to disturbances. The major mistake of the government was in neglecting the South, in not trying to control the situation in Osh and not appointing, for example, a special representative for the South who could ensure that the writ of Bishkek reaches it. Provisional government might be too apprehensive of the South to show up there.'[33]

In May, protest demonstrations against the new authorities erupted in Osh and Jalalabad. In both cities the governor's offices were overtaken by crowds. However, in Jalalabad the riots turned more serious, as Kyrgyz protesters demanded the resignation of the new governor, Bektur Asanov.[34] The police did not interfere as crowds besieged the administrative building and demanded that he come out. The governor, fearing for his life, hid in the district police headquarters and appealed to Bishkek for help.

Politicians in the government, unable to rely on the formal security structures, tried to get their party militias geared into action. At least Ata Meken had their groups in the province. This did not seem to work, and Omurbek Tekebayev and Azimbek Beknazarov appealed to Batyrov,[35] asking him to rescue the government in exchange for favours for him and his community. Batyrov agreed and appeared in the city centre with his armed group to 'restore order.'

This development proved fatal. The conflict quickly transformed from a political into an interethnic one. The demonstrative move by Batyrov was perceived as an Uzbek display of force and as a statement of their political intent. Riots occurred in Jalalabad city from May 14 to 19, in which at least six people died and more than sixty were injured. The ethnic Kyrgyz protesters demanded the arrest of Batyrov. The crowds besieged the building, in which the governor and government members, who had come from Bishkek to resolve the situation, were hiding. Officials realised that they had no forces to rely upon − one armed personnel

[33] Ismanov claimed that he, amongst others, called on key government figures to act and got 'thank you, we control the situation' in response.

[34] There were persistent reports that the protests were organised by Bakiyevs' family, which appears consistent with their plans to undermine the new government, but there has not been solid proof.

[35] Batyrov had his own scores against the ex-president. The Bakiyevs took over the assets, which in 2005 had belonged to Mr. Batyrov, who assumed that this was the time to take his assets back ('Interviews, Janna Saralayeva, Bishkek, June 5, 2010; Raya Kadyrova, Bishkek, June 1, 2010; Aziza Abdurasulova, Bishkek, June 25, 2010).

carrier was subsequently found − and persuaded the governor to come out and face the crowds.[36]

When the arrest warrant was issued, Batyrov went into hiding. His university was overrun by rioters, and the facilities were ransacked with the police watching on. Batyrov gave a controversial interview, transmitted by Uzbek-language Osh and Maizon TV stations, in which he articulated the Uzbek-community grievances. The interview had a divisive impact and further ignited tensions. After these events the most acute Uzbek concerns centred on physical security and the absence of a responsible interlocutor in the provisional government.[37]

Subsequently the situation somehow stabilised, and the University – the site of clashes on May 19 – resumed its activities on May 24. On May 25, the general managers of Osh TV and Maizon TV − respectively Khaliljan Khudaiberdiev and Javlan Mirzahodjaev − were taken to the Jalalabad Prosecutor General's Office to be interrogated in connection with broadcast of Kadyrov's speech, and returned to Osh.

As political instability provoked ethnic tensions between the two communities in the South, negative stereotyping became rampant. In the words of civil society activist Dilbarhan Mamadjusupova, speaking in Osh two days before the riots broke out, 'there is such tension in the air that any spark can ignite a big fire' (Interview, IRET Foundation, June 8, 2010).[38]

Throughout the violence of 2010 young people played a detrimental role, revealing that their problems were long neglected. There were several aspects. First, society as a whole experienced a crisis of traditional authority, in which respect for elders used to be paramount. Nowadays, elders may be listened to in family matters, but rallying around younger leaders has far more currency when it comes to public action, when youth networks are mobilised. Such leaders are typically businessmen, often with links to the underworld. They understand modern life better and what young people aspire to. Leaders can do things for the youth, such as provide casual employment, organise labour migration, pay for hospitality and run sports clubs. Young men support them sometimes because they need money or favours, sometimes because of genuine respect.

Second, the younger generation grew up with more materialistic values than their Sovietised fathers. On the one hand, there is an abundance of money around because of the drug economy, allowing a seemingly accessible fancy lifestyle, also promoted by TV images. On the other hand, available jobs in cotton plantations are unlikely to make this desired lifestyle possible. Thus, cotton fields give way to construction of cottages, as more money passes through Kyrgyzstan's economy, apparently made very quickly. A vivid gap between aspirations and reality causes frustration among youth.

Thirdly, migration from the countryside into towns has rapidly increased as rural areas experience decline. The Soviet system tightly controlled internal migration, and people were

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[36] The governor was taken by rioters to the race course, where he was humiliated and beaten for three hours, with an Uzbek hat put on his head, until an ambulance managed to take him out.
[37] The May riots left the community in Jalalabad frightened, especially after the editorial offices of the Uzbek newspaper *Deidor* were shot at ('Interview, *Rodina* party members and University of People's Friendship staff, June 7, 2010).
[38] 'Ms. Mamadjusupova also noted that the mayor of Osh 'advised' IRET not to deal with interethnic issues, as 'NGOs only support the minorities, but not Kyrgyz people.'

only allowed to move for a purpose when jobs and accommodation were prepared for them. This has changed in the time of independence when opportunities in casual labour appeared in towns, mostly attracting young men.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, absence of state measures to promote a culture of interethnic relations from a young age planted the wrong seeds. Children were brought up with a sense that solidarity is provided by an extended family and that outsiders are competitors to be viewed with suspicion. Teaching of values of internationalism at schools was abandoned, as the state no longer pushed for them. State-run cross-community social activities and vocational training, which used to bring groups together, came to a halt. The employment structure was becoming more monoethnic, as jobs for young men in the public sector were reduced, while the private sector is mostly based on clans (Collins 2006).

Rumours and new technology played a role in rapid mobilisation of young men. Calls to mobilise were sent via mobile phones and spread very quickly, directing people in what seemed like a semi-organised pattern. Already in May images of beatings and humiliations by 'their' group of 'our' guys were circulating on mobile phone screens in Osh and Jalalabad. Those who had access to the internet could see videos on YouTube.

Those civil society leaders (Foundation for Tolerance International, Civic Rapid Response Group in Jalalabad) who tried to negotiate with 'angry young men' gathered in the streets and in the hippodrome in Jalalabad, admitted their lack of success. 'It was unclear if they had leaders whom they listened to and if there were leaders at all. Their role models are criminal bosses' (Interview, Janna Saralayeva, Bishkek, June 4, 2010).

June clashes in the South

Following the May violence, low-key intimidation continued, as noted by respondents within the human-rights community in Jalalabad. Uzbek residents in rural areas surrounding the city reported that groups of Kyrgyz young men drove at night to their houses and threw Molotov cocktails. Many families moved their women and children to faraway villages to stay with relatives, and remaining men did not switch on the electricity at night. Residents were forming vigilante groups and collecting stones and farm tools for self-defence ((Interview, Janna Saralayeva, Bishkek, June 4, 2010). Disturbances also happened in Bazar-Kurgan in Jalalabad province (Interview, Abdulmalik Sharipov, Jalalabad, June 7, 2010).

Violence started on June 10 in Osh, out of a dispute between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth groups in a casino (International Crisis Group 2010). By the morning the city was in flames and out of government control. On June 13 violence spread to Jalalabad city and the neighbouring rural districts. Figures are being verified,[39] but it is estimated that approximately 2,000 people – mostly Uzbeks − were dead, 400,000 became refugees and 100,000 were displaced internally (*The Guardian*, June 16, 2010). In Osh, Uzbek neighbourhoods, schools and businesses were destroyed by fire. In Jalalabad many private houses were destroyed, whole Uzbek streets were burnt down, and most hotels, restaurants and theatres were razed to the ground, while the University of Peoples' Friendship and Uzbek school no. 8 were burnt down completely.

Politicians in the new government were unprepared to deal with a crisis of such magnitude so early in their time in office. The visits of Roza Otunbayeva and Omurbek Tekebayev to the

[39] See footnote 1.

South to meet with the population were tense, while others were not accepted (Interviews, Janna Saralayeva, Bazar-Korgan, June 19, 2010; human-rights defenders, Osh, June 18 – 19, 2010).[40] The Uzbek community felt that the government was inclined to sympathise more with the Kyrgyz, and was aggrieved that President Otunbayeva on her visit to Osh on June 18 did not meet with Uzbek representatives who were waiting for her. Their demands to be heard were articulated subsequently by Davran Sabirov, president of the Society of Uzbeks of Osh province.[41] Subsequently, the way the northern politicians dealt with the outbreak was to indulge the enraged South, even if at the expense of the Uzbek minority. In a sense, North and South found a way of reaching some form of accommodation, with the scapegoating of 'outsider' Uzbeks who stepped into this situation. This helps to explain the fairly lax attitudes of Bishkek towards excessive use of force by law-enforcement agencies.

Interethnic clashes subsided, but security was not restored (Human Rights Watch 2010). On July 20, UNHCHR said Kyrgyz security forces continued with repeated rights violations against ethnic Uzbeks, including torture, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty Newsline, July 25, 2010), and on July 27 warned that some 75,000 internally displaced were at risk, including detention and harassment by the authorities. Harassment was now done in a more organised way, and extortion and theft became the main preoccupation. Human-rights defenders tried to be present during police operations, until Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdurasulova were not detained themselves. The situation was well known to the government in Bishkek, but even the president was powerless to rectify it (Interviews, members of international diplomatic community, Bishkek, June – July 2010).

Arrests of prominent Uzbeks followed. Uzbek leader Inomjan Abdurasulov fled fearing arrest as his family and associates − even his driver − in Kara-Suu district of Osh province were harassed by the security services (Interview, Raya Kadyrova, Osh, June 24, 2010). A search warrant was issued for Jahangir Salakhutdinov, the president of the Uzbek National Cultural Centre wanted on criminal charges of organising armed violence. He went into hiding. Arrests of ordinary Uzbek men took place. Each neighbourhood had between six and ten men arrested. Sixteen men were taken away by security forces from Nariman neighbourhood after a mopping up operation there (Interviews, Dilbarhan Mamadjusupova, Osh, June 24, 2010; Tolekan Ismailova, Bishkek, June 25, 2010). The mopping up resulted in eight-hundred newly displaced people from Nariman, most of whom were already displaced from Cheremushki, a neighbourhood in central Osh that was burnt down entirely. Excessive force was used in the operation, which human-rights defenders considered a punitive one (Interview, Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdurasulova, Bishkek, June 25, 2010).

In Jalalabad province, security structures had more success with arrests, having detained 102 prominent Uzbeks, including: Azimjan Askarov (human-rights activist), Ulugbek Abdulasamov (editor-in-chief of *Deidor* newspaper and member of Constitutional Council), Azamjan Akbarov (member of Constitutional Council), Ozodbek Karamatov (rector of the University of Friendship of People), Vahidjan Ergeshov (director of Dostuk joint venture), and Muhamadjan Ahmedov (*imam-khatib* of Suzak mahalla mosque, located next to the 'Uzbek' University) (Interview, Abdulmalik Sharipov and Valentina Gritsenko, Jalalabad, June 24, 2010). By contrast, there was only one known case of detention of a prominent Kyrgyz outside of Bakiyev's family: Bakhtiyar Shermatov, director of Bayil market, was

[40]'.Temir Sariyev was roughed up in Bishkek when he tried to pacify crowds of youngsters in Bishkek (eyewitness accounts, Bishkek, June 2010).
[41] 'Appeal to Chair of Provisional government Roza Otunbayeva on behalf of Osh Uzbeks,' Osh, June 18, 2010.

held, but after Kyrgyz protesters gathered around the police HQ where he was kept, he was released (Interview, Muradaly Uchkempirov, Jalalabad, June 24, 2010).

Ethnic resentment in the communities heightened after the riots when emotions were flying high. Uzbek and Kyrgyz human-rights activists were criticised by their ethnic kin for cooperating with the other side and had to keep a low profile, as they came under pressure from nationalists on both sides (Interview, Tolekan Ismailova, Bishkek, June 25, 2010). 'It should be written in the constitution that Uzbeks should respect us,' a Kyrgyz woman stated to President Otunbayeva at an Osh referendum rally. Opinions expressed in the focus groups conducted by Foundation for Tolerance International are indicative: Kyrgyz respondents in Osh wished that officialdom would no longer use the Uzbek word '*mahalla*', but '*kocho*' or '*aiyl*' instead. There were calls to ban the displaced Uzbeks from returning into Kyrgyzstan after they allegedly gave interviews on Uzbekistan's TV. One indicator of the community's emotional state was a request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to launch an official protest to Uzbekistan against a song by an Uzbek popular singer, Yulduz Usmanova. The song apparently inspired strong feelings among the Kyrgyz.[42]

Even in the areas with no Uzbeks, ethnic resentment amongst the majority group continued. Roadblocks were set up in the north of Jalalabad province on the main road to Bishkek, far from the Ferghana Valley, to apprehend the Uzbeks fleeing violence in the South. Even NarynHydroEnergo workers, who are constructing the Kambarata power station, a flagship of Kyrgyzstan's economy, left work to set up a checkpoint to detain Uzbeks. Authorities in Osh shared the sentiment: when a Kyrgyz NGO activist delivered aid to the Kyrgyz, she was provided with a state-armed escort, but when she took aid to Uzbek quarters, she had to go on her own (Interview, Dilbarhan Mamadjusupova, Osh, June 19, 2010).

A number of alternative interpretations have emerged (International Crisis Group 2010). Since some are pursued by important actors, they have to be considered, but, in the author's opinion, appear unlikely.

1. **Violence was organised by the Bakiyev family.**

It is true that several Bakiyev relatives may have wanted to settle scores with the new power holders. They probably instigated May disturbances in Jalalabad and in Osh through a mix of loyalty and payment. It is noteworthy that the protests in Osh were much weaker than action in Jalalabad, the ex-presidential family stronghold. The June clashes were different, and the political rationale is doubtful. Kurmanbek Bakiyev stated that he had no intention of claiming back the presidency, and his limited popularity would not have allowed him to do so. Destroying two cities, killing hundreds and unleashing ethnic hatred that would affect both communities for years is counterproductive tactics for a comeback. Political assassinations of key politicians, in which the Bakiyev regime was quite skilful, were an easier way to 'get at' the new power holders.

2. **Criminal groups are to blame.**

Major criminals had little sympathy with Bakiyev's rule, while the new situation was too fluid for the government to harm criminal interests. Moreover, drug smuggling and money laundering, which are the main types of crime, need a state to regulate the market and protect it from eventualities − for example, operations by Russian drug-enforcement agencies.

[42] Foundation for Tolerance International conducted focus groups on June 19-25, 2010 in Osh and Jalalabad provinces, in the areas most affected by violence.

Criminals have a pattern of collaboration with individuals in the state machine and play a regulatory function. For instance, it is believed that the ceasefire in the South was actually organised by criminal elements and not by the elders, as officially stated (Interview, Mars Sariyev, Bishkek, June 26, 2010).

3. **Islamist groups were responsible.**

Tajik snipers, jihadists from Pakistan, Uzbeks from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and international terrorists of all kinds were 'seen' in Osh, turning it into the new battleground in the War on Terror. However, the author's field research in Osh and Jalalabad prior to the violence did not bring to light any evidence of religion deepening gulf between communities. On the contrary, mullahs sought to play a pacifying role, urging calm and conciliation, and trying to reach out to the other community. For example, mosques initiated collection of humanitarian supplies for the victims of floods in Suzak, irrespective of ethnicity (Interview, Muradaly Uchkempirov, June 7, 2010).

These interpretations are pursued by officialdom because blaming violence on outsiders, oppositionists and 'villains' distracts attention from their own mistakes and shifts responsibility away from addressing minority grievances.

4. **Violence derives from competition over land, water and control of resources.**

This tends to ignore the reality that after twenty years of independence Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were occupying different economic niches. This interpretation of economic determinism, which ignores the power of nationalist feelings and explains the world through materialistic rationality, is Marxist at root. Smith (2001: 19) argues that 'economic self-interest is not usually the stuff of stable collective identities', while cultural collectivities are more stable because the basic cultural elements – memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions – tend to be more persistent and binding.

There is also a vested interest by international developers who pursued conflict-prevention programmes in the South to interpret the conflict as resource-based.[43] These programmes had a rural bias, when most attention went into countryside, while urban areas where violence subsequently happened were overlooked. Instead of tackling issues of nationalism in the public sphere and the culture of intolerance among youth, priority was given to rural poverty alleviation as the best remedy against conflict.

External powers

The crisis in the South demonstrated that no external actor is sufficiently interested in Kyrgyzstan to intervene decisively. The country's profile on the international arena is dismally low. It has no energy or valuable mineral resources that matter, no geopolitical rivalry to speak of, is small, remote and has weak lobbying capacity in the capitals that matter.

Regional reactions

After the April crisis, neighbouring Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan closed their borders with Kyrgyzstan. As a result the republic faced severe shortages, as many food products − such as flour, and oil and lubricants − are imported from Kazakhstan. The provisional government did not expect anything different from Uzbekistan, but the behaviour of kinship-related

[43] For example, UNDP Peace and Development Programme.

Kazakhstan caused grievance (Interview, Ata Meken, Bishkek, June 2010). Various proposals were considered as to how to put pressure on the neighbour, including using Kazakhstan's prospective membership in the World Trade Organisation as leverage. In the end water became the weapon of choice. Valves on the rivers were shut off and Kazakhstan no longer received the water its agriculture required. Following this, Kazakhstan opened up three border crossings with Kyrgyzstan and water was permitted to flow to Kazakhstani fields. Even when some restrictions were lifted, Kyrgyzstan's economy continued to suffer.[44]

The main burden of the refugee crisis fell upon Uzbekistan, and it coped efficiently with it (Eurasianet, July 15, 2010). However, the political mosaic is more complicated. In the run-up to the June clashes many among the Uzbek intelligentsia and community leaders in Kyrgyzstan were convinced that if anti-Uzbek riots happened, help from Uzbekistan would arrive soon, either as a peace-enforcement intervention by Tashkent or kinship-solidarity movement by relatives and friends (Interview, Izzatilla Rahmatillaev, Osh, June 6, 2010). None of this happened: the immediate reaction of Tashkent was to close the borders to fleeing refugees (AFP, June 14, 2010), while the 'people's solidarity' movement never materialised.[45] Uzbekistan was forced to open the borders on and off, as the pressure of people trying to cross mounted and several were crushed to death by crowds.

In the aftermath, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were interested in returning refugees as soon as possible. There were reports that refugees had been told that unless they returned quickly, they would be unable to claim their property and social rights, and might not be allowed back into Kyrgyzstan. Some were loaded into buses in Uzbekistan allegedly to be moved to a different camp, but ended up deported to Kyrgyzstan (Ferghana.ru, June 26, 2010). By the June 27 referendum (less than two weeks after the riots), no refugees were left in the camps. Only those sheltered by relatives managed to stay. This made international observers doubt that all returns were voluntary.

Tashkent's response vividly demonstrated its policy of non-support of its ethnic kin abroad. President Karimov showed that his priority was stability in his own country and preservation of power, which a spill over of the crisis might challenge, given a presence of a Kyrgyz minority in Uzbekistan. How would he go down in the history of his own people – as a great leader who showed restraint in a testing time or as a villain who betrayed his own people in a desperate plight − only time would tell. However, if Islam Karimov is succeeded by a more nationalist politician, the June 2010 riots could become a cornerstone of the new ideology.

Tajikistan was the only neighbour that sought to preserve cordial relations with the Bakiyev leadership during his time in office, for want of other access routes. Instability in the south of Kyrgyzstan frightened Dushanbe. Since the Tajik/ Kyrgyz border is in large measure an open one, it threatened to produce a spill over into its own territory and disrupt transportation links.

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[44] By June 1, the cross-border movement of all goods other than medicines, food products, fuel and farming products remained banned by an instruction issued by the Kazakhstani authorities, according to the Association of Markets, Trade and Service Enterprises of Kyrgyzstan. The State Customs Service addressed the issue in a letter to the Kazakhstani authorities and requested the support of the Foreign Ministry.

[45] The Embassy of Uzbekistan claimed that pre-emptive work had been undertaken through administrators and community leaders to prevent revenge attacks from happening, (IISS meeting on Kyrgyzstan, London, July 16, 2010). This is plausible because the population is afraid of the government and can be easily pressurised into obedience. However, it means that Tashkent thought that violence was possible in advance and did nothing to avert it in Kyrgyzstan.

International responses

Russia plays a major role in the military field, economic development and the socio-cultural sphere of Kyrgyzstan. The republic hosts two foreign military bases on its territory – a Russian and a US. Kant Air Base is a Russian military facility in the Ysyk-Ata district of Chui province, located 20 kilometres east of Bishkek. It was opened in October 2003 and hosts the Russian Air Force's 5th Air Army's 999th Air Base. The base is staffed by 250 officers and 150 servicemen. In 2009, Moscow was discussing its intentions to open a second military training centre in southern Kyrgyzstan, but these plans were put on hold first by the cooling down of relations between Moscow and Bakiyev, and by the April and June crises under the new government.

Bishkek is also bounded to Moscow by various multilateral fora, such as Eurasec, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The latter two provide mutual security guarantees and claim the existence of collective rapid response forces, capable of crisis intervention.

During the crisis interim President Otunbayeva publicly appealed first to Russia, and then to the CSTO to urgently deploy troops to stop mass killings and destruction. In this appeal she was supported by other senior government figures, opposition politicians and civil society (ITAR-TASS news agency, June 13, 2010). Moscow declined, sending airborne troops to defend its military facility in the North instead (Ferghana.ru, June 13, 2010) and humanitarian supplies to the South. The reasons why Moscow chose this course of action are beyond the scope of this paper.[46]

The US has defence interests in Kyrgyzstan as it hosts a transit centre at Manas Airport (unofficially Ganci Air Base), primarily operated by the US Air Force. Established in December 2001, it is a transit point for US military personnel heading to operations in Afghanistan and is also used by other NATO International Security Assistance Force member states. The US response to the 2010 crises was muted, with cautious and belated statements and little action beyond humanitarian aid. The likely explanation is the effect of suspicions that the US had been behind 2005 'colour' revolution. After that Washington sought to appear neutral and apolitical, with minimal contacts with the opposition and cautious not to raise hopes that the US could intervene in any way. The EU resorted to diplomatic means of high profile visits of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, but had no capacity on the ground apart from allocation of aid.

International conflict-prevention mechanisms do not come out of the crisis with flying colours. OSCE Centre in Bishkek sponsored local NGOs to do assessments and interethnic dialogue interventions, which were sensible, but vastly insufficient steps to prevent a rapidly developing crisis. Only on June 14 (the fourth day of mass killings) did the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek issue an early warning to the Permanent Council and 56 OSCE participating states. In the aftermath, President Otunbayeva requested Kimmo Kiljunen, Special Representative for Central Asia of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to initiate an international independent commission for inquiry into the events in southern Kyrgyzstan.

[46] It is believed that the advice from the Russian Embassy was to deploy troops as the government's appeal was made, but Moscow decided differently (Interview, Russian diplomats, Bishkek, July 2010).

On July 22, OSCE leaders announced their intention to deploy a 52-member unarmed police advisory group to the South for four months. Osh Mayor Myrzakmatov and Osh City Council denied the need for the mission, while over two-thousand in the South and Bishkek protested against deployment, despite the government's admission of its inability to protect citizens, and repeated calls for international assistance. Resistance also came from Kyrgyz youth who feared that the mission would act in the interests of the Uzbek minority and 'undermine respect for Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement.' Twelve youth organisations, including Ak Kyzmat, joined at the Osh youth action headquarters to protest against OSCE policing (AKI-Press, August 6, 2010).

Nevertheless, the crisis brought an influx of new funds: in July donors pledged $1.1 billion in post-crisis assistance to the country (Reuters, July 27, 2010). Before the crises, Kyrgyzstan was largely viewed as a successful case of international development. Net ODA reached $360 million and net ODA/ GNI ratio was 8.3 percent in 2008. Out of the OECD countries, Turkey was the largest donor with $61 million, followed by the US with $51 million (OECD 2008). Harmonisation and alignment policies worked reasonably well, and the country benefited from substantial volumes of aid. At the same time, the country carried on in conditions of institutional multiplicity, with two parallel realities co-existing alongside one other (Di John 2008). As noted by Fiacconi (*Times of Central Asia,* June 17, 2010):

> 'Kyrgyzstan has always been surviving between the benevolent approach of the international community, with their geopolitical interests, and the internal reality made of political opportunists, often with clear ties with organised crime, millions of poor people struggling to survive, and hundreds of thousands looking for their future outside the country.'

Prospects for democracy, stability and 'all the good things in life'

The paradox of Kyrgyzstan has been that an apparently fragile state managed to extract a great deal of compliance from its citizens and periodically projected real fear, and at the same time it is a place where a regime can be overthrown with relative ease. When challenged by social forces, its presidents tend to flee rather than fight. The question is why people obey weak governments of questionable legitimacy, which they can overthrow and expel from the country? There is no satisfactory answer, apart from diminishing resilience of inherited Soviet institutions, habits and expectations stemming from that past − 'in case you comply, the system would reward you' − and inability to replace these institutions with ones more suitable for modern times.

The current study sees the causes for the interethnic conflict of 2010 in the nationalism prevalent around the southern Kyrgyz group, which was allowed to get out of hand by a fragile central state. It appears that awakening a national consciousness among the Kyrgyz took the form of resentment towards those who were different. Batyrov's disastrous blundering into North-South political tensions allowed the resentments to find a tangible local target, and in the absence of tempering on the part of the state security apparatus the situation spiralled out of control. The conflict produces the biggest challenge to the state. Its long-term repercussions are worrying, as the Uzbek community realises that it is on its own with its problems. There are three possible templates for the future: that of Sri Lanka, where a powerful guerrilla organisation emerged after a policy of exclusion and an outbreak of ethnic riots; that of Chechnya, where a nascent nationalist movement fell prey to Islamist solidarity networks; and that of Uzbekistan, which reacted to Andijan with overwhelming repression,

but also managed to persuade the population that it acted in the best interests of society protecting it from *jihadis*.

The outlook for the future is uncertain. Currently, state resilience is low, which makes it vulnerable to internal and external challenges. There is a chance that the new leadership, with the help of the international community, will steer through the period of instability and succeed in consolidating the state. The danger is that the northern and southern Kyrgyz may strike a bargain among each other at the expense of the Uzbeks, which will be quite sad and possibly unstable in the long run. However, the worst case scenario is not impossible: disintegration of the state into two halves – North and South − which may go their separate ways, either joining their bigger, more prosperous neighbours of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, or trying it on their own. This would be an admission that the Soviet experiment with creating a Kyrgyz Union Republic was an unfortunate one, and that the crafting of independent statehood over the last two decades at some point went in the wrong direction.

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