

Forum: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Issue: The current political situation in Kyrgyzstan

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INTRODUCTION

“A country without solid borders is like a house without solid walls – it is bound to collapse”. Kyrgyzstan is a nation located in Central Asia. It is bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Its capital and largest city is Bishkek. Surprisingly, despite the state of solitude that one would assume the nation had throughout history (primarily due to its mountainous terrain and location), it has hosted countless civilizations throughout history, albeit temporarily. It served as a crossroads, as it was part of the Silk Road, a network of trade routes connecting the East and the West. On the 31st of August 1991, Kyrgyzstan declared independence from Moscow and formed a democratic government. It then attained sovereignty as a nation state, following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Ever since then, Kyrgyzstan has remained (at least officially) a unitary presidential republic. Despite this, the nation itself hasn't been stable since independence. It undergoes ethnic disputes, revolts, transitional governments, political conflict and even economic crisis.

To top it all off, on the 28th of April 2021 began a border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The reason for this is rather debatable, as there are multiple theories.



Figure 1: A map of the area of Kyrgyzstan and its neighboring nations.¹

As the situation was addressed by Russia, the nation is “without leadership” and “chaotic”.

It is undeniable that Kyrgyzstan has not had political stability ever since its independence. Due to the overwhelming amount of political conflict and international issues over the past decade, the matter has been undermined. Even in the midst of one of the largest crises the world has faced, a global pandemic, the UN needs to shine some light on the matter.

¹ “2021 Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan Conflict.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 May 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Kyrgyzstan%E2%80%93Tajikistan_conflict

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Border

A political boundary is an imaginary line separating one political unit, such as a country or state, from another. Sometimes these align with a natural geographic feature like a river to form a border or barrier between nations. Occasionally, two countries may contest where a particular border is drawn.²



³Figure 2: A picture of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border

Territorial dispute

Territorial disputes occur when official representatives of one country make explicit statements claiming sovereignty over a specific piece of territory that is claimed or administered by another

² National Geographic Society. "Political Borders." *National Geographic Society*, 14 Oct. 2019, www.nationalgeographic.org/lesson/political-borders/

³ Pannier, Bruce. "Conflict On The Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Moves From Sticks And Stones To Bullets And Bombs." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Conflict On The Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Moves From Sticks And Stones To Bullets And Bombs, 30 Apr. 2021, www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-deadly-border-fighting-analysis/31231165.html

country.⁴ Within the context of the matter, an example of this is the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border conflict.

Conflict

Conflict is defined as any dispute between 2 or more parties. It is mostly used as a political term and in the context of the guide, this is its sole meaning.

Political stability

Political stability is just one of the three pillars of national stability when it comes to a country, along with economic and social. For a nation to be politically stable, it must have a clear governing party, a clear governmental system (such as democracy) and stable international relations with its neighboring nations as well as its allies and even competitors.

Revolt

Revolt (in social and political science) is a major, sudden, and hence typically violent alteration in government and in related associations and structures. The term is used by analogy in such expressions as the Industrial Revolution, where it refers to a radical and profound change in economic relationships and technological conditions.⁵

Coup d'état

A sudden decisive exercise of force in politics. Especially refers to the violent overthrow or alteration of an existing government by a small group.⁶

Ethnic conflict

Ethnic conflict, a form of conflict in which the objectives of at least one party are defined in ethnic terms, and the conflict, its antecedents, and possible solutions are perceived along

⁴ "Territorial Disputes." *Obo*, www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0178.xml

⁵ "Revolution." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/revolution-politics

⁶ "Coup D'état." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coup%20d%27%C3%A9tat

ethnic lines. The conflict is usually not about ethnic differences themselves but over political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial matters.⁷

Faction

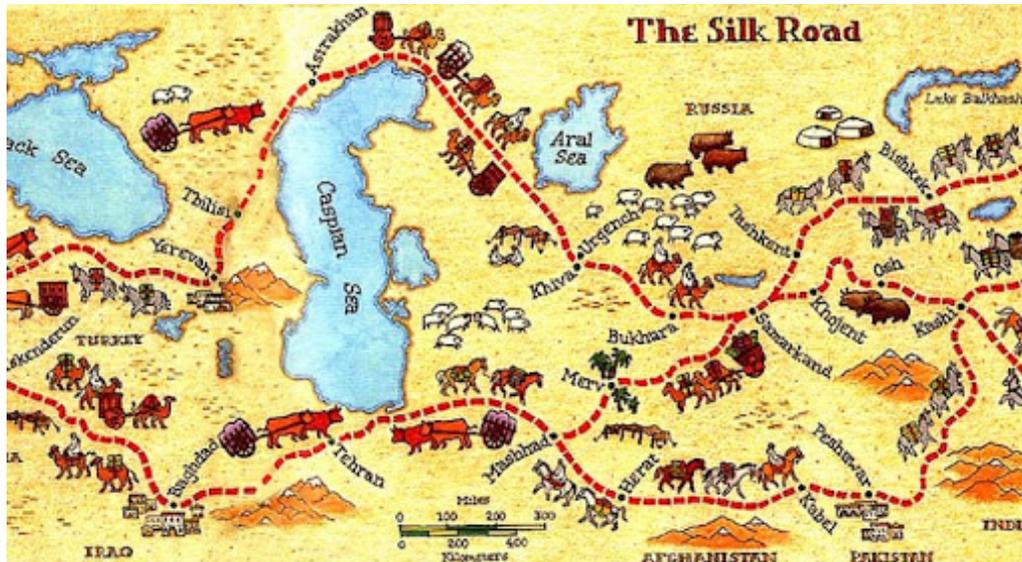
A group within a larger group, especially one with slightly different ideas than the main group: The president's advisors represent every faction of his party.⁸

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kyrgyzstan in early-to-late history

Early centuries

In its very early days the Kyrgyz state was home to multiple cultures and civilization and participated in only one war: the one with Uyghur, which it won and managed to expand to its current size. It was – as aforementioned – a trade route passage and had a decent amount of popularity to its name because of it. While the tribes residing in the state were rather peaceful and calm, they were overrun by the Mongols in the 17th century. In the mid-18th century they were invaded by the Manchurian Qing dynasty, and in the early 19th century by the Uzbek Khanate of Kokand.



⁷ "Ethnic Conflict." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-conflict

⁸ "Faction." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/faction

Figure 3: The Silk Road: a trading route of ancient times

19th-20th century

Through the Treaty of Tarbagatai in the late 19th century, part of the current Kyrgyz land was given to the Russian Empire by Qing China. This region is currently known as the Issyk-Kul region. The territory was fully incorporated into the Russian Empire by 1876. This was – of course – met with multiple revolts, of which all were in vain. Due to the failure of such revolts (among them the 1916 rebellion), a good part of the Kyrgyz people migrated to neighboring nations, such as China and Afghanistan.

Soviet power was initially established in the region in 1919, and the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was created within the Russian SFSR (the phrase Kara-Kirghiz was used until the mid-1920s by the Russians to distinguish them from the Kazakhs, who were also referred to as Kirghiz). On the 5th of December 1936, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic was established as a constituent Union Republic of the Soviet Union.

During the 1920s, Kyrgyzstan developed considerably in cultural, educational, and social life. Literacy was greatly improved, and a standard literary language was introduced by imposing Russian on the populace. Economic and social development also was notable. Many aspects of the Kyrgyz national culture were retained despite the suppression of nationalist activity under Joseph Stalin.

In June 1990, ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz surfaced in the Osh Oblast (southern Kyrgyzstan), where Uzbeks form a minority of the population. The tensions between Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks in Osh led to 186 deaths. Attempts to appropriate Uzbek collective farms for housing development triggered the Osh Riots. By then, the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement (KDM) had developed into a significant political force with support in Parliament. On the 15th of December 1990, the Supreme Soviet passed a vote to alter the republic's name to the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. The following January, new government structures were introduced and a new cabinet was appointed – composed mainly of younger, reform-oriented politicians. In February 1991, the name of the capital, Frunze, was changed back to its pre-revolutionary name of Bishkek.

Akayev, the most prominent Kyrgyz political figure at the time, was gaining too much power in the eyes of the Russians. The State Emergency Committee (SEC) assumed power in Moscow and attempted to perform a coup, which failed and led to the resignation of Akayev, on the 26th of August 1991. This was followed by a Supreme Soviet vote declaring Kyrgyz independence.

⁹ “‘Silk Road Today’: Kyrgyzstan on the Ancient Silk Road.” *Информационное Агентство Кабар*, 3 May 2017, en.kabar.kg/news/silk-road-today-kyrgyzstan-on-the-ancient-silk-road/

As soon as independence was established, the nation was in need of solid leadership and so in need of elections. The elections took place in October of the very same year, in which – not surprisingly – Akayev ran unopposed, receiving a staggering 95% of the votes cast. Kyrgyzstan, after joining the Commonwealth of Independent States, gained full independence and autonomy on the 25th of December 1991. Once again, it comes with no surprise that around the same time, the USSR was disbanded for good.



Figure 4: The national flag of Kyrgyzstan adopted in 1992 is now a symbol of peace and independence¹⁰

The Tulip Revolution and its aftermath

The Tulip Revolution or First Kyrgyz Revolution led to President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev's fall from power. The revolution began after parliamentary elections on February 27 and March 13, 2005. The revolutionaries alleged corruption and authoritarianism by Akayev, his family and supporters. Akayev fled to Kazakhstan and then to Russia. On April 4, 2005, at the Kyrgyz embassy in Moscow, Akayev signed his resignation statement in the presence of a Kyrgyz parliamentary delegation. The resignation was ratified by the Kyrgyz interim parliament on April 11, 2005. Even though the revolution had a strong basis, the occasion would soon be proven to be one of the worst decisions the Kyrgyz people had ever made, as it led to the creation of a severely unprepared government and to heavy foreign criticism that impacted the nation's international relations.

¹⁰ Kosmozoo, et al. "Flag Kyrgyzstan Stock Vector Art 490586402." *IStock*, www.istockphoto.com/photos/kyrgyzstan-flag.



Figure 5: Protester in the Tulip revolution waving the Kyrgyz flag¹¹

This led to a giant power-struggle in the nation, in which multiple factions participated, of which most were associated with organized crime. From that point on, it was all downhill. Political instability was a constant and government corruption was a certainty. Protest after protest, assassination after assassination the nation was falling. Not 5 years later, there was massive civil unrest in 2010 due to some new government measures that were implemented in order to benefit it instead of the people.

Protesters attacked President Bakiyev's offices, as well as state-run radio and television stations. There were conflicting reports that Interior Minister Moldomusa Kongatiyev had been beaten. On 7 April 2010, President Bakiyev imposed a state of emergency. Police and special services arrested many opposition leaders. In response, protesters took control of the internal security headquarters (former KGB headquarters) and a state television channel in the capital, Bishkek. Reports by Kyrgyzstan government officials indicated that at least 75 people were killed and 458 hospitalized in bloody clashes with police in the capital. Reports say that at least 80 people died as a result of clashes with police. A transition government, led by former foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva, by 8 April 2010 had taken control of state media and government facilities in the capital, but Bakiyev had not resigned from office.

Due to the overwhelming pressure of the situation, the then-president Bakiyev resigned and flew out of the country, leaving the nation without any leadership. Around the same time, Russia was accused – not for the first time – of helping the protesters in their cause. Naturally, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin denied this claim.

The question of the current situation

The current situation is much worse politically, economically and socially than it was even at the end of the revolution. But how did the nation transcend from the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution to what can only be described as its all-time low? The process can be broken down to 2 parts: Everything that led to it and the mistakes made by those in power.

¹¹ Marat, Erica. "Tulip Revolution Reloaded." *Jamestown*, 15 Sept. 2016, jamestown.org/program/tulip-revolution-reloaded/

The buildup

It's highly likely that the majority of the contribution to the situation is due to the events that occurred rather than the decisions made. After the country was left in shambles and at a constant state of internal conflict, everything started to fall apart. As there was no clear government or party in a position of absolute power, every decision was either uncertain or challenged by the rest. The lack of decisions led to the downfall of international relations, especially those with neighboring nations. It led to poverty, as economic policies were not implemented to account for the societal changes that conflict had brought about. Not to mention, this caused a severe humanitarian crisis and the second-largest in national history mass migration. The aforementioned eventually and inevitably got worse with time, leading to the current situation.

The political decisions

Although one could easily argue that most of the blame is to be attributed to the situation brought upon by the earlier decisions of prior governments and civilians, one could just as easily argue that some of the blame belongs to the collective decisions made. This is because – as mentioned before – the nation was and is lacking solid leadership, leading to decisions being significantly harder to make. This is due to the fact that if a faction decides on something and the others accept it, it will imply that they accept that faction as the one in power, which was simply impossible, considering the then and current tensions between them. The decisions made were unstable and extremely unfit for the situation at hand.

The 2021 Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan conflict

A border conflict began between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on 28 April 2021. The conflict's origin hasn't been confirmed to this day and none of the sources can be certified as reliable. The most likely possibility is that tensions rose due to some newly introduced border surveillance policies. At least 55 people were killed in the events and more than 40,000 civilians were displaced.

Most of the destructive part of the conflict was near the border and carried out – although merely allegedly – by civilians and residents of nearby cities, after reports from the Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The conflict only further adds to the severity of the political instability in Kyrgyzstan and makes it even harder to resolve, as it adds the variable of yet another nation to the list of things that need to be accounted for.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Tajikistan

Tajikistan has always had to endure the effects of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. It wasn't until recently that it became part of it and has generally had a rather supportive role towards the nation. Of course, the good intentions remain there but are now blocked by the border dispute between them. The nation wishes to firstly resolve this issue and then proceed to helping Kyrgyzstan.

Russian

Federation

The Russian Federation was involved in Kyrgyz history from early on until today. It has always tried to benefit from the nation's geographical position and has evidently taken control of it in order to achieve its goals. Its predecessor (the USSR) ruled over the nation until 1991. As it stands, the Russian Federation seems to be rather keen on supporting the protesters causing the political unrest in the nation, despite having denied it multiple times.

China

China has definitely been – even though slightly compared to other events it has endured – by the political instability in Kyrgyzstan. Surprisingly, it only partially shares Russia's views. China has always been trading partners with Kyrgyzstan, making its political and therefore economic downfall a loss for them. Despite the Russian Federation being keener on supporting a people-ran government and then supporting the nation, China could benefit regardless of the government, as long as its trade partnership continued.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

The Human Rights Watch isn't necessarily the most involved organization when it comes to the situation, but it has kept a very close eye on it and has provided the rest of the world with accurate reports of any human rights infringements, especially on the border dispute lately.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
8th century	Arab Empire conquers a vast area, of which modern Kyrgyzstan is a part of
10th-13th centuries	Kyrgyz people begin migrating southwards
1685	Kyrgyz people settle in what is current

	Kyrgyzstan, which at the time was conquered by the Mongols
1758	Chinese Empire claims the land
1876	Russian forces conquer the area and incorporate what is now Kyrgyzstan into the Russian empire
1916-17	Russian forces face a revolution in Central Asia, which is suppressed
1917-23	Civil war due to the 1917 October Revolution in Russia
1920s and 1930s	Governed peacefully by the Russians until a policy on farming contradicts the traditions of the Kyrgyz people, which sparks political conflict between the Russian Government and the Kyrgyz Communist Party
1936	The area becomes a part of the USSR officially
1990	State of emergency imposed after several hundred people are killed in interethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz around the southern town of Osh; Askar Akayev, a liberal academic on the reform wing of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, elected by the legislature to the newly created post of president
1991	The name Kyrgyzstan is acquired and independence is finally earned and the nation joins the CIS
1992	Kyrgyzstan joins the UN
1993	There is a change in currency, which sparks temporary civil unrest

1995	Akayev is re-elected – maintaining majority
1996	A referendum is held, which approves constitutional amendment, making the president more powerful
1998	The death penalty is temporarily prohibited, a government policy which was soon taken down
July 1998	It is decided that Akayev should be allowed to run for the 3 rd consecutive time
August-September 1999	Troops are sent to fight against Islamic groups near the Tajik border
November 2000	Akayev is re-elected for another 5 years. However, these elections are characterized as illegitimate by some nations
May 2002	Political rival of Akayev Felix Kulov is sentenced to prison, after being arrested for abuse of office as the national security minister
November 2002	Protests increase internal tensions, demanding the president's resignation
February 2003	A referendum is held. It approves a constitutional change in the distribution of power, giving more to parliament
October 2003	President Vladimir Putin opens an air base very close to a US base, within Kyrgyzstan
February 2005	Parliamentary elections spark wave of protests as numerous independent and opposition candidates are barred from standing
March 2005	Protests become more frequent, all against

	the president. The president breaks under the pressure and leaves for Russia, to have the opposition's leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev take his place and Felix Kulov to be released from prison
April 2005	The official resignation of Akayev is recognized by the state
July 2005	Bakiyev enjoys a landslide victory in the presidential elections
August 2005	Bakiyev nominates Felix Kulov as Prime Minister, following his inauguration
November 2006	Bakiyev signs a constitution that limits his political power, in order to silence Bishek protests against him
December 2006	The government falls apart, calling for parliamentary elections
January 2007	Azim Isabekov replaces Felix Kulov for Prime Minister
March 2007	He then resigns in turn and is replaced by Almaz Atabayev. The nation is becoming more politically unstable every second
April 2007	Police protests against Bakiyev
May 2007	The prime minister survives an assassination attempt
October 2007	Constitutional changes pave the way to a more authoritarian regime
December 2007	Parliamentary elections are held again, heavily accused of fraud
January 2009	After major financial aid by Russia, the US

	airbase is forcibly shut down by Bakiyev
July 2009	After US offers more financial support in turn, the base is allowed to remain open
October 2009	Prime Minister resigns and is replaced by Daniyar Usenov
January 2010	Former defense minister is sentenced to prison under presidential orders
April 2010	Opposition spreads and Bakiyev is forced out of power. An interim government is formed
May 2010	Roza Otunbayeva claims the position of interim president
June 2010	More than 200 dead due to Kyrgyz-Uzbek armed conflict
October 2010	First parliamentary elections under the new constitution fail
November 2010	Bakiyev along with 27 former government officials are tried for abuse of power
October 2011	The then Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev wins the presidential election
June 2012	Mutually beneficial deal between NATO and Kyrgyzstan is signed
September 2012	Putin and Atambayev agree to shut down the US air base in 2014
October 2012	A coup is attempted by the MPs which leads to their sentence in prison
May 2013	Protests increase
June 2013	Protests spread and continue stronger than ever

April 2014	Joomart Otorbayev is elected as the new Prime Minister
June 2014	The US airbase is finally closed
July 2015	Kyrgyz authorities report 2 islamist attacks
2016	Political instability grows without showing signs of end, as positions are quickly switched once again
August 2017	Tekebayev is sentenced to prison weeks before the elections
October 2017	Sooronbay Jeenbekov is elected president
October 2020	Parliamentary elections fail again and again and president Jeenbekov resigns
January 2021	Sadyr Japarov is elected president
2021	A territorial dispute occurs between the nation and Tajikistan, further worsening instability

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Unfortunately for the Kyrgyz people, the issue has been neglected for such a long time and has been overshadowed by other matters for such a long time that even the UN has not yet taken major action. This doesn't undermine the importance of the issue – to the contrary: it stresses it even further.

One of the two only recorded UN actions on the matter was around when Osh became relatively calm on the 14th June 2010, but Jalal-Abad witnessed sporadic incidents of arson. The entire region was still under a state of emergency as Uzbeks were reluctant to leave their houses for fear of attacks by the mobs. The United Nations decided to send an envoy to assess the situation.

The second was the Statement by the UN Secretary-General on the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic, which basically took the facts into consideration and promoted UN ideals, in hopes of inspiring some peace upon the people.

Statement by the Secretary General

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

When discussing the possible solutions to the matter, one has to take into consideration the various factors affecting the political stability of the nation

Stable government

It is certain that one of the largest issues that the nation has faced is an unstable government, as it switches prime ministers almost yearly at this point and presidents are driven out of their position of power shortly after their elections, in elections with questionable legitimacy. Measures definitely need to be taken to establish a more stable government as well as a much more transparently democratic electoral system.

Border dispute

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the conflict with Tajikistan. This can either be done through UN mediation or any sort of negotiation. In the case that this is not applicable, the involvement of other organs may be necessary in order to have a more drastic form of mediation, even to the extent of peacekeeping forces.

Economic crisis

This is one of the trickier parts of the matter. Pouring funds onto the nation and expecting it to fix its own issues is simply utopic. The most likely scenario is finding a way for the UN to supply the monetary funds but also track their use by the government, in order to ensure that they are used for the purposes they are actually meant for.

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