

KYRGYZSTAN: A FALTERING STATE

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KYRGYZSTAN: A FALTERING STATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kyrgyzstan's post-revolution government lurches from crisis to crisis in the face of worsening political violence, prison revolts, serious property disputes and popular disillusion. There is a growing sense that it is barely less corrupt than its predecessor and perhaps less competent. The security services are slipping out of government control, raising the prospect of more chaos and criminality. If Kyrgyzstan is not to become a failed state whose fate reinforces the views of its neighbours that the path to stability lies not in democracy but in dictatorship, the U.S., European Union and other donors need to give the shaky government more political and financial backing.

Fraudulent parliamentary elections in February 2005 led to a popular uprising the next month that deposed President Askar Akayev and replaced him with Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who was elected president in July. Formation of a new government, however, has been slow and hampered by divisions among the revolutionary leaders – mostly former office holders who had broken with Akayev. The most crucial relationship – the “tandem” between President Bakiyev and Prime Minister Feliks Kulov – has held but there are concerns about its longevity.

Property is being redistributed in a chaotic and sometimes violent manner as government, criminals and other interests scramble for the country's valuable assets, including many that the Akayev family monopolised. The incidents listed below present a troubling picture of a society on the brink:

- A long-simmering dispute over a vital bazaar in Karasuu (Osh province) led to street violence and the murders of two key figures, including parliamentarian Bayaman Erkinbayev.
- Popular anger at the abuses of a former Akayev ally led to a workers' uprising at the Karakeche coal mines in Naryn province; the authorities' lack of response paved the way for the rise of a local populist leader, Nurlan Motuyev, and produced the possibility of conflict over a key national asset.
- Corruption and ineffectual government land reform policies have resulted in the occupation of much farm land by squatters and drawn thousands of

people from the countryside to Bishkek, leading to worsening tensions with city dwellers and the government.

- Endemic problems in prisons – including a cash-strapped administration, deteriorating infrastructure and increasingly harsh conditions – sparked revolts in October 2005, one of which resulted in the murder of another parliamentarian, Tynychbek Akmatbayev. Subsequent demonstrations in Bishkek, which demanded that Prime Minister Kulov be fired, raised doubts about the government's authority and the state's stability.

None of these specific problems, much less the underlying issues, have truly been solved. Instead, the authorities have deferred decisions and let events run their course, while a growing pool of discontented individuals and groups forms, and confidence in the administration wanes. Most worryingly, the government has largely lost control over public security. The law enforcement agencies lack resources, are severely demoralised, and have become susceptible to outside pressure. There is growing concern about the influence of criminal groups.

Rather than face up to these problems, the government has been struggling with internal dissent. Two of its best-known members, acting Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov and acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva, have been ousted and may now form the nucleus of a new opposition movement. In Beknazarov's home region of Aksy, anger at his dismissal and a lingering sense of injustice from police killings in 2002 have fuelled protests and demands for the president's resignation.

The arrival of thousands of Uzbeks who fled their homeland after the violent suppression of the Andijon uprising in May 2005 produced the new government's first international crisis. After an initial misstep accepting a request from Uzbekistan to return forthwith a handful of the refugees, it subsequently rejected Karimov's demands for wholesale return and cooperated with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the European Union and the U.S. in finding asylum for the bulk of the refugees.

The transport to Romania of some 450 who applied formally for refugee status eased tensions somewhat but an unknown number of unregistered fugitives remain, and relations between the neighbours are at an all time low, with Tashkent applying pressure over energy, trade and security issues. At the same time, Russia and China have pressed Kyrgyzstan to reconsider use by the U.S. of an airbase near Bishkek, though the government is unlikely to accede, in part at least because the facility provides important revenue.

If Kyrgyzstan is to succeed as a test case for democracy in Central Asia, there must be a genuine commitment by the new government to be transparent and develop the rule of law. There also need to be greater efforts by donors to help it achieve these ends. Otherwise, there is a real risk that the central government will lose control of institutions and territory, and the country will drift into irreversible criminality and permanent low-level violence.

Bishkek/Brussels, 16 December 2005

KYRGYZSTAN: A FALTERING STATE

I. INTRODUCTION

The revolution that removed President Askar Akayev from power on 24 March 2005 was the first of its kind in Central Asia.¹ Coming on the heels of the “coloured revolutions” in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, it had a galvanising impact on opposition movements and civil society activists throughout the region – and, at times, a chilling effect on their relations with their own governments, which were concerned the habit might spread. In Kyrgyzstan, the ouster of Akayev was widely greeted with elation, with hopes that many of the ills which had been growing in the last years of his rule – corruption, nepotism, and authoritarianism – would be cured.

Yet, there was uncertainty as well. However corrupt the system may have been under Akayev, there had been an element of predictability. Since the revolution, concerns have persisted about chaos and instability resulting from a perceived power vacuum and about whether the new government really represents a true break with the past. Within a few months it has become not uncommon to encounter nostalgia for the relative stability of the Akayev years. While the new government has weathered a number of potentially disastrous crises, it still faces the daunting challenge of delivering on the revolution’s promises. “The people won’t give us fifteen years the way they did Akayev”, a senior government official said. “We have a year to show that things have changed – maximum”.²

While there are many pressing issues – constitutional reform, economic development, gender inequality and corruption, to name a few – this report focuses on a few key conflicts, mostly the result of systemic problems in

such sectors as the judiciary, the penal system, and security services, as well as land reform, and on the concerns produced by the government’s response. Some of these issues will be dealt with in greater detail in subsequent Crisis Group reporting.

¹ For more on Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°81, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, 11 August 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°37, *Kyrgyzstan’s Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy*, 20 August 2002; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°22, *Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the “Island of Democracy”*, 28 August 2001. For an account of the March 2005 revolution and its aftermath, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°97, *Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution*, 4 May 2005.

² Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

II. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Kurmanbek Bakiyev replaced Akayev as acting president and also took the post of acting prime minister. A native of Jalalabat in the south and a career politician, he held positions under Akayev, including governor of Jalalabat and Chuy provinces (1995-1997 and 1997-2000 respectively) and prime minister from 2000 until he resigned in 2002 after the violent police crackdown on protests in his home province (Aksy district). He entered parliament and in 2004 was chosen to head the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK), a loose association of opposition leaders

As an important first step towards legitimising the new government, presidential elections were set for 10 July 2005. Bakiyev's most serious potential rival was the charismatic Feliks Kulov, another political veteran. A native of the northern Chuy province, Kulov rose through the ranks of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in Soviet times and held influential posts after independence, including minister of internal affairs (1991-1992), vice president (1992-1993), governor of Chuy province (1993-1997), minister of national security (1997-1998), and mayor of Bishkek (1998-1999). He joined the opposition Ar-Namys (Honour) party in 1999, was arrested on corruption charges in 2000 and received a seven-year prison sentence the following year which was extended to ten years in 2002. Released after the revolution, he briefly took over the security forces but stepped down after some order had been restored, thereby strengthening his reputation as a champion of law and order – and a savvy politician. There were concerns that rivalry between him and Bakiyev – supported as they were by northern and southern political elites, respectively – might provoke violence.³

On 12 May, in a move apparently intended to prevent that, the two announced they would run on a single ticket, with Kulov to become prime minister should Bakiyev be elected. In the meantime, Kulov would become acting first deputy prime minister.⁴ While some complained that this removed any real competition from the election, it was generally seen as a positive step towards re-establishing stability.

The campaign, however, was marred by two violent incidents. On 10 June, parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev was shot and killed in broad daylight in the centre of Bishkek. Some suspected a political act since he

was a strong Akayev supporter and was rumoured to have organised the young men in white caps who had attacked anti-Akayev demonstrators outside the White House on 24 March.⁵ He was also a well-known Bishkek businessman, and others believed the slaying, with all the hallmarks of a contract killing, was linked to a property dispute.

In the second incident, a week later, supporters of the political movement Mekenim Kyrgyzstan (My homeland Kyrgyzstan) stormed and briefly occupied the White House. Mekenim was founded by Urmat Baryktabasov, a wealthy and influential businessman from Issykkol who had recently been denied registration as a candidate on the grounds he was a Kazakh citizen. Riot police drove the protestors away with tear gas and batons. Subsequently, Mekenim offices around the country were raided, with arrests following and allegations that many participants in the 17 June riot had been paid.⁶ Mekenim supporters claim that over 2,000 people were interrogated, and some ten members have been charged by the National Security Service (NSS)⁷ with attempting to organise a coup d'état.⁸

Although Bakiyev had five opponents in the presidential election, none posed a serious challenge, and he received a reported 89 per cent of the vote.⁹ The overwhelming victory appeared to represent a genuine desire for stability after months of uncertainty and for reform after years of misrule, as well as a hope that the Bakiyev-Kulov tandem would provide these. Winning an election is one thing – and there was little doubt that Bakiyev *would* win. Much more important was what would come next.

One of the government's earliest promises was to review the constitution, with an eye towards limiting presidential power in order to prevent a return to the excesses of the Akayev years. Hopes for this to be addressed quickly

⁵ Ibid. The White House is the popular name for the central administrative building.

⁶ According to IWPR, acting Interior Minister Murat Satalinov reported that "more than half of the 238 people arrested" for participating in the unrest "were women who had turned up in return for between 100 and 1,000 soms", (between \$2.50 and \$25). IWPR reported that the "rent-a-mob" phenomenon was becoming an increasingly popular way for people to supplement meagre incomes. Leila Saralaeva, "Rent-a-Mob in Kyrgyzstan", IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 391, 28 June 2005. Figures denoted in dollars (\$) in this report refer to U.S. dollars.

⁷ The NSS, also known by its Russian initials SNB, is the successor to the Soviet KGB.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, Mekenim Kyrgyzstan member, Bishkek, September 2005.

⁹ While many have praised Kyrgyzstan's elections as "the fairest in Central Asia", this is faint praise at best; there have been concerns about irregularities in the turnout figures and in vote counting. Still, there is a consensus that any violations did not alter the final result, and no challenges have been raised to the overall legitimacy.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Ainagul Abdrakhmanova and Sultan Jumagulov, "Kyrgyz Heavyweights Team Up", Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 379, 17 May 2005.

proved to be in vain, however, and many feel momentum has been lost. Bakiyev's commitment to limiting his own power is questionable, and the fact that he chairs the Constitutional Assembly, an association of nearly 300 representatives of government and civil society formed to discuss reform, has also raised concerns. Nevertheless, on 10 November his office did present a draft constitution and called for public debate until 15 December. What happens next is not clear; the draft could be put to a referendum or sent to parliament. Among the changes it envisages are: limiting the president to two five-year terms and forbidding a referendum on additional terms,¹⁰ abolishing the death penalty, and changing the way parliament is elected.¹¹ While many proposals are positive, some observers see the draft as a move by Bakiyev's supporters to curtail debate and push through a document to their own liking.¹²

On 8 December, according to the Russian news agency Regnum, Bakiyev met in closed session with members of Kyrgyzstan's parliament, the *Jogorku Kengesh*, to discuss the issue of constitutional reform. He reportedly proposed delaying reform altogether until 2009, while the parliamentarians declared their willingness to move ahead with reform and argued that the ultimate goal of constitutional reform should be the establishment of a parliamentary republic.¹³ Whether or not this report is accurate, the parliament has already begun to assert itself more and more as an independent force and is far from being the rubber-stamp body found in some neighbouring states. It was particularly assertive in handling Bakiyev's cabinet nominees, many of whom were rejected (see below).

The new cabinet was completed only on 2 December 2005, with the confirmation of Medetbek Kerimkulov as first deputy prime minister. Yet, the parliament is itself not uncontroversial; it was, after all, disputes over the results of the February 2005 parliamentary elections that led to Akayev's ouster. While the new government allowed those results to stand – perhaps necessary to

preserve stability – Topchubek Turgunaliyev, head of the Erkindik (Freedom) party and a long-time activist, recently announced that he has gathered the 300,000 signatures required to force a referendum on parliament's dismissal and will submit them to the Central Election Commission for review.¹⁴

On 18 December 2005, Kyrgyzstan will hold elections at the lowest level of government, the local administration (*ayyl okmotu*). Many look likely to be hotly contested, particularly in the south, and the possibility of localised conflict exists. The Bishkek-based Early Warning for Violence Prevention Project has warned of “an increase of tensions” during the campaign, with “separate conflicts related to attempts to change the election results” a possibility in the aftermath.¹⁵

¹⁰ Such referendums have been widely used by presidents in Central Asia to remain in power.

¹¹ Members of the current parliament were elected on an individual basis; the proposed changes envision a mixed system of individual and party-list candidates, to be implemented in the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2010.

¹² See Leila Saralaeva and Cholpon Orozbekova, “Kyrgyz Leader Pushes for More Power”, IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 420, 15 November 2005.

¹³ “Prezident Kirgizii predlozhit perenesti konstitutsionnuu reformu na 2009 god” [The President of Kyrgyzstan has proposed postponing constitutional reform until 2009], IA Regnum, 8 December 2005. In a televised address to the nation on 8 December, President Bakiyev stated: “I have no objections to a parliamentary republic, but I say this: not today”.

¹⁴ RFE/RL Newsline, vol. 9, no. 215, 16 November 2005.

¹⁵ See the project's weekly bulletin for the week of 22-29 November 2005 at www.fti.org.kg.

III. CHALLENGES TO STABILITY

A. THE REDISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY

On coming to power, Bakiyev was immediately faced with the problem of what to do with businesses that had been privatised during the Akayev years, particularly those controlled by the former president and his family. Questions as to the legality of the privatisation process, and who had ultimately controlled it, needed to be resolved. Some of the revolution's more zealous figures, such as acting Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov, promised a full audit and return "to the people" of institutions found to have been acquired illegally. A commission was formed to identify the companies in which the Akayev family had a controlling interest. Chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, it has identified well over 100 enterprises for investigation but otherwise has little to show for its work.

It is not only the Akayev family's alleged holdings that have become the focus of new disputes, however. The disruption of the previous system of patronage and political allegiances, combined with a power vacuum at almost all levels of society, has brought other long-simmering disputes into the open, with often violent results. Ambitious local leaders, including the heads of criminal groups, have taken advantage to carve out a piece of the pie for themselves, often under the pretext of righting past wrongs. There are rumours that some in the new leadership may be finding it hard to resist temptation as well. A parliamentarian complained: "We are dividing up property as though we were at war".¹⁶

Indeed, the way property disputes are being resolved is troubling. Disputes have been accompanied by violence and deaths. There is often a complete lack of transparency, with the interested parties acting through proxies, including "rent-a-mobs". This is damaging faith in the new regime's stated goals of fairness, openness, and transparency, and does not bode well for stability.

1. The Karasuu bazaar

The Shakhrikhansay River forms part of the border with Uzbekistan and divides a town known as Karasuu in Kyrgyz and Qorasuv in Uzbek, which is home to the largest wholesale bazaar in the Fergana Valley, the relatively populous area where Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan meet. The market supplies goods, largely imported from China, to other markets throughout Central

Asia and is a key component in the livelihood of millions. With the collapse of the USSR, the market, located on the eastern side of the river, went to Kyrgyzstan, but the border meant little until 2003, when Uzbekistan unilaterally closed the crossing on its side of the river and blew up its half of the bridge.

Shuttle traders from Uzbekistan faced two unattractive choices; attempt to cross the river themselves and risk arrest or death by drowning, or cross through the remaining checkpoints, which would necessitate a series of bribes and risk confiscation of their goods. The importance of the bazaar was demonstrated in May 2005, when, in the wake of the Andijon uprising, residents of the Uzbek half of the town drove out the local administration and rebuilt the bridge. The border checkpoint was re-opened and remains so to this day.¹⁷

In September 2005 a long-standing dispute over control of the bazaar came to a head, brought Kyrgyzstan to the brink of grave crisis and resulted in the fall of one of the revolution's leaders and the death of a controversial and influential figure who had been one of its main backers. Beknazarov, the acting Prosecutor General, was at the centre of events.¹⁸ Throughout most of the spring and summer of 2005, he had been embroiled in the dispute over what to do with the hundreds of Uzbek citizens who had fled the recent violence in Andijon (see below).

As the refugee crisis receded, he spent more time investigating Akayev-era corruption, beginning an increasingly vigorous campaign against members of the former president's inner circle and bringing corruption charges against such high-ranking figures as former Central Election Commission head Sulayman Imanbayev, National Bank director Ulan Sarbanov, the former head of the presidential office, Medet Sadyrkulov, and former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev.¹⁹ This won him accolades from civil society representatives. "Beknazarov is Kyrgyzstan's only hope for democracy", one activist said.²⁰ At the same time, his efforts to re-nationalise certain large enterprises

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, parliamentarian, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁷ For more on the significance of the Karasuu bazaar, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°33, *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential*, 4 April 2002, and Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°38, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, 25 May 2005.

¹⁸ In addition to his key role in the 2005 revolution, Beknazarov, then an opposition parliamentarian, was arrested in January 2002, prompting demonstrations in his home region of Aksy. Five civilians were killed in subsequent clashes with the police. See Crisis Group Report, *Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis*, op. cit.

¹⁹ See Cholpon Orozobekova, "Kyrgyz Prosecutor Gets Tough", *IWPR, Reporting Central Asia*, no. 409, 10 September 2005.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 26 August 2005.

may have brought him into conflict with powerful interests who had their own plans for redistributing property.²¹

In September 2005 Beknazarov became involved in an increasingly violent struggle for control over the massive bazaar in Karasuu. For at least the last five years, a large share of the bazaar was owned by Bayaman Erkinbayev, an influential businessman and parliamentarian from Jalalabat, whom some portray as a true popular hero, always ready to lend a helping hand to those in need, while others allege that he was one of the south's most prominent organised crime leaders. He denied rumours of involvement in drug trafficking, and officials say they have no evidence of wrongdoing.²² Erkinbayev's influence and wealth were crucial factors in the March revolution, particularly in the south, where it began.²³

In 2000, the company Kyrgyz sooda birimdigi (Kyrgyz Trade Association), of which Erkinbayev's sister was the director, purchased a share of the Karasuu bazaar from the Consumer Union²⁴ of Osh province.²⁵ This became one of the family's most lucrative business holdings. The purchase was reportedly challenged by a business rival, Abdalim Junusov, but was approved by a local court.²⁶ Following the 2005 revolution, however, dissatisfaction with Erkinbayev's management of the bazaar grew.

²¹ One such case involved a cement and slate factory in the town of Kant, some twenty kilometres east of Bishkek. Beknazarov claimed that 67 per cent of the factory's shares had been illegally privatised and ordered that they be frozen; the then acting deputy prime minister, Daniyar Üsönov, attempted to acquire 13 per cent of the frozen shares but was stopped when Beknazarov opened a criminal case. Beknazarov believes this affair was a major factor in his ouster. Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, 21 September 2005. Shortly after Beknazarov's dismissal, the prosecutor general's office issued a statement disputing Beknazarov's claims; the statement is on the website of the AKIpress news agency, <http://www.akipress.org>.

²² Questioned about the rumours, Erkinbayev in April 2005 replied: "Drugs trafficking? Even though they write that I control drugs trafficking, I'm against drugs". Crisis Group interview, Bayaman Erkinbayev, Bishkek, 14 April 2005. A senior official of Kyrgyzstan's Narcotics Control Agency could not confirm the rumours: "There have been rumours, yes, people say he's a narco-baron, but so far no one has proven anything. No one has ever even come forward with formal accusations, so we have to proceed on the presumption of innocence". Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 4 August 2005.

²³ See Crisis Group Report, *Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution*, op. cit. In an interview with the newspaper *Litsa* on 6 October 2005, Beknazarov stated that "[Erkinbayev] helped us more than anyone".

²⁴ Consumer unions (*potrebsoiuzy*) are a holdover from Soviet times, serving as intermediary organisations between the production and sale of consumer goods.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Osh, November 2005.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

Traders complained of high rent for stalls, and on 9 June some 200-300 took to the streets, demanding that Erkinbayev give up control of the market. The following day young men (said to be allies of Junusov) beat up Erkinbayev's security guards, and by the end of the day had driven his people from the bazaar.²⁷ Junusov apparently then set himself up as de facto owner of the market.

On 13 June, a large crowd, some carrying sticks, advanced on the Alay Hotel in Osh, also owned by Erkinbayev. Security guards opened fire from within, wounding a dozen.²⁸ Shortly afterwards, authorities arrested two men, Aybek Chomoyev and Saparaly Akanov (Erkinbayev's nephew), suspected of instigating the shootings. They were briefly detained, then released on their own recognisance while the investigation continued. The situation in Karasuu remained tense, with supporters of Erkinbayev and Junusov clashing in the streets. On 7 July, some 100 local traders, largely women, gathered outside bazaar headquarters, demanding that the market be taken away from Junusov and given to the traders. A second group of traders soon arrived, and a street brawl developed.²⁹ Early in the morning of 5 September, shortly before court hearings in the dispute were to begin, Junusov and his driver were shot dead at his home in Karasuu.³⁰

Given their rivalry, it was not surprising that suspicion fell on Erkinbayev. Dissatisfaction over perceived foot-dragging in the murder investigation again led to demonstrations in Osh and Karasuu. On 11 September, demonstrators in Karasuu demanded that Beknazarov resign and criminal charges be brought against Erkinbayev.³¹ They briefly occupied the local prosecutor's office and beat up a local journalist covering the protest.³²

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Karasuu and Osh, 10-11 June 2005.

²⁸ Participants in the march on the hotel claimed their intent was solely to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Karasuu dispute and that they were fired on without provocation; police showed a Crisis Group researcher a car which had reportedly accompanied the demonstrators and which contained firearms and a hand grenade. Crisis Group interviews, demonstrators and police, Osh, 13 June 2005.

²⁹ Crisis Group observations in Karasuu, 7 July 2005. Traders in the market alleged that the women protestors had been paid 500 *soms* (\$12.50) each by Erkinbayev's supporters as part of an effort to undermine Junusov's authority.

³⁰ "Ubit byvshii direktor bazara v Karasuu" [The former director of the bazaar in Karasuu has been killed], AKIpress, 5 September 2005, <http://fergana.akipress.org/?id=17056>.

³¹ See "Mitingovavshie u zdaniia Karasuiskogo raiprokuratury trebovali otstavki Genprokuratury KR i Predsedatelia Konstitutsionnogo suda KR" [Demonstrators at the building of the Karasuu District Prosecutor demand the resignation of the Prosecutor General of the Kyrgyz Republic and the head of

As tensions mounted, the government assembled an ad hoc study commission. Little was revealed about its composition or goals until 19 September, when the explosive announcement was made that, based on its findings, Beknazarov was to be removed for negligence in handling the Karasuu dispute.³³ In a hastily-convened televised press conference, commission members stated that Chomoyev and Akanov, the men accused of instigating the 13 June violence, were now suspected of having organised Junusov's murder as well – allegedly beginning their planning “from the very moment” of their release, for which Beknazarov was blamed. It was this, the commission members stated, which had prompted the Karasuu traders' outrage. Beknazarov's ouster, they insisted, had no political cause.³⁴ The following day, it was announced that commission chairperson Tabaldiyev would replace Beknazarov as acting prosecutor general.

Beknazarov was stunned by the decision, which he saw as politically motivated. In an interview shortly after, he displayed letters from local authorities supporting his allegation that commission members had pressured Osh officials into signing documents accusing him of mishandling the Karasuu dispute.³⁵ In a later interview with the Bishkek newspaper *Litsa*, he accused the MIA³⁶ and the NSS of orchestrating the campaign against Erkinbayev in Karasuu with the aim of removing him as a potential political challenger.³⁷

On the evening of 21 September, Erkinbayev was shot outside his Bishkek apartment and later died in hospital.³⁸

the Constitutional Court], AKIpress, 12 September 2005, <http://fergana.akipress.org/?id=17104>.

³² See “Zdanie karasuiskogo raiprokuratury bylo zakhvacheno na dva chasa” [The office of the Karasuu District Prosecutor was seized for two hours], AKIpress, 12 September 2005, http://fergana.akipress.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=17099; and “Vo vremia piketa v Karasuu postradala zhurnalistka” [A journalist was injured during the Karasuu protest], AKIpress, 12 September 2005, <http://fergana.akipress.org/?id=17100>.

³³ Members of the commission included Busurmankul Tabaldiyev (head of the department of defence and security affairs of the presidential administration), Sherqozi Mirzokarimov (first deputy minister of internal affairs), Jumadil Makeshov (first deputy prosecutor general), and Abdijalil Jamalov (first deputy chairperson of the National Security Service).

³⁴ Press conference by Karasuu commission members, KTR television, 20 September 2005.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, Bishkek, 21 September 2005.

³⁶ The MIA is the ministry which runs the police force.

³⁷ Interview with Azimbek Beknazarov, *Litsa*, 6 October 2005.

³⁸ “Ubit deputat Baiaman Erkinbaev” [Parliamentarian Baiaman Erkinbayev has been killed], AKIpress, 21 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22341. Erkinbayev was shot and slightly wounded in an assassination attempt in April.

A few days before, his bodyguards had been detained and their car impounded as part of the investigation into Junusov's murder – an action which in effect had left him defenceless. According to Parliament Speaker Omurbek Tekebayev, Erkinbayev had feared for his life and appealed to him for protection. Tekebayev said his appeals to the MIA and the NSS went unanswered.³⁹

Erkinbayev's murder stunned parliamentarians, who demanded that Bakiyev, Kulov, and security service representatives brief them. In an often stormy session, the deputies expressed their lack of confidence in Bakiyev and the security services, passed resolutions calling for the resignations of several high-ranking officials and opposed Tabaldiyev's appointment as acting prosecutor general.⁴⁰ They demanded that Kulov take over the fight against organised crime by creating a special commission made of representatives of the relevant government agencies.⁴¹ Finally, they passed legislation allowing parliamentarians to carry arms.⁴²

Many deputies plainly feared they too might be killed – some began speaking of a “black list” of those slated for execution. “Parliamentarians really are in danger right now”, one said, adding:

It's not that there's an official list as such – rather, some parliamentarians have disputes with the new government over property. Some parliamentarians have left and not come back – if they do come back they'll have real problems. If they believed that civilised decisions would be taken, they never would have left. But now, at best, they will lose everything. And at worst....⁴³

There are those who see a political motive in Erkinbayev's murder, suggesting he had outlived his usefulness. “This was a purely political murder”, a parliamentarian insisted.

³⁹ “Ö. Tekebaev: Veчерom Erkinbaev zvonil 4 raza i plakalsia, chto u nego net okhrany” [Ö. Tekebayev: In the evening Erkinbayev called four times and cried that he had no protection], AKIpress, 22 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22352.

⁴⁰ Among those whose resignation the parliamentarians demanded were: NSS chief Tashtemir Aytbayev and his deputy, Abdijalil Jamalov, Deputy Ministers of Internal Affairs Sherqozi Mirzokarimov and Alymbay Sultanov, and Security Council head Miroslav Niyazov. Two attempts to pass a resolution calling for the resignation of acting Minister of Internal Affairs Murat Satalinov failed. “Postanovlenie JK KP ‘O kriminogennoi obstanovke v KR’” [Resolution of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic on the crime-breeding situation in the Kyrgyz Republic], AKIpress, 22 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22383.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See RFE/RL Newsline, vol. 9, no. 182, 26 September 2005.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

“Why were his bodyguards and his cars taken away? He was put in front of a bullet. Ordinary criminals couldn’t have done this”.⁴⁴ Others suggest he was merely the latest victim of a power struggle in the criminal underworld, as new figures challenge the dons of the Akayev era. “Bayaman died because he was a criminal, that’s all”, another parliamentarian said. “He wanted to become legitimate; he wanted to be a politician; he was in a state of euphoria after March but he still fell to a criminal dispute”.⁴⁵ NSS chief Tashtemir Aytbayev told parliament on 29 November that his agency had concluded the murder resulted from failure to deliver a promised 20 kilograms of heroin to an organised crime group.⁴⁶

Erkinbayev’s relatives reject this version and insist that the government has not arrested the “real” killers. “What was the reward for Bayaman’s head? How much did the killers get?”, his sister asked. “Which minister demanded confiscation of his guns, bodyguards, and documents? Bayaman’s people were just defending private property, and now four are in jail and two are in hiding. No one from the other side has been arrested. There is no justice”.⁴⁷

As for the bazaar itself, on 14 September 2005 a district court in Karasuu ruled that the purchase by Erkinbayev’s company of part of it in 2000 had been illegal and ordered that it become state property.⁴⁸ Some have questioned the legality of this ruling, which is unlikely to end the dispute.⁴⁹ The Osh Consumer Union’s appeal for the bazaar to be returned to its original ownership was rejected by the province court. Another potential claimant is the municipality of Karasuu, which owns the land on which the bazaar was built.

Erkinbayev’s angry relatives ask: “The others who own parts of the market still have their shares – why did they

single out Bayaman?”⁵⁰ Protests by his supporters in Jalalabat took a dramatic turn on 11 November, when his brother, Asan, set himself on fire in front of the provincial administration building. He survived but with serious burns. Others have threatened to follow suit if their demands are not met; recently, a number of female relatives, including the mother and six sisters, erected a tent on Jalalabat’s main square and threatened to immolate themselves within it. While government officials and NGO leaders eventually dissuaded them, the relatives vowed to continue protests. “We realise there’s no point in burning ourselves” one sister said. “But we’ll stay here until our demands are met”.⁵¹

2. The Karakeche Coal Mines

The Karakeche basin in Naryn province’s Jumgal district provides just over half of all coal mined in Kyrgyzstan. Four of the five mines are privately owned, and one, Akulak, is largely owned by the state-run Kyrgyzkomur (Kyrgyz Coal) company.⁵² Following independence, a local businessman, parliamentarian and Akayev ally, Kamchybek Joldoshbayev, took over ownership of the largest (Beshsary).⁵³ According to former employees, he treated his workers poorly, often paying late and beating them for disobedience, but his ties to Akayev kept workers in line. In June 2005, however, a revolt at the mine drove Joldoshbayev’s men out.⁵⁴

A pivotal role was played by Nurlan Motuyev, a local journalist, human rights activist and one of the most radical supporters of the revolution. His admirers call him a hero; an official in the Naryn Province administration described him in hyperbolic terms, as “a combination of Hitler, Zhirinovskii, and Mussolini”.⁵⁵ Motuyev insists that the privatisation of the Beshsary mine was “illegal”, and has set himself up as director. Access roads are patrolled by young toughs, and Motuyev now controls all five mines.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

⁴⁶ Aytbayev also denied that there was a political motive in the slaying of parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev, stating instead that it was part of a dispute over ownership of a large automobile market in the suburbs of Bishkek. “SNB: Ubiistvo Surabaldieva sviazano s ego sobstvennost’iu, a Erkinbaev byl ubit iz-za narkotikov” [NSS: Surabaldiev’s murder was linked with his property, and Erkinbayev was killed because of narcotics], AKIpress, 29 November 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23889.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Jarkynay Erkinbayeva, Jalalabat, 15 November 2005.

⁴⁸ Ruling of Karasuu district court, 14 September 2005.

⁴⁹ In the words of a local lawyer not involved in the case, “the bazaar was private property. It was unlawful to hand it over to the state. This whole situation is a perfect example of how the state is becoming entangled with criminals”. Crisis Group interview, November 2005.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Jarkynay Erkinbayeva, Jalalabat, 15 November 2005.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kyrgyzkomur is subordinate to the state geological agency and supports the four private mines in Karakeche as well, helping them find investments and providing technical support, in return for 1 per cent of their coal. Crisis Group interview, Malik Abakirov, vice president of Beshsary mining company, Bishkek, 13 October 2005.

⁵³ Beshsary supplies 41 per cent of coal mined in Karakeche. Crisis Group interview, Malik Abakirov, Bishkek, 13 October 2005.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, mine workers, Beshsary, 1 July 2005.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Naryn, July 2005.

He has begun distributing free coal to some institutions in Jungal, his native region, boosting his popularity there,⁵⁶ but his actions risk sparking local conflict, as he has severely restricted the supply to the neighbouring community, Kochkor, which receives only low-quality coal at a greatly inflated price.⁵⁷ Motuyev reportedly has begun selling better-quality coal from the mine's reserves on his own. "Motuyev is shipping out coal, and criminal elements are shipping out coal", an official in Naryn said. "There's already 20 to 30 million soms' [\$500,000 to \$750,000] worth of coal that's been brought to the surface, and he's shipping it out".⁵⁸ The uncontrolled sale of coal from Karakeche clearly costs the Kyrgyz government tax revenue,⁵⁹ and it has raised concerns about how Bishkek, which relies on that coal to power its central heating station, will face the winter. The fact that many specialists have left Karakeche since Motuyev's takeover also may have serious implications for safety and operations at the mine.

Authorities seem uncertain of how to respond. There was a half-hearted attempt to legalise Motuyev's seizure of Beshsary by combining the mine with another, Mingkush, run by the Akulak company. This created considerable dissatisfaction among the latter's administrators and only exacerbated tensions. A member of Akulak's governing body said:

The authorities sold me in exchange for a bandit. ... Maybe the authorities are behind this. Maybe someone else is. But this is definitely illegal. And this precedent can't be allowed to develop, or things like this will happen in other regions too. A redistribution of property has begun – and the authorities will dig their own graves with it.⁶⁰

Motuyev, meanwhile, requested that all five mines be combined into one company, under his control.⁶¹ In a bid to bolster his local popularity, he extravagantly promised his new employees and customers that:

I'll raise the salaries of the whole region by 50 per cent. I'll raise pensions. I'll add on hardship pay for living in a high mountain region. I'll sell coal cheaply, for 345 som (\$8.60) per ton. 3,000 families will receive free coal.⁶²

At the request of the former owner, Joldoshbayev, the MIA began to investigate the seizure. On 17 August Prime Minister Kulov issued an order to all competent bodies, including law enforcement, to take measures to return the situation to normal but little was done.⁶³ In an effort to defuse tensions, Tursunbek Akun, head of the Presidential Commission for Human Rights and a lifelong friend and mentor of Motuyev, visited the region in September but failed to find a solution. "Motuyev has already become worse than Joldoshbayev was", Akun complained.⁶⁴

The apparent unwillingness of the authorities to confront Motuyev and his supporters directly is a source of frustration to local authorities, who blame government inaction for prolonging the crisis. "We could have arrested Motuyev ten times", an official said, "but we were waiting for the elections to pass". Another described the situation as follows:

[Motuyev] didn't get a post after the revolution, so he came here. [The authorities] did nothing to stop him – Bakiyev didn't want any excesses. He was afraid that there would be another Aksy [the southern town where police shot demonstrators in 2002]. Nobody, not even the NSS, could give him any analysis, make any predictions of how the population would react. They were afraid. But if the government had immediately accepted the demands [of the mine workers], if they had solved their problems beforehand, they never would have supported Motuyev. The inertia of the authorities, this idea of creating a new company – this is just a dead end.⁶⁵

Speaking in mid-September, a security service representative would not rule out the use of force against Motuyev and his supporters, but added that "the time needs to be right – the people themselves should understand that acts which border on the criminal cannot be tolerated. When people realise this, then we do not exclude the possibility that adequate measures could be

⁵⁶ According to Erke Akmatjanova, head of the local administration of Chayek village in Jungal District, local schools, hospitals, and kindergartens had been given 200 tons of coal by mid-August, and impoverished local families were due to receive it soon as well. Crisis Group interview, Erke Akmatjanova, head of local administration, Chayek, 26 August 2005.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, resident of Kochkor, September 2005.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Naryn, July 2005.

⁵⁹ According to one expert, Motuyev has only contributed 20,000 som (\$500) to the local budget, as opposed to the 3 million som (\$750,000) that should have been paid. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Mingkush coal mine, 21 July 2005.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Nurlan Motuyev, Chayek, 21 July 2005.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Postanovlenie o neotlozhnykh merakh po vozobnovleniiu dobychi uglia na mestorozhdenii 'Kara-Keche'" [Decree on urgent measures to restore coal mining at the Karakeche mine], 17 August 2005, http://www.adviser.kg/base/search_new.fwx#.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, Tursunbek Akun, chairperson, Presidential Commission for Human Rights, Bishkek, 14 September 2005.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Naryn, 20 July 2005.

used in proportion to the methods used by Motuyev”.⁶⁶ Despite reports that people in neighbouring Kochkor have begun signing a petition complaining of coal shortages and there is talk of blocking the road to Jumgal and the mines, many officials seem unconcerned. A government source said that:

Karakeche is nothing....One by one we're slowly putting out the fires. We couldn't put them all out at once, so we're dealing with them individually. It's a slow and peaceful process. The south is mostly calm now – Aksy is calm, Karasuu is calm, Osh is calm – so soon we'll come to Karakeche. Motuyev himself will calm down. Or if the people of Kochkor close the road [to Jumgal], the people of Jumgal themselves will demand that Motuyev do something. This is not a serious problem.⁶⁷

Not everyone agrees. “Motuyev is a serious figure”, a local analyst said. “He can organise people and he's popular”.⁶⁸ Motuyev himself has warned that he is prepared to resist any attempt to remove him by force: “If they send 1,000 officers, we'll oppose them with 20,000 people of Jumgal”.⁶⁹ There have been reports, however, that he is running short of money, which has led to growing strains within his camp.⁷⁰ On 1 December according to the Early Warning for Violence Prevention Project, he used a hand grenade to fend off an attack by an erstwhile ally.⁷¹

It is understandable that the authorities wish to avoid sparking new conflicts; this concern may be the basis for their seeming unwillingness to tackle disputes such as Karasuu and Karakeche openly. But the methods that are being employed, which allow parties in the disputes, perhaps including the administration itself, to turn to local proxies and hired mobs, may lead to further escalation. Problems as complex as Karasuu and Karakeche will not simply vanish with time. The legitimisation of questionable means of seizing property sets dangerous precedents and does little to increase public trust in legal mechanisms of conflict resolution.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 16 September 2005.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

⁶⁹ Press conference by Nurlan Motuyev, Bishkek, 9 September 2005.

⁷⁰ Asked whether he was presently more concerned with his safety or with money, Motuyev replied simply: “Money”. Crisis Group question to Nurlan Motuyev during press conference, Bishkek, 9 September 2005.

⁷¹ Early Warning for Violence Prevention Project bulletin, issue 23, 7 December 2005. Motuyev denied that the incident took place but other sources have corroborated the report. Crisis Group interviews, Bishkek, December 2005.

3. Land

In 1991, Kyrgyzstan embarked on a reform program, which culminated in a 1998 decision giving citizens the right to own land (previously, exclusive property of the state).⁷² Soviet collective farms were to be divided up and given to their former employees. In many respects, the project has been a success, yet problems persist. A lack of familiarity with the new laws on the part of both local governments and would-be landowners, combined with instances of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, has haunted it from the outset.

Following the March revolution, tens of thousands seized land around Bishkek. The government, initially slow to respond, promised to build affordable housing in the city, and tensions gradually declined.⁷³ But the issue is yet to be settled. Thousands still claim a right to occupy “unused” land and in some cases have threatened to construct homes on occupied plots. Many of these people supported the March revolution and see a plot of land as their just reward. Officials have been reluctant to use force to remove them and have continued to promise a legal solution. Some squatters have been persuaded to leave and file official requests for government plots, and the government has promised to form a study commission but the process has proved lengthy, the patience of many squatters is running out.

In some cases, squatters have formed associations to advance their interests. At a press conference in September, members of one such association, Altyn kazyk (Golden Post), expressed frustration with how slowly their cases were being considered and threatened to build without permission if they were not given land soon. “We've done everything by the book”, Kanymbubu Chynybayeva said:

Each time they try to calm us down. We've been holding these lands for six months now. This is humiliating. We believed their promises – we even recorded their promises on video. “Go ahead and put up your tents, we'll give you land”, they said. It's thanks to us that Bakiyev became president – we all voted for him. Can it really be that officials don't need the common people anymore after the election? This is humiliating.⁷⁴

⁷² In this respect, Kyrgyzstan has progressed much further than its neighbours Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where land remains state property. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°93, *The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia's Destructive Monoculture*, 28 February 2005.

⁷³ See Crisis Group Report, *Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution*, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Press conference by Altyn Kazyk association, Bishkek, 19 September 2005.

The squatters' growing anger and impatience is not the only issue. Tensions between squatters and those who live nearby have been growing as well. On 30 September, squatters near the village of Kokjar in Bishkek's suburbs claim they were beaten by approximately a dozen horsemen from the local community; they also say a group of six local women, apparently intoxicated, tried to provoke a fight. In the ensuing clashes, squatters report, seven people were injured, five requiring hospitalisation. They allege that both the horsemen and the local women had been paid by local authorities to drive them away.⁷⁵

The complaints voiced by the Kokjar squatters are similar to those expressed by Altyn Kazyk members, one of whom said:

We've been waiting here for months. We've been promised and promised. We were told that if we would only wait, we would get everything on a legal basis. First they said, "wait until after the elections". Then they said, "wait until the inauguration". Then [Bishkek Mayor Arstanbek] Nogoyev came and told us to wait because of the change in administration.⁷⁶ Then we were told to wait because of Bayaman [Erkinbayev]'s murder. [The media] have called us "land terrorists". But we're just normal people who need land.⁷⁷

Tensions with local communities remain high, with farmers complaining they have lost a large part of the year's harvest due to the occupation of their fields.⁷⁸ The government's patience may be running out as well. "These land seizures are violations of private property", a senior official said. "Enough of these games. The government has enough power and enough means – we will do everything to defend private property".⁷⁹ On 27 October, acting First Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov stated that "not one square metre of land in the city will be given; there will be no redistribution of land given earlier as private property".⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, squatters, Bishkek, 30 September 2005. Bishkek police who arrived on the scene say they found themselves caught between the two groups and that no local officials ever appeared to attempt to resolve the conflict. Crisis Group interviews, police officers, Bishkek, 30 September 2005.

⁷⁶ On 18 August 2005, Nogoyev was elected Mayor by Bishkek's City Council after acting Mayor Askarbek Salymbekov withdrew; Nogoyev had been deputy mayor. See RFE/RL Newline, vol. 9, no. 157, 16 August 2005.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, squatter, Bishkek, 30 September 2005.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, local resident, K kjar, 30 September 2005.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

⁸⁰ "D. Usenov: Ni odin kvadratnyi metr zemli v gorode vydavat'sia ne budet, vydannie ranee v chastnuiu sobstvennost' zemli perezpredeliat'sia ne budut" [D. Usenov: Not one square

Rhetoric about the inviolability of private property is not likely to find a receptive audience among people who have camped out for six months in empty fields. Continuing demonstrations outside the White House testify that the pronouncements are not having the desired effect. With frustrations rising on all sides, the possibility of a generally acceptable solution decreases by the day. The government should accept responsibility for dragging out the conflict and mobilise all possible resources to solve the issue; the police should not be the only organ involved. Essential steps include combating the corruption of local officials, increasing the legal literacy of all parties in the dispute and increasing transparency in the process of the registration and evaluation of applications for land and housing. Re-establishment of trust is a crucial element of conflict prevention and resolution.

B. THE DOWNFALL OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE "NEW OPPOSITION"

The anti-Akayev People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK) was formed in September 2004 and chose Bakiyev as its leader. It was later joined by the former education minister, Ishengul Boljurova, the former foreign minister and ambassador to the U.S. and UK, Roza Otunbayeva, and parliamentarians Adakhan Madumarov, Omurbek Tekebayev, Alevtina Pronenko, and Azimbek Beknazarov, among others. The PMK largely led the revolution, and many of its core members formed the acting government: Bakiyev as acting president and prime minister, Boljurova and Madumarov as deputy prime ministers, Otunbayeva as foreign minister, Pronenko as minister of labour and social security, and Beknazarov as prosecutor general. Splits within their ranks were evident early on, however, as ambitions and differing ideas over how deep the revolution should be led to increasing friction.

1. The removal of Beknazarov

On 19 September, acting Prosecutor General Beknazarov had reason to feel pleased. He had just reached one of his longstanding goals, persuading parliament to strip Aydar Akayev, son of the former president, of his parliamentary immunity from prosecution. Yet returning to his office at the end of the day, he found his door locked and under seal, the consequence of his dismissal at the recommendation of the commission investigating the Karasuu unrest.

metre of land in the city will be given; there will be no redistribution of land given earlier as private property], AKIpress, 28 October 2005, http://www.akipress.kg/_ru_news.php?id=23141.

Beknazarov was shocked at what he considered a personal betrayal: “Bakiyev trampled on me. He gave me up to the corrupt, and they’re all laughing at me right now”. On returning home, he says, he found the house surrounded by police. Asked if he felt that his life was at risk, he replied: “There is a danger, yes”.⁸¹

Beknazarov saw his ouster as a direct result of his campaign to strip Aydar Akayev of his immunity, and his investigation into shady business deals being made by the new leadership. Other commentators, however, feel that Beknazarov, in his pursuit of wealth allegedly stolen from “the people”, had crossed the line from politics to personal vendetta – at the cost of his career. Whatever the reason, his ouster almost produced a serious government crisis. At first six, then nine acting ministers from the former PMK declared their readiness to resign. To their surprise, however, Bakiyev seemed unmoved, replying: “Don’t come to me all at once anymore. We’re not the PMK anymore – you’re ministers, and I’m the president. If you don’t want to work, there’s the door”. Beknazarov says he himself persuaded the ministers not to resign. In the end, they stayed on.⁸²

There was concern over the effect that Beknazarov’s ouster would have on stability, particularly in his native region of Aksy. Small groups of Aksy residents and Bishkek-based human rights activists began to demonstrate outside the White House immediately after he was fired, some carrying banners calling for his reinstatement and warning Bakiyev not to “sell himself to the mafia”, but they were generally outnumbered by police.⁸³ Rumours began circulating, however, of thousands rallying in Aksy and preparing to march on Bishkek. According to Beknazarov, his supporters had issued an ultimatum to Bakiyev that they would march on the capital if he was not reinstated within three days. Beknazarov himself seemed undecided, infuriated by his ouster but haunted by memories of 2002. “I don’t want bloodshed”, he said. “Those deaths from Aksy are still on my conscience. I don’t want any more lives to be lost”.⁸⁴

On 25 September 2005, an estimated 12,000 people gathered in the village of Jangyjol in Aksy. They called the decision of the Karasuu commission illegitimate and condemned the dismissal of Beknazarov, demanding that he be reinstated and allowed to investigate the murders of Junusov and Erkinbayev. They also insisted that Bakiyev meet with them by 28 September or there would be

further protests. Some called for Bakiyev’s resignation.⁸⁵ Beknazarov promised to hold a public meeting on Bishkek’s central Alatoo Square on 28 September in order to give a full account of his work in office; hundreds of supporters began arriving by bus in the capital on 27 September. At the same time, there were rumours of a counter-demonstration forming, consisting of residents of Karasuu, Osh, and Jalalabat. Security forces were placed on high alert, and many business owners around Alatoo Square, apparently fearing a repeat of the looting which had followed the 24 March revolution, closed their doors.

On the evening of 27 September, however, Beknazarov gave a televised address in which he thanked his allies for their support but announced that, due to the attempts by “third forces” to provoke a conflict in Bishkek, he would cancel his public address and called on his supporters to refrain from further protests.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, unrest in Aksy continued, with protestors demanding that Bakiyev come to address them. The chief of the presidential office, Usen Sydykov, came in Bakiyev’s place but was shouted down when he attempted to address the crowds.⁸⁷ Demonstrators in Aksy issued another ultimatum, with a 24 March 2006 deadline – the anniversary of the revolution – to show progress against corruption or face further unrest. New demonstrations against the government broke out in early November.

Beknazarov has recently taken a conciliatory tone. “At the moment, we have a very difficult political situation in the country”, he said, just prior to parliamentary by-elections in November:

The government needs to win through it – we need to give them understanding and tolerance. We need to give the regime time – it’s impossible to have order straight away after a revolution. That’s why we’ve given them one year to straighten things out. The government have had difficulties, and they’ve made mistakes. But we’ll sort it out. The important thing is to unite the people and the government.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, Bishkek, 21 September 2005.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Crisis Group observations, Bishkek, 20-27 September 2005.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, Bishkek, 21 September 2005.

⁸⁵ “Aksyitsy trebuiut otstavki Prezidenta KR” [The people of Aksy demand the resignation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic], AKIpress, 26 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22426; Sultan Kanazarov, “V Dzhahalabadskoï oblasti Kirgizii v subbotu snova proshel massovyi miting” [In the Jalalabat Province of Kyrgyzstan a massive demonstration has again taken place], Fergana.ru, 26 September 2005, <http://news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=1669&mode=snews>.

⁸⁶ Address by Beknazarov on KTR television, 27 September 2005.

⁸⁷ “Aksyitsy gotovy k novoi revoliutsii” [The people of Aksy are ready for a new revolution], *Litsa*, 29 September 2005.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, Aksy district, 22 November 2005.

2. The removal of other cabinet members

Beknazarov's dismissal was followed in short order by the departure from government of other former PMK members. On 27 September, parliament finally began reviewing Bakiyev's ministerial nominees. This, too, was not without conflict. Demonstrations between supporters and opponents of PMK member Ishenbay Kadyrbekov, the nominee as transportation and communications minister, were held in front of parliament.⁸⁹ He failed to receive the required two-thirds majority. Also failing to win confirmation was acting Minister of Labour and Social Security Alevtina Pronenko.⁹⁰ But most sensational was the defeat of one of the March revolution's most visible figures, acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva.⁹¹ An ambitious, outspoken politician who had spent many years as a diplomat, her relations had become increasingly strained with both the White House and the parliament.

The failure of Pronenko and Otunbayeva to win confirmation means that there are almost no women in senior positions in the new Kyrgyz government; the lone exception is Aygul Ryskulova, who chairs the State Committee on Migration and Employment. Nor is there a single woman in Kyrgyzstan's parliament. In a society where women make up just over half of the population and tend to be better-educated than men, this is a puzzling and troubling state of affairs.⁹²

In November, both Otunbayeva and Beknazarov stood in parliamentary by-elections, the former in Bishkek's Tunduk district (the constituency of the slain parliamentarian Surabaldiyev), the latter in his native Aksy. While Beknazarov had no serious opposition and won handily with a reported 89 per cent of the vote, Otunbayeva ran second with 28 per cent, to Jangysh Kudaybergenov, a relative of Surabaldiyev, who received a reported 52 per cent of the vote.⁹³ The race in Tunduk,

in which former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev also stood, was hotly contested, with rival camps trading allegations of campaign violations. Otunbayeva promised demonstrations if the results appeared fraudulent,⁹⁴ and the youth movement KelKel, which was active in anti-Akayev protests in Bishkek in March 2004, has expressed concerns about violations by Kudaybergenov.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, as perilous as matters seemed after Beknazarov's ouster, calm has largely been maintained, though the Aksy situation remains complex, Beknazarov's conciliatory tone notwithstanding. Concern with what many see as the unfair and illegal sacking of a native son persists, as does a lingering sense of injustice stemming from the 2002 shootings. In October, local leaders from Aksy met with members of the government in Bishkek to demand a full accounting of the Karasuu commission's work and repeat insistence that Bakiyev travel to the region to address them.⁹⁶ Anger is just below the surface, and both sides will need to tread carefully if conflict is to be avoided.

3. Strains within "the Tandem"?

Perhaps the most widely-discussed political relationship is the so-called Bakiyev-Kulov "tandem". Bakiyev made good on his promise to appoint Kulov as prime minister following the election, and Kulov was easily confirmed by parliament in September. However, there have since been rumours of tension between Kulov and certain key figures close to Bakiyev, particularly Deputy Prime Minister Usenov.⁹⁷ There have also been allegations of tensions between Kulov and NSS chief Aytbayev – Kulov is said to have made Aytbayev's firing a condition of his joining the "tandem". (Aytbayev denies there are any strains.)⁹⁸

28 November 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23838.

⁸⁹ "V sluchae 'nechestnykh vyborov' v Tundukskom okruge R. Otunbaeva namerena provesti pikety" [In the event of "dishonest elections" in Tündük precinct, R. Otunbayeva intends to hold protests], AKIpress, 24 November 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23776.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, members of KelKel, Bishkek, 30 November 2005.

⁹¹ Among those visited by the Aksy delegation was acting Prosecutor General and Karasuu commission head Tabaldiyev. In an interview with a Bishkek newspaper, he said the people from Aksy accused him of having used the commission as a pretext to take Beknazarov's post. Tabaldiyev also announced his intention to resign. Interview with Busurmankul Tabaldiyev, *Obshchestvennyi reiting*, 13 October 2005.

⁹² Üsönov has denied there are tensions between himself and Kulov. See interview with Daniyar Üsönov, *Vechernii Bishkek*, 14 October 2005.

⁹³ "Glava SNB: Na sledstvii Kulov nazval imia predpolagaemogo ubiitsy Erkinbaeva" [The head of the NSS: In the investigation,

⁸⁹ Crisis Group observation, Bishkek, 27 September 2005.

⁹⁰ Pronenko has remained in government, accepting the post of deputy minister.

⁹¹ Also failing to win approval were Naken Kasiyev, the nominee as head of the office of the prime minister; Emil Uzakbayev, nominated to head the new Committee for Migration and Employment; and Toktokan Borombayeva, nominated as minister of culture. See "Parlament utverdil 10 ministrov, ostal'nye 6 ne utverzhdeny" [Parliament has approved 10 ministers, the other 6 were not approved], AKIpress, 27 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22476.

⁹² See "Kyrgyzstan: Focus on gender inequality", IRINnews.org, 1 December 2005.

⁹³ "Po predvaritel'nyim itogam vyborov ZhK KR, lideruiut kandidaty Zh. Kudaibergenov i A. Beknazarov" [According to preliminary results of the parliamentary election, J. Kudaybergenov and A. Beknazarov are leading], AKIpress,

Rumours about the relationship between Bakiyev and Kulov are likewise rife, and both have tried to quash them with public denials.⁹⁹ Some experts doubt the sincerity of those statements but for now the partnership appears to be holding, although if anything, the balance of power seems to be on Bakiyev's side. Since his prominence in the early days of the revolution, Kulov has by and large taken a back seat; some have speculated he is simply waiting for his moment, while others feel he has indeed reached an accommodation with Bakiyev.

C. THE PRISON CRISIS

As potentially dangerous as the above issues were, they paled in comparison with the crisis the government faced in late October 2005, when an escalating series of prison uprisings led to the murder of yet another parliamentarian, Tynychbek Akmatbayev, the chair of the Committee on Defence, Security, Law Enforcement and Information Policy and brother of Ryspek Akmatbayev, who until recently had been on the run as the lead suspect in a triple murder. In July, Ryspek came out of hiding to meet then acting Prosecutor General Beknazarov. As part of a general amnesty, he was allowed to remain free while investigations continued.¹⁰⁰ Beknazarov authorised prosecution just before his mid-September dismissal. The trial was due to begin on 28 October.

In the meantime, Ryspek took advantage of his "legalised position" to improve his image and cultivate links with the new elite. On 23 August, he and his brother organised a festival of traditional games in their native Isykkul province, in honour of a national hero.¹⁰¹ Coming shortly after Bakiyev was sworn in as president, the event was sarcastically dubbed by some in the media a "second inauguration".¹⁰² It was attended by a number of acting ministers, including Deputy Prime Ministers Adakhan

Kulov named the supposed killer of Erkinbayev], AKIpress, 29 November 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23894.

⁹⁹ On 2 November 2005, for example, Bakiyev and Kulov held a joint press conference to declare their support for each other.

¹⁰⁰ In addition to Ryspek Akmatbayev, other prominent figures who had been accused of serious crimes during the Akayev years presented themselves to the prosecutor general. This gave them the right to live freely in-country while their cases were pending.

¹⁰¹ "Brat'ia Akmatbaevy provodiat torzhestva, posviashchenny natsional'nomu geroiu Er-Tabyldy" [The Akmatbayev brothers hold a festival in honour of national hero Er Tabyldy], AKIpress, 23 August 2005, http://www.akipress.kg/_ru_news.php?id=21691.

¹⁰² "Tekebaev poshel protiv Ryspeka. Chem eto zakonchitsia?" [Tekebayev has gone against Ryspek. How will it end?], Gazeta.kg, 25 August 2005, <http://www.gazeta.kg/view.php?i=15704>.

Madumarov and Ishenbay Kadyrbekov, and Education Minister Dosbol Nur-uulu, as well as parliamentarians.¹⁰³

1. The killing of MP Akmatbayev

The crisis had its origins in the maximum security prison system. Kyrgyzstan has 36 prisons, with up to 18,000 inmates. Eleven are "strict-regime" camps, housing those convicted of particularly grave offences. Most of these are in Chuy province. Administration of the camps falls to the General Directorate for the Execution of Punishment (GDEP, also known by its Russian initials, GUIN). Conditions in many of the camps are dire for both inmates and administrators, as GDEP is seriously underfunded.¹⁰⁴ Inmates generally rely on relatives for most needs.

Anger at deteriorating conditions led to prison protests throughout the country following the March revolution.¹⁰⁵ On 20 October, after weeks of growing unrest in a number of camps outside Bishkek, Tynychbek Akmatbayev, accompanied by GDEP head Ikmattulla Polotov, entered Prison Camp 31 in the town of Moldovanovka, about 25 kilometres from Bishkek, apparently to negotiate with rebellious inmates. Camp 31 was no ordinary camp – it was also "home" to Aziz Batukayev, an ethnic Chechen criminal leader¹⁰⁶ rumoured to be a rival of Ryspek Akmatbayev.¹⁰⁷ The exact circumstances are unclear but an altercation broke out between Akmatbayev and the prisoners, in the course of which the parliamentarian was brutally beaten and then shot dead. Two of his aides were also slain. Polotov was gravely wounded and died in hospital several days later.

Interior ministry forces surrounded the camp, preparing to storm it but Prime Minister Kulov accepted the inmates demand that he negotiate with them, and he was able to obtain release of surviving members of the delegation being held hostage as well as the bodies of the victims.

¹⁰³ "Brat'ia Akmatbaevy provodiat torzhestva", op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ The deputy head of the GDEP, Akylbek Ibrayev, said: "We receive only 25 per cent of what we need from the budget. We only have 9 per cent of what we need for medicines, and only 4 per cent of what we asked for bedclothes. We got nothing for repairs this year, and the average pay of our employees is \$40 to \$70 per month". Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005. Endemic corruption also ensures that what funds are allocated to the GDEP often do not reach the prisons.

¹⁰⁵ Problems in Kyrgyzstan's penal system are extensive and present serious potential challenges to the country's stability. Crisis Group will discuss these problems in greater detail in subsequent reporting.

¹⁰⁶ Batukayev bears the title "thief in the law" (*vor v zakone*), one of the highest ranks in the Soviet and post-Soviet underworld.

¹⁰⁷ Among the crimes of which Ryspek Akmatbayev is accused is the murder of Aziz Batukayev's brother-in-law.

The situation remained tense, however, with GDEP employees effectively on strike. “We won’t go inside [the camp]”, one said. “If they shot their ‘master’, the head of the GDEP,¹⁰⁸ then they’ll just swat us like flies. We don’t even have truncheons to defend ourselves. And they’re armed. Why didn’t Kulov send in the special forces? Let the troops go in and take their weapons”.¹⁰⁹ In other high-security camps in Chuy province, prison officials similarly refused to work, as a consequence of which many camps were virtually unguarded. Security forces had to take up positions to prevent escapes.

2. Demonstrations in Bishkek

On the morning of 22 October, led by Ryspek Akmatbayev, hundreds of people began to gather in Alatoo Square calling for Kulov’s resignation. Indicating their determination to stay until their demands were met, demonstrators erected tents, yurts and portable toilets, and cooked collective meals in huge cauldrons to break the Ramadan fast. Ryspek was clearly in charge, declaring that he knew “100 per cent” that Kulov had colluded with Batukayev to arrange his brother’s murder.¹¹⁰ After some hours, the demonstrators packed up and moved 200 metres northwards to the Old Square, outside the parliament, stating that they would remain there until Kulov resigned or was sacked by the president or parliament. Their wrath also fell on Speaker of the Parliament Tekebayev, whom they accused of intentionally sending Akmatbayev to his doom in Camp 31.

Kulov was defiant. At a press conference, he denied Ryspek’s accusations, adding “criminals will never be able to dictate conditions to the president, the government and parliament, and make them kneel before them”. The Akmatbayev supporters continued to demand a special session of parliament to discuss Kulov’s ouster, but on 23 and 24 October parliament was unable to muster a quorum. Kulov’s supporters began their own demonstration on Alatoo Square on 25 October. Police kept a low profile, even as rumours spread that both sides were arming and mobilising supporters in other regions. That same day, Speaker Tekebayev met with Ryspek Akmatbayev in front of parliament, later announcing the institution would not consider Kulov’s resignation.

3. Reactions

The spectacle of an accused murderer meeting openly with high-ranking government officials and issuing political demands caused a sensation. One after the other, ministers, parliamentarians, and White House officials came to express their condolences for Tynychbek Akmatbayev’s murder. On the first day of the demonstrations, brother Ryspek received the condolences of senior members of the security services, including Interior Minister Murat Satalinov and Aytbayev of the NSS. The scene troubled many, not least some members of the law enforcement agencies. “Look at our minister, bowing before Ryspek”, a senior police official sighed. Others chafed at what they saw as their chiefs’ unwillingness to act. “There are a lot of criminals in the square now, and we’re itching to get at them”, a patrolman said. “If only they would let us carry out an operation and get them all”.

More senior law enforcement officials took a somewhat different view, pointing out that the demonstrators were breaking no laws. “They’re maintaining order, they’re not violating anything”, a senior official said. “They’re not even stopping traffic through the square. They have permission to hold a demonstration, and Ryspek himself has promised security and order. Everything’s fine”.¹¹¹ Other officials even suggested support. “He’s not guilty of anything”, a senior NSS officer said. “These crimes were just pinned on him – they were really committed by other people, including Aziz Batukayev. There are a lot of myths about Ryspek, but that’s all they are – myths”.¹¹²

Bakiyev kept a conspicuous silence, which did little to allay mounting unease in the country. An open letter from some twenty NGO local representatives condemned him for refusing to say that he “would not allow the criminal world to dictate its conditions to the state” and urged him to “resolutely support the government and its head – Feliks Kulov”.¹¹³ Representatives of the international donor community met with Bakiyev on 26 October, and likewise expressed concerns; the most outspoken was Donald Lu, deputy chief of mission of the U.S. embassy, who warned Bakiyev that “nothing is more ruinous for investor confidence than when a government closes its eyes to the activities of organised crime”.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ According to the rough “laws” of the high-security prison world, there is a kind of truce between prison officials and inmates; the former provide for the prisoners’ basic needs but do not interfere in their daily activities, while the latter maintain order within the prison and do not threaten the authorities. The slaying of Polotov thus came as a shock to many in the GDEP system.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, October 2005.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Ryspek Akmatbayev, AKIpress, 25 October 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22979.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 22 October 2005.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 25 October 2005.

¹¹³ “NPO provergli rezkoi kritike deistviia Prezidenta KR” [NGOs have strongly criticised the actions of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic], AKIpress, 26 October 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23095.

¹¹⁴ “Kak ‘skandal’nuiu’ okharakterizovali SShA situatsiiu s trebovaniem krimi.nal’nykh grupp k pravitel’stvu” [The U.S. has characterised the situation with the demands of criminal

Tensions continued to build in Bishkek as the demonstration increasingly attracted those with various grievances. Nurlan Motuyev arrived with supporters from Naryn. Topchubek Turgunaliyev, a well-known human rights activist and a close relative of the slain Akmatbayev, took the opportunity to repeat his call for disbanding parliament.¹¹⁵ Marat Imanaliyev of the Meken birimdigi (Unity of the Homeland) party from Batken voiced nationalist grievances: “In Uzbekistan everyone speaks Uzbek, in Kazakhstan – Kazakh. But in Kyrgyzstan we’re deprived of this, we’re humiliated”. Later, he added: “I joined [this demonstration] because this revolution has given us nothing. I participated in the revolution. It affected every inhabitant of this country, but now Kyrgyzstan is being divided up – we need to stop this”.¹¹⁶ Some members of the GDEP briefly added their voices to calls for Kulov’s ouster, blaming him for not sending forces into Camp 31. A separate demonstration of those demanding land began outside the White House.¹¹⁷

A false move or provocation by any side would have been disastrous. Indeed, organisers of Akmatbayev’s demonstration seem to have anticipated the use of force against them. “There are a lot of us here, and we’re ready, just in case the police begin an operation”, a demonstrator said. “We can resist them. When we were planning to come to Bishkek, we took only strong young men with us, and even put in an age limit – no one born before 1960”.¹¹⁸ Yet, the demonstrators repeated their desire to maintain order: “Today one person came running into our camp – he’d stolen a mobile phone, and was hiding from the police, but we turned him in ourselves”.¹¹⁹

On 25 October, parliament finally met and declared it did not have a mandate to consider Kulov’s possible ouster. A commission chaired by Alisher Sobirov, an influential Osh parliamentarian, was formed to investigate the killing of Akmatbayev.¹²⁰ Bakiyev received a parliamentary delegation on 26 October and the following day met with Akmatbayev representatives. Ryspek agreed to

withdraw his supporters pending the conclusions of the parliamentary commission – and, participants in the negotiations say, to avoid the appearance of seeking to influence his murder trial, scheduled to start the following day.¹²¹ Kulov’s supporters likewise vacated Alatoo Square. As Bishkek breathed a sigh of relief, however, troubles continued in the prison camps. On 1 November, special forces of the MIA and the GDEP stormed Camp 31, using armoured personnel carriers and heavy weapons.¹²² Batukayev’s relatives say he was severely beaten and is now detained by the NSS.¹²³ According to official accounts, four inmates were killed;¹²⁴ Batukayev’s sister, Yakha, has said inmates told her the casualty figures were in fact much higher.¹²⁵

Ryspek Akmatbayev’s situation is unresolved. His murder trial was postponed three times, finally beginning on 30 November.¹²⁶ In the meantime, his supporters and Kulov’s have continued to swap accusations. On 31 October, Arslan Buteshev, a former Kulov driver, alleged that he had been kidnapped and shot by none other than Akmatbayev himself. Akmatbayev’s relatives denied the allegations, pointing out that Ryspek had been in his home town, Cholpon-ata, for celebrations marking the end of Ramadan. Shortly thereafter they claimed that one of the slain brother’s bodyguards had been beaten by attackers, including a Kulov assistant.¹²⁷

The demonstrations may have boosted Ryspek Akmatbayev’s own authority in some quarters. Even those whose job it was to maintain surveillance, such as an NSS agent who had spent several days monitoring the demonstration in the Old Square, voiced grudging admiration:

Our bureaucrats need to learn from these guys. Look at their discipline, their organisation! When they left, they did it in three hours’ time, and didn’t leave behind so much as a handful of litter.

groups to the government as “scandalous”], AKIpress, 26 October 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23102.

¹¹⁵ Since the summer of 2005, Turgunaliyev has been seeking to gather the necessary 300,000 signatures for a petition to disband the parliament, which he considers illegitimate. Once the signatures have been gathered, Turgunaliyev intends to submit his petition to Bakiyev.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 26 October 2005.

¹¹⁷ Participants in that demonstration say they attempted to join Akmatbayev’s camp but he rebuffed them, saying, “I’m here for my brother – I don’t need any land”. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 26 October 2005.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 26 October 2005.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Supporters of the slain deputy, including aides, were included in the commission.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interviews, Bishkek, 27 October 2005.

¹²² Aziz Batukayev’s sister, Yakha, said the assault came without warning. “Our relative who was visiting Aziz called us and only had time to say, ‘They’ve released gas, they’re shooting!’ before the line went dead”. Crisis Group interview, November 2005.

¹²³ Yakha Batukayeva said, “We’re not allowed to see him, we can only bring him medicine and bandages. We have no idea what state he’s in”. Crisis Group interview, 14 November 2005.

¹²⁴ Leila Saralaeva, “Kyrgyzstan: Furore Over Crushing of Prison Revolt”, IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 418, 5 November 2005.

¹²⁵ Interview with Yakha Batukayeva, *Litsa*, 1 December 2005.

¹²⁶ “Sud nad Ryspek Akmatbaevym vozobnovilsia” [Ryspek Akmatbayev’s trial has been renewed], AKIpress, 30 November 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23926. He pleaded innocent.

¹²⁷ Press conference by Ryspek Akmatbayev’s supporters, Bishkek, 11 November 2005.

They had rubbish bins, they had portable toilets, they had communications – they all had cell phones, and some even had satellite phones. They kept their voices down when they talked – they’re competent, all right”.¹²⁸

For others, however, the events sent a troubling message. After Kulov and Akmatbayev’s supporters had left, a coalition of NGOs held a demonstration of their own on Alatoo Square to denounce government inaction in the face of the growing influence of criminal groups. For some residents of Bishkek, the “Akmatbayev affair” evoked a sense of nostalgia for more “stable” times. “Yes, the Akayevs were corrupt”, one said, “but we never saw anything like this when they were here”.¹²⁹

On 1 December, the parliamentary commission concluded that Tynychbek Akmatbayev’s murder appeared to have been planned and stemmed from an old rivalry between Batukayev and Ryspek Akmatbayev.¹³⁰ Once again a potentially disastrous crisis, far from being resolved, has simply been deferred. The use of force alone will not solve the endemic problems of the prison system; on the contrary, the crisis has shown how deep those problems go.¹³¹ Nor is it clear how Ryspek Akmatbayev and his supporters, who seem, for whatever reason, deeply convinced of Kulov’s complicity in the brother’s murder, will act next. Akmatbayev himself seems likely to maintain a low profile while his trial continues but concerns about violence between his supporters and those of Batukayev remain. In short, a tense and dangerous situation has been created which provides ample opportunities for exploitation by competing forces.

D. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIME

The Kokjar dispute discussed above¹³² illustrates not only the dangers of an opaque, corrupt, or simply inefficient mechanism for property redistribution, but also the precarious position in which law enforcement officials

find themselves. More and more often, they are called in to act as mediators in local conflicts, without the support of conspicuously absent local administrators.¹³³ Yet, law enforcement agencies often lack the necessary training in conflict mediation needed to end disputes peaceably and are more likely to resort to force than anything else, which does little to address the underlying issues behind conflicts.¹³⁴

Law enforcement agencies are also frequently impoverished, demoralised, and unwilling to take steps to restore order out of fear of the possible consequences. “People have realised that they don’t have to follow the law”, a parliamentarian said. “If 100 people go out on the street, the police won’t arrest them – they’re afraid that another crowd will come and take over the police station”.¹³⁵ There is also worry about running afoul of hidden, deeply entrenched, interests. “Many politicians are using these crowds”, a police officer in Naryn said, “and we’re afraid to approach them”.¹³⁶

In August 2005, Sherqozi Mirzokarimov, the first deputy minister for internal affairs, acknowledged an increase in crime since the revolution, which he attributed to temporary confusion in the ranks. “The old leadership doesn’t know how to govern in new ways”, he said, “and the new leadership hasn’t firmly established its control yet”.¹³⁷ Leadership concerns are indeed a problem; as one commentator put it, “these recent murders will probably not be solved because the *system* is broken; our operatives often don’t feel the support of their colleagues or superiors”.¹³⁸ Constant reshuffling of senior security officials can hurt morale,¹³⁹ and concern is voiced in some quarters about the potential of such recently dismissed figures to form the core of a new opposition movement.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 27 October 2005.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 26 October 2005.

¹³⁰ “Parlamentskaia komissiiia ob ubiistve Tynychbeka Akmatbaeva: Ubiistvo soversheno na pochve protivorechii mezhdru A. Batukaevym i R. Akmatbayevym” [The parliamentary commission on the murder of Tynychbek Akmatbayev: The killing was carried out on the basis of a conflict between A. Batukayev and R. Akmatbayev], AKIpress 1 December 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=23978.

¹³¹ Some in the GDEP express hope the crisis is spurring the government to take its problems seriously. “Thanks to this conflict, the government is facing the problems of the GDEP”, a prison official said. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

¹³² Section III A 3 above.

¹³³ For example, negotiations with squatters on the outskirts of Bishkek, including K kjar, more often than not, fall to police officers, while administration officials stop by only to harangue the squatters to leave.

¹³⁴ Similar problems plague law enforcement agencies in other Central Asian countries. For more information, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°42, *Central Asia: The Politics of Police Reform*, 10 December 2002.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Naryn, July 2005.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sherqozi Mirzokarimov, first deputy minister of internal affairs, Bishkek, 24 August 2005.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 30 September 2005.

¹³⁹ A case in point is the career of  m rbek Suvanaliyev. A close ally of Kulov, he was put in charge of Bishkek’s police on 25 March 2005 and made deputy minister of internal affairs. In July, he was offered command of the force in the southernmost province, Batken, a clear demotion. He chose to resign. On 24 October, Kulov restored him as chief of Bishkek police and deputy minister; shortly thereafter, he was replaced as police chief by Moldomusa Kongantiyev, though retained as deputy minister.

“These people are angry”, a local analyst said, “and they can get support. They’re associated with control, with order, and with stability”.¹⁴⁰

There are also concerns that criminal elements may be seeking to strengthen their influence in the police as well as rumours that criminal leaders have considerable influence over personnel policy within the law enforcement agencies. Combined with this is anxiety that law enforcement agencies are not entirely neutral in local disputes – there have, for example, been troubling allegations about security service involvement on the side of Junusov in the Karasuu dispute.¹⁴¹ Others point to local police inaction in Karakeche. Speaking to parliament after Erkinbayev’s murder, Prime Minister Kulov stated “the biggest problem is that the law enforcement agencies have become intertwined with the criminals, and honest law enforcement structures are afraid to fight crime”.¹⁴²

A growing worry is that powerful criminal leaders may take advantage of weakened law enforcement also to increase their political influence in the political sphere. “The criminals have gone public”, a local analyst said. “They are carrying out public events, giving out money to the people, organising festivals, taking over companies supposedly for the sake of the people, and so on. The question is: can the police resist them?”¹⁴³ In short, the danger exists that law enforcement will become yet another resource over which competing interests will seek to exert influence, with grave implications for the rule of law.

The reaction of law enforcement officers to the “Akmatbayev affair” was telling. As noted, there was division over how to regard Ryspek Akmatbayev, with some expressing outright support. “The Kyrgyz should be proud of Ryspek”, a police official said. “He didn’t allow the Chechens and the Russians to come in and take away our wealth. He didn’t let the Kazakh racketeers squeeze ‘tribute’ out of the Issykkul resorts. He’s a real leader of the Kyrgyz people”.¹⁴⁴ Batukayev likewise has his admirers; a GDEP representative said: “The state needs Batukayev. We brought him up ourselves. His word is law in the criminal world. I respect him as well. Through

him we managed to keep all the prisons calm. Our bureaucrats should take a lesson from him”.¹⁴⁵

There has been much talk about reforming the law enforcement sector; the OSCE has a large project on police reform, and the U.S. Embassy recently announced \$1.5 million grant for traffic police reform. Minister of Internal Affairs Satalinov has spoken openly about the need for reform and his commitment to see it through. “The OSCE project is useful for all of us”, he said, “but the shortages of funds and equipment make reform difficult”.¹⁴⁶ Unless the police can become truly independent of outside interference, however, dollars and good intentions can do little.

The Bakiyev administration is clearly interested in seeing to it that the security organs remain on its side. One of its first steps was a 50 per cent pay raise for the police. But since salaries were extremely low, this amounted to little. “The police *want* to fight crime”, a politician said, “but they simply don’t have the means. This will inevitably push them to commit illegal acts”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, November 2005.

¹⁴¹ One observer commented: “The police took no steps to stop Junusov’s people. On the contrary, they practically cleared the streets for them to come in”. Crisis Group interview, September 2005.

¹⁴² See “Feliks Kulov: Ia nazovu imia ubittsy Erkinbaeva na sledstvii” [Feliks Kulov: I will name Erkinbayev’s killer during the investigation], AKIpress, 22 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22360.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, November 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, October 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Murat Satalinov, minister of internal affairs, Bishkek, 14 October 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 30 September 2005.

IV. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

In the months since the Kyrgyz revolution, Central Asia has become vastly more complicated. A watershed event took place on 13 May 2005, when Uzbek security forces brutally suppressed an armed uprising in the eastern city of Andijon, near the Kyrgyz border.¹⁴⁸ The repercussions reach throughout the region and have profound implications for Kyrgyzstan's relationships with Uzbekistan, as well as, potentially, powers such as Russia and the U.S.

A. UZBEKISTAN

Kyrgyzstan had scarcely begun to recover from the shock of 24 March when it found itself faced with an international crisis. Following suppression of the Andijon uprising, in which hundreds of civilians are believed to have been massacred by government forces, other hundreds of Uzbeks fled their country for the relative safety of Kyrgyzstan. The single largest group, over 500, crossed the Karadarya River into the Suzak region (Jalalabat province) and were housed in a hastily assembled refugee camp in the no-man's-land between the borders. The proximity to Uzbekistan raised concerns about the refugees' safety, and on 4 June 2005, they were relocated to a second camp deeper inside Kyrgyzstan where conditions were somewhat better. The refugees were housed in 60 tents rather than the initial ten; administration was entrusted to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with a French NGO, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), providing food and sanitation and UNICEF and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) the funding. Yet, security concerns persisted; on 14 June several dozen locals burst into the camp, beating up a Kyrgyz foreign ministry representative and threatening to return in greater force and clear out the camp.¹⁴⁹

The presence of hundreds of refugees put the government in a difficult position. It faced massive pressure from Tashkent, which demanded their return. There are reports that Uzbek security forces also applied pressure on the

refugees' relatives in Andijon to persuade them to go home and that there were two instances of attempted kidnapping from the camp.¹⁵⁰ The Kyrgyz government was divided over how to respond, and officials issued contradictory statements. Acting Prosecutor General Beknazarov initially seemed determined to hand most, if not all, back to Uzbekistan,¹⁵¹ while acting Foreign Minister Otunbayeva was much more receptive to Western insistence that they be protected.¹⁵²

Acting on an Uzbek extradition request, the Kyrgyz authorities removed sixteen men from the camp on 9 June and placed them in investigative custody in Jalalabat. That evening, four were handed over by the Kyrgyz NSS to their Uzbek counterparts. They were secretly taken to Uzbekistan and are believed to be in custody in Tashkent.¹⁵³ Following this, refugees said they did not feel safe. "If they gave four to Uzbekistan, this means that anybody at any time can be sent back secretly", one said. "Now, even when we go to see the doctor, we only go in groups".¹⁵⁴

The return of the four, a clear violation of Kyrgyzstan's international law obligations,¹⁵⁵ provoked international

¹⁵⁰ The Andijon authorities organised regular trips to the refugee camps for relatives, which were often used to attempt to coerce the refugees to return. Refugees said their relatives were usually escorted by officials of the Andijon local government but when out of earshot of their minders urged them not to come back. Crisis Group interviews, refugees, June 2005. For more, see "Burying the Truth: Uzbekistan Rewrites the Story of the Andijan Massacre", Human Rights Watch, September 2005.

¹⁵¹ Speaking after his removal, Beknazarov insisted that he was only seeking to ensure that the dispute over the refugees was resolved in a "legal", rather than "political" manner. "There was great pressure on me just to hand the refugees over [to the UNHCR]", he said. "But I said, 'No, let's take our time, and make sure that everything is being done according to the law'. I didn't want to take a hasty decision that everybody would regret later on". Crisis Group interview, Azimbek Beknazarov, Bishkek, 21 September 2005.

¹⁵² Although sympathetic to the West's demands on the refugees, Otunbayeva clearly felt isolated and frustrated during the crisis. "Why does Kyrgyzstan have to be the example to teach Uzbekistan about human rights? We did not create this crisis; it was forced on us. We should not have to suffer for it". Crisis Group interview, Roza Otunbayeva, Bishkek, 13 July 2005.

¹⁵³ The four men are: Dilshod Hojiyev, Tavvakal Hojiyev, Hasan Shokirov, and Muhammad Qodirov. There have since been unconfirmed reports that Shokirov has died in custody. See, "Burying the Truth", op. cit.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, refugee, June 2005.

¹⁵⁵ As a party to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (General Assembly Resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984), Kyrgyzstan may not "expel, return ('refouler') or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being

¹⁴⁸ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, op. cit. For more on the uprising and its aftermath, see "'Bullets Were Falling like Rain': The Andijon Massacre, 13 May 2005", Human Rights Watch, June 2005, and the report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, released on 12 July 2005. See also the excellent series of articles produced by the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), available at http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?centasia_uzbekunrest.html.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bob Deen, ACTED representative, Jalalabat, 5 July 2005.

outrage and led to redoubled pressure on the government, while the Uzbeks maintained their extradition demands.¹⁵⁶ By mid-June, 29 refugees had been separated from the rest and were in investigative custody in Osh. Finally, at the end of July, and after repeated warnings of impending forced return and intense Western pressure for their release, most of the refugees (including fourteen of the 29 Osh detainees) were flown from Jalalabat to Bishkek, and then on to Romania, pending their relocation to possible other countries. In early September, the governments of Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden announced their willingness to accept eleven of the remaining fifteen detainees.¹⁵⁷ On the night of 15 September, the Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's office officially handed them over to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),¹⁵⁸ and they departed Kyrgyzstan early the next morning.¹⁵⁹ The fate of the remaining four still in detention is unclear, and one Western diplomat suggests their status is not likely to be decided "for months", although no further forced returns seem imminent.¹⁶⁰

Uzbekistan was infuriated by the relocation and retaliated against the U.S., which it saw as the main force behind the move, by demanding evacuation of the Qarshi-Khonobod (also known as "K2") airbase within 180 days. It accused UNHCR of supporting criminals and increased pressure on the Kyrgyz government, dissolving an agreement it had made only on 19 July 2005 to supply Kyrgyzstan with natural gas.¹⁶¹ Kyrgyz authorities report that a Kazakh company, Kaztransgaz, has agreed to take up the slack – at a somewhat higher price – provided that Bishkek takes steps to pay back a \$17.5 million debt.¹⁶² The report of

the Uzbek parliamentary commission investigating the Andijon violence alleged that 70 "religious extremists" underwent training in "subversive and terrorist methods" in southern Kyrgyzstan in the months prior to the uprising.¹⁶³ Uzbekistan's prosecutor general asserted that the participants in the uprising had purchased arms and equipment in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁶⁴ The allegations have been angrily denied. "It seems that the Uzbeks are mostly trying to blame their own problems on us", an official said.¹⁶⁵

Some ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan were apparently involved in the Andijon events but the exact nature and extent of this involvement remain unclear.¹⁶⁶ Uzbek government allegations of training camps in Kyrgyzstan staffed by foreign instructors seem far-fetched, and no evidence of such camps has been made public.

Most observers agree that the few hundred refugees evacuated from Kyrgyzstan represent only a fraction of those who fled the violence in Andijon. Many more fugitives¹⁶⁷ are thought to be in Kyrgyzstan. In June, the director of an Osh-based NGO estimated that over 1,000 were currently in that city, sheltering with friends or relatives.¹⁶⁸ In all, local journalists and human rights activists estimate that between 3,000 and 4,000 fugitives are scattered throughout Osh and Jalalabat provinces.¹⁶⁹ Some believe the numbers are even higher. In the months that followed the Andijon events, some of these Uzbek fugitives are rumoured to have made their way from Kyrgyzstan to other countries.¹⁷⁰ There have been troubling reports of continued efforts by Uzbek security services to ferret the fugitives out of southern Kyrgyzstan, and of rewards being offered by the Uzbeks for the apprehension

subjected to torture". (See the full text of the convention at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cat.htm>.)

¹⁵⁶ Throughout the refugee crisis, Crisis Group and many other non-governmental organisations lobbied policymakers in the region and in the West to protect the refugees' rights and to give Kyrgyzstan the support it needed to resolve the crisis.

¹⁵⁷ See RFE/RL Newline, vol. 9, no. 168, 6 September 2005.

¹⁵⁸ "Genprokuratura KR reshila peredat' 11 uzbekskikh bezhentshev UVKB OON" [The Prosecutor General's Office of the KR has decided to hand 11 Uzbek refugees to the UNHCR], AKIpress, 16 September 2005, http://www.akipress.org/_ru_news.php?id=22216.

¹⁵⁹ "UN evacuates 11 Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan", RFE/RL, 16 September 2005, <http://www.rferl.org>.

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁶¹ Having only limited sources of natural gas itself, Kyrgyzstan generally relies on gas from its neighbours, particularly Uzbekistan, in return for access to irrigation water, which Kyrgyzstan, as an "upstream" country, controls. See Crisis Group Report, *Central Asia: Water and Conflict*, op. cit.

¹⁶² See Leila Saralaeva, "Kyrgyz Concerned by Uzbek Gas Cuts", IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 407, 30 August 2005. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have since reached a new agreement on gas, with Uzbekistan promising to supply Kyrgyzstan with gas beginning on 1 January 2006.

¹⁶³ RFE/RL Newline, vol. 9, no. 168, 6 September 2005.

¹⁶⁴ "Prokuratura Uzbekistana podvela pervyi etap rassledovaniia sobytii v Andizhane" [The Prosecutor General's Office of Uzbekistan has summarised the first stage of the investigation of the Andijon events], Fergana.ru, 15 September 2005, <http://news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=1627&mode=snews>.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Of the fifteen men sentenced to lengthy prison terms in Tashkent in November 2005 for involvement in the Andijon uprising, three were ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁶⁷ In this section, "fugitive" refers to those who have fled Uzbekistan for Kyrgyzstan in the wake of the Andijon events but have not made a formal request to the Kyrgyz authorities or any international organisation to be recognised formally as refugees.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 16 June 2005.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Osh and Jalalabat, June 2005.

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Osh, September 2005. Local officials and representatives of international organisations interviewed by Crisis Group in Osh and Khujand in September 2005 stated that while they had heard these rumours, they had no concrete information and could neither confirm nor deny them.

of certain individuals.¹⁷¹ Local observers have told of individuals who fear to approach either the Kyrgyz authorities or international organisations lest they be handed over to the Uzbeks.¹⁷²

The Kyrgyz authorities are reluctant to touch off a new crisis in their relations with Uzbekistan. “We can’t take any more refugees – the cost for us is simply too high”, an official said.¹⁷³ Some are resentful of what they see as the meddling of foreign powers in what should have been, in their view, an easy decision. “We should have given [the refugees] back to the Uzbeks”, a senior law enforcement official said. “In return we would have gotten our criminals who are hiding in Uzbekistan”.¹⁷⁴ More troublingly, there are signs of some sympathy among law enforcement officials for the Uzbek government’s version of events, namely, that dangerous criminals and terrorists were among the 25 Osh detainees eventually sent to Europe. None of this augurs well for the reception possible future fugitives might receive.

At the October 2005 meeting of Central Asian heads of state with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg, Bakiyev and Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov spoke of mending the bilateral relationship and pledged closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism and religious extremism.¹⁷⁵ Still, many Kyrgyz authorities clearly remain greatly concerned over the situation in neighbouring Uzbekistan, which has potentially disastrous consequences for their own country. “Karimov is sitting on top of a bomb from which all safety mechanisms have been removed”, one said. “If there is an explosion there, it will be extremely bloody, and we will probably become unwilling participants in the resulting conflict”.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Among those reportedly being actively sought by the Uzbek security services is Qobiljon Parpiyev, a resident of Andijon alleged to have been one of the leaders of the May 2005 uprising. Said to still be in the region, though changing his location constantly, Parpiyev gave a number of interviews to foreign journalists in the first few months after the uprising but has recently fallen silent. See Alisher Saipov, “Andizkhanskikh bezhentshev v Kirgizii gorazdo bol’she, chem mozhno sebe predstavit’. No nikto ikh ne schital” [There are more Andijon fugitives in Kyrgyzstan than one can imagine. But no one has counted them], *Fergana.ru*, 8 December 2005, <http://news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=401544050953.24,1713,2907900>.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interviews, Osh, October 2005.

¹⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Zayavlyenie Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki K.Bakieva dlya pressy [Declaration of President of the Kyrgyz Republic K. Bakiyev for the press], 10 October 2005, <http://www.president.kg/press/news/491/>.

¹⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

B. RUSSIA AND THE U.S.

President Bakiyev appears inclined to follow his predecessor’s policy of striking a balance between Moscow and Washington. Following the near-breakdown in relations with Tashkent, Kyrgyzstan has taken on a new importance in U.S. foreign policy. Of primary concern is continued access to the Ganci Air Base at Bishkek’s Manas International Airport, which the U.S. has used since 2001. The loss of K2 in Uzbekistan, as well as an oblique call for the U.S. to vacate Central Asia issued at the July 2005 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO),¹⁷⁷ seems to have caused some concern in Washington that a similar fate might befall Ganci. In recent months, a series of senior officials, including Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the head of the U.S. Central Command, General John Abizaid, have visited Bishkek.

Bakiyev thus far has maintained that the U.S. can stay at Ganci as long as necessary but has also said that the terms of use may need to be renegotiated, which most interpret as an indication that the U.S. will be required to pay more. The Kyrgyz government has also said that it believes some \$16.5 million in U.S. payments for fuel went previously through the Aalam Service company, which was run by Askar Akayev’s son-in-law, Adil Toygonbayev, to the Akayev family rather than to the state treasury.¹⁷⁸

Russia, seeing a new opportunity to increase its influence in Central Asia, has also been courting the Bakiyev government with promises of large investments. It also seeks to bolster its military presence in the country; during a recent visit, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov announced plans to invest in the development of the Kant airbase east of Bishkek, which Russia has used since 2001.¹⁷⁹

C. KAZAKHSTAN

As relations with Uzbekistan deteriorate and concerns about instability and corruption keep many potential Western investors away, relations with Kazakhstan are likely to be important for the new Kyrgyz government, especially as Kazakh economic influence in the region grows. Its economy fuelled by oil wealth, Kyrgyzstan’s

¹⁷⁷ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation members are Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁷⁸ Cholpon Orozbekova, “Kyrgyzstan Tells U.S. to Pay Up for Air Base”, IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no. 419, 10 November 2005.

¹⁷⁹ Crisis Group will analyse the complex and shifting geopolitics of Central Asia in greater detail in subsequent reporting.

northern neighbour is emerging as a key investor. In the first six months of 2005, according to National Statistical Committee figures, Kazakhstan invested \$6.315 million, a 260 per cent increase on the equivalent period in 2004.¹⁸⁰ There have been new Kazakh investments since the revolution in such diverse fields as antimony production, the banking sector and gas distribution. A Kazakh media holding company has bought a Bishkek television station.¹⁸¹

Kazakhstan is also a major trading partner: the third largest importer of Kyrgyz goods, and the second largest exporter to the country.¹⁸² Many Kyrgyz citizens are migrant workers in Kazakhstan – during a 13 October 2005 meeting with President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kulov estimated 60,000 to 80,000 are in this category, either legally or illegally.¹⁸³ Kyrgyzstan should benefit greatly from a Kazakh plan to introduce commercial visas and increase employment quotas for its citizens. On the same visit it was agreed that “the two countries will expand cooperation steadily in the trade, economic, scientific and technical and humanitarian sectors and will continue to engage in friendly dialogue on a regular basis”.¹⁸⁴

The relationship is not without complications, however. Many Kyrgyz are affronted by what they see as the somewhat condescending attitude of their more prosperous northern neighbours. There have been reports of Kyrgyz labour migrants falling prey to human trafficking schemes and ending up as virtual slaves in Kazakhstan.¹⁸⁵ In early December, as its presidential election approached, Kazakhstan closed its borders with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and deported Kyrgyz citizens who had allegedly been residing and working illegally in Almaty.

While Kazakh officials have denied that these moves were in any way motivated by political concerns, many in Bishkek saw it as a sign they fear the export of revolutionary ideas and tactics from Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁸⁰ “V I polugodii 2005g. priamye inostrannye investitsii v KR vozrosli na 13% do \$74 mln” [In the first half of 2005, direct foreign investment in the Kyrgyz Republic rose by 13% to \$74 million], AKIpress, 22 August 2005, http://www.akipress.kg/_ru_news.php?id=21661.

¹⁸¹ “Kazakh broadcaster buys Kyrgyz TV channel”, BBC Monitoring, 22 June 2005; Kazakhstan Today news agency website, Almaty, in Russian, 21 June 2005.

¹⁸² For January-June 2005, Kyrgyzstan exported goods to Kazakhstan worth \$48.2 million and imported goods worth \$80 million. Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report Kyrgyzstan, 1 November 2005.

¹⁸³ “Kazakhstan agrees to supply fuel to Kyrgyzstan”, BBC Monitoring, 14 October 2005; Kazakh Khabar TV, 13 October 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Prem’ery Kazakhstana i Kyrgyzstana dogovorilis’ dobivat’sya maksimal’no polnoy realizatsiya sushchestvuyushchikh vozmozhnostey dvukh stran [The prime ministers of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan agreed to work for maximum realisation of the possibilities of the two countries], AKIpress, 13 October 2005, http://www.akipress.kg/_ru_news.php?id=22798.

¹⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Osh, October 2004.

V. CONCLUSION

Akayev's ouster did much to raise hopes for change in Kyrgyzstan. However, the months after the revolution were marked with uncertainty and at times seeming paralysis. To a certain extent, this was only to be expected. The new government has taken shape at last, and the injunctions to wait – for order to be restored, for elections, for the inauguration, for the cabinet to be confirmed – will no longer be adequate. The government has a unique opportunity to win the trust of its citizens, to show that 24 March 2005 was indeed a revolution, not a mere reshuffling of ruling elites, but it does not have unlimited time.

Most fundamental to the longevity of the new government will be its ability to show that it represents a break with the past. The last thing it can afford is a seeming return to politics as usual. One mechanism for public monitoring of the government which has been proposed by some of the revolution's supporters is a *Kurultay* (assembly), which would convene regularly to discuss the government's actions. There are questions, however, about its status, how it would be funded, who its members would be, and what kinds of legal and constitutional changes it would imply. A more effective means of public control, it seems, would be continued development of civil society and independent media. It is here, perhaps, that there have been the most encouraging signs, with the media enjoying unprecedented freedom and both the media and civil society having unprecedented access to the corridors of power.

It is to be hoped that these gains will be consolidated and strengthened as time passes, yet there have been problems here, too. Some media outlets have been subjects of the ongoing redistribution of property and resources: a case in point are recent disputes over the ownership of the private "Piramida" television station, and KOORT, the country's first nationwide independent television station. Some have complained that media outlets which had been outspoken critics of the Akayev regime have gone to the other extreme, with little tolerance for criticism of the new government.¹⁸⁶ Speaking at a meeting of the country's Security Council in late November, new Prosecutor-General Kambaraaly Kongantiyev condemned media outlets, "which inflame passions and destabilise the situation in the country", an apparent reaction to the reporting of Asan Erkinbayev's self-immolation in Jalalabat.¹⁸⁷

Current difficulties and uncertainties notwithstanding, there is still tremendous international goodwill towards the new government, and a genuine willingness to support its efforts at strengthening democracy, developing the economy and reforming the security sector, and generally to assist it in the event of further regional instability. Bakiyev himself seems to have been surprised by this. In the words of a local observer, he was "euphoric" after his return from the UN summit in September. "Everyone was thanking him for releasing the refugees and was treating Kyrgyzstan like a country which would move forward progressively. This was surprising to Bakiyev. He realised that Kyrgyzstan had such a [positive] image, and that he could ask for any assistance he wanted".¹⁸⁸ This may be true – up to a point. If the positive image is to be maintained, this too will require a greater commitment to reform, transparency and the rule of law. The international community, for its part, should give Kyrgyzstan the advice and support it will need to see these reforms through.

Most importantly, however, the Bakiyev administration must be prepared to tackle the underlying issues behind its many conflicts. There is a disconcerting tendency to avoid a hard look at matters. Officials point out that many problems – from disputes over property and ownership, to land reform, to the problems of the prison system – have their origins in the Akayev regime. "These problems aren't our fault", one official said. "They're the problems of the Akayev years. If the previous administration hadn't constantly violated the law, we wouldn't have these problems now".¹⁸⁹ Another was dismissive: "These local conflicts are the natural outcome of the problems of the previous regime. Of course, people are demanding things now. But Akayev's responsible for all this – what does it have to do with us?"¹⁹⁰

While it may indeed be true that the origins of the problems precede the Bakiyev administration, the responsibility for their resolution rests squarely with it. The use of force will not be sufficient; development of truly independent, transparent institutions and the fundamental reform of existing ones are needed – daunting tasks, to be sure, yet ones that are necessary if the Kyrgyz experiment is to succeed. If its concern for regional stability is genuine, the international community must lend its support. The stakes are high: Kyrgyzstan can become an object lesson either for the rewards of determined reform and continued international engagement, or for the dangers of half-measures and neglect.

Bishkek/Brussels, 16 December 2005

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, "Kyrgyzstan: Media liberation slow, say journalists", IRINnews.org, 7 December 2005.

¹⁸⁷ See Astra Sadybakasova, "Kyrgyz Prosecutor Attacks Media 'Distortions'", IWPR, *Reporting Central Asia*, no.

423, 25 November 2005.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, September 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, October 2005.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF KYRGYZSTAN



APPENDIX B

KEY FIGURES MENTIONED IN THE REPORT

Ryspek Akmatbayev Born 1960 in Isykkul province. Went into hiding after being named a homicide suspect. Reappeared in June 2005 to give testimony to prosecutor general, case is still pending. Brother of murdered parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev. Organiser of large October 2005 demonstration in Bishkek demanding Prime Minister Kulov's ouster.

Tynychbek Akmatbayev Murdered parliamentarian. Born in 1962 in Isykkul province. Headed the parliamentary Committee on Defense, Security, Law Enforcement, and Information Politics. Killed during a prison uprising outside Bishkek in October 2005.

Tashtemir Aytbayev Chairman of the National Security Service. Born 1943 in Naryn province. Studied in Moscow, worked in Communist youth organisation, Komsomol, and KGB; 1995-99, deputy minister of internal affairs; 1999-2000, chairman of ministry of national security; 2000-2002, minister of internal affairs; 2002, dismissed, appointed deputy minister of justice.

Kurmanbek Bakiyev President. Born 1949, Jalalabat province. Was factory director and involved in party work at end of Soviet era. Governor of Jalalabat province, 1995-1997, and of Chuy province, 1997-2000; prime minister 2000-2002, resigned after Aksy events, continued as deputy, joining a centrist group. Became head of opposition People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan in November 2004. Failed to win seat in February 2005 parliamentary elections but became prime minister and acting president when Akayev's regime collapsed the following month. Elected president in July 2005.

Aziz Batukayev Criminal leader. Ethnic Chechen, born 1966 in Tokmok District, Chuy province. Said to have controlled criminal activity in eastern Chuy province. Convicted numerous times, most recently (2004) on assault and illegal weapons charges. Rumoured to be a rival of Ryspek Akmatbayev. In custody of NSS following October 2005 prison unrest and murder of parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev.

Azimbek Beknazarov. Born 1956 in Aksy District, Jalalabat province. Trained and worked as a prosecutor and judge; 2000, elected parliamentary deputy; arrested in January 2002 after becoming more opposition-oriented, particularly critical of border treaty with China; his imprisonment led to Aksy tragedy, when five protestors were shot dead by police; released later that year on appeal; re-elected in first round in Aksy in 2005. Became acting

prosecutor general in March 2005. Relieved of his post in September. Elected to parliament in November 2005 by-election in Aksy.

Bayaman Erkinbayev Assassinated parliamentarian. Born 1967 in Jalalabat province. Attended Tashkent Agricultural Institute. Martial arts specialist who became a wealthy businessman, reputed underworld leader. First elected to parliament 1995. Murdered in Bishkek in September 2005.

Feliks Kulov Prime minister. Born 1948 in Bishkek. Worked his way up through the Soviet police and interior ministry structures. Served under Akaev in 1990s in key positions such as minister of interior, vice president, and mayor of Bishkek. After resigning as mayor, formed Ar-Namys (Honour) party in 1999. Banned from standing in 2000 presidential elections against Akayev, then imprisoned under corruption charges in 2001. Released after March 2005 revolution, briefly headed security structures before stepping down. Confirmed as prime minister in September.

Roza Otunbayeva Born 1950 in Osh. Academic, Soviet diplomat; 1992-2002, foreign minister and ambassador (to the U.S. and then to UK); 2002-2004, Deputy Special Representative of UN Secretary General to Georgia. In December 2004, announced creation of Ata-Jurt oppositional movement, which soon allied with Bakiyev; disqualified from February 2005 parliamentary elections; central figure in the opposition's Coordinating Council. Became acting foreign minister after the March 2005 revolution but failed to win parliamentary confirmation in September. Ran for parliament in November 2005 by-elections in Bishkek (Tunduk district), but lost.

Murat Sutalinov Minister of internal affairs. Born 1963 in Bishkek. Trained as lawyer. Worked his way up through the police system before joining Akayev's presidential administration in 2004. Appointed prosecutor general by Akayev 23-24 March 2005, the day before the revolution. Appointed acting minister of internal affairs in May 2005 by Bakiyev and confirmed in the post by parliament in September.

Omurbek Tekebayev Speaker of the Parliament. Born 1958 in Bazarkorgon district, now in Jalalabat province. Qualifying as a physics teacher in 1981, he worked in education until 1991, when he became a local government official. Requalified as lawyer in 2004. Has been a parliamentary deputy since 1995. Came second in

2000 presidential elections with the support of Feliks Kulov. After revolution, elected speaker of parliament.

Daniyar Usenov Former acting deputy prime minister for economic affairs. Born 1960 in Bishkek and studied there. Worked as mining engineer, Karabalta (Chuy), and in local government. Rich businessman and a founder of Eridan Corporation, with interests in banking and construction; member of second parliament (1995-2000), became deputy speaker. Forced out of parliamentary election in 2000 after opposing Akayev, and business interests attacked by authorities. Parliament refused to confirm him as deputy prime minister for economic affairs in November 2005.