

KYRGYZSTAN: WIDENING ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN THE SOUTH

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KYRGYZSTAN: WIDENING ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN THE SOUTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kyrgyzstan's government has failed to calm ethnic tensions in the south, which continue to grow since the 2010 violence, largely because of the state's neglect and southern leaders' anti-Uzbek policies. Osh, the country's second city, where more than 420 people died in ethnic clashes in June of that year, remains dominated by its powerful mayor, an ardent Kyrgyz nationalist who has made it clear that he pays little attention to leaders in the capital. While a superficial quiet has settled on the city, neither the Kyrgyz nor Uzbek community feels it can hold. Uzbeks are subject to illegal detentions and abuse by security forces and have been forced out of public life. The government needs to act to reverse these worsening trends, while donors should insist on improvements in the treatment of the Uzbek minority.

The nationalist discourse that emerged after the Osh violence unnerved the interim government that had replaced President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010. Until the end of its term in late 2011, it was largely ignored, and sometimes openly defied, by Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov, the standard-bearer of an ethnic Kyrgyz-first policy and the most successful radical nationalist leader to emerge after the killings. This did not change when President Almazbek Atambayev, a northerner, took office in December 2011. Senior members of his administration express dismay at tensions in the south but say they have no way of influencing the situation there.

Uzbeks are increasingly withdrawing into themselves. They say they are marginalised by the Kyrgyz majority, forced out of public life and the professions; most Uzbek-language media have been closed; and prominent nationalists often refer to them as a diaspora, emphasising their separate and subordinate status. International organisations report continuing persecution of Uzbeks by a rapaciously corrupt police and prosecutorial system, almost certainly with the southern authorities' tacit approval.

The flight of many Uzbek business people and the seizure of Uzbek-owned businesses have sharply diminished the minority's once important role in the economy. The sense of physical and social isolation is breeding a quiet, inchoate anger among all segments of the community – not just

the youth, who could be expected to respond more viscerally to the situation, but also among the Uzbek elite and middle class. This is increased by an acute awareness that they have nowhere to go. Neither Russia, with its widespread anti-Central Asian sentiments, nor Uzbekistan with its harshly autocratic regime, offers an attractive alternative. While Uzbeks are far from embracing violence and have no acknowledged leaders, their conversations are turning to retribution, or failing that a final lashing out at their perceived oppressors.

The views of southern Kyrgyz have also hardened since the violence. Many feel that Uzbeks brought disaster on themselves with an ill-advised power grab in June 2010. This version of history has not been proven; it is privately doubted even by some senior Kyrgyz politicians, but hardly ever challenged by them. Myrzakmatov enjoys considerable approval among broad segments of southern Kyrgyz society – including among the younger, better educated and urbanised social groups that might have been expected to take a more liberal and conciliatory position.

Ominously, he re-stated and strengthened his tough anti-Uzbek approach in late 2011 in a book on the June 2010 violence. Depicting Uzbeks as an essentially separatist force that threatens Kyrgyzstan's survival, he stressed the need for non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups to understand their future role would be as subordinates.

Government claims that after the June 2010 pogrom, several hundred young Uzbeks from Osh and other parts of the south went to northern Afghanistan and southern Waziristan (Pakistan) for military training with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and other radical Islamist groups have further raised tensions. A series of high-profile police raids and clashes have added to suspicions. The risk of radicalisation certainly exists, and there are indications that Islamist groups have benefited from the aftermath of June 2010. Some young Uzbeks undoubtedly did leave for military training, and a few may have returned, but the true number of post-June recruits is almost certainly a fraction of the official figure.

In all probability the one radical Islamist movement that publicly rejects violence, Hizb ut-Tahrir, has benefited most: its articulate proselytisers sound even more convincing to people who feel threatened. Central Asian Islamists fighting in Afghanistan, on the other hand, have so far shown little interest or capacity to extend major operations to Central Asia. Repression and marginalisation of Uzbeks and other minorities in the south will not cause radical Islamist violence in the near future but can ensure that radical forces have a more welcoming operational environment. More importantly, the steady exclusion of Uzbeks from all walks of life risks creating a dangerous predisposition to violence: the feeling that the only means of redress left are illegal ones.

In the meantime, nationalist leaders in the south seem to be confusing silence with success. The lack of clear leadership within the Uzbek community may slow the development of protest, but might also heighten volatility and unpredictability. It seems unlikely that even the most determined ethnic nationalist can keep the Uzbek population silenced forever. The 2009 census showed Uzbeks to have almost equal numbers with Kyrgyz in Osh city and to be a substantial minority in the two main southern regions. The central government's failure to act on the situation is allowing nationalists to set and implement an exclusionist agenda. The longer it waits, the harder it will be to reverse the situation.

There are signs that the central government is once again looking for ways to remove Myrzakmatov. Previous efforts have failed, and simply changing one person is not, alone, a solution. The situation can almost certainly be turned around, but it will require assertive and long-term efforts by Bishkek to reassert its power in the south and strong, visible support from the international community. Neither is currently apparent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Kyrgyzstan:

1. Appoint or restore qualified Uzbeks to positions in local administration, education, the judiciary, police and other key areas of government, particularly in areas where there is a substantial Uzbek minority; and make reintegration of the police, currently almost exclusively ethnic Kyrgyz, an urgent priority.
2. Reopen major Uzbek-language media closed after June 2010. Senior government figures should use these outlets to reach out to Uzbek citizens.
3. Carry out infrastructure improvements to roads, water and electricity supplies, playgrounds and sports facilities in Uzbek communities, where such features are often considerably below standard.

4. Extend the anti-corruption campaign explicitly to Uzbek areas, where the population is at particular risk from abusive officials.
5. Support and reinforce measures undertaken by the current prosecutor-general to eradicate the use of torture by police and security bodies; place the temporary detention facilities (IVS), where most torture takes place, under the justice ministry; enforce rigorously the prohibition of confessions obtained by torture; give defence lawyers adequate security; and make regular rotation of senior police and security officials the norm, in an effort to reduce abuse and corruption. Implement recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on torture, in particular:
 - a) amend the criminal code to define torture as a serious crime in accordance with Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture;
 - b) ensure in the Law on Amnesty that no person convicted for the crime of torture will qualify for amnesty;
 - c) ensure that legislation concerning evidence presented in judicial proceedings is brought into line with Article 15 of the UN Convention against Torture in order to exclude explicitly any evidence or extrajudicial statement obtained under duress; and
 - d) make police station chiefs and investigating and operational officers criminally accountable for any unacknowledged detention.
6. Repudiate publicly nationalist rhetoric that asserts the supremacy of ethnic Kyrgyz and reaffirm Kyrgyzstan's status as a multi-ethnic state in which all groups enjoy equal rights.

To the International Community:

7. Give energetic, long-term and consistent attention to this problem, including in the following ways:
 - a) make support for efforts to reduce ethnic tensions in the south the central focus of operations in Kyrgyzstan;
 - b) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should follow-up on his declarations that UN operations in southern Kyrgyzstan after the violence were a success by calling for a truly inclusive political process and an end to impunity, making these demands the priority for the UN agencies working in Kyrgyzstan.
 - c) international organisations and donors should actively encourage central government efforts to alleviate tension and restore government political control in the south, making these benchmarks for future economic assistance, and in the meantime

avoid funding any programs that might benefit, directly or indirectly, the nationalist exclusionist agenda;

- d) international organisations and foreign governments should make clear to Osh Mayor Myrzakmatov and other key nationalist leaders that discriminatory policies towards Kyrgyzstan's minorities will not only damage the country's – and Osh's – international standing, but also their access to international funding; and
- e) international organisations should stagger their staff rotations in the south, ensuring the presence of a constant core of senior representatives with an institutional memory of the 2010 violence and subsequent political developments, in order to be able to better evaluate the development of the situation on the ground and the statements made by both official and unofficial political players.

Bishkek/Brussels, 29 March 2012

KYRGYZSTAN: WIDENING ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN THE SOUTH

I. INTRODUCTION

This report examines the growing tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan as the second anniversary of the June 2010 violence approaches.¹ It views those tensions against the political backdrop of an emergent, strident Kyrgyz nationalism and a relatively liberal central government in Bishkek that is unable and perhaps unwilling to address the issue. It also briefly addresses the tendency of some major international players, including the UN, to portray intervention in the south after June 2010 as a success for preventive diplomacy.

Kyrgyzstan's approach to inter-ethnic relations has long been marked by sublimation and accommodation. During the Soviet period, ethnic tensions and any manifestations of nationalism were swiftly repressed. Treatment of the problem, however, ended there. As a result, with the crumbling of the Soviet Union, nationalist movements emerged from the shadows across the USSR. Some were relatively moderate and sophisticated; others had a hard, xenophobic dimension that can still be encountered in Russia and elsewhere. The Kyrgyz variety combines an angry edge with the political populism that has been a feature of the country since independence in 1991.

While successive governments in Kyrgyzstan tried not to think about the ethnic problem, the south's Uzbeks adopted a policy of quiet accommodation.² They, along with most-

ly Russian Slavs, were traditionally more urbanised than ethnic Kyrgyz. Relatively few Russians or Uzbeks became fluent in Kyrgyz, many of them blaming poor teaching of the language in school. The two groups gravitated towards each other, often voicing a shared condescension for the supposedly less sophisticated Kyrgyz they encountered in the streets. With independence, the Kyrgyz came to dominate politics and public administration. Uzbeks played a disproportionate role in business life and developed a fatal reputation in the southern street for living "too well". The Uzbek approach to relations with the government was through personal or political relations, on the basis often of gifts or bribes to officials who could help solve any problems that arose with the authorities. The resulting situation proved reasonably stable until the unrest of 2010, when both approaches were quickly overtaken by events.

Research for this report was carried out in the south, largely the Osh area and surrounding districts. Given the high level of tension in this region, nearly all interviews – some repeated on multiple occasions – were anonymous.

¹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°193, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, 23 August 2010.

² According to the 2009 census, ethnic Kyrgyz account for 71 per cent of the country's total population of 5.36 million. Ethnic Uzbeks at just over 14 per cent, or 768,405, are the largest ethnic minority. Ethnic Russians make up the other main minority, with 7.8 per cent of the population, about 420,000, in 2009. The Russian population has probably diminished significantly since the June violence. Ethnic Kyrgyz are in a substantial majority in the south as a whole – defined as the three regions of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken. Uzbeks are almost at parity in Osh city, however, with 44 per cent of the population, and are a significant minority in Jalalabad city, with almost 35 per cent. The census is available at <http://212.42.101.100:8088/nacstat/sites/default/files/Book%20II-1.pdf>.

II. JUNE 2010: VIOLENCE AND AFTERMATH

On the night of 10 June 2010, a dispute between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths in the centre of Osh turned into a riot, with Uzbek men rampaging through the city centre for several hours. The dynamic of violence abruptly changed early the following morning, when large and well-organised groups of young Kyrgyz men appeared on the street. These were frequently coordinated by older men, some armed with automatic weapons, and as the day progressed, they were joined by large numbers of ethnic Kyrgyz, both from the city and outlying areas, many enraged by rumours spread by cell phone that young Kyrgyz women had been raped and massacred. About a day later, ethnic violence spread to the city of Jalalabad and surrounding areas. Over 50 died in clashes in the following days. The violence in Jalalabad seemed less organised, and there were few allegations of official complicity.

The bulk of deaths and physical damage took place in Osh itself, between the early hours of 11 June and the late night of the 12th. Supported by gunmen and sometimes by armoured personnel carriers, mobs attacked Uzbek districts; members of the military, police and organised crime groups are also believed to have taken part in the assaults. In all some 420 people were killed,³ 111,000 fled to Uzbekistan, and a further 300,000 temporarily fled their homes but remained in Kyrgyzstan. Most displaced people returned home by July. Over 2,800 properties were destroyed or damaged by looting or fire.⁴ About 74 per cent of the fatalities were ethnic Uzbeks, and the majority of buildings destroyed were Uzbek-owned, many of them in traditional Uzbek districts known as *mahallas*. In subsequent trials, however, the majority of defendants have been ethnic Uzbek, giving support to the widely propagated theory in Kyrgyz political circles that the Uzbeks initiated the violence.⁵

The causes of the June 2010 events are complex and not yet fully understood, and there is little sign that the current Kyrgyz government is making any effort to do so. Nevertheless, some important factors are clear. One is the

twenty years of government neglect after independence in 1991, when little effort was made to develop a viable economic base for the new nation, or to develop adequate education or social services. Another is the tendency displayed by successive governments to sublimate any discussion of ethnic friction, and avoid public consideration of the remarkably similar and even bloodier outburst of ethnic violence in 1990.⁶ Governments consistently hewed to the line that any public consideration of ethnic frictions would only make matters worse.⁷

The result was a large population of restless, unemployed and uneducated young Kyrgyz, easily mobilised by nationalist slogans, and talk that ethnic Uzbeks were plotting secession. These problems came to a head in early 2010. Southern politicians saw the overthrow of President Bakiyev, a southerner, on 7 April that year as another move by northerners to weaken their position. Organised crime groups, including those involved in the exceedingly lucrative drug trade, saw a chance to consolidate their power and support the emergence of well-inclined politicians. These factors played into the hands of southern political leaders, who were angered at the removal of one of their own from the presidency and keen to obtain their share of economic and political power under the new dispensation.

Events in May in Jalalabad, the south's second-largest city, probably made the June violence all but inevitable. When security forces failed to respond to a local power grab by Bakiyev loyalists there, an informal militia organised by a prominent ethnic Uzbek politician, Kadyrjon Batyrov, joined supporters of another political party, Ata Meken, to suppress the local revolt. During these events, property belonging to the deposed president's family was burned. There is no hard evidence either to confirm or invalidate the allegation that Batyrov was responsible, but the most important thing was that in the feverish and confused atmosphere after Bakiyev's overthrow, many southern Kyrgyz were willing to believe that of Uzbeks. A top interim government leader noted soon after the June violence that the burnings had been a "Rubicon" in ethnic relations. The belief that Uzbeks had burned Kyrgyz property was "crucial in forming an aggressive Kyrgyz mass among the population as a whole".⁸ Tensions rose, Uzbeks called for greater rights, nationalists claimed this was proof that Uzbek separatism was again on the rise, and Osh exploded.

³ See the table of those killed during the June events produced by the NGO Kylym Shamy, <http://ksh.kg/?p=168>, 16 December 2011.

⁴ "Joint Economic Assessment: Reconciliation, Recovery and Reconstruction", Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, 21 July 2010, p. 43, at www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2010/072110.pdf.

⁵ Ethnic Uzbeks as of early 2012 were 77 per cent of those detained and charged for crimes related to the June 2010 violence. Communication to Crisis Group from an international official, February 2012.

⁶ For further details see Crisis Group Report, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, op. cit.

⁷ Crisis Group Report, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, op. cit. President Atambayev seemed to be taking the same approach in a BBC interview, 31 October 2011, shortly after his election, see fn. 28 below.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 22 July 2010, originally cited in Crisis Group Report, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, op. cit.

The political consequences of June 2010 were profound. A new leadership surfaced in the south. Osh Mayor Myrzakmatov, a Bakiyev appointee who abandoned his patron days after the April revolt, emerged as the south's pre-eminent political and economic power broker, one who never misses a chance to defy the capital. In August 2010, he shrugged off an effort by Bishkek to remove him. Other southern nationalists – second-tier Bakiyev appointees, but keen to fill the political and economic vacuum he left rather than restore him – formed a new party, Ata-Jurt. Viewed with condescension by the interim government and more established parties, it surprisingly emerged from the October 2010 legislative elections with the largest bloc of seats – 28 of 120. Its members joined a coalition cabinet, led important parliamentary committees and made one of their leaders, Akhmatbek Keldibekov, speaker. The interim government, unnerved by the swing to nationalism and anxious to avoid further violence, made no effort to challenge its political narrative. The centre of political gravity shifted to the nationalists, who have largely dominated the debate since.

A. NARRATIVES

Several official reports were issued in the wake of the violence. A National Commission of Inquiry placed the blame on the Uzbek community and supporters of former President Bakiyev. The ombudsman largely concurred.⁹ Reports by international groups, including Crisis Group, faulted both communities but concluded that the Uzbeks had been subjected to organised and brutal attacks. Crisis Group cited senior government officials who expressed the belief that prominent political figures, possibly abetted by local criminal elements, were involved in planning the attacks, and witnesses who claimed that some elements of the security organs had been complicit in the bloodshed.¹⁰

The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), an international, independent research body created at the request

of interim President Roza Otunbayeva and headed by Finnish parliamentarian Kimmo Kiljunen, started work in late October 2010, concluded it in late January 2011 and presented its findings on 3 May.¹¹ Its final report criticised the interim government's ineptitude and irresolution. It described the distribution of weapons, mostly automatic rifles, to Kyrgyz crowds, and noted that armoured personnel carriers had been surrendered without resistance and subsequently used in attacks on Uzbek communities. It concluded that the violence could not be qualified as genocide, a term often used in the Uzbek community and by its sympathisers, but found that the Uzbeks suffered the bulk of the violence, and their assailants were well-equipped and organised. The report also concluded there was a "consistent and reliable body of material" that many crimes committed during the attacks on Uzbek *mahallas* – notably murder and rape – could if proven "satisfy all three physical elements of crimes against humanity".¹²

The Commission also noted a "consistent and reliable body of material which tends to show that individual Uzbeks committed crimes during the events, including some of the enumerated crimes within the crimes against humanity definition". But it added that the material "fails to satisfy the remaining two physical elements of the definition" of crimes against humanity.¹³

The presidency was embarrassed and alarmed by the KIC report. This was largely due to fear. The leadership in Bishkek was deeply anxious that any detailed discussion of the violence and its causes could provoke a confrontation with nationalist leaders – some of whom had in fact been accused by Kyrgyz state security of involvement in the violence. It also feared it would not be able to control another outbreak of violence.¹⁴ The government's official 29-page response described the KIC report as one-sided and at times "erratic". It repeated its belief that the Bakiyev family played a major role in the unrest; challenged the assertion that attacks on the *mahallas* were organised, or that they could be classified as crimes against humanity; and concluded that the June events were an "ethnic

⁹ "There have been concerns about the lack of independence and impartiality of both investigations. At least three members of civil society, who were among members of the National Commission of Inquiry, expressed concerns about the modalities, composition and the terms of reference of the National Commission Debates in Parliament on the findings of the National Commission were characterized by numerous provocative nationalistic statements and biased remarks regarding the role of ethnic Uzbeks in the violence". Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on technical assistance and cooperation on human rights for Kyrgyzstan, UN Human Rights Council, 1 April 2011.

¹⁰ Crisis Group Report, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, op. cit. Human Rights Watch reached similar conclusions; see "Where is the Justice? Interethnic Violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan and its Aftermath", 16 August 2010.

¹¹ The full report and related documents can be found on www.k-ic.org.

¹² The KIC defined the three physical elements as "an act ... such as murder, rape or serious injury to body or physical health; committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack; directed against any civilian population". "Final Report", paragraph 246, www.k-ic.org/images/stories/kic_report_english_final.pdf.

¹³ Ibid, paragraph 251.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, members of presidential staff, Bishkek, March and April 2011.

conflict in which both sides were armed, committed violence against each other, and suffered casualties”.¹⁵

Government anxiety notwithstanding, the KIC report generated relatively little public comment. Somewhat confusingly, the nationalist-dominated parliament announced plans both to ban Kiljunen from Kyrgyzstan and summon him to explain the report. Politicians named in various reports, official and unofficial, denied involvement in the violence.¹⁶ The Uzbek leader Kadyrjon Batyrov, who reportedly obtained political asylum in Sweden, was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment for fomenting mass unrest, separatist activity and inciting “national, racial, religious or inter-regional enmity”.¹⁷

B. SOUTHERN REVENGE: THE KYRGYZ LEADERSHIP’S OFF-THE-RECORD ANALYSIS

The government seemed preoccupied and often paralysed by the nationalist surge. Leading members, careful to speak only in private, did not challenge reports that prominent southern Kyrgyz politicians had played an active role in the violence. Senior officials in fact voiced such suspicions just weeks after the June violence. One of the most highest ranking senior emphasised that southern Kyrgyz could be very hot-headed. Two southern politicians publicly accused of involvement in attacks on Uzbeks were “very southern people”, the official remarked. “Their mentality is that [ethnic] Kyrgyz should be protected. They blame the Uzbeks, and say they do not respect our culture” and feel that without a firm Kyrgyz position, the Uzbeks would “crush us”.¹⁸

As the year progressed, private discussions became franker and accusations more explicit. Eight months after the June events and in a long discussion on them, the official cited above was bitterly critical of Myrzakmatov and other na-

tionalist leaders. The mayor is “an ugly man”, working with organised crime figures, the person said; senior members of the main nationalist party are “half-gangsters”, who are “making ridiculous demands for high level appointments”. Discussing the violence and its aftermath, the same leader asked rhetorically: “Who worked in Osh in June? Who grabbed buildings? Who participated in organised plunder?”, and then named a number of top organised crime figures who had allegedly cooperated with southern politicians in launching the attacks. Organised crime groups provided the muscle for attacks on *mahallas*, the official said, and were rewarded with a free hand in the extortion, illegal detention and ill-treatment, almost exclusively directed against Uzbeks, that gripped the city for months after June 2010.¹⁹

Under the cover of anonymity, senior officials accused the South’s new leaders not only of responsibility for the June violence, but also of active involvement in the drug trade.²⁰ All have indignantly denied this. Myrzakmatov in particular accused “some of my friends in the interim government” of creating his reputation as a “narcobaron” and a bandit, which he called a fiction created by his political opponents.²¹

One alleged organised crime figure gave a press interview to deny any involvement in the June events. Almambet Anapiyayev told a newspaper interviewer that his “boys” had been on the street during the unrest, but only to offer medical assistance. In the same interview, he admitted to past links with criminal groups, but said he now concentrates exclusively on the development of traditional Kyrgyz martial arts. He also stressed his devotion to a tradition often cited by those ethnic Kyrgyz who view the June events as an heroic response to Uzbek aggression – the Jigit tradition of fearless, ruthless young Kyrgyz mounted warriors, answerable to a single commander, often a feu-

¹⁵ “Comments by the Government of Kyrgyzstan in response to the report of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission into the events in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010”, available on KIC website, www.k-ic.org.

¹⁶ Kamchybek Tashiyev, an Ata-Jurt leader who was accused by Kyrgyzstan’s state security agency of participating in the violence, claims that he protected Uzbeks during the unrest, as does Myrzakmatov. Ata-Jurt is not the only party to be accused of links to organised crime. Senior members of parliament from the president’s Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan assert that other parties also have extensive links to organised crime leaders. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, February 2011.

¹⁷ Press Service of the Kyrgyzstan Supreme Court, 31 January 2012, www.sudsystem.kg/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=932.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 22 July 2010, originally cited in Crisis Group Report, *The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan*, op. cit.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, high-level official, Bishkek, 29 March 2011. Most accounts say the police were responsible for the extortion. The two versions of the events seem contradictory but are not. The majority of Kyrgyz observers, as well as international specialists in security who follow law enforcement in Kyrgyzstan, say that police and organised crime are synonymous. See also Section III.D below.

²⁰ So did the Russians. An anonymous Russian source, described as a Moscow-based “high-level representative of one of the Russian power [ie, security] structures” gave an interview to a widely-read news site in which he named several high-ranking members of the Bakiyev regime and an Ata-Jurt leader who, he alleged, were actively involved in the drug trade. Ferghana.ru website, 30 August 2011, www.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=7067.

²¹ Myrzakmatov made these accusations in his 2011 book, *In Search of the Truth. The Osh Tragedy: documents, facts, appeals and declarations* (Bishkek, 2011), p. 19. See Section III.A below for details.

dal chieftain or local dignitary.²² He went on to complain at the way that Kyrgyzstan's minorities, among them "Chechens, Uighurs and Uzbeks", had "grown bold and were spitting on Kyrgyz".²³

In the view of the senior government leader quoted above, the underlying cause of the violence was the rivalry between northern and southern political elites, in particular the southerners' belief that northern Kyrgyz had enjoyed inordinate political power since independence in 1991. "June was retaliation for April", the official said, attributing the phrase to senior nationalist politicians. In other words, the overthrow of Bakiyev, a southerner, and his perceived replacement by a group of northerners had enraged members of the southern elite who felt excluded from power. The June violence was their way of restoring their hold on the south. The official clearly found this both persuasive as an explanation of the events and a warning for the future, and noting that the nationalists had done very well from the June events, concluded grimly that those like Myrzakmatov and another nationalist leader, Kamchybek Tashiyev, were now "national heroes".²⁴

II. AFTER THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Presidential elections in October 2011 resulted in the overwhelming victory of Almazbek Atambayev, formerly the interim government's prime minister. Nationalist presidential candidates fared poorly, claimed fraud, and called a series of demonstrations that soon fizzled.²⁵ An Ata-Jurt leader, Akhmatbek Keldibekov, lost the parliament speakership following allegations of frequent contacts with a major organised crime figure.²⁶ Ata-Jurt also lost its position in the ruling coalition, and in February 2012 announced its merger with another stridently nationalist party, Butun Kyrgyzstan, led by Adakhan Madumarov. Yet even after the elections, the nationalists remained vociferous, while the new, largely northern government showed signs of continuing nervousness about the South. Myrzakmatov kept a certain distance from the election campaign, and there is no indication that his position was weakened as a result of Atambayev's victory.

Atambayev had visited the south during the campaign and been greeted tepidly by Kyrgyz. Uzbeks voted for him "without any great hopes", as a local Uzbek leader put it.²⁷ After his installation as president, he made several statements that could be interpreted as gestures to the Uzbeks, but there was no concrete follow-up.²⁸ Members of his en-

²² Jigit is derived, according to most Russian dictionaries, from a Turkic word meaning "young". Young men on horseback have often joined waves of protests in recent years. See Shvedova, *Dictionary of the Russian Language* (Moscow, 2007) [Толковый Словарь Русского Языка, Moscow 2007, and Max Vasmer, *Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language*, accessible on http://mirslovarei.com/content_fasmer/dzhigit-26321.html. Jigits appear, often in an ambiguous light, in works by Lev Tolstoy (*Haji Murat*) and Mikhail Lermontov (*Hero of Our Time*). The Anapiyayev interview was originally published in the Arena.kg newspaper, 6 October 2011, www.gezitter.org/society/5613/.

²³ Anapiyayev interview, op. cit. The quotations are taken from a Russian translation on the Gezitter.org website, which specialises in Russian-language translations of articles from Kyrgyz-language media. At least one pro-Russian website published in Bishkek has offered a lengthy but unsourced account of the violence and its main alleged organisers, naming prominent Kyrgyz politicians and crime figures. See in particular www.paruskg.info/2010/11/11/35280.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, high-level official, Bishkek, 29 March 2011.

²⁵ The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observer Mission described the elections as taking place in a "generally calm atmosphere" but noted "significant irregularities on election day, especially during the counting and tabulation of votes", expressed doubts about the turnout figures and voiced concern about shortcomings in some aspects of preparations for the polls. "Election Observation Mission Final Report", Warsaw, 10 January 2012. Some supporters of the new president conceded that local officials had probably been over-zealous in massaging the Atambayev vote.

²⁶ These include celebrating New Year 2010 at a hotel with the crime figure and later flying on the same plane with him to Dubai. A parliamentary commission examined these and other allegations and endorsed a demand for the speaker's recall. "Conclusion of a commission of deputies, formed by resolution 1392-B of the parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, 7 December 2011". The conclusion and another document laying out a number of charges against the speaker were made available to Crisis Group by a member of parliament. After resigning, Keldibekov claimed he had been the victim of political intrigue by the country's new leadership and complained that many people had celebrated the New Year in the hotel. "Киргизского спикера вывели за рамки закона" [The Kirgiz speaker has been removed from the framework of the law], *Kommersant Daily* newspaper, Moscow, 13 December 2011.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

²⁸ In February 2012, he instructed the prosecutor-general and Kyrgyzstan's state security committee to "scrupulously investigate" crimes stemming from the June events. No reference was

tourage are not surprised. Some have long said that he is more of a deal maker than a confrontational politician. Any effort to reopen an investigation would quickly bring him in conflict with the southern nationalists.²⁹ A senior aide said the president is not fully engaged on southern issues. The new government is aware of the gravity of the situation in the south and agrees that openings to the Uzbek community are vital, he said, but still had no way to push these through, because it has no political leverage in the region. “The mayor controls everything. He has the means, the forces and the popularity” to resist Bishkek.³⁰ Myrzakmatov meanwhile laid out his version of the June events in a book that took a strongly anti-Uzbek line and further advanced his self-image as a national hero.

A. THE MAYOR’S STORY

Myrzakmatov’s book was published in Kyrgyz first, then in Russian in December 2011, just after the new president took office.³¹ The 414-page volume is largely a collection of statements and official documents issued by the mayor or his office in the period surrounding the violence. The 100-page interview that opens it, however, presents a detailed picture of the June events, as well as an ideological vision for Kyrgyzstan that has little place for any ethnic minority.

The mayor states bluntly that “it is necessary that the reins that govern the country, that the creation of stability in Kyrgyzstan, that the strengthening of national unity and intercommunal accord be in the hands of the Kyrgyz themselves”.³² The Kyrgyz are the “state-forming national grouping” around which the “other ethnic groups that live

on our land” will one day unite.³³ The mayor sees himself as the representative of a new generation of politicians who will mobilise a “broad layer of patriotic youth” to replace the tired and discredited political class personified by the interim government and thus by extension the country’s current leadership, most of whom occupied senior positions in the interim administration. The interim government, he added, did deals with the “separatist-inclined leaders of the Uzbek people”, including its principal leader, Kadyrjon Batyrov, largely in the hope of winning their support in parliamentary elections. Without such contacts, he claimed, Uzbek separatists would not have dared “to move so impudently against the Kyrgyz state and people”.³⁴

Other references to patriotic youth in the book make it clear that Myrzakmatov is referring to ethnic Kyrgyz. Though he drops an occasional kind word for individual Uzbeks, most mentions are linked directly to separatism and threats to the country’s territorial integrity. The clear message, stressed repeatedly, is that separatism is never far beneath the surface in the Uzbek community and is the principal long-term threat to southern Kyrgyz.³⁵ His descriptions of thousands of Uzbeks on the streets of Osh, “armed to the teeth”, make it clear that he views Uzbek separatism as an organised and well-equipped mass phenomenon, not the work of a radical fringe.

The outbreaks of violence in 1990 and 2010 were both the “idea of separatist-inclined leaders of the Uzbek diaspora living in the south of the republic to create an Uzbek autonomous republic in Kyrgyzstan”, he writes. The conflicts were largely the result of the state’s failure to take steps against the “diaspora’s” separatism, as well as the lack of a “comprehensive national ideology”.³⁶ Kyrgyz officials often claim that the word diaspora in Russian is a neutral synonym for an ethnic group. The Russian Academy of Sciences’ standard one-volume Russian dictionary, however, defines the term as “people of a single nationality, living outside their country of origin, outside their historical homeland”.³⁷ Myrzakmatov uses the word on several occasions. He also refers to separatist leaders

made to the thousands of June-related cases that are still pending. The president of Kyrgyzstan has signed a directive, “on urgent measures for the strengthening of public security”, 24.kg news site, 2 February 2012, www.24.kg/politic/120243-prezident-kyrgyzstana-podpisal-ukaz-laquoo.html.

²⁹ On 31 October 2011, in one of his first interviews after his election, he was critical of Western journalists and international organisations for singling out the plight of Uzbeks in the south. “You and various international organisations who single out the problems of one or another ethnic group – it is you who divide the people of Kyrgyzstan”, he told a BBC radio interviewer. In this connection, he added that the country’s security structures are “pretty corrupt”.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, January 2012.

³¹ В поисках истины. Ошская трагедия: документы, факты, интервью, обращения и заявления – Бишкек, 2011 [*In Search of the Truth. The Osh Tragedy: documents, facts, appeals and declarations* – Bishkek, 2011], henceforth *In Search*.

³² Ibid, p. 97. The adjective translated here as “intercommunal” is межнациональной. The term нация is frequently used to designate a specific national grouping.

³³ Ibid, p. 14.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 80.

³⁵ The correct diagnosis of ethnic tensions in the South is: “blatant separatism aimed at undermining the territorial integrity of Kyrgyzstan, threatening national security and intercommunal concord”, *ibid*, p.12.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 6. Soviet investigations into the 1990 events failed to mention separatism among its causes, Myrzakmatov said, and “because of this the patriotic youth, including myself, did not agree” with official conclusions, *ibid*, p. 7.

³⁷ Shvedova, Толковый Словарь Русского Языка, *op. cit*.

of the Uzbek community, driving home his thesis of Uzbek mass responsibility for the June violence.³⁸

The June events were in essence an attempted Uzbek coup, the mayor suggests: the violence was not a clash between unemployed youth. Uzbek separatist leaders, aiming to destroy Kyrgyzstan's territorial integrity, planned "to seize the organs of local power, security forces and, before the Kyrgyz could 'come to', take over with lightning speed state buildings and announce to the outside world the creation of an autonomous [entity] and the structures of government".³⁹ Many details are questionable, and key events are missing. There is little reference to attacks on Uzbek districts, and no discussion of casualties in Uzbek areas. In an apparent indirect reference, he admits he lost the "information war" to the Western media, which is frequently accused of overemphasising Uzbeks' plight.⁴⁰ He claims that 10,000 Uzbeks had gathered by the Hotel Alay, the site of the first night's violence – a much larger estimate than most others. In his version, ethnic Kyrgyz were totally surprised by a heavily-armed Uzbek assault: the power grab was foiled by the mayor and a few heroic Kyrgyz inspired by the Jigit tradition and the spirit of Manas, the Kyrgyz national hero.

Many of Myrzakmatov's themes – uncaring northern leaders, hostile Western pressure, beleaguered southern Kyrgyz and the need for Uzbeks to understand their place in modern Kyrgyz society – are regular features of political discussion in the south. Many well-educated southern Kyrgyz, in fact, view the mayor as the moderate, acceptable face of nationalism. Some youth activists who meet him professionally expressed admiration for his communication and people skills, which, they felt, stood out in sharp relief to those of some of the other, cruder nationalist leaders.⁴¹

B. IDEOLOGY WITHOUT STRATEGY

Senior government officials and members of Kyrgyzstan's political establishment dismiss some of Myrzakmatov's assertions out of hand. Asked about his relentless emphasis on Uzbek secessionism, a top member of the interim government – still not willing to be quoted publicly – re-

marked "I never heard that the Uzbeks demanded autonomy" during the 2010 crisis.⁴² Yet, the mayor's version of events is likely to be taken very seriously by many southerners, particularly in the absence of a compelling account from Bishkek.

What was widely described by political leaders as an all-out effort to remove Myrzakmatov in March 2012 apparently foundered when his party won the Osh municipal elections by a comfortable margin.⁴³ (The city council appoints the mayor.) President Atambayev and Prime Minister Omurbek Babanov fielded separate slates, while the two most prominent nationalist leaders, Kamchybek Tashiyev and Adakhan Madumarov, rallied around Myrzakmatov.⁴⁴ Babanov, who has a political foothold and business interests in the south, was described as the main strategist of the anti-Myrzakmatov campaign. Long-time political observers and strategists, however, warned before the polls that any abrupt effort to remove the mayor – without carefully laying the ground work by undermining or co-opting his key supporters – risked at least another political crisis and quite possibly serious violence.⁴⁵ Any effort to unseat him will have to contend with Myrzakmatov's political machine, his massive economic clout, his control of most security forces and his street muscle, composed of various informal and sports groups.

Even if the mayor is eventually removed, his ideology may well outlast his tenure. He has given voice to an interpretation of recent history that many southern Kyrgyz, and not just radical nationalists, find highly persuasive. It is also deeply flawed. In particular, Myrzakmatov has not laid out a program, but his message drives home the need for ethnic Kyrgyz pre-eminence and for ethnic minority – Uzbek at this stage – subservience. Yet, other than isolating or demoralising the minorities, he does not seem to have a plan for them. A senior member of the Atambayev administration, watching from Bishkek, expressed bafflement when asked what Myrzakmatov intended for the Uzbeks. "He can't squeeze them all out", he said.⁴⁶ The mayor's approach seems visceral and improvisatory, and he is walking a delicate line. His praise of patriotic Kyrgyz and warnings against secessionist plots risk sending

³⁸ "Kyrgyz nationalism was a response to the separatist slogans of leaders of the Uzbek community and their dangerous attempts to undermine Kyrgyzstan's integrity and sovereignty, *In Search*, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*; Myrzakmatov also recalls that one of his first steps when fighting broke out was to ban access by foreign journalists to the wounded or morgues, *ibid*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Communication to Crisis Group, independent researcher working in Osh, February 2012.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 29 March 2011.

⁴³ Myrzakmatov's "Unity of nations" party won over 47 per cent, the president's Social Democrats almost 24 per cent, and Babanov's Respublika 17 per cent. The possibility of a post-election coalition aimed at dismissing the mayor cannot be ruled out.

⁴⁴ "Kamchybek Tashiyev: we will support Melis Myrzakmatov", *Vecherny Bishkek* newspaper, 9 February 2012, www.vb.kg/news/politics/2012/02/09/178347_kamchybek_tashiev_my_bydem_podderjivat_melisbeka_myrzakmatova.html.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, government adviser, September 2011; member of parliament, October 2011.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, December 2011.

the wrong signal to his base constituency, the angry young, impulsive Kyrgyz, whose situation has not improved since June 2010. The mayor now has a major stake in the south's political and economic status quo and can ill afford violence while he is in power.

In one way, Myrzakmatov has already left his mark on Osh. A program of monumental architecture is reconfiguring the city's identity to emphasise Kyrgyz roots. Imposing statues erected since 2010 include a ten-metre high monument to Manas, Kurmanjan Datka, and other Kyrgyz leaders, either legendary or historical. Another commemorates Kyrgyz nomadic traditions – in sharp distinction to the traditionally urbanised and sedentary Uzbeks. The building program gives an ethnic Kyrgyz colouration to an ancient Fergana Valley city on the border with Uzbekistan – somewhat at odds with its close historical association with the Timurid Emperor Babur, founder of the Mughal dynasty, who was born in modern Uzbekistan, buried in Kabul, wrote his memoirs in Chagatai Turkic and was equally fluent in Persian.

Many southerners favour an assimilationist policy. They believe tension would be alleviated if the Uzbeks agreed to linguistic, physical and probably cultural assimilation, accepting Kyrgyz-language education, abandoning their own districts and marrying Kyrgyz. Myrzakmatov has often voiced this approach. In September 2011, the city government flirted briefly with the immediate introduction of Kyrgyz-language instruction Uzbek-language schools. He has offered cash rewards for mixed marriages.

The city government has announced its intent to replace “monoethnic districts” – bureaucratic jargon for the *mahallas* – with ethnically mixed high-rise buildings. Their rationale is that mixed ethnic areas were not attacked during the violence, but the logic is flawed, based on the assumption that the attacks were spontaneous, not well organised and backed by military armour. It assumes that the police tried actively to protect the *mahallas*, whereas there are considerable indications that members of the security forces stood aside and at times participated. The *mahallas* are rarely in fact monoethnic: many have traditionally been home to Russians and other ethnic minorities. Some Russians were, in fact, able to witness the pogroms at close-hand precisely because the attackers seemed to have received instructions not to target them.

At the same time, assimilation does not appear to conform fully to Myrzakmatov's vision of ethnic minorities clustering obediently around the majority, politically dominant ethnic group – perhaps partially assimilated, but not enough to blend imperceptibly into the majority. The mayor envisages a clearly subordinate position for what he often calls the Uzbek diaspora. Other nationalists probably would not agree with an assimilationist approach ei-

ther: Tashiyev caused a brief stir in February 2012, calling for the government to be run by “pure-blooded” Kyrgyz. This was taken as an attack on Prime Minister Babanov, whose mother is Kurdish.⁴⁷ It seems to take little for an Uzbek to become a separatist in Myrzakmatov's eyes: talk of a special status for the language or representation in regional affairs already smacks of extremism.⁴⁸ His rank-and-file supporters feel the same. “The only reason they [the Uzbek minority] talk about Uzbek language so much is because they are planning to move the border”, said a retired Kyrgyz policeman.⁴⁹ It may well be this sense of impermanence, of dominance without durability, that leaves so many southern Kyrgyz feeling insecure.

C. KYRGYZ IN THE SOUTH

Many analysts and workers from international organisations or foreign NGOs assumed that the violence was a fringe phenomenon, born of unemployment, lack of education and manipulation by unscrupulous politicians. They assumed that the Kyrgyz middle class in the south – those with higher education, foreign languages or members of the professions – might have a more conciliatory response to the events and might provide a bridge for reconciliation between the communities. These were after all the sort of people hired by the large international aid and relief presence that deployed in Osh after June 2010. Analysts were tempted to make a distinction between the violent, disenfranchised young men who took part in the violence – organised and directed, it should be stressed, by considerably older and more calculating figures – and the urban middle class. They were disappointed.⁵⁰

The image of ethnic Uzbeks as dangerous outsiders, ruthless opportunists who had long been plotting a power grab, proved to have deep roots. In part this was because few people had access to any analysis of the violence that challenged those versions that placed responsibility for the events on Uzbek shoulders. Even when they did, how-

⁴⁷ “Is it a sign of guilt to say a Kyrgyz should lead?”, Radio Azattyk web site, 13 February 2012, http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_tashiev_babanov/24480047.html. Tashiyev did not deny the quotation but claimed it had been misrepresented by journalists and activists in the pay of his enemies. Mothers, he stressed, are “sacred”.

⁴⁸ Thus Myrzakmatov wrote in his book that after the events of May 2010 in Jalalabad, Uzbek leaders, including Batyrov, further inflamed the mood by raising the issues of the Uzbek language and of government “cadre policy”, as well as autonomy. *In Search*, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 23 November 2011.

⁵⁰ After the presidential elections in late 2011, the head of a major NGO remarked that the Kyrgyz staff were fine at work, “but we pretty much know who they voted for”. Crisis Group interview, Osh, November 2011.

ever, many seemed inclined to dismiss these findings out of hand. Leaders of one highly regarded local NGO, a frequent recipient of international grants and working directly in the field of post-conflict reconciliation, privately dismissed the Kiljunen report as yet more pressure from the international community, northern politicians and Kyrgyz civil society. Many southerners clearly feel that these three institutions are the pillars of anti-southern prejudice.

Southern NGO activists tended to respond with extreme sensitivity to attempts to discuss the plight of Uzbeks. An article in an Osh youth paper in August 2011, for example, drew considerable criticism from Kyrgyz NGO activists because of its discussion of the decline in Uzbek enrolment in higher education after the 2010 violence. One complained – voicing a line common in both Osh and official circles in Bishkek – that focusing attention on an Uzbek-specific problem “divides people and only deepens the problem”.⁵¹ The starting point of many southern Kyrgyz explanations of the June events is that the Uzbeks brought ruin upon themselves. They had been planning a power grab for years, but miscalculated. This argument emerged quickly and has been remarkably tenacious. One month after the violence a well-educated young Kyrgyz posted a message in English on a web site devoted to photographs of the events:

Uzbek people used to have the same rules as for Kyrgyz ones, they had Uzbek schools, universities and all conditions. They must appreciate it. But they wanted more and started this conflict with the guns. Before this tragedy started, 80-90 per cent of guns in shops in Osh were bought by people of Uzbek nationality, it means they were preparing and started this conflict.⁵²

She continued with an appeal for young people to join in a campaign to plant flowers in Osh. This narrative has now become deeply embedded – and perhaps predominant – even among many otherwise liberal southern Kyrgyz.

In more remote rural areas, the mood remains raw. Harking back to June 2010, some politicians refer to the brave young Jigits who came down from their mountain villages to save their native land in a time of need.⁵³ Some young Osh residents speak of the “volunteers” who came in to save the city. Speaking of the young men who joined in the pogroms, a Kyrgyz observer noted that “these kids

gained a lot of pride as a result of the events”, adding that “they have not had much to feel proud of for a long time”.⁵⁴ Villagers refer to young men killed in the fighting as “*shakhid*” (martyrs).⁵⁵ An independent researcher visiting a remote Kyrgyz village was told by teachers that southern Uzbeks should be sent to Uzbekistan, where, given their ethnic origins, they would be happier. The researcher was then urged not to raise the June events with village youth, as they were only too keen to return to Osh or Jalalabad and continue the fight against the Uzbeks.⁵⁶

The key southern Kyrgyz narratives all concur that Uzbeks of southern Kyrgyzstan have again become a dangerous “other”, a latent threat. Many voice the fear that the current situation is only a breathing space before more violence breaks out.

Kyrgyz appear more acutely aware than before of the presence of Uzbekistan, just a few kilometres away, with over six times Kyrgyzstan’s population, a powerful security machine by regional standards and a decisive, ruthless president.⁵⁷ “Few people have any confidence in the future here – neither Kyrgyz nor Uzbek”, said a Kyrgyz professional, voicing a very common opinion. “Sooner or later there will be another explosion”.⁵⁸ Many Kyrgyz and Uzbek interlocutors say members of their communities are buying weapons for self-defence. Very few were willing to say or even hint that they had done so themselves.

D. UZBEKS IN THE SOUTH

Uzbeks continue to retreat, or be forced, into their shell. As a representative of a major international body put it, their “space and voice in the community appears to be

⁵¹ Communication to Crisis Group, independent researcher working in Osh, February 2012.

⁵² http://uzbektragedy.com/?page_id=1312&cpage=1#comment, posted on 26 July 2010. It elicited abusive messages from Uzbeks.

⁵³ Myrzakmatov has a particularly florid passage on this in his book, *In Search*, op. cit., p. 29. He confuses the situation somewhat, by playing down elsewhere in the book any involvement by young Jigits in the June events.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, November 2011.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Kyrgyz residents of Kurshab and Aravan, November 2011.

⁵⁶ Communication to Crisis Group, independent researcher working in southern Kyrgyzstan, December 2011.

⁵⁷ These anxieties will not be lessened by Myrzakmatov’s story that on 13 June 2010, 5,000 “handpicked” Uzbek troops – “executioners who know no pity” and who had already crushed the 2005 unrest in the Uzbek city of Andijan – were on their way to take over Osh, destroy the city’s leadership and “wipe its infrastructure off the face of the earth”. The assault was allegedly countermanded at the last minute, in unexplained circumstances, by Uzbekistan’s president, Islam Karimov. Myrzakmatov depicted how, as the hour of the expected assault approached, his lieutenants phoned in to bid farewell before their fight to the death, while the mayor counted the bullets in his handgun, set aside the last for himself, and prayed to the spirit of Manas. *In Search*, op. cit., pp. 63-65. The story was dismissed by a senior member of the Atambayev administration as “gibberish”. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, January 2012.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 24 November 2011.

progressively limited, which affects their enjoyment of all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, social and political”.⁵⁹ This process is sustained by a steady pattern of unpleasantness in everyday life: in public transport, at the market and in dealings with local officials. Probably the most scarring form of harassment is still the fear of arrest, torture and detention, often with the aim of extortion.

For Uzbeks, this started soon after the violence ended and has been a permanent feature since in Osh and other parts of the south. Neither arbitrary arrest nor torture is new or specific to any part of Kyrgyzstan. Years of attempted police reforms, notably by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have had no appreciable effect, observers in the field of security say, and the police remain a byword for brutality, corruption and criminality.⁶⁰ Some international specialists in the field feel that the tightly-knit texture of corruption in law enforcement bodies forecloses any entry-point for potential reforms. The law enforcement bodies are “self-sustaining criminal organisations”, a specialist said.⁶¹ Those who reject this ethos do not last long in its ranks.⁶² Some senior Western officials, in fact, have recently voiced the belief that police reform programs should be cancelled.⁶³ Meanwhile, torture is an irreplaceable part of police procedure, human rights advocates say.⁶⁴ Without it, one noted, there would be no successful court prosecutions. The vast ma-

jority of convictions are made on the basis of confessions, nearly all extracted by torture.⁶⁵

The wave of abusive detentions, extortion and torture directed at the Uzbek community since soon after June 2010 is widely referred to simply as “impunity”.⁶⁶ If police abuse and torture are unexceptional, the extent, duration and the clear target of this campaign has been highly unusual. Most long-time observers feel that senior southern politicians and officials continue to countenance abuses in order to ensure police support.⁶⁷ With rare exceptions the victims have all been Uzbek, some as young as fourteen. They range from migrant workers, often thought to have large amounts of cash on their return from Russia or elsewhere, to businessmen. Targets are picked up off the street or in their homes; sometimes they are charged with crimes; at other times, they are detained pending investigation. Friends or families are required to pay, whether for release, for torture or abuse to stop, for a lesser charge or a

⁵⁹ Communication to Crisis Group, March 2012.

⁶⁰ When asked in a press interview what constituted the main threat to Kyrgyzstan’s security, the president of a large Kyrgyz NGO answered: “... our law enforcement system. Any mother will tell you that she is scared not of extremism or terrorism but that the police will pick up her son, beat, torture him, illegally ‘lock him away’ or – god forbid – take the case to court, which automatically means that the child has no chance to return to normal life”. Interview, Raya Kadyrova, president, Foundation for Tolerance International, “If someone tries to touch”, 24.kg news website, 24 August 2011, www.24.kg/politic/107487-raya-kadyrova-esli-kto-to-popytaetsya-tronut.html, 24 August 2011.

⁶¹ Many Kyrgyz politicians and foreign observers believe that the Kyrgyz leg of the drug smuggling route from Afghanistan to Russia is protected by border troops and police. Asked who the current chief protector of this multi-billion dollar business was, three sources – a government minister, and two Western security specialists, interviewed separately – all named one of the highest-ranking security officials in the south. Crisis Group interviews, Osh and Bishkek, October 2011.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, international observer, Bishkek, November 2011.

⁶³ Crisis Group interviews, senior official of an OSCE-affiliated body, Bishkek, 29 November, 2011; senior international organisation official, Bishkek, November 2011.

⁶⁴ In January 2011, Osh City police picketed the local headquarters of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) in protest against the alleged torture of three colleagues whom the SCNS had detained on suspicion of extortion.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 21 November 2011.

⁶⁶ The term *безнаказанность* is used. Initially almost anyone in a uniform took part in the raids on Uzbeks, a Kyrgyz observer said. Crisis Group interview, Osh, November 2011. Gradually the criminal investigation police came to play the central role. Most beatings and torture allegedly take place in police temporary detention facilities (Изолятор временного содержания) known usually by the Russian initials IVS. These are cells often attached to police stations. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, issued after a December 2011 visit to Kyrgyzstan, noted: “Almost all detainees interviewed indicated that they had been subjected to mistreatment or beating since the time of apprehension and delivery to the temporary detention facility for the purpose of extracting a confession”. Mendez also expressed his concern that “serious human rights violations committed in the context of ongoing investigations into the events of June 2010 and after have continued unabated in recent months”. www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-61-Add2_en.pdf.

⁶⁷ The government maintains that it is taking energetic steps to stamp out torture and abuse. In its comments to the Special Rapporteur’s statement, it noted that the prosecutor-general issued several instructions in 2011 strengthening measures against torture and making senior prosecutors personally liable for enforcing its prohibition. An “Action Plan” on the prevention of torture was also being implemented, the government noted. “Mission to Kyrgyzstan: comments by the State on the report of the Special Rapporteur”, www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-61-Add5_en.pdf. International and Kyrgyz human rights specialists, however, say these measure are not applied with vigour or consistency. While the prosecutor-general herself seems committed to curbing torture, international officials noted, she receives little support. “She is pretty much on her own”, said one senior international official. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, February 2011.

lesser sentence, depending on the progress of the case.⁶⁸ Most human rights observers say the minimum bribe is \$1,000.⁶⁹ In all instances, the detainees were beaten or tortured, sometimes after being handed over for brutalisation by common criminals held in the same facility.

As late as the end of 2011, international monitors estimated receiving an average of 40 complaints a month.⁷⁰ This is likely to be only a very small fraction of the real number of abuses. Most victims of impunity are believed to avoid international bodies or local human rights defenders, preferring to reach a private agreement with authorities. This is in part because the chances of redress are minimal, and in part because time is of the essence when attempting to obtain the release of a detained relative. Complaints of brutality are usually dismissed by the police, ignored by judges, or result in further imprisonment and torture until the detainee drops the allegations.⁷¹ International observers have also recorded cases where officials and police warn Uzbeks not to press charges or go to international organisations. In one recorded case, police warned an Uzbek who tried file a complaint for assault that “the international organisations will one day leave, and then you will have to deal with us alone. So it is better that you behave”.⁷²

If the case goes to trial, defence lawyers, the defendants themselves and on occasion international monitors are abused and harassed by spectators. Lawyers and monitors allege that a civic group, “Victims of Osh” (Ош шейиттери), is particularly active in this. Monitors have also recorded

incidents in which police warned would-be defence lawyers that they risked harassment by Victims of Osh if they defended Uzbeks.⁷³ The group, founded in July 2010, and most of whose members are women, is widely viewed – including by senior government officials and politicians – as a militant ally of the mayor. It has entrée to the higher echelons of power, including President Atambayev – an acknowledgement, Bishkek politicians say, of its influence on the streets of Osh.⁷⁴

The group’s president, Turungay Aytieva, denied that her organisation harassed defence lawyers, saying that it challenged them when they did not tell the truth but did not beat them up. She also asserted that the judicial system was “100 per cent corrupt”. She said the group concentrates on social and moral support for victims of the violence, including 50 Uzbek families, and added that she has excellent access to Myrzakmatov, who provided the movement with an office and other assistance.⁷⁵

The government acknowledges the problem of torture and has taken steps to address it, but these have proven almost completely ineffectual. The prosecutor-general issued three decrees in 2011 aimed at checking and punishing the use of torture and ill treatment of detainees. There have, however, been no successful prosecutions.⁷⁶ Three memorandums of understanding between prosecutors and southern human rights organisations have likewise had little effect. In the first place, the government needs to insist on implementation of its own anti-torture measures. It should also insist that courts apply the laws of the land with regard to inadmissibility of evidence obtained by torture. And it should shift the control of temporary detention cells – the location of much of the torture and ill treatment – from the police to the justice ministry and open them up to independent monitoring.

Arbitrary arrest and related incidents are the most violent and demoralising features of everyday Uzbek life. They

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kyrgyz and international monitors, October and November 2011. An observer noted one variation on the standard model in November 2011: officials went to an Uzbek community with a list of names. They said they had to arrest a certain number of people from the list, and the first five to pay several thousand dollars would be exempted from the sweep.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, human rights monitor, November 2011. Crisis Group interlocutors in the Uzbek community cited figures, based, they said, on personal knowledge, ranging from \$200 to \$15,000. Generally speaking, lower bribes are paid to prevent police from detaining a family member, higher ones when a relative has been arrested and interrogated. Other frequently reported harassment includes opportunistic violence – Uzbek car mechanics, for example, report being beaten if they do not offer ethnic Kyrgyz, particularly police, preferential service. Human rights observers cite regular cases of Uzbek men or women attacked and beaten in public places and police failing to intervene.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 7 November 2011.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, international official, Bishkek, 15 February 2012.

⁷² Human rights monitoring notes, made available to Crisis Group early 2012. The incident took place on 28 October 2010, in Osh. One of the alleged assailants was a policeman.

⁷³ International monitors allege that since September 2010, “Victims of Osh” has systematically disrupted the trials of ethnic Uzbeks, sometimes using physical violence, and has intimidated witnesses, judges and lawyers. No measures have been taken against it, the same sources add. Crisis Group interviews, Osh, October-November 2011.

⁷⁴ The group had a closed-door meeting with Atambayev during his visit to Osh in February 2011, *Vecherny Bishkek* newspaper, 16 February 2012. The head of “Victims of Osh”, Turungay Aytieva, said that discussion focused on compensation for victims of the violence. Crisis Group phone interview, 17 February 2012.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group phone interview, Turungay Aytieva, 17 February 2012.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, international official, Bishkek, 5 March 2012.

have been accompanied and reinforced by other patterns of pressure. An Uzbek interlocutor, formerly prominent in the southern Uzbek community, described this as “everyday unpleasantness”. Other interviewees offered numerous examples: an Uzbek goes to the market, and prices go up because of their ethnicity; a Kyrgyz goes to an Uzbek shop, and takes something without paying; Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth fight, but the Kyrgyz are never arrested. Long-distance taxis, once the preserve of Uzbeks, have become Kyrgyz in border towns. An Uzbek gets in the taxi, and the driver puts on anti-Uzbek songs. “Our boys are afraid of anyone in a uniform; they have no future here. But where can they go?”⁷⁷ A leading community figure in a majority Uzbek town said she ceased to cooperate with the ethnic Kyrgyz-dominated local administration when she realised this only legitimised a local administration that was doing nothing for her community. “A black ideology is at work”, she said, its aim to appoint only ethnic Kyrgyz to positions of authority.⁷⁸

Events during the October 2010 parliamentary elections brought home to one substantial Uzbek-majority district, Aravan, the new precariousness of their situation. A community of about 105,000 on the border with Uzbekistan, relatively prosperous and with a well-connected elite that in earlier times had direct links with the regional and national leadership, it had been able to avert the June violence – largely, residents say, through the prompt action of informal leaders.

Less than three months later, according to residents and other observers intimately acquainted with the events, organised crime figures and their muscle descended on the town. They described themselves as supporters of a rising young nationalist politician, a native of the area. They confronted prominent Uzbeks, and ordered them to get out the vote for Ata-Jurt, a party that was anathema to most Uzbeks. They threatened to burn any houses whose occupants did not vote for Ata-Jurt and to take reprisals against community leaders – and their relatives – who failed to mobilise the vote. “If you want to vote for someone else, get out”, a prominent Uzbek recalled them saying. Anyone who wished to depart would be required to pay the group one million som (about \$24,000 at the rate at that time).⁷⁹ For many prominent older Uzbeks this was both intimidating and demoralising. Many are still unwilling to discuss the details. “We voted Ata-Jurt because no

one protected us”, a resident recalled.⁸⁰ The young nationalist politician was elected to the national parliament.

Since the June 2010 violence, Uzbeks have retreated into the relative security of their own communities. “It was striking”, an Uzbek professional recalled. “During the fighting, people phoned Bishkek and elsewhere, to see if anyone was coming to help. No one was. They stopped calling, and turned in on themselves [and] to Allah”.⁸¹ One sign of this turn inwards is the growth of interest in more strictly observant, and sometimes radical, Islam. This, many Uzbeks noted, is a significant change in a community that, while more observant than many other ethnic groups, had until recently been relatively liberal and relaxed in its religion.⁸²

There are repeated but anecdotal signs of Uzbeks, often well-educated, embracing more rigorously observant forms of Islam, eschewing alcohol or traditional celebrations, and of husbands urging their wives to dress modestly and wear a headscarf, sometimes even frowning on women drivers. This phenomenon was to a degree visible before June 2010, when some well-educated young Uzbeks, offended by the corruption and immorality of the Bakiyev regime, were drawn to a stricter version of Islam and traditions such as arranged marriage, but it seems to have accelerated considerably since the violence. If previously this was the province of youths and young adults, the embrace of observant Islam appears to be spreading to middle-aged and established professionals. Thus, a well-connected local community leader noted that many doctors in one area were turning to more radical forms of Islam, while others reported that some local government officials had done the same.⁸³

Most are turning to stricter Islam, not violent jihadism. In all likelihood, the underground organisation that has benefited most from June 2010 is Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a radical group that publicly rejects violence as a means to create the new Caliphate. A movement that excels at community organisation and flourishes under corrupt or authoritarian regimes – whose own actions often reinforce its arguments that Western political and economic systems are hypocritical and decadent – HT continues to make se-

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, southern Kyrgyzstan towns along the border with Uzbekistan, November 2011. The examples quoted were those most frequently cited by interlocutors during several research visits to southern Kyrgyzstan.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, community leader and activist, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Aravan, November 2011

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Aravan, October 2011.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

⁸² These comments apply to Uzbek communities in and around the city of Osh and communities along the Uzbek border in Osh region. Other Uzbek areas in the south, the town of Uzgen, for example, or the district of Nookat, have for some time had a reputation for strictly observant Islam and are often described as HT strongholds.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, late 2011.

rious inroads in Central Asian states.⁸⁴ Younger Uzbeks speak of radical religious activists giving impromptu talks on current affairs and other subjects after Friday prayers – behaviour that sounds very much like that of Hizb ut-Tahrir. “One thing about Hizb ut-Tahrir”, said an Uzbek resident of a small town just outside Osh, “They will have an answer for any question – from religion to the world economic crisis”.⁸⁵

Signs of armed jihadism are rarer and vaguer. An interlocutor in Osh and one in a small town some distance away said radically inclined acquaintances had told them the June attacks were punishment for local Uzbeks’ godlessness (безбожья). This may echo the line of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), an Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan offshoot, which after the violence called on the people of southern Kyrgyzstan to deepen their faith. The government has claimed that 200 – on other occasions 300-500 – young Uzbeks went to northern Afghanistan or Pakistan for military training. Officials have offered no further details, and a senior counter-terrorism officer said there was no supporting evidence.⁸⁶ Occasional press reports of security force operations against Islamists keep tensions high but do not prove an increase in jihadi infiltration.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Signs are growing that HT or other radical Islamic groups are improving their contacts with local administrative structures, possibly as part of a program of infiltration. Some security officials refer to HT-run villages in Jalalabad Oblast. Other informal and more radical trends of Islam are also quietly active in the villages. A researcher in a remote part of Jalalabad encountered by chance a group of very articulate young Islamist missionaries, who described themselves simply as practitioners of *daawa* (даватисты, religious mission). Communication to Crisis Group from independent researcher, January 2012. They may well have been members of Tabligh Jaamat, a missionary group banned in Tajikistan for extremism, but still tolerated in Kyrgyzstan. For a survey of Tabligh and other Islamists in Kyrgyzstan’s prisons, and the government’s ambivalent attitude towards them, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°97, *Central Asia: Islamists in Prison*, 15 December 2009.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Uzbek community figure, late 2011. See also Crisis Group Asia Report N°176, *Women and Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan*, 3 September 2009.

⁸⁶ Кыргызстан: ГКНБ опровергает слова Отунбаевой и Дуйшебаева об уходе сотен узбеков в лагеря подготовки террористов. [SCNS repudiates the words of Otunbayeva and Duishebayev about the departure of hundreds of Uzbeks to terrorist training camps], Fergana news site, 9 June 2011, www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=16840&mode=snews. The then Kyrgyz President Otunbayeva and the chair of the State Committee for National Security, Keneshbek Duishebayev, made the claims, while the latter’s deputy and chief of counter-terror operations, Marat Imankulov, said there was no confirmation of the reports.

⁸⁷ One of the more publicised incidents took place in early October 2011, when an alleged Islamist fighter was killed on the edge of Osh by security forces. He was described as being a

Interviews indicate that some young people did leave for training, but that the figure was probably a fraction of official claims. A few may have returned. Some appear to be living in home districts; a source said they are well regarded in their community. But it is unclear whether they are involved in any militant activity.⁸⁸

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), based in Northern Afghanistan and Pakistan and today a pan-Central Asia group that draws in Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Tatar and Uighurs as well as Uzbeks, has itself offered fragmentary indications that young men from Osh are fighting and dying in its ranks. Biographies of IMU fighters killed in 2011 included the story of two men from Osh, identified only as Ayub and Yunus, who died together in a suicide attack. Ayub drove a car-bomb into a crowd of “enemies of religion” in Pakistan. Yunus detonated himself shortly afterwards. Yunus had only recently joined the IMU, the biography said. He was reserved and showed neither joy nor sorrow. He only revealed his “secret” before his suicide mission: he had volunteered for martyrdom because of “the unbelievers who had caused pain to my brothers, sisters and parents. We chose this path for the sake of revenging our relatives”.⁸⁹

The general mood among Uzbek areas may be more important, and worrying, than infiltration by Islamist fighters. Feelings expressed by residents of the *mahallas* of Osh and the villages along the border are often confused, a mixture of fear, hearsay and irrational hope. Nearly all conversations are deeply pessimistic about the future and usually end on a note of coming violence – either a fresh round of nationalist attacks or an explosion of desperation by the Uzbeks. Uzbeks, even those who are well-educated, relatively secular and ranging in age from their 30s upwards, sometimes admit to a frisson of pleasure when the government warns of terrorist threats. A community activist noted that she felt a sense of satisfaction when the government issued an alert about the return of a large number of Afghan-trained Uzbek jihadis. It would be good if someone avenged us, she said. Another recalled panic in

Tajik of Uzbek origin, operating together with several other Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens and at least one Uighur. Eleven alleged militants were arrested. The group was said to have come from Kazakhstan, and an official source said that Kazakhstan’s security service had warned the Kyrgyz government about the group. “Kyrgyz explain how terrorists were caught”, Central Asia Online news site, http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2011/10/11/feature-02.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, southern Kyrgyzstan, October and November 2011.

⁸⁹ <http://furqon.com/component/content/article/195-1432-2011.html?start=2>, 18 February 2012. Furqon is the propaganda arm of the IMU. Crisis Group was unable independently to confirm the two cases.

Osh during a shootout, when he was told, Kyrgyz “ran like rabbits”.

Others said they are paying more attention to Uzbekistan. Its national TV was often the mainstay for Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbek community in the past – in some parts of the south, Kyrgyz TV was unavailable or reception was poor. Since Uzbek-language TV stations in Osh were taken over and turned into largely Kyrgyz-language networks, broadcasts from across the border have become a mainstay. “We liked the music before, but never noticed the politics”, a well-educated woman noted. “Now a lot of us follow the politics. We know [President] Karimov is a harsh leader. We do not understand why he did not come to our aid. But his country seems to be doing well. And they have a very strong army”.⁹⁰

Along with this are the stories, always hearsay, that during the June violence, Uzbek border guards told villages that they would not resist if local residents seized their weapons to defend themselves against Kyrgyz attackers.⁹¹ These sound very much like conflict legends rather than reality, but they illustrate a remarkable change in the thinking of many Uzbeks. From comfortable, often privileged and authoritative members of Kyrgyz society, they have been pushed by the violence and repression that have been their daily lot since June 2010 to the position of a scared minority on the edge of the Kyrgyz state.

The hope that, next time, Uzbekistan will somehow come to the Uzbek community’s aid is also a startling irony: Osh was long the home to anti-Karimov activists, most from the local Uzbek community.⁹² Further, the Uzbek security services, which are viewed as the most competent in the region, move freely around the Osh area, officials and local observers believe. Few local Uzbeks hold seriously to the hope of aid from Tashkent. “If I had wanted to go to Uzbekistan, I would have gone years ago”, said one, formerly a senior local official, “but generations of my family were born here”. If Atambayev can stop the process of exclusion in the next couple of years, he said,

there is a chance for a return to normality. If not, “we have no future: we just have to hope the nationalists rub each other out in a *razborka* [a clash between organised crime groups]”.⁹³

The chances of any Uzbek intervention look close to zero in the immediate future. Should the situation in the region continue to deteriorate, the idea will look less far-fetched. Declining living conditions and growing unrest in Uzbekistan – coupled hypothetically with further repression of southern Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbeks – might spur President Karimov or a successor to shore up his position by means of a limited intervention to help fellow Uzbeks. So might a disintegration of political power in southern Kyrgyzstan, an area of strategic importance for Uzbekistan.⁹⁴

Few Uzbeks look to the future with more than guarded optimism. “People will come back”, a prominent figure in her community said. “If they can work in business, they will, [but] if they are pressured, there will be a conflict”.⁹⁵ Many who remain are already losing hope. “Every step perceived as directed against the Uzbeks only increases our aggression”, said an Uzbek professional.⁹⁶ Some, meanwhile, express a sense of almost desperate fatalism. “If there is to be a bang, let it be a big bang”, one told international workers, voicing a quite common sentiment.⁹⁷

Though the situation is serious, relatively modest steps by the government might help prevent further deterioration and could even improve matters somewhat. The appointment, or reappointment, of qualified Uzbeks to positions in local government, from civil administration through the police to education, would give Uzbeks a trusted point of contact. Measures to improve basic facilities in Uzbek areas, which are often considerably inferior to some Kyrgyz ones, would be a politically neutral way of reaching out to the community. The reopening of Uzbek media would provide a direct channel for the government to talk to its minority citizens. Fundamentally, however, change will be very difficult without assertive moves by the central government to reaffirm its political control in the south and challenge the dominant nationalist narrative.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, border town, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011. Uzbekistan’s tightly controlled media do indeed paint an unmitigatedly rosy picture of their country. Independent observers note deteriorating economic and social conditions and extremely harsh political and religious repression.

⁹¹ Ibid. Crisis Group heard a similar story from an ethnic Uzbek living along another part of the border.

⁹² This explains in part the reported substantial covert presence of Uzbekistan’s security services in southern Kyrgyzstan. They are widely believed to be better informed than their Kyrgyz counterparts and have been linked to attacks on anti-Karimov Uzbeks. See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°76, *Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan’s Isolation*, 14 February 2008.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

⁹⁴ Any deterioration of security in the south will also be of great concern to the U.S. and NATO. One of the ground routes of the Northern Distribution Network, which resupplies the Afghanistan war effort, passes through Osh en route to Tajikistan and then Kunduz. The main regional air hub is located just outside Bishkek, at Manas international airport.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, southern Kyrgyzstan, November 2011.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, international agency official, Osh, September 2011.

III. RESPONSES

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has on a number of occasions included Kyrgyzstan in a short list of “encouraging successes” for the UN, particularly in the field of preventive diplomacy and mediation.⁹⁸ He told the Security Council that the organisation had helped put an end to the violence in the country,⁹⁹ and elsewhere noted UN success in preventing or limiting “atrocities crimes” in Kyrgyzstan and often spoken of the UN role in easing tension in the south.¹⁰⁰ Other UN bodies have offered a detailed list of their achievements.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ban Ki-moon, “‘Responsibility to Protect’ Came of Age in 2011”, speech, New York, 18 January 2012, Address to Stanley Foundation Conference on the Responsibility to Protect. Ban’s speeches and comments cited here are available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/>.

⁹⁹ The full quotation is: We have used diplomacy to ensure a peaceful referendum in Sudan, a democratic transition in Guinea and an end to the violence in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan. Ban Ki-moon, “Remarks at Security Council High-Level Briefing on Preventive Diplomacy”, New York, 22 September 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Ban Ki-moon, “Remarks to Peacebuilding Fund high-level stakeholders meeting”, New York, 22 November 2011.

¹⁰¹ The UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU), in its annual report, listed the following activities for 2010: “In April 2010, violent protests in Kyrgyzstan led to the resignation of President Bakiyev, the establishment of a new transitional government, and elections in October 2010. To support this transition process (which was also marked by inter-ethnic violence in July 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan), MSU provided the following support: (a) from 20 May to 12 June 2010, MSU deployed its standby team experts on power-sharing and constitutions and a mediation support planner to assess the situation. Completing its assessment, this MSU team advised the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of UNRCCA, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator (RC) in Kyrgyzstan on the development of a political and reconciliation strategy; (b) in July 2010, MSU redeployed this mediation support staff to Bishkek to contribute to UN planning efforts on the political process leading to elections and the national reconciliation process; (c) deployment of a longer-term Senior Reconciliation Advisor (SRA) from the MSU mediation roster for nine months, at the request of UNRCCA. The SRA actively engaged with national actors and promoted dialogue through various forums, working closely with the Peace and Development Advisor in the RC’s office; and (d) in December 2010, the SRA together with UNRCCA organized a conference entitled ‘Political Stabilization in the Kyrgyz Republic: Challenges and Perspectives’. The conference brought together local policymakers and academics as well as representatives of international organizations”. UN Mediation Support Unit Annual Report 2010. <http://www.cinfo.ch/org/inhalte/jobs/intOrganisationen/MSU-Annual-Report-2010.pdf>. Little came of all this, a senior official on the ground in Bishkek remarked, “I am not impressed”. The official noted, for example, that the political and reconciliation strategy never

The record is more mixed, unfortunately. Even if the initial response of the UN and international community, state and NGO, helped provide shelter and support for the victims of the violence on both sides, the root cause of the conflict remains. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) played a major role in rehousing those who lost their homes; the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)¹⁰² continued to work on the ground while the violence raged, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has provided crucial support to victims of policy and other forms of official impunity. The fundamental issue addressed in this report, however, continuing discriminatory pressure on the Uzbek community, remains largely neglected by either the international community or the national government.

OHCHR makes it clear that violence is a daily affair in the south, and impunity is the norm. It sees few fundamental improvements and little willingness of the government to address, in deeds rather than words, the serious human rights issues in the south and the rest of the country. A senior international official with extensive on-ground experience in both north and south, both before and after June 2010, described the current situation as neither worse nor better than 2010:

[It is] just a bit different. There is no obvious loss of life or movement of people as a direct result of the human rights situation. Corruption, impunity and lack of accountability undermine any real efforts to improve the human rights situation. There has been some improvement in human rights, in the sense of more debate. Legislation has improved a little bit, and it is more in line with international standards, but there is still some way to go. Government policies and practices need to change.¹⁰³

Commenting on the declining willingness of local people to approach the UN with reports of torture or other abuse – a

came to fruition, the conference had little or no impact, and MSU wrongly described the violence as taking place in July 2010. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, senior international official, 28 March 2012.

¹⁰² Rather than withdrawing staff from Osh when violence exploded, as the OSCE did temporarily, ICRC stayed on the ground when the fighting started, and deployed extra personnel when violence was at its height. UN officials on the other hand were prevented by what many of them felt were excessively cautious internal security protocols, and were finally only able to deploy properly in the south in early July. Crisis Group interviews, ICRC and UN officials, Osh and Bishkek, June, July 2010, February 2012.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, March 2012.

result of increasing pressure from southern officials – another monitor remarked, “I can understand their position”.¹⁰⁴ Ban’s emphasis on inclusive political processes¹⁰⁵ is vital but has been completely ignored by the key political players. The Osh local government shows little interest in fostering such a process, and the central government says it has no power to do so. A more active, consistent and high-profile role by the UN would be welcome and could have a significant effect on the situation. The Secretary-General could usefully advocate making the Kyrgyzstan government follow through on some of his more frequently-repeated calls – for political inclusiveness and bringing abusive institutions to account, which should be the benchmarks against which to determine future assistance, including by the UN.

Most importantly, the UN should concentrate on achieving something often discussed within the international community in Kyrgyzstan but never achieved: a common position among donors and interested nations regarding the situation and methods needed to pull the country out of a many-faceted crisis.

Few outside observers disagree that the situation is bad. The 2012 congressional budget justification of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) noted that its assistance is focused on “addressing the Kyrgyz Republic’s broad, underlying development challenges and chronic instability, which were exacerbated by the effects of the 2010 political upheaval and ethnic violence”.¹⁰⁶ UN officials are beginning to talk of the need for a new approach that would address the overall crisis in the country, rather than trying to conduct business as usual with sector-by-sector aid.¹⁰⁷

In his rosy assessment of UN performance after June 2010, Ban has made much of the joint activities of the senior OSCE, UN and EU representatives during the crisis. The tandem had little tangible effect. But in the future joint demarches that raise significant concerns and warn of dangerous consequences could play an important part in catalysing the situation and concentrating the Kyrgyz government’s mind on its gravity of the situation.

A united international community – admittedly highly elusive much of the world over – would wield considerable clout. Kyrgyzstan is not only chronically unstable, to use USAID’s phrase, but leads a precarious economic existence. It survives to a substantial degree on the proceeds of

one gold mine, which provides 10 per cent of its GDP and one third of its foreign currency reserves; and on the remittances of migrant workers in Russia, there largely for lack of employment at home and whose earnings produce about 20 per cent of GDP.¹⁰⁸ Both are very vulnerable to fluctuations – to international prices, in the case of gold, and relations with Russia, in the case of migrant labour. Otherwise, the Kyrgyz budget usually incurs a substantial shortfall, while foreign direct investment runs at \$300-\$400 million per year.¹⁰⁹ The country is, as a result, considerably dependent on foreign aid, particularly grants.

Aid operations in the south have begun to shift from reconstruction to a panoply of programs under the general heading of peacebuilding, ranging from dialogue and conflict resolution to economic development. This would be a good time to act. A united donor community, making judicious use of its financial leverage, could encourage and embolden the central government to take action in the south. Using delicacy and discretion, as well as caution about where it spends its money, the international community could help the central government regain a foothold in areas where it currently has little presence. Infrastructure programs funded by the centre would signal to southerners that Bishkek is willing to be a counterweight to the mayor of Osh. Outreach programs to the Uzbek community would help break the stranglehold on these communities before their residents try to do it themselves. At the same time, international organisations should themselves deploy programs in the rural, majority Kyrgyz areas of the south that have come to see themselves as ignored by the north and shunned by an international community that reserves its sympathies for the Uzbeks.

The task would be a challenge for a government that at the moment lacks resolve and vision and like all previous governments is bedevilled by high-level corruption and low capacity. It would also be a problem for the donors and aid organisations, for whom coordination seems to present significant bureaucratic challenges. It would, however, respond to the fundamental imperative in Kyrgyzstan at the moment: an energetic and effective political response, at all levels and in all spheres, to the exclusionist nationalist narrative that threatens this country’s future.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, international worker, Osh, October 2011.

¹⁰⁵ “Remarks to Peacebuilding Fund”, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ Congressional Budget Justification, vol. 2, Foreign Operations, 14 February 2012, p. 106, <http://www.usaid.gov/performance/cbj/158267>.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, UN adviser, Bishkek, 12 March 2012.

¹⁰⁸ “Kyrgyz Republic: First Review Under the Three-Year Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria”, International Monetary Fund (IMF), staff report, 17 November 2011, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2011/cr11354.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

IV. CONCLUSION

It could well be that with time the Uzbek community will accept its ghettoised position, and the south's leaders will begin, for a price, to allow Uzbek businessmen once again to play a substantial role in economic life. So far, almost two years on, this has not happened: the Uzbeks live in fear, southern Kyrgyz leaders espouse a narrative of Uzbek separatism, and many ordinary southern Kyrgyz seem quite satisfied. Meanwhile, the situation around Kyrgyzstan is becoming increasingly unpredictable. It seems prudent, therefore, to examine the worst-case scenarios.

The situation in southern Kyrgyzstan is symptomatic of a double crisis. First, an exclusionist ethnic policy risks, without urgent attention, steadily pushing the Uzbek community towards a breaking point. As Uzbeks number somewhere around 700,000, a large proportion of them compactly concentrated in the south, this could be a serious problem. Though few southern Uzbeks express any theological or political sympathies with the radical jihadis being trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan, some are viscerally more favourably inclined to them, from sheer anger, than before. If jihadism in the south receives a boost after the Western pullout from Afghanistan in 2014, and if southern Uzbeks become further alienated from the regime, the Kyrgyz government will struggle to control the situation. Its security forces, among the region's weakest, are already having a difficult time. It is thus in the government's interest to reassure its Uzbek population that they have a place in Kyrgyzstan's future.

The second, related crisis is one of governance. Since the political revolt of April 2010 and the bloodshed two months later, the south has been slipping out of control. Southern politicians moved fast and effectively to seize the advantage after the June violence. Because of this, the north-south split in Kyrgyz society is growing. The clearest evidence of this is the broad support that Myrzakmatov enjoys from urban southerners, not just the mountain Kyrgyz of the hinterland. The grip of organised crime in the south has if anything increased. This is not to suggest that the north is any better: one point that political leaders agree upon is that Kyrgyzstan's political system is deeply corrupt and strongly influenced by organised crime at all levels. Leading members of the government say in private that they are too weak to reimpose state authority on the south.

This is not just a problem for Kyrgyzstan. Other regional players have a stake in the south's stability. The south is a vital corridor from Afghanistan and Tajikistan to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and China. Among the key commodities passing along the corridor are opiates and jihadis. The drugs move primarily to Russia, which is increasingly aware of its problem – the Russian market ac-

counted for 25 per cent of the global opiate market, some \$18 billion, in 2009, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)¹¹⁰ – and in lesser amounts to China. Armed Islamic militants are a concern to neighbouring Tajikistan, which believes that southern Kyrgyzstan already offers fighters a safe haven; to Kazakhstan, where such attacks are just beginning to worry the country's leadership; and in particular to Uzbekistan, which has the most to fear from a return of Central Asian jihadis from Afghanistan. China is concerned, too, by the risk that Central Asia could become a base for armed movements directed at its Xinjiang province.

Though the idea seems far-fetched at the moment, the possibility that Uzbekistan could intervene in southern Kyrgyzstan cannot be completely ruled out. The Uzbek security and military forces are probably the strongest in the region. They expect to acquire U.S. military equipment once the Afghanistan pullout begins.¹¹¹ Yet, the Karimov regime faces an array of problems – social and economic troubles, growing radicalisation, lack of a succession mechanism, and, if internal security deteriorates, the risks of both succession and irredentism. At some point, Tashkent may feel inclined to intervene – possibly as a way to shore up domestic support for President Karimov, or as a response to increased cross-border activity by the IMU or other armed groups.

The first crisis could, with government will and international community support, be addressed relatively quickly. Discriminatory measures, harassment and oppression could be rolled back, and a minimum of qualified and experienced ethnic Uzbeks could be brought back into public life – especially local government, where they could be a bridge between communities and help gradually defuse the tension and anxiety that grips the Uzbek community. Doing so should be a top priority for the Atambayev administration and for the international community. It would also lay the groundwork for addressing the second crisis: restoration of the central government's control over the whole country. Failure to do this would leave the Atambayev administration diminished, impotent in the face of a defiant and dangerous political leadership in the south that is determined to set its own political agenda.

Bishkek/Brussels, 29 March 2012

¹¹⁰ UNODC World Drug Report 2011, p. 83, Fig. 48.

¹¹¹ See, for example, "Uzbekistan and U.S. discuss issues of reallocation of military equipment from Afghanistan", CA-NEWS, 28 November 2011. This was originally published on a U.S. military site, www.dvidshub.net/, and quickly removed.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF KYRGYZSTAN



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