



In brief: Kyrgyzstan

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Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power in the so-called Tulip Revolution of March 2005, ousting the previous incumbent, Askar Akayev, who was accused of nepotism and corruption. Akayev had pursued a conciliatory policy towards ethnic minorities, but this was overturned by Bakiyev.

In early April 2010, street violence erupted in protest at endemic government corruption and utility price rises. In two days, President Bakiyev had fled the country, some 85 were left dead and the centre of the capital, Bishkek, had been looted. Popular resentment was fuelled by general economic failure, the influence of organised crime and the narcotics trade on the government, and a disregard for democracy: very much the same problems as those that brought the previous government down.

A thirteen-member interim government was installed, led by Roza Otunbayeva, a former foreign minister in Bakiyev's government who broke with him and joined the opposition. It has been beset by internal division from the start. Otunbayeva is generally regarded to be closer to Russia than her predecessor.

For several weeks, the situation in the country seemed to have become relatively calm. The government's plans to conduct a referendum which would legitimise its rule and parliamentary elections seemed reasonable. There were, however, simmering tensions in the south, where ousted President Bakiyev had much of his support. Ethnic Uzbeks, who form a large minority in the region, were prominent in helping the provisional government re-establish authority, leading to friction with ethnic Kyrgyz supporters of Bakiyev in the south. Ethnic Uzbeks accused the security forces, many of whom are close to the previous regime, of failing to protect them.

On the night of 10/11 June, inter-ethnic violence flared up again, leaving scores dead. A state of emergency was declared. On 11 June, the provisional government called for Russia to intervene to control the fighting. Violence spread dramatically and tens of thousands of Uzbek refugees fled towards Uzbekistan. Unofficially, it was suggested that the death toll was approaching 2,000. By the June 16, violence had subsided and the barricades were being dismantled in the southern city of Osh, worst affected by the clashes.

Russia is still considering whether to send troops and some accuse the international community of ignoring the crisis.

Who is behind the violence?

Rumours have been circulating since April that the violence has been orchestrated. At first, fingers were pointed at Russia for orchestrating the downfall of the Bakiyev government in order to install a friendlier regime. When Bakiyev had fallen and violence broke out again in

June, attention turned to Bakiyev's supporters, who were accused of hiring outsiders, particularly Tajiks, to shoot at both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz to provoke violence between them and bring down the new government. Bakiyev denies any involvement. Some ethnic Uzbek refugees have simply blamed the Kyrgyz state for their plight.

Refugees

There are thought to be 75,000 refugees in Uzbekistan (mainly women and children) and some 300,000 internally displaced persons; in total about eight per cent of the population.

Referendum

A referendum on a new constitution is planned for 27 June. The constitution will replace the present presidential system with a more liberal, parliamentary one. There have been calls for the referendum to be postponed, since a state of emergency still applies and it is not clear whether ethnic Uzbeks will be able or willing to vote.

How does this affect Britain?

Britain has an interest in the maintenance of stability in Central Asia.

- European plans for energy security involve the area's energy reserves, particularly gas.
- Failed states in the area might provide a base for extremist militants. Inter-ethnic violence could easily spread because most of the states in the area are ethnically mixed and have autocratic regimes that may be brittle.
- The US military base at Manas in Northern Kyrgyzstan is central to the military mission in Afghanistan, allowing the Northern Distribution Network to resupply US and NATO troops.
- Maxim Bakiyev, the son of the ousted president was reportedly arrested in Britain on 13 June. He is wanted by the provisional government on serious fraud allegations, some of them involving contractors working for NATO and the US on the Northern Distribution Network. The provisional government is demanding his extradition.

