

Kazakhstan and Central Asia Defence and Security Report Q4 2010

<https://marketpublishers.com/r/KB59530DCC8EN.html>

Date: August 2010

Pages: 102

Price: US\$ 1,295.00 (Single User License)

ID: KB59530DCC8EN

Abstracts

Includes 3 FREE quarterly updates

It had been initially hoped that the regime change in Kyrgyzstan would be bloodless and not lead to any marked increase in regional tensions.

Those hopes have not been realised. According to a Kyrgyz Ministry of Health statement on July 20 the death toll from the political violence is 355, with 1.080 hospitalised. Deputy Prime Minister Azimbek Beknazarov, however, at least 895 people have been killed. The UNHCR reported on 21 July that some 75,000 people are still displaced.

There is a definite ethnic character to the violence. The deposed President had come from the south of the country where almost half of the population is ethnically Uzbek. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, has reported that Uzbeks are being systematically targeted and many are being pressured to leave Kyrgyzstan.

The five Central Asia Republics had all been part of the Soviet Union. During that time these ethnic tensions remained internal matters. Stalin had deliberately drawn internal boundaries in such a way that facilitated a principle of divide and rule. Now though they represent potential flashpoints between independent states.

Kyrgyzstan had asked Russia for military assistance. While Kyrgyzstan is a close ally of Russia and Russia had been the first country to recognise the new regime following the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Russia has declined to become directly involved. Russia instead sees the need to maintain the balance of its interests in the region. It has for instance been drawing closer to Uzbekistan after some years of

coldness. While Uzbekistan needs to be seen to support actions to protect fellow Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, this does not mean that it would welcome Russian army forces on its border. While there are continuing tensions in the region with some outbreaks of violence, we do not foresee the current troubles leading to either the fall of other regimes in the region or to clashes between countries. Any potential unrest is more likely to have an Islamist driver. The Ferghana Valley that is divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan is considered to be a breeding ground for Islamic militancy. Groups such as Tablighi Jamaat and Bayaat have been able to find support in this poor region and in light of the war in Afghanistan.

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