



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

FHSMUN 34

SECURITY COUNCIL CRISIS

THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN

Introduction

Two decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic, ethnic, political, and religious tensions threaten to further destabilize Central Asia. Virulent ethnic nationalism combined with fears of violent separatism and narcotics trafficking have recently resurfaced in southern Kyrgyzstan as tensions between the Kyrgyz security forces and the Uzbek minority community present not only Central Asia but the wider international community with very serious challenges. The respective national governments in Bishkek and Tashkent have become increasingly intransigent as they seek to advance seemingly conflicting national and regional interests; an additional concern for the affected communities, as well as the national leadership, is the potentially limited reach and/or enforcement of the rule of law in southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyz Nationalism

Kyrgyzstan's ethnic divisions present potentially serious challenges to the program of Kyrgyz nationalism being promoted by both national and local leaders, including President Almazbek Atambayev and the Mayor of the southern city of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov. The Uzbek minority community in the south numbers approximately 700,000 out of a total Kyrgyz national population of 5,500,000. Furthermore, Kyrgyz authorities routinely assert that the Uzbek minority community is becoming increasingly radicalized because of links to perceived jihadist groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

The worst outbreak of violence in recent years occurred in June 2010 in the city of Osh, although the terrifying events of June 11 & June 12, 2010 are widely acknowledged to be the predictable consequences of 20 years of Kyrgyz governmental neglect of the Uzbeks as well as the violence in June 1990 that killed between 300-1,000 people. In June 2010, "in all some 420 people were killed, 111,000 fled to Uzbekistan, and a further 300,000 temporarily fled their homes but remained in Kyrgyzstan."¹ Even though most displaced persons returned to their homes by the end of July 2010, distrust and ethnic resentment remain pervasive.

¹ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South" March 29, 2012 p. 2.

Uzbek Nationalism

Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan frequently protest that they are persistently denied fundamental cultural and social rights as well as essential police protections. In the aftermath of the June 2010 Osh riots, in which “about 74 per cent of the fatalities were ethnic Uzbeks” and the “majority of defendants have been ethnic Uzbek...”², “many Kyrgyz and Uzbek interlocutors say members of their communities are buying weapons for self-defence.”³ Furthermore, the extensive networks of barriers and fortifications along Uzbekistan’s borders with both Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan indicate that President Karimov’s regime views its neighbors as potential threats. The International Crisis Group (ICG) further notes that “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.”⁴

Osh.0: Renewed Ethnic Violence in 2013

In early January 2013, previously barely subterranean ethnic tensions and resentments resurfaced. Continued neglect of ethnic Uzbek demands to improve living standards and reform the justice system and security apparatus in southern Kyrgyzstan boiled over when Kyrgyz utility workers were attacked by angry Uzbeks in Khushyar in the Uzbek enclave of Sokh.⁵ Dozens of hostages were taken and the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border was closed for several weeks. Even after the borders were reopened, very serious tensions persist. Both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have increased their security presences along their respective borders and frequent, but still unsubstantiated, reports filter in that border guards and police officers on both side of the border have indicated that they will not prevent attacks against their counterparts or the opposing ethnic community.

In late February 2013, as ethnic tensions continued to escalate along the borders and in ethnically mixed enclaves and communities, Presidents Atambayev and Karimov blamed each other for fomenting ethnic nationalist and/or separatist strife. Kyrgyz allegations of Uzbek security links to jihadist organizations, including the Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as Chechen and Uighur separatist movements are now being bolstered by more direct assertions of possible military responses to continued “provocations.” While these allegations may be more representative of inflated political rhetoric than empirical fact in early March 2013, “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.”⁶ The security implications for the broader region of Central Asia are also of paramount concern as unresolved conflicts in the region may well metastasize into broader conflagrations.

² ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 2.

³ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 9.

⁴ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 9.

⁵ Altynai Myrzabekova, Inga Sikorskaya, & Anvar Khaldarov, “Kyrgyzstan in Turmoil” Institute for War & Peace Reporting January 11, 2013.

⁶ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 17.

During the early morning of March 2, 2013, international media reported that Kyrgyz census workers were attacked while traveling through the Uzbek enclave of Sokh. Kyrgyz military forces, seeing this as an attack, entered Sokh to protect the workers; upon arrival, they were greeted by Uzbek protestors and local police forces, which engaged the Kyrgyz military in skirmishes. Government officials in Tashkent and Bishkek were in communication throughout the morning, though neither government would take responsibility for what occurred and offered conflicting reports. Uzbek media report that the Kyrgyz census workers were armed and were a guerrilla force that fired upon Uzbeks, while Kyrgyz media deny the claims and say the workers were civil servants who were attacked while traveling through Sokh to a final, Kyrgyz destination. International media report at least nine Uzbek civilians and five Uzbek police officers were killed in firefights in Sokh, while at least twelve Kyrgyz census workers and two military officials were reported to be dead or missing. Uzbek president Islam Karimov issued a public statement saying the violence was “just more of the same wanton and indiscriminate oppression we expect from those pigs,” and Kyrgyz president Almazbek Atambayev said on state television that “the Uzbek liars have no interest in peace or decency – only in slaughtering the peace loving Kyrgyz people.”

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was alerted of the incident, as was NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. NATO has looked to the corridor between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as a way for ISAF forces and materiel to leave Afghanistan once NATO involvement in the country ends in 2014.

Regional Implications

The centrality of ethnic and/or sectarian tensions in Central Asia has disturbing implications for other regions, including South and East Asia. The International Crisis Group (ICG) notes that “the south [of Kyrgyzstan] is a vital corridor from Afghanistan and Tajikistan to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and China,”⁷ particularly in regards to illicit arms and narcotics smuggling. Renewed conflict will invariably draw in outside states and likely non-state actors, delaying and/or preventing necessary human and economic development as well as fostering long-term resentments that may lead to intermittent episodes of violence in a seemingly interminable war.

Conclusion

The UN System, specifically the Security Council, needs to take profound interest in resolving the conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly in light of previous comments by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “that the organization had helped put an end to the violence in the country, and elsewhere noted UN success in preventing or limiting ‘atrocious crimes’ in Kyrgyzstan and often spoken of the UN role in easing tension in the south.”⁸ Violence in southern Kyrgyzstan has not been ended and the potential for renewed and reinvigorated conflict remains perturbingly prominent.

⁷ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 17.

⁸ ICG, “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South” March 29, 2012 p. 15.

Guiding Questions

Is your country involved in the current ISAF operations in Central Asia? What relations does your country have with either Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan?

What are the most immediate actions the Security Council can take to help diffuse the tension?

Would your country support the introduction of observers and/or other forces, be they from the UN, the EU, NATO or the OSCE, to the area to ensure a peace is kept?



Figure A: Map of Kyrgyzstan.⁹



Figure B: Map of Uzbekistan.¹⁰

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16186907>.

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16218112>.