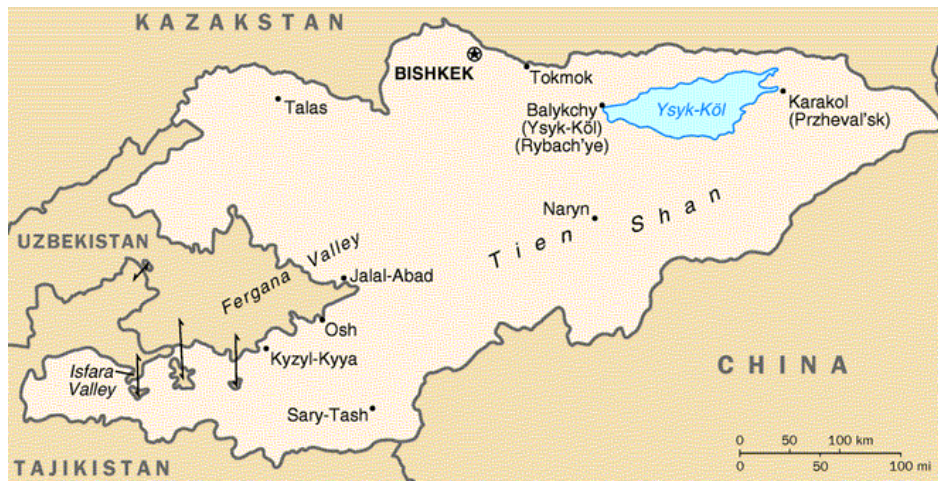


January, 2013 in Kyrgyzstan

Major events of the New Year¹

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2013 has had an apprehensive beginning in Kyrgyzstan, and the question is whether this trend will continue. This article will discuss several major events in January, providing an assessment of trends to watch this year.

1. Border Issues

The problem of border demarcation, still unresolved in the Fergana valley, was clearly demonstrated in January, with the conflict in the Sokh enclave. Though the conflict was controlled, it highlighted the salience of the issue. With more border talks set for this year, the question of resolution is being prioritised in the Jogorku Kenesh. Regionally, the Kyrgyz relationship with Tajikistan is improving, but relations with Uzbekistan are becoming more tense. With growing tension, the likelihood of regional conflict is rising, and there are many points along the border where ethnic and political tensions could flare up. This situation is similarly connected with the water issue, where water sources are located in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that flow into rivers providing irrigation water for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Uzbekistan in particular recognises this as a major security concern. Conflated with the issues of border demarcation and ethnic cleavages, this leaves the Fergana valley at a very high risk for

¹ Adapted from: Anton Lyamar, "Топ-10: Беспокойный январь Кыргызстана (Топ-10: The Restless January of Kyrgyzstan)," *24.kg Press*, February 8, 2013. <http://www.24kg.org/community/147577-top-10-bespokojnyj-yanvar-kyrgyzstana.html>.

conflict.

2. Kumtor

Economic nationalism is becoming a worrying trend in Kyrgyzstan, especially with the accusations of an attempted coup led by Ata Jurt Deputy Kamchybek Tashiev in October 2012. The Kumtor mine has been at the spearhead of this trend, with accusations of environmental damage the basis for trying to renegotiate the contract with Canadian investors, Centerra Inc. Whether the accusations are true are unimportant: no matter what, Jantoro Satybaldiev's government has to contend with a nationalist opposition (Ata Jurt), and a socialist coalition partner (Ata Meken). How the issue will be resolved is unknown, but whatever conclusion is reached will significantly affect the Kyrgyz economy and foreign investment partners.

3. Manas

The situation surrounding the Transit Centre 'Manas' is also heating up: American investment in the centre will conclude in 2014, and the Russians are pushing to keep it that way. It seems that American interest in Central Asia will continue, especially with the January visit to Bishkek by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, and it looks likely that the US government would prefer to continue working in the base that has already been invested in. President Almazbek Atambaev insists that the investment is over, however, this situation already happened in 2009, when Washington previously succeeded in extending the life of the lease. The Russian government does maintain its own base at Kant, whose lease has already been extended another 15 years.

4. Anti-Chinese violence

In 2012, there were many reports of clashes, disappearances and murders of visiting Chinese workers. Another skirmish occurred between residents and Chinese workers in January, in Kurshab. Investigation and reconciliation efforts were made, but how effective they were are not known. But the increase in clashes between local residents and citizens of China cannot but cause concern. There is increasing nationalism and racism in Kyrgyzstan, but the root cause of these clashes would seem to be because Chinese workers are being imported by Chinese firms operating in Kyrgyzstan, rather than the Chinese companies hiring local workers. The problem with resolution of this conflict, however, is that the Kyrgyz residents aren't necessarily qualified for the employment, which presents an issue for Chinese investors. This situation also presents an extremely difficult circumstance for the Kyrgyz government, as efforts to increase Chinese investment will become complicated if violent actions continue to increase, and Chinese investment represents the foundation upon which the Development Strategy will be achieved.

5. Shots in Osh

Head of Osh regional department for combating organized crime, 35-year-old police colonel Tolkunbek Shonoev, was shot in the head in January, demonstrating that criminal organisations are still alive and well. While some elements of Kyrgyz crime are sitting behind bars, possibly

still exhibiting considerable influence, recent drug seizures show that the narcotics trade is certainly still thriving in the South of Kyrgyzstan. Police and the Interior Ministry are making concerted efforts to clamp down on organised crime, but whether corruption in the police force can be overcome to achieve this task, is another question.