

Beyond the Headlines—Kyrgyzstan Background

Ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan attracted the attention of the world in June 2010. Violence in southern Kyrgyzstan killed thousands, mostly Uzbeks. It also touched off a major refugee crisis as hundreds of thousands of Uzbeks tried to escape across Uzbekistan border.

The United States, Russia, and China all have strategic political and economic interests in the part of the former Soviet Union known as Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

United States In late 2001, the United States established an air base at the Manas International Airport near Bishkek to support military operations in Afghanistan. Following popular protests and political instability, Manas became a Transit Center. The United States-led war on terror complicates the post-Cold War dynamic in this region.

Russia Kyrgyzstan is a former Soviet Republic, and Russia views the country as part of its post-Soviet sphere of influence. After the American base was established, Russia opened a military airfield in Kant, about twenty miles from Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the world to house both NATO and Russian military bases.

China The Chinese Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region borders Kyrgyzstan. The Uyghur people, a Central Asian Turkic ethnic group, make up about half the population of the Autonomous Region, but also live in communities in Kyrgyzstan. In the Autonomous Region, the majority of Uyghurs live near the border with Kyrgyzstan. Ethnic tensions between the Uyghurs and the Han (Chinese) in the Autonomous Region have recently broken out into violence. Unrest in this important gas and oil producing area greatly concerns the Chinese authorities.

Resources:

The New York Times Kyrgyz News Page

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/kyrgyzstan/index.html>

BBC Kyrgyzstan Country profile:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1296485.stm

“1991: End of the Soviet Union,” *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*

<http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1991end&Year=1991>

EurasianNet (Kyrgyzstan)

<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan>

The Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) website

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=topics.home&topic_id=1409

International Crisis Groups

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia.aspx>

Manas Transit Center Website

<http://www.manas.afcent.af.mil/>