

All Eyes on Central Asia: Disintegration in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan¹

After thousands of people had stormed the seat of government in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on 24 March 2005, the then president, Askar Akaev, fled the country, signing his official resignation in Moscow on 4 April. Shortly thereafter, the Kyrgyz parliament announced that presidential elections would be held early on 10 July 2005. These led to the election of Kurmanbek Bakiev as the new president of Kyrgyzstan, with almost 90 per cent of the vote. In this way, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in Central Asia to elect a new leader following the break-up of the Soviet Union. After the turbulence in the first half of 2005, which had led to the fall of president Akaev, the elections were surprisingly quiet and unspectacular. None of the five other presidential candidates received a significant number of votes, which meant that, on this occasion, protests by disappointed followers did not take place. Hence, there is cause for optimism that Kyrgyzstan may enjoy a period of political calm.

On 13 May 2005, Uzbek governmental forces killed hundreds of civilians who had participated in a demonstration in the city of Andijan in the Ferghana Valley. Despite international pressure, President Islam Karimov continues to refuse to allow an independent international investigation team to work in the country. Uzbekistan appears to be calm at present, but this is deceptive. It is obvious to observers that the events in Andijan will not be the last bloody clashes between the government, on the one hand, and the general population and opposition groups, on the other. Currently, the most frequently posed question is whether and how long Karimov will stay in power.

Today, in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, there are many questions to which a clear answer is not always available: Which actions are being taken by which actors (political and economic groups and individuals)? What are their motives? How will the situations in the two countries develop in the next few months? How much of an impact will this year's events have on the general security situation in Central Asia and Europe?

This article will contribute to a better understanding of the events in both countries by analysing their causes in detail. It will also discuss the direction(s) that future developments are likely to take and the nature of the tasks and challenges lying ahead for the international community.

¹ The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.

Parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan took place on 27 February and 13 March 2005. For these elections, the number of the seats contested had been reduced from 105 to 75. The political mood in the country was already tense in the run-up to polling, since some applicants had not been admitted as candidates by the Central Elections Commission. The most prominent of these was the former foreign minister Roza Otunbaeva. Her candidacy was rejected in January on the grounds that she had not lived in Kyrgyzstan in recent years. Perhaps it was merely coincidence that she wanted to run for office in the same electoral district as the daughter of the president, Bernmet Akaeva. At meetings, which continued throughout January and February, several non-governmental organizations joined the opposition in demanding free and fair elections.

Only 31 of the 75 parliamentary seats were decided in the first ballot on 27 February; virtually no opposition candidates were successful. When it became clear at this point that certain candidates would not get a seat in Parliament, the population in southern Kyrgyzstan took to the streets to protest. After the second ballot on 13 March, 71 of the 75 parliamentary seats were distributed, five of them to opposition politicians. The population in the south refused to accept the results and continued to demonstrate.

A *Kurultai* (public gathering) was held in Jalal-Abad on 15 March. At this meeting, a national co-ordination council was elected and demands for a re-run of the elections and the resignation of Akaev were made. The opposition politician and former prime minister Kurmanbek Bakiev was one of the leading figures of the *Kurultai*.

On 18 March, after ten days of protests, an irate crowd stormed the building of the provincial administration in Osh and, on 21 March, conducted a *Kurultai* there, too. In the intervening three days, government troops and demonstrators had fought for control of the provincial administration building. On 20 March, demonstrators seized the equivalent building in Jalal-Abad as well as the airport. A day later, demonstrators in Osh finally captured the provincial administration building in that city, several police stations, and the headquarters of the secret service. In the northern provinces of Naryn and Talas, more and more people took to the streets to protest. It is still not quite clear whether the protests were organized and, if so, by whom. However, there is some evidence that influential local citizens supported the protest financially and logistically.

2 A short chronology of the events between January and March is available at IWPR's website: Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), *Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution" Timeline*, at: www.iwpr.net/index.pl?centasia_kyrgyzrev_00.html, and in: International Crisis Group (ICG), *Kyrgyzstan. After the Revolution*, Brussels, 4 May 2005, at: www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3411&l=1.

On 22 March, the protests spread to Bishkek. Events gained momentum as more and more demonstrators from the southern provinces and Naryn arrived in the capital. Although government supporters were still able to organize a 10,000-strong demonstration on 22 March – the day on which the new parliament was also sworn in – two huge anti-government protests were held on the 23rd, during which many participants were detained.

Several opposition politicians, among them Bakiev and Otunbaeva, appealed to their followers to come to a large joint demonstration in Bishkek on the morning of 24 March. The protestors converged from two sides upon the White House, the seat of Kyrgyz government, meeting on Ala Too Square in the city centre. The protest was peaceful at first – the participants chanted slogans and listened to speeches. Later on that same morning, a large group of protestors from Osh joined the gathering on Ala Too square and began attacking the White House. Supported by young people already present in the square, they were able to capture the White House within a very short time. Akaev and other members of the government had already left the building by that time.

The storming of the White House came as surprise not only to the government but also to opposition politicians. According to their statements, they had prepared for a longer period of protests and negotiations. Although Bakiev and Felix Kulov – who was freed from prison by his followers that same day – appealed to the population for calm; looting and plundering took place all over the city in the days and nights that followed. In particular, shops allegedly belonging to the Akaev family and their political allies were attacked systematically. Only after several days was the interim government able to establish law and order in Bishkek, at least during daylight hours.

Background to the Events

Kyrgyzstan became an independent nation in August 1991. Askar Akaev had been named president of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1990 and had become the international community's great white hope for liberalization and democratization. His reform policy made Kyrgyzstan the first Central Asian state to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although they were considered political advances, the Kyrgyz people experienced these reforms as shock therapy: The state – which had permeated all areas of life – suddenly lost interest in the lives of its citizens. It withdrew the budget for social security and pensions and ceased to maintain any kind of welfare net for its people. The social costs of transformation were high, and poverty increased dramatically, especially in the south.

One important reason for this can be attributed to the structure of the Soviet economic system: The goal was not the self-sufficiency of each republic, but rather their specialization in certain economic areas. For Kyrgyzstan, this meant, above all, the development of electrical energy and agri-

culture in the mountainous areas located in the south. Kyrgyzstan's *Kolkhozy* (collective farms) produced meat for the Soviet market and the country was in turn supplied – in part, directly from Moscow – with all the necessities of life. The one-sided focus of production alienated the people from their natural environment, causing them to forget how to live self-sufficiently in the mountains. Following independence and during the period of economic reform, they were suddenly confronted again with the problems of living in a mountainous environment: No technology or organization that could cover their needs was available to them. They were forced to (re)learn how to provide for themselves. Most people had to go through this learning process under unfavourable conditions and without any preparation. Poverty increased dramatically and the negative mood among the people increased noticeably. In addition to all of this, in recent years, clans from the north and the west of the country (*Ong* wing) had dominated the southern clans (*Sol* and *Ichkilik* wings) economically and politically, thus intensifying the social differences between the two regions. Akaev and his wife, who were both from the north, were able to ensure that their own clients and hangers-on were provided with posts, while politicians from the south had very little influence in the capital.

In January 2002, when the popular politician from the south, Azimbek Beknazarov, was taken into custody, heavy protests broke out in the region, above all, in his home district Aksy. He was officially accused of abusing his former office as Prosecutor General. The truth was that Beknazarov had criticized Akaev's leadership style time and time again. He had, in particular, been outspoken against the Kyrgyz-Chinese border accords that would cede 95,000 hectares of Kyrgyz territory to its eastern neighbours. On 17 March, at least five people were killed when police troops fired at demonstrators in Aksy. The government was dissolved shortly after the then Prime Minister, Kurmanbek Bakiev, took responsibility and stepped down at the end of May 2002.

The continuing unrest in the south, borne of the demand for more political participation, led Akaev to hold a debatable referendum on 2 February 2003 that was to have legitimized his claim on power until the end of his term in office in the autumn of 2005. According to official statements, 78 per cent voted for him to remain in office. The OSCE declined to observe the referendum.³

Although Akaev did not have a political solution, he was still able to secure new legitimacy for himself and initially calm the waters. The appearance of stability was, however, elusory and the discontent continued to simmer. On the occasion of the city's 125th anniversary in the summer of 2003, while

3 For more information on the referendum see OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Kyrgyz Republic Constitutional Referendum 2 February 2003. Political Assessment Report*, Warsaw, 20 March, 2003, at: http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/03/1381_en.pdf.

those in the capital celebrated with fireworks and concerts, the salaries of public service employees in the south were not being paid. In less than two years, the discontent building up would ultimately lead to the storming of the White House and the downfall of Akaev.

Unlike the revolutions in Georgia and in Ukraine – both of which had distinctive symbols and messages and a charismatic opposition leader – in Kyrgyzstan, confusion reigned as to the symbols or signs of the coup d'état, a situation symptomatic of the distrust between the population and the opposition, as well as of the discord within the opposition itself, which was split into more than 40 different parties. The opposition's political vision was more or less an unknown quantity and its democratic credentials more than questionable. It was less concerned with regime change than with accomplishing a shift in the balance of power within the elite.

Prominent opposition leaders such as Bakiev and Otunbaeva took advantage of the population's displeasure and positioned themselves at the head of the protests in the south. Although both they and, later, Kulov were presented in the international media as the new opposition leaders, they were not unknown at home; for a long time, they had belonged to the leadership of the country and had been very close to President Akaev for a while.

Bakiev, born in 1949 in the southern province of Jalal-Abad, was governor of the northern province of Chui from 1997 until 2000 and Prime Minister from December 2000 until May 2002, when he was forced to step down following the events in Aksy. Bakiev is the leader of the Peoples Movement of Kyrgyzstan, an electoral alliance comprised of nine parties.

Kulov, born in 1948 in the northern city of Frunze (today Bishkek), has been the leader of the Ar-Namys party since 1998. Among the posts he has held are Minister of the Interior, Vice President and Mayor of Bishkek. To prevent him from standing as a candidate in the presidential elections, he was arrested in March 2000, and, in January 2001, sentenced to seven years in prison for abuse of office. On 24 March 2005, he was freed from prison by his supporters and has meanwhile been pardoned by the court.

Otunbaeva, who was born in 1950 in southern Osh, was Foreign Minister under Akaev, and was the Kyrgyz ambassador to the USA, Canada, and the UK.

After considerable speculation about Bakiev's and Kulov's chances of running in the presidential elections and about which of them would be able to attract support from both the north and the south, both candidates declared on 13 May that Kulov would not stand for office and would instead be joining Bakiev's electoral campaign team. As a result, Bakiev's victory in the elections has been considered more or less a pre-arranged deal – both by the population as well as by international observers.

Campaigning for the presidential election officially began on 14 June 2005 and was very much dominated by Bakiev. Just one day after the Central Elections Commission (CEC) had announced the registration of seven candidates – among them one woman – Bishkek was covered with billboards and flyers with Bakiev's portrait and slogans saying "The future of our country is based on work and unity".

The latter issue is particularly important to the population. During the uprising in the spring, the differences between the north and the south surfaced once more. Since then, the fragile security situation has made the population feel insecure, and international analysts are of the opinion that the state monopoly on the use of force is disintegrating and power is being relocated to the regional and local levels. At these levels, politicians involved in shady business dealings dominate daily life and are fighting to fill the political and economic vacuum that Akaev and his family left after they fled the country. During the weeks following the overthrow of the government, violence and shootings resulted in many injuries and several deaths. For instance, at the beginning of June, the parliamentarian Jyralbek Surabaldiev was shot in Bishkek in broad daylight. In addition to his political activities, he was the owner of a second hand car market near Bishkek that he had seized from a rival just one year earlier. Several days later, there was an armed clash in Osh between followers and opponents of another parliamentarian, Bayaman Erkinbaev, during which one person was killed. Erkinbaev controlled several markets in southern Kyrgyzstan, such as the one in Kara-Suu at the Uzbek border.⁴ During this same period, Bakiev's campaign office in Bishkek was attacked and two guards were injured.

The violence did not cease then. On 17 June, Urmat Baryktabasov, chairman of the movement "New Generation – Mekenim Kyrgyzstan", and his followers stormed the seat of the government in Bishkek again. His candidacy for the presidential elections had been rejected by the CEC, because he had only held Kazakh citizenship since 2002. It has proved impossible to get the genie of revolt back into the bottle. Demonstrations, sit-ins, and the storming of buildings became routine in Kyrgyzstan in the period following the end of March.

International organizations feared such a development and had therefore prepared statements for the candidates to sign before the elections. With their signatures, they committed themselves to behaving according to international standards and to the law, to keeping their followers under control, and to avoiding any form of provocation and violence during the election campaign. The OSCE and the UNDP invited the candidates to the most luxurious hotel

4 Erkinbaev was shot dead on 21 September 2005 in Bishkek. He is the second Member of Parliament to be killed since March 2005.

in the capital, where, however only three of the seven candidates signed this “gentleman’s agreement”.

Further potential for conflict in connection with the elections and the future unity of the country stems from the deep-rooted ethnic tensions of southern Kyrgyzstan. In the provinces of Osh and Jalal-Abad, one quarter of the total population are Uzbeks. They are extremely anxious about how their interests will be represented in the future. No one has forgotten the bloody clashes between the Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks that took place in Osh and Uzgen in June 1990, when 300 people lost their lives. One of the reasons for the outbreak of violence was the demand that Uzbek be made an official language in Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek community knows of Bakiev at least that he was born in the province of Jalal-Abad and is thus familiar with life in the south and has first-hand experience of the co-existence of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and other ethnic groups. Furthermore, because his wife is Russian, he has a reputation as an internationalist.

The increasing instability has led the population to yearn for peace and stability more than anything else. Many are afraid that their small scale businesses will be destroyed or will collapse. In June 2005, many shops had slogans on their windows, such as “We are with the people” or “This shop is guarded by the people’s patrol”.

Whether the team of Bakiev as President and Kulov as Prime Minister will be able to stabilize the security situation in the near future is not yet clear. It may be necessary to prepare for a time when there is no proper state control in Kyrgyzstan. The state would then remain as an empty shell while power devolved to the regional level. The state would lose its monopoly on the use of force to powerful local individuals, such as influential businessmen. Power would effectively be personalized and the rule of law set aside.

Uzbekistan

*Timeline*⁵

The events that occurred in Andijan during the night of 12 to 13 May 2005 are still not clearly understood. Various sources document that, on that night,

5 For a detailed description of the events see: Human Rights Watch, *Bullets Were Falling Like Rain. The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005*, New York, June 2005, at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistan0605/>; International Crisis Group, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, Asia Briefing No. 38, 25 May 2005, at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3469&l=1>; OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, 13 May 2005*, Warsaw, 20 June 2005, at: http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/06/15233_en.pdf; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report of the Mission to Kyrgyzstan by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Concerning the Killings in Andijan, Uzbekistan of 13-14 May 2005*, Geneva, 12 July 2005, at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/press/docs/andijan12072005.pdf>.

the Uzbek secret service arrested family and friends of a group of 23 local businessmen. The individuals arrested had participated in a protest in front of the court where the businessmen were being tried. It has also been reported repeatedly that an armed group attacked and seized a local police station and later a barracks, and that weapons stocked there were looted. Likewise, it has been reported that, on that same night, some 50 to 100 armed men stormed the jail in Andijan and freed 600 inmates. It is, however, unclear whether both raids were carried out by the same people. In addition, it is not yet known how the armed group(s) came together, or whether family members of the accused businessmen were involved.

What is relatively certain, however, is that the armed men who released the inmates were informed about a protest that was to take place on Babur Place, the city's main square. Many of those released thus joined the group of armed men and headed towards the main square and the local government building (*hokimiyat*). On the way there, fire was exchanged with the secret service building; 30 people are believed to have been killed. It is not clear whether the building was stormed in order to release the detained protestors or whether the secret service first opened fire in order to stop the group from marching to the *hokimiyat*.

At the break of dawn on Friday 13 May, more and more people – who had heard about the events or who had been mobilized – began to assemble on Babur Place in front of the *hokimiyat*. According to witnesses, some 5,000 civilians filled the square that day. The armed group had surrounded and occupied the *hokimiyat*. By the end of the day, they had taken about 30 hostages, among them the prosecutor general and the director of tax inspections. Using a quickly improvised stage equipped with loudspeakers, the people in the square took this opportunity to express their discontent with the situation in Andijan – high unemployment, lack of social security, excessive corruption among the local authorities, and state repression. The statements of several witnesses concur that the armed group twice spoke on the telephone with the Uzbek Minister of the Interior, Zokir Almatov, who refused to enter into any negotiations. Around four o'clock in the afternoon, the government began preparations to storm the *hokimiyat*. Although government troops kept firing at the people gathered at the square throughout the day – reports vary between 50 and 100 deaths – many persevered and remained on the square. Eyewitnesses say that the main reason for their persistence was the hope that President Karimov would show up in person and listen to their concerns.

Between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, government troops began to attack, firing on the people gathered in the square from all sides, using armoured vehicles, lorries, and military jeeps on which guns had been installed. This led to mass panic. Two larger groups, each of which had taken hostages, fled from the square to one of the main streets (*Cholpon Prospekt*). There, a massacre took place, in which about a hundred people – among them many women, children and young people – lost their lives. They were fired at from

the doorways of homes, from rooftops, and from behind barricades, where the troops had positioned themselves to shoot at their targets mercilessly. Some survivors marched overnight for ten hours to reach the Kyrgyz border, only to be shot at once again. They were only able to cross the border after lengthy negotiations. A camp was set up for the 500 refugees directly on the border; in early June it was moved inland to the Kyrgyz province of Jalal-Abad.⁶

Background to the Events

The catalyst for the events in Andijan was the legal proceedings against 23 businessmen – entrepreneurs and tradespeople – that took place on 10 February of this year before the criminal court in Andijan. The defendants were accused of being members of a group called *Akromiya* and of preparing to overthrow the government. The name of this group – its existence and goals are highly speculative – has been traced to its alleged founder, Akrom Yuldashev. In 1992, he composed a small booklet entitled “The Path to Faith” in which he laid out his ideas about how to lead a life according to God’s will. In this book, he also dealt with questions pertaining to business life and the social responsibility of companies. In 1998, Yuldashev was briefly detained and sentenced, but was soon granted amnesty. In 1999 – after a series of explosions in February in Tashkent – he was arrested again and sentenced to 17 years in prison. The charges were described as follows: 1. deliberate alteration of the constitution in an anti-constitutional way, public appeal to take over power; 2. formation and leadership of criminal coalitions; 3. deliberate preparation of information and materials that propagate religious extremism and fundamentalism.

From the very beginning, the trial of the 23 businessmen in Andijan was accompanied by demonstrations. Family members, workers, and neighbours gathered together in silence day after day before the courthouse. In interviews conducted in March and April, demonstrators explained that, with their silent protest, they were calling for justice for the defendants and that they did not believe the extremist group *Akromiya* existed. In fact, they were convinced that the business people had been accused because they were successful and socially involved. On 11 May, on the last day of the proceedings, over 2,000 people gathered in front of the court house. Sentence was due to be handed down on 12 May; on this day, however, it was indefinitely postponed. Furthermore, the protestors learned of the arrest of several young men who had participated in the demonstrations.

The extent of the bloodbath in Andijan is shocking, yet the event itself did not come as a surprise and will probably not remain an isolated case. Andijan was the first tragic result of a socio-economic and political develop-

6 In late July, all but fifteen of the asylum seekers were evacuated to Romania. Another eleven were evacuated to the UK in mid-September.

ment that has grown more and more acute in recent years. Since 1990, the authoritarian president, Islam Karimov, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, has ruled the country with an iron fist. His position within the power apparatus is utterly dominant, and the separation of powers exists only on paper. Those fundamental rights and freedoms proclaimed in the Constitution of 8 December 1992, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion, as well as political pluralism, have not been implemented and are viewed as threats to the stability and internal security of the country. Political opponents of all kinds are persecuted. In prisons, torture is systematically practised. Parliament is weak, and its members come exclusively from parties loyal to the government and the administration. The few extra-parliamentary opposition groups and movements are embroiled in internecine squabbles, and several of their leaders are in exile.

Because of the political conformity enforced upon the secular parties in Parliament and the fragmentation of the secular opposition movements, most of the present-day opposition in Uzbekistan consists of illegal Islamist groups, such as *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*. Sympathy for such organizations is not solely based on religious beliefs. Rather, concepts like the establishment of a Caliphate, in which enduring social problems, poverty, and corruption are to be solved by means of Islamic law, are highly attractive in a state that hardly allows its citizens the air to breathe. As shown in various interviews with members of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, many young people see the organization as the only opportunity to make their political views known and to voice their discontent with the social conditions and the Karimov regime. The government keeps portraying both *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* and other Islamic or Islamist groups as a collective bogeyman and a symbol of Islamist terrorism, thus legitimizing its policies of repression by referring to conditions in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Particularly in the traditionally religious Ferghana Valley, the population had already begun to suffer from such policies in the 1990s. In 1997/1998, for instance, the government blamed "Wahabist terrorists" for the killing of several members of the police force, and arrested between 1,000 and 1,500 people in Namangan and Andijan. Another wave of arrests followed the attempt to blow up the Uzbek President in Tashkent on 16 February 1999. On that day, six bombs killed 15 people and damaged several buildings. By 23 February, 30 people had been imprisoned after Karimov claimed that they all belonged to extremist religious groupings. Up until the beginning of March, between 200 and 500 additional people shared the same fate. In June 1999, 22 individuals were accused of being involved in the attack, and, following a show trial, six of them were sentenced to death. The others were given prison sentences of between ten and 20 years. None was acquitted. Furthermore, hundreds of people were arrested after distributing flyers in support of the accused at Tashkent markets and other public places.

In Uzbekistan, several thousand people have been apprehended and detained because of their religious or political beliefs over the past few years. Many of these are in the infamous *Jaslyk* forced-labour camp, set up by the Uzbek government in the desert southwest of the Aral Sea. The families only rarely receive news of the whereabouts of their relatives. Coffins are sent back nailed shut in order to hide evidence of torture. More and more often, people, most of them women, are demonstrating against the despotism of the government and the administration, thereby risking persecution and violence.

The arbitrariness of the Uzbek government and the public authorities is not directed exclusively against religious and allegedly religious groups and individuals. Traders and small businesses also suffer from the lack of any kind of rule of law and the day-to-day abuses meted out by the police. For example, the introduction of severe import restrictions in 2002 meant that the population was forced to buy only domestically produced goods. In October 2003, the government decided that small traders should only be allowed to operate from their sales in registered kiosks and shops and made the use of cash registers compulsory. These and other measures have ruined the standard of living of many small traders and their families. The rigour with which the police and tax inspectors enforce the relevant regulations and confiscate the goods of those affected has been a cause of growing animosity. More than once this has led to strikes and protests by small traders. The demonstrations – bordering on hunger riots – that occurred at the beginning of November 2004 show the scale of the problem. The number of protestors in Kokand alone was estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000. These protests are symptomatic of the declining living standards in Uzbekistan, where many families live from hand to mouth.

International Reactions

The events in Andijan attracted worldwide attention – at least in the short-term. But access to information, to the town, and to eyewitnesses was and still is the key problem with respect to reporting and analysing the events. In Uzbekistan, the most important websites, which had been reporting on the events, were blocked following 13 May. On terrestrial television, news broadcasts in Russian were suspended, while cable television was shut down completely. Satellite television was the only medium to offer a full range of news stations. These measures aimed to stop the flow of information within the population.

At the time of the demonstrations, only a few journalists were in the town, most of whom were waiting for the court decision in the trial against the 23 businessmen. Later on, the Uzbek government established a dense net of roadblocks on the road to the Ferghana Valley, as well as in and around Andijan and, in so doing, hindered journalists as well as representatives of international organizations from entering the town. As a result, many articles

and analyses are based on interviews with refugees in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) published the first report on the events, which was entitled “Uzbekistan: The Andijan Uprising” (20 pages) on 25 May. Human Rights Watch (HRW) followed with a 60-page report “Bullets Were Falling Like Rain” on 3 June. And the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) issued a 30-page report on the “Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, 13 May 2005”.⁷ All three reports concluded that the government used indiscriminate and disproportional force against unarmed civilians and estimated that the number of dead was higher than stated by officials in Tashkent. In addition, all three organizations strongly recommended that an independent international investigation be held.

Shirin Akiner of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London presents a completely different view: At the end of May, she travelled for one day to Andijan and – according to her own statements – was able to talk to about 40 persons without any problem. On 29 May, back in Tashkent, she gave an interview on Uzbek state TV and, on 7 June, published a 30-page report entitled “Violence in Andijan”.⁸ Both the interview and the report concur with the picture the Uzbek government has drawn of the events and, consequently, are used by the government for its own purposes. In the report, Akiner – who works as an independent consultant for NATO and the FAST Programme of Swisspeace – several times stresses that she is attempting to report objectively and to uphold academic standards. However, she does not take into account the ICG and HRW reports, which had already been published at that time, and condemns “sensationalist media reports” in general. If we take into account the immense pressure the Uzbek government has put on the inhabitants of Andijan since the event, and the fact that Akiner was accompanied by the governor of the province of Andijan, it seems obvious that the reliability of Akiner’s sources should be questioned.

Many governments have expressed their concern about the events in Andijan, which have already been commented upon by international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union. On 20 May 2005, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, published a statement on the situation in Andijan and called on Uzbekistan, which, after

7 Cf. Note 5. On 20 September, 2005 Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch published new reports about the events and their aftermath: Amnesty International, *Uzbekistan. Lifting the siege on the truth about Andizhan*, London, 2005, available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur620212005>, Human Rights Watch, *Burying the Truth. Uzbekistan Rewrites the Story of the Andijan Massacre*, New York 2005, available at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistan0905>.

8 The report, which was initially circulated via email, was later published as a Silk Road Paper by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute: Shirin Akiner, *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assessment*, Washington/Uppsala, 2005, available at: http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/silk_road.htm.

all, is an OSCE participating State, to allow an independent investigation of the events of 13 May. At the same time, he announced that the OSCE would work together closely in this affair with the United Nations and the European Union. Just a day before, on 19 May, the Luxembourg EU chairmanship had issued a statement in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, in which the EU member states argued for an independent international investigation and demanded unhindered access to Andijan for the representatives of the International Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In a press statement on 23 May, the EU Council of Ministers voiced its support for the demands of the OSCE and the United Nations for a thorough clarification of the events. The NATO Council issued a press statement on 24 May condemning the “use of excessive and disproportionate force by the Uzbek security forces” and expressing its support for the United Nation’s call for an independent international investigation. Uzbekistan was also reminded of its commitments under NATO’s Partnership for Peace Programme. On that same day, the United States government threatened not to provide Karimov with promised financial support in the amount of 22 million US dollars unless an independent investigation of the incidents took place. At the meeting of the EU foreign ministers on 13 June in Luxembourg, it was announced that the EU would discuss sanctions against Uzbekistan should Karimov not allow an international investigation in the country.

Whether the appeals and the pressure announced by the international community will have any effect on the government in Tashkent is doubtful for several reasons. On the one hand, up until now and especially since 11 September 2001, Karimov has been very successful in dressing up his domestic policies towards religious groups as anti-terror measures and, in doing so, has received understanding and support from Western governments. Uzbekistan was the first state in Central Asia to become a member of the anti-terror coalition. As a consequence of sanctions against Uzbekistan, it is conceivable that the US and Germany might be required to give up their military bases in the south of the country. On the other hand, Karimov does not depend on Western states – neither for his political legitimisation, nor for financial support. The regional great powers Russia and China as well as neighbouring Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan support Karimov’s position and his “Islamist terror hypothesis” unreservedly. Ten days after the events in Andijan, Karimov visited China. On the eve of his arrival, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that China supported Karimov’s fight against “separatists, terrorists, and extremists” wholeheartedly. At a meeting in June in Moscow, Karimov and Russia’s President Putin discussed issues such as the international fight against terror and closer economic and military co-operation between the two countries.

The events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan illustrate the effects of deficient rule of law with regard to the domestic and foreign security situation of both countries. President Karimov is only adding fuel to the flames by continuing his measures of repression. The pressure will keep on growing in the area with more and more minor outbreaks until one day the whole situation explodes into chaos and mayhem.

The Kyrgyz town of Osh, one of the locations where the protests originated in southern Kyrgyzstan, is only 30 km from Andijan. In March, the population of Uzbekistan saw in the example of its Kyrgyz neighbours what a determined mass movement could accomplish. They are also sure to have noted that the administration, militias, and the President are not all powerful. What they did not take into account was Karimov's willingness to use violence, something that distinguished him from Akaev.

In both countries, the security situation can be expected to remain unstable in the coming months. Kyrgyzstan's new president, Bakiev, is faced with the task of restoring the state's monopoly on violence at all levels and in every region. In Uzbekistan, Karimov wishes to retain his grip on power and is seeking the support of regional superpowers Russia and China in doing so. The sanctions announced by the EU and the possible invocation of the Moscow Mechanism by the OSCE will probably have no influence on the regime in Uzbekistan. In neighbouring Turkmenistan, President Sapamurat Niyazov has shown only too well over the last few years that domestic power can be maintained without international co-operation if one has sufficient resources at one's disposal. In Uzbekistan, the attempts to attach conditions to the provision of Western support are likely to be counterbalanced by unconditional support offered by Russia and China. In addition, special attention should be paid to the fact that any attempts to isolate Uzbekistan politically and economically may lead the population to feel abandoned by the international community and to begin to heed promises – of whatever kind – made by extremist groups.

International organizations should work towards implementing national laws and regulations at the local level. Only when the rule of law is guaranteed will the population start to believe in abstract concepts like democracy and their own right to participate in the political and economic system. Until this happens, their only option is to counter the abuse from above with illegal activities from below.