



# The question of political instability in central Asia

Security Council



From a separated world to global peace: the need  
for a new look on institutions.



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## Introduction

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries have enjoyed self-governance under the heavy influence of the Russian Federation. Because these countries have poorly drawn borders when it comes to the different ideologies and ethnicities in the area. This has led to many border conflicts, most of these conflicts happened around the Fergana Valley. An area blooming with life and more suitable for agriculture and building settlements. As most of the Central Asian territory consists of deserts and mountains this valley provides many opportunities, opportunities all neighboring countries desire.

Further adding to the conflicts is the limited amount of water in the area. Water has always been a source of conflict in human history. In areas with limited access to water, it can be used as a bargaining chip if one nation is located upstream from another country.

The Russian Federation often stepped in to mediate these border conflicts, The central Asian countries however fear the Russian Federation less since the start of the special military operations in Ukraine. This weakened the Russian Federation and as a result, also weakened its international influence.

Not only is there political instability between these countries but also within these countries. The fall of the Soviet Union left some quite corrupt governments in place. This usually does not go by well and it did not in this case either. The populace did not accept the corruption and went to the streets, in response the governments started harsh crackdowns on these protests.



## Definition of Key Terms

### **Crackdown**

Is the use of extreme measures to counter illegal activity or people. In the context of this research report, it is mostly used to describe the measures taken against the protesters speaking up to the governments, often resulting in the violation of human rights.

### **Border dispute**

Is a disagreement between countries about the placement of the border. Often originating from ethnicity, race, or other features of the inhabitants in the area. Other possible reasons for these disputes are economic or political.

### **Border conflict**

A border conflict appears when a border dispute turns violent, either by the inhabitants of the area or by a country's military actions. Border disputes can be used as a justification for war.

### **Special military operations**

Is a term often used for reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, and counterterrorism. The Russian Federation used this term in its controversial campaign in Ukraine. Putin claimed the goal was to demilitarise and de-nazify the regions.

### **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**

Is an international cooperation that mostly strives for free and fair elections, security, human rights, conflict prevention, and crisis management.



## General Overview

### Political unrest in the Central Asian countries

The Central Asian countries all have very low scores on the democracy index, having such low scores often leads to the suppression of human rights, civil unrest, and international disapproval.

#### Turkmenistan

After being led by a dictator for about fifteen years, the Turkmen government adopted a new constitution allowing for multiple parties to exist and increasing the size of the parliament. Although these are steps in the good direction there is still a lot of work to be done, as the 2013 elections were widely regarded as rigged. Now all parties rule jointly under the DPT, meaning there is no true opposition in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is also incredibly corrupt, scoring a 19/100 on the corruption index.

#### Tajikistan

Following a civil war in this country, directly after the fall of the Soviet Union, this country now is led by an authoritarian regime. Opposition parties and the OSCE claim the 2010 elections were not democratic, the Tajik government claimed they only made some small infractions on democracy. These infractions would not affect the will of the people according to the government.

#### Uzbekistan

This country, like all others, has an authoritarian regime. However, great reforms have happened since the death of Islam Karimov. The current president, Chavkat Mirziyoyev, is faring a much more democratic and western driven course. His rule is often compared to the rule of Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev. His rule has been internationally named to be an “Uzbek Spring”.

#### Kazakhstan

Like the aforementioned countries, Kazakhstan is led by an authoritarian regime where freedom of speech is deeply oppressed. Small improvements have been achieved, such as the limit to the presidential terms. It is now also easier to establish a political party. The current president, like most leaders in this region, seems to strive towards a slight increase in democracy and human rights.

#### Kyrgyzstan

Lastly, Kyrgyzstan is a country with a significant amount of corruption. It has however had the score of partly free and now carries the score of a hybrid regime. The last two elections had some interesting results where 80% voted in favor of the current president, later a referendum was held about whether the president should have more power, where 85% voted in favor.



## **Political discourse between the Central Asian Countries**

Apart from rising tensions due to the weakening of the Russian Federation, there also were some border conflicts. For example, the border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that have been raging for nearly two years. Further adding to the rising tensions are the intrinsically different people in the area, the current borders are a sort of knot of all these different ideologies. These tangled borders are currently in the Fergana Valley, a highly desirable landmass due to the high fertility and large amounts of level ground. This area is perfect for cities and agriculture, neither can be easily built nearby.



## Major Parties Involved

### The Russian Federation

Previously the dominant power in the region, their position weakened following the special military operations in Ukraine. Their military showed to not be as powerful as previously anticipated, allowing the central Asian countries to break free from their grasp. This however has increased tension as the Russian Federation often stepped in as a mediator in the region, working to keep the peace.

### Turkmenistan

This country has seen a lot of corruption since the fall of the Soviet Union. The first government was officially democratic with a president, the opposition was however imprisoned. He was succeeded by Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, who was then succeeded by his son Serdar Berdimuhamedow making Turkmenistan the second former Soviet state to have dynastic succession.

### Tajikistan

This country has an authoritarian regime plagued by corruption, civil unrest, and defectors to the Islamic state. This country also recently got involved in a conflict in Afghanistan. This country is also under the military influence of India after they rebuilt Ayni Air Base. It has been involved in repeated border conflicts with Kyrgyzstan for nearly two years.

### Uzbekistan

Like the other Central Asian countries, this country is led by an authoritarian regime. This regime tries to appear democratic; this is however hard to believe when you take the election results. The current president seems to fare a less autocratic policy compared to his predecessor.

### Kazakhstan

This country got a new president after being led for 29 years by Nursultan Nazarbayev. When the country plummeted into civil unrest in January 2022, the new president seized the opportunity to take power and definitively remove his predecessor from office.

### Kyrgyzstan

This country had some of the most severe civil unrest of the Central Asian countries. This country, however, has developed genuine free news and political opposition. These developments have seen a decline since the border conflict with Tajikistan, these conflicts have been going on for nearly two years now.

### China

Since the decline in Russian dominance in the region, China has been working to jump into the power vacuum left behind. Chinese influence over the region has increased significantly in the past few years, strengthening their ties to the local governments in areas such as economy and security. Central Asia is of great interest to China for the silk road initiative, aiming to create a network of railways to transport Chinese goods to Europe.



## India

A country with an upcoming economy also directs its attention towards Central Asia for partnerships. Their Connect Central Asia policy focuses on strengthening India-Central Asian connections. This policy has a lot of different aspects, but the most important aspects are the political and economic ties between the regions.



## Timeline of Events

26-12-1991	Dissolution of the Soviet Union
14-04-1992	CSTO is established
06-10-2007	CSTO peacekeeping force is established
04-2010	The April crisis in Kyrgyzstan
04-2021	Severe border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
01-2022	CSTO deploys 2000 peacekeeping units to Kazakhstan
02-2022	The Russian Federation announces Special Military operations in Ukraine
09-2022	Border conflicts between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan evolve to armed clashes



## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### **Collective Security Treaty Organisation**

Quickly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the former member states signed the Collective Security Treaty. This allowed for military cooperation resembling NATO. This treaty protects from security threats outside the signatory states and allows for peacekeeping operations between and within the states. This has helped decrease the violent protests and de-escalate a few border disputes before they could turn to violent border conflicts.

### **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**

The OSCE has repeatedly expressed its concerns for the well-being of humans in Central Asia. It has also stated it considers the elections unjust because multiple severe violations of democracy happened in all Central Asian countries. The OSCE has yet to take any suitable measures to improve the situation.



## Possible solutions

As the build-up of tensions continues, particularly on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border it is necessary to act swiftly before the conflict further escalates. It is therefore needed to send UN peacekeeping units to the region to ensure the conflict further escalates. An alternative is to immediately cease fire along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and to demilitarise the zone to ensure safety for all civilians in the area. To establish lasting peace a different solution needs to be found. This can either be done by redrawing the borders or by making strict agreements about the allocation of their limited water supply. The establishment of a Free-Trade Zone (FTZ) can also improve the foreign relations between the states, this can also boost the economies of these countries.

Another option is to send aid to the CSTO to allow it to de-escalate the ongoing conflicts in the region. This will also help the countries retain more control as the de-escalation is done by the local governments, making them closer to the nations and thereby instilling more trust. If chosen, this option needs to be monitored carefully as allowing the nations to resolve their issues might not be successful.

There are a few options to tackle the civil unrest in Central Asia. The UNHRC could report on the human rights status and democracy in Central Asia. The UNSC can then act on the reports and recommendations written by the UNHRC. A possible outcome of a bad report can be sanctions or aid to mend the human rights violations and make sure they don't happen again.

Another option is to allow the Central-Asian states to resolve the problem how they see fit. This option allows the nations to keep more of their sovereignty, leaving local governments more functional to keep ruling.



## Useful documents

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