

Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Another Color Revolution or Even Civil War?

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The historically unstable Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan was suddenly thrown into yet another crisis after the former president and his supporters opened fire on the special forces that were dispatched to serve a warrant for his arrest on corruption charges following his refusal to comply with earlier requests for his surrender, with the latest violence threatening to spiral into a Color Revolution or even a civil war in the worst-case scenario.

Russia's CSTO mutual defense ally and fellow Eurasian Union member Kyrgyzstan has been suddenly thrown into yet another crisis earlier this week after a long-simmering power struggle between the current and former presidents finally turned violent. Former President Atambayev was [stripped of immunity](#) earlier this summer and charged with corruption by incumbent President Jeenbekov, his former protege, but he refused to comply with previous requests for his surrender. The authorities therefore dispatched special forces to serve a warrant for his arrest but they were met with gunfire at Atambayev's compound outside the capital. The [initial operation ended in a total failure](#) but he finally [agreed to give himself up](#) the day after. The former leader claimed that he's a victim of political repression, while the current one says that his predecessor just [blatantly violated the constitution](#) by resisting arrest, among his other alleged offenses, especially after he [admitted](#) to firing on the forces that were sent to arrest him. In turn, Atambayev called on his supporters to [protest in Bishkek](#), raising fears that the latest violence might spiral into a [Color Revolution](#) or even a civil war in the worst-case scenario given the unstable Central Asian country's history of unrest in recent years.

The core of the current problem appears to be that Atambayev assumed that he'd be able to control Jeenbekov and therefore continue to exercise indirect influence over the state indefinitely, but his successor had other plans and decided to assert his independence by holding his former patron to account for his alleged violations of the law. The incumbent might have done so as part of a genuine anti-corruption drive, but he could very well have also had political motives in dismantling the shadow network that his predecessor had established and which might have been functioning as a "state-within-a-state". After all, earlier constitutional changes made it so that Kyrgyz Presidents can only serve one six-year term in office, so it's possible that Atambayev wanted to continue functioning as the de-facto head of state through various proxies, both official ones like Jeenbekov and unofficial ones like the armed supporters who had already assembled at his compound when the first unsuccessful raid was attempted. So influential was Atambayev even after serving his term that he still maintained ties with Putin and [even visited him in Moscow](#) late last month in a last-ditch Russian-mediated attempt to avoid what ended up being the inevitable standoff that just took place.

Casual observers might not be aware of this, but Kyrgyz political culture is still largely centered on clans, which is why the latest situation is so potentially explosive because [two Color Revolutions already happened in less than 15 years](#) after dissatisfied clansmen took to the streets to protest in 2005 and 2010. Per the traditional Color Revolution template, the police responded to various provocations at those times and the situation quickly escalated to the point where the incumbent was eventually removed from office, with the latest regime change being especially bloody following inter-ethnic clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley. That's why Atambayev's request that his supporters rally in the capital in his support was so inflammatory because it could very well trigger a repeat of those two previous scenarios, as was [unsuccessfully attempted](#) Thursday night after the former head of state's ultimate surrender. It'll remain to be seen whether that'll still be the case during the coming weekend or not, but the security services seem prepared to deal with another Color Revolution attempt if active efforts are made to return the country to its recent history of unrest.

Looking forward, the only sustainable solution is for Kyrgyzstan to reduce and ultimately eliminate the influence that clan-centric shadow networks play in its "national democracy", so in hindsight this week's dramatic operation against the former head of state had to have happened sooner or later in the interests of the country's long-term stability. It might very well prove to be an uphill battle that the state itself might not be properly prepared to handle given the likelihood that elements of its security and other apparatuses could already be infiltrated by those said networks. Therefore, one can simplify the challenge ahead by saying that Kyrgyzstan must "cleanse" its "deep state" (permanent bureaucracy) simultaneously with cracking down on organized crime (which is sometimes affiliated with some "deep state" forces), but this might lead to serious societal disruptions depending on how entrenched the problem might be. That could explain why it hasn't been seriously attempted before, though it's more likely that previous leaders and influencers preferred to exploit the preexisting system in place for their own benefit than reform it and risk losing out on their self-interested perks. As such, Kyrgyzstan probably has some tough times ahead of itself and should therefore be kept an eye.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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Articles by: **Andrew Korybko**

About the author:

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