

## *Kyrgyz Republic: Extremism & Terrorism*

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On February 16, 2023, the Kyrgyz Republic repatriated 18 women and 41 children from Syrian conflict zones back to the Central Asian country. The children are expected to be placed in a rehabilitation and readaptation center. It is unreported whether the women—who are the first consenting adult women to return home to Kyrgyzstan—will face criminal punishment for possible participation in a terrorist organization. The latest repatriation effort follows another operation in March 2021, when 79 children were repatriated from conflict zones in Iraq. Of the estimated 850 Kyrgyz citizens that left for Syria and Iraq between 2013 and 2015, hundreds of men reportedly died in battle, and an estimated 380 women and children were left stranded at Al-Hol and Roj refugee camps in northern Syria. (Sources: [Al Arabiya](#), [Eurasia Net](#))

### **Overview**

Violent extremism does not have an extensive history in the Kyrgyz Republic—more commonly referred to as Kyrgyzstan—but its location within a nexus of countries afflicted by insurgencies has made it vulnerable to the fallout from terrorism. Extremist groups reportedly surfaced in Kyrgyzstan following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Soviet government reportedly funded orthodox Islamic scholars to discredit the Hanafi strain of Islam, which gained traction in neighboring Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley region. (Sources: [United States Institute of Peace](#), [European Eye on Radicalization](#))

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) first emerged in Central Asia in 1991 and evolved into a significant violent threat in Kyrgyzstan by the late 1990s, with the southern Osh region being particularly impacted by the IMU. Specifically, the IMU seeks to establish a caliphate in Central Asia through militant jihad. The southern region of Kyrgyzstan has porous borders, which facilitates the flow of people and illicit goods, particularly from insurgent-heavy areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. In the late 1990s, the IMU controlled key drug trafficking routes in southern Kyrgyzstan’s Fergana Valley, which funded continued violent activity throughout Central Asia. Furthermore, the demographics of those susceptible to violent extremism is highly concentrated in the south. Of the 850 Kyrgyz-born recruits to fight alongside ISIS in Iraq and Syria, 77 percent were from the country’s southern provinces. Additionally, 94.5 percent of those included on special watch list by law enforcement in 2016 lived in the southern regions, with most coming from the Jalalabad and Osh provinces. (Sources: [United States Institute of Peace](#), [European Eye on Radicalization](#), [Marshall Center](#))

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) also developed a support network in the Fergana Valley. HT is an international Islamist non-violent political party that seeks to peacefully convince Muslim nations into accepting Islamist political systems. Although HT does not regularly carry out acts of violence, the Kyrgyz authorities consider HT a terrorist organization due to the group’s alleged ideological and operational ties to extremist groups abroad. In 2003, the Kyrgyz government banned HT. (Sources: [USAID](#), [International Crisis Group](#), [Marshall Center](#), [United States Institute of Peace](#))

Terrorist incidents were not actively reported until 1999 when the Kyrgyz military battled guerilla groups from Afghanistan seeking to gain entry to Uzbekistan. The first recorded incident of violent extremism was reportedly carried out by the IMU in 1999. The group kidnapped several hostages in southern Kyrgyzstan, including Japanese nationals, only releasing them after receiving ransoms between \$500,000 and \$2 million. Kidnappings for ransom continued through 2001. These attacks were countered by air assaults on IMU positions from the Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan military, forcing the jihadist group to seek safe haven from the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan in September 2001. (Source: [United States Institute of Peace](#))

It was not until the 2020s that Kyrgyzstan saw an increase in arrests related to participation in terrorist groups. However, Kyrgyzstan’s first national program and action plan to combat extremism, which was adopted in 2017, does not clearly define what is considered terrorism or terrorist activity. The nebulous criteria for defining terrorist activity resulted in security forces sometimes arbitrarily determining who could be charged with terror-related crimes. Amendments were adopted, however, in 2019 to clarify the exact circumstances that would result in terror-related arrests. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [The Diplomat](#))

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan has faced multiple periods of political and economic instability, including the overthrow of two of their presidents in 2005 and 2010. Political instability marked by nepotism and corruption, economic unrest, tensions between the ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, and a power competition between the north and south of the country, has created unstable conditions conducive to radicalization. Following the rise of ISIS, Kyrgyz citizens were targeted as recruits for the terrorist group. According to government statistics, around 850 Kyrgyz citizens left the country to join ISIS or other terrorist groups, although regional scholars insist the number is higher. Hundreds of Kyrgyz born foreign fighters have returned since the defeat of ISIS’s so-called caliphate. However, the Kyrgyz government is ill-equipped to systematically carry out the investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation of returnees. (Sources: [Carnegie Endowment](#), [International Crisis Group](#),

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[USAID](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Voice of America](#))

Despite Kyrgyzstan's proximity to countries with active jihadist insurgencies, international governments and organizations contend that there is little risk of violent extremism flourishing in Kyrgyzstan. The largest potential threat is from growing ethnic Kyrgyz nationalism that has been endorsed by a small but persistent group. Furthermore, it is estimated that extremist Islamic ideology has not been adopted by a large enough demographic to warrant action against by the government. Rather, the country has been subjected to a history of political and ethnic violence. Ethnic tension between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks resulted in significant violence in June 2010. Additionally, dissatisfaction with a corrupt political system incapable of the adequate delivery of state goods and services has catalyzed Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic tensions as well. Regional scholars therefore concluded that intense nationalism has the potential to fuel continued political violence. (Sources: [USAID](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Voice of America](#))

### **Radicalization and Foreign Fighters**

Around 90 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population of 6.7 million identify as Muslim. Previously, Kyrgyzstan did not enforce regulations regarding religions outside of the country's "traditional faiths" of Hanafi Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church. However, as followers of international Salafist movements disseminated their teachings throughout the country, the Kyrgyz government began to enforce laws and policies designed to safeguard the country's religious traditions and principles. Accordingly, the regulations served to prevent the influence of foreign Islamic practices that could potentially endorse violent extremism. The country's chief religious institutions—the Muftiate and the State Commission for Religious Affairs—oversee and monitor religious organizations as a way to prevent and restrict the activities of potentially extremist religious groups. As of 2022, Kyrgyzstan had banned more than 20 religious groups designated as extremist or terrorist organizations. (Sources: [Silk Road Studies](#), [Radio Free Europe](#))

Despite state intervention within the religious sphere, Kyrgyzstan remains vulnerable to extremist groups that threaten their Central Asian neighbors. In particular, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as extremist groups in nearby Afghanistan and the North Caucasus, pose a significant risk if militants use Kyrgyzstan as a base to launch attacks. Additionally, those same groups could attract recruits from Kyrgyzstan disillusioned by pervasive ethnic repression, political instability, and economic turmoil across the country. (Sources: [United States Institute of Peace](#), [European Eye on Radicalization](#))

Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan has also mobilized some groups of Kyrgyz to act against Uzbek and Russian minorities within the country. Although Uzbeks only represent 15 percent of the country's population, they are mostly concentrated in the south, where their numbers rival that of the ethnic Kyrgyz. Dissatisfaction with the political system and inadequate delivery of state goods and services has catalyzed ethnic tensions, pitting some Kyrgyz against Uzbeks who they assume drain the country of its resources. Following the April 2010 overthrow of President and Kyrgyz nationalist, Kumanbek Bakiyev, ethnic tensions came to a head in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. The ensuing violence resulted in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and the displacement of almost 100,000 people. Although most returned following the violence, Uzbeks were disproportionately affected by the conflict. Kyrgyz nationalists fueled narratives that Uzbeks instigated the violence. Prior to the conflict, anti-Uzbek narratives were disseminated across Kyrgyz-language newspapers, and Uzbek calls for greater representation across politics and business was interpreted as opportunistic. However, the Uzbek goal of greater representation and authority was a response to the rights Bakiyev stripped from them. Intense nationalism has surfaced in recent years and scholars speculate that it could be fuel for further political violence. (Sources: [USAID](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Voice of America](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#))

Uzbeks remain marginalized throughout Kyrgyzstan, which could become a radicalization driver, particularly for vulnerable youth. Furthermore, should violent extremism become a greater threat throughout Kyrgyzstan, international NGOs and human rights groups believe Kyrgyz security forces will disproportionately target Uzbeks under the guise of counterterrorism. As the government provides sweeping powers to security officials to determine guilt or innocence for terror crimes, the historically repressed Uzbek are vulnerable to unsubstantiated accusations of terrorism or violent extremism. The unjust targeting of the group could potentially push some young Uzbeks toward radical ideologies, which would in turn further fuel Kyrgyz nationalists' anti-Uzbek propaganda. (Sources: [Carnegie Endowment](#), [International Crisis Group](#))

### *Foreign Fighters and ISIS*

Kyrgyz nationals represent one of the larger groups of foreign fighters who fought alongside ISIS and other violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria. ISIS first targeted Kyrgyz Muslims in July 2015, releasing a propaganda and recruitment video. In the video, a militant speaking Kyrgyz urged Muslims to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria, claiming the jihad would be the start of eventually challenging the Kyrgyz government. Despite the Muftiate and the government quickly distributing counter-extremist materials to mosques throughout the country, 850 Kyrgyz nationals, of which a

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large number were Uzbeks from southern Kyrgyzstan, eventually joined the ranks of the extremist group. According to the United States Institute of Peace, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) leaders also capitalized on ISIS's growing popularity at this time among the Kyrgyz and advocated for the overthrow of the Kyrgyz government. Additionally, HT advocated for replacing Kyrgyz nationalism with Islamic law and allegedly provided money to the families of "martyrs" in Syria. (Sources: [International Crisis Group](#), [United States Institute of Peace](#))

Of the Kyrgyz foreign fighters, 90 percent were ethnic Uzbek disaffected by continued discrimination throughout Kyrgyzstan. According to a 2017 report by the NGO Search for Common Ground, the drivers of radicalization were not religious in nature, but the result of socioeconomic and sociocultural vulnerabilities. Additionally, those persuaded to travel to Iraq and Syria were not motivated by leading Kyrgyz religious figures, but rather extremists not connected to the larger community. Most Kyrgyz ISIS supporters are reportedly young migrant laborers who embrace Islam as a means of identity and solidarity. ISIS affiliates within Kyrgyzstan reportedly persuaded and then eventually facilitated the travel of Kyrgyz youth to fight in Syria and Iraq. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Cambridge University Press](#), [Search for Common Ground](#))

Of the Kyrgyz that traveled to fight in Syria, some joined Central Asian headed terror outfits, such as Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ). KTJ is a predominantly Uzbek and Kyrgyz group that was established in 2013 and operates in Syria's Aleppo Province. KTJ reportedly cooperates with al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's former official affiliate in Syria. KTJ also coordinates and shares propaganda material with Katibat Imam al-Bukhari (KIB), an IMU splinter group that was founded in 2011 on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and has actively collaborated with al-Nusra Front. According to the United Nations Security Council, since 2016, KIB also has deployed fighters from Syria to Afghanistan to establish terrorist training camps. (Sources: [International Institute for Counterterrorism](#), [United Nations Security Council](#))

Four years after the 2019 fall of ISIS's so-called caliphate, in February 2023, Kyrgyzstan repatriated its first group of adult women from Syria. As Kyrgyzstan limits information available about issues relating to national security, it is uncertain whether the 18 returnees will face charges for participation in a terrorist organization, or whether they will be eligible for rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Prior to repatriating the female detainees, in March 2021 Kyrgyzstan repatriated 79 children from conflict zones in Iraq. Although children are transferred to rehabilitation and reintegration centers upon their return, the Kyrgyz government has not revealed whether they have established the mechanisms to investigate, prosecute and rehabilitate adults that return to the country. Of the Kyrgyz citizens that left for Syria and Iraq between 2013 and 2015, around 200 men reportedly died in battle, and an estimated 380 women and children were left stranded in the al-Hol and Roj refugee camps in northern Syria. According to a 2021 report published by the Terrorism Research Initiative, two Kyrgyz male nationals voluntarily returned to Kyrgyzstan and submitted themselves to the appropriate authorities. The number of secret returnees—who spend an average of four years in Syria versus the 11 months for those who voluntarily submit themselves for return—is difficult to gauge, but according to a 2021 report funded by the European Union, at least 38 foreign terrorist fighters have been arrested in Kyrgyzstan, of which three claimed they returned to their home country for the purpose of carrying out terrorist attacks. (Sources: [Al Arabiya](#), [Eurasia Net](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Terrorism Research Initiative](#), [Research Center for Religious Studies](#))

### *Hizb-ut Tahrir*

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), meaning "Party of Liberation," is an international Islamist non-violent political party that seeks to peacefully convince Muslim nations into accepting Islamist political systems. In Central Asia—including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan—HT membership is estimated at between 20,000 and 100,000. Members typically include college students, teachers, the unemployed, and factory workers. The popularity of the group first spread from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan in the late 1970s and continues to have a sizable following in both the north and south regions as well as from both major ethnic groups. HT financing in Central Asia is believed to come from private donations and dues paid by members, estimated at anywhere from five percent to 20 percent of a member's monthly income. (Sources: [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#), [American Foreign Policy Council](#), [Hudson Institute](#), [Radio Free Europe](#), [International Crisis Group](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

Although HT does not regularly carry out acts of violence, the Kyrgyz authorities consider HT a terrorist organization. HT members are considered political and security threats to Kyrgyz authorities, who believe HT has deep ideological and operational ties to extremist groups abroad. In 2003, the Kyrgyz government banned HT, claiming the group sought to overthrow the government. (Sources: [USAID](#), [International Crisis Group](#))

Regional scholars have suggested that HT has supported recruitment activities that have funneled Kyrgyz fighters to Syria. Kyrgyz authorities have further accused HT with supporting the al-Qaeda affiliate al-Nusra Front in Syria and recruiting Kyrgyz citizens for the war in Syria. In 2015, Artur Medetbekov, the former deputy chairman of Kyrgyzstan's intelligence service, the National Security Committee (GKNB), claimed HT members "brainwash our people to such an extent that people are going to war and taking their families. Their main weapons are ideology and money. And everything happens through social networks and through those who have already gone [to Syria]." As the HT movement does not stress ethnicity,

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HT has drawn support from Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan as the group promotes a platform of guaranteed social goods and services for all. Following the ethnic violence in 2010, HT saw an increase in membership from Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan who were negatively affected. While HT's goals resonate more often with Uzbeks, HT has also had success in recruiting more ethnic Kyrgyz alienated by what they view as corrupt religious institutions and figures operating in the country's north. (Sources: [United States Institute of Peace](#), [Radio Free Europe](#))

### *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)*

One of the first and most violent extremist groups to operate in Kyrgyzstan is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU became a greater threat to Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s when the group asserted control over the Fergana Valley and gained a following throughout Kyrgyzstan's south. The IMU is an internationally designated terrorist organization that seeks to overthrow and replace governments in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries with an Islamic state. Tahir Yuldashev co-founded the IMU with Jumabai Ahmadzhanovich Kholiyev (a.k.a. Juma Namangani), a former Soviet paratrooper with experience in the Afghan war. The two militants founded the IMU in Afghanistan in August 1998 and declared a jihad to overthrow the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to establish an Islamic state in the Fergana Valley. (Sources: [Jamestown Foundation](#), [BBC News](#), [International Institute for Counterterrorism](#))

In August 1999, Namangani led about 800 Islamic extremists—mostly Uzbeks—in a cross-border raid into Kyrgyzstan from bases in Tajikistan, seizing several villages near the Uzbekistan border. The extremists reportedly attempted to establish a base in Kyrgyzstan to launch attacks into Uzbekistan. According to media sources, the IMU has influenced the radical activity of individuals in the Osh region, even luring youth to join and advance their cause in conflicts abroad. If the recruits return home, the tactical skills acquired in conflict zones could then be used to strengthen the capacity of the group's violent activities. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Jamestown Foundation](#), [Congressional Research Service](#), [Voice of America](#), [Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey](#))

From 1999 until 2001, the IMU carried out a series of kidnappings for ransom. In August 1999, the IMU kidnapped the mayor of Batken and several other hostages in southern Kyrgyzstan and released them in exchange for \$500,000. Shortly thereafter, the group once again carried out a kidnapping in Batken, this time holding an official from Japan's Interior Ministry and four Japanese geologists hostage. The abductees were later released for a ransom of more than \$2 million. In August 2000, IMU militants once again struck in Batken, kidnapping 12 mountain climbers, four of whom were Americans. The mountaineers all managed to escape or were rescued and details of possible ransom payments remain murky. As the IMU continued to carry out kidnappings and exert their influence over the Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan launched an air campaign against the terror group and Kyrgyzstan launched its own offensive against IMU positions in southern Kyrgyzstan. The IMU eventually retreated to Afghanistan in September 2001, where the group pledged loyalty to Taliban leader Mullah Omar and received permanent safe haven. Following the U.S.'s October 2001 bombings of IMU bases in northern Afghanistan, the group then relocated to Pakistan in 2002 where they were embraced by the Pakistani Taliban. After the IMU's relocation to Pakistan, a network of former IMU extremists joined together to create the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). Included among the al-Qaeda aligned network are Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Kazakh militants who reportedly share sources of funding, violence-oriented tactics targeting Central Asian authorities, and the goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate. The group maintains a small number of troops in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas as well as in Afghanistan where they operate alongside the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network. (Sources: [United States Institute of Peace](#), [Conflict Studies Research Centre](#), [Jamestown Foundation](#), [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), [National Counter Terrorism Center](#))

Although currently based in Pakistan's tribal areas of North and South Waziristan, the IMU could take advantage of the country's permeable borders to staunchly reestablish itself in Afghanistan or make their way back to Kyrgyzstan. Despite previously being an ally of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, on August 6, 2015, the IMU pledged allegiance to ISIS, an enemy of both groups. Following the IMU's pledge, the Taliban established a special unit to combat all pro-ISIS groups in the region. By December 2015, the Taliban had killed hundreds of IMU fighters, including its leader, Usman Ghazi (a.k.a. Abu Usman). In 2013, IMU's strength was estimated at 10,000 with 3,000 of those members serving in a militant capacity. Estimates have significantly varied over the years, but as of 2022, 3,500 IMU members, of which half are active, were located in Afghanistan alone. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [CBS News](#), [International Institute for Counterterrorism](#), [International Institute for Counterterrorism](#), [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), [Center for Eastern Studies](#), [European Eye on Radicalization](#))

## **Timeline of Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents**

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### **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

#### *Counterterrorism Legislation and Agencies*

The Kyrgyz Republic's first law regarding terrorism, called the "Law on Countering Terroristic Acts" defined terrorism and provided the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic (MVD) and State Committee for National Security (GKNB) the authority to identify terrorist threats and prevent attacks. Kyrgyz law criminalizes all activities in support of terrorism, extremism, and radicalization if the activities threaten domestic security, and those convicted of recruiting, training, or participating in terrorist activities abroad face up to 15 years imprisonment. Kyrgyz security officials have not delved into the details of prosecuting foreign fighters, but according to a report released by U.N. Women, Kyrgyz security officials have previously stated those that return are arrested, convicted, and imprisoned if deemed a threat to the public. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [UN Women](#))

Kyrgyzstan approved its first national program and action plan for combating terrorism and extremism in 2017. The plan, which was enacted in the same year, was to be implemented within the following five years, with a significant part of the national plan focused on comprehensive approaches to preventing extremism. The action plan has three main objectives: preventing extremism, detecting and suppressing extremism, and improving legislative mechanisms for responding to and combating terrorism. However, in 2021, the program faced criticism from civil society organizations that claimed Kyrgyz security services applied the law—particularly relating to extremist materials on the Internet—disproportionately against ethnic Uzbeks. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Along with the national program and plan, in 2017 the U.N. and the Kyrgyz government developed the 2017-2020 Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP). The PPP prioritizes preventing radicalization that could lead to violent extremism, as well as "decreasing the number of Kyrgyz citizens leaving for Syria or other countries as foreign terrorist fighters as well as the number of extremist and terrorist cases." (Sources: [OSCE](#), [United Nations](#))

Despite the intentions of the national plan, Kyrgyz legislation does not clearly define what is considered terrorism or terrorist activity. This absence of clarity has resulted in security forces sometimes arbitrarily determining who is charged as an extremist offender. Previously, security officials regularly used article 299-2 of the Criminal Code to imprison suspects for terror crimes. From 2010 until 2018, 258 people were convicted for possessing vaguely defined extremist material under article 299-2. Cited as the most common charge against extremist and terrorist suspects, authorities have used article 299-2 to imprison suspects for seemingly innocuous crimes such as reading banned literature or practicing conservative forms of Islam. In 2016, the Law on Countering Extremist Activities was amended to criminalize public expressions of approval and justification for extremism or terrorism. Previously, possession of extremist material was a criminal offense, but in December 2016, Kyrgyzstan's parliament approved an amendment that rendered possession of extremist content a criminal offense only when the suspect intended to disseminate the materials. Those found guilty of distribution face up to five years in prison. The amendments to the criminal code took effect in January 2019. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [The Diplomat](#), [U.S. Department of Justice](#))

On August 24, 2021, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov signed the Law on Protection from False Information. The bill reportedly targets the widespread use of fake social media accounts that disseminate disinformation in an attempt to discredit Kyrgyz political officials. Additionally, the law—which also identifies customers of cellular companies and Internet service providers—enables bodies within the Ministry of Culture, information, Sport, and Youth Policy to request and eventually block the content of websites and social media platforms that do not comply with the parameters of the legislation. Further compounding the sweeping powers of security services, the May 2022 law on National Security Bodies allows security services to conduct video and audio surveillance without prior court consent. Both acts of legislation prove controversial as they can be used to arbitrarily target those who are critical of the government in any capacity. Authorities could subsequently go as far as charging suspects with extremism related offenses. In one instance in May 2022, Taalaibek Duishenbiev, the director of a television station, was arrested after airing comments on Kyrgyzstan's alleged support of Russia's war in Ukraine. A Bishkek court subsequently handed Duishenbiev a three-year sentence for airing "extremist" comments. (Sources: [Radio Free Europe](#), [OHCHR](#), [Freedom House](#), [International Partnership for Human Rights](#), [Radio Free Europe](#))

#### *Combating the Financing of Terrorism*

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The Kyrgyz Republic is a member of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, and the country's State Financial Intelligence Service is a member of the Egmont Group, an international organization that encourages the sharing of intelligence and information among member countries to combat money laundering, terrorist financing, and similar crimes. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Eurasian group on combating money laundering and financing of terrorism (EAG). EAG is an associate member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and is a regional body that also includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, India, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The EAG intends to reduce the threat of international terrorism while ensuring the transparency, reliability, and security of the financial systems of member states. The EAG also works to support the region's further compliance in international standards of combating money laundering and terrorism financing. (Sources: [Eurasian Group](#), [Eurasian Group](#))

### *Countering Violent Extremism*

The State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) is one of the leaders of in developing programs and training to prevent the radicalization of Kyrgyz youth and other vulnerable communities. With the Ministry of Education, the SCRA implements a curriculum for high school-aged students on "moderate" Islam and to identify terrorist recruitment tactics. Alongside the Ministry of Interior, the SCRA works with local religious leaders and civil society to organize countering violent extremism (CVE) training and prevent radicalization and religious extremism among youth. In order to develop and support interfaith dialogue, the SCRA also established an interfaith council throughout three southern regions. The SCRA also works with international organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund to increase civic education on the role of Islam in Kyrgyz society and to prevent the recruitment of religious youths by terrorist organizations. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

As prison inmates are particularly vulnerable to radicalization, the Kyrgyz Prison Service, along with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched a project to counter the spread of extremism and radicalization among inmates. Additionally, the Probation Department within the Ministry of Justice holds trainings with the SCRA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on preventing extremism among probation clients. The Probation Department further worked with UNODC in October 2021 to provide comprehensive support to former foreign fighters. The project focused on post-release monitoring of foreign terrorist fighters and violent extremist prisoners. The UNODC also worked with the prison administration to ensure violent extremists were secured away from other inmates to prevent radicalization. In order to better prevent the re-radicalization of terror offenders, the Kyrgyz government requires returnees to commit to at least six months of a reintegration program that entails consistent monitoring of the probation client. The program strives to reduce the risks of recidivism in those returning from conflict zones. Of the 38 known male returnees, the process of deradicalization and rehabilitation have not been thoroughly documented. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [UNDP](#), [Research Center for Religious Studies](#))

## **International Counter-Extremism**

### *Regional Cooperation*

On November 30, 2011, Kyrgyzstan, along with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan adopted the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) for regional cooperation in countering terrorism. The JPOA is based on the U.N. global counterterrorism strategy. The JPOA serves as a regional framework that provides Central Asian countries with guidance on implementing policies and facilitating comprehensive and coordinated efforts to combat terrorism and prevent extremism. The JPOA not only builds on counterterrorism initiatives implemented by member countries, but also addresses gaps and long-term challenges within those programs. The Central Asian member states adopted an updated JPOA in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2022. The project continues to address new and emerging security threats and seeks to enhance each country's response to violent extremism. (Sources: [United Nations Regional Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia \(UNRCCA\)](#), [UNRCCA](#), [UNRCCA](#))

Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a regional security force that includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Although established in 1993, the CSTO has only undertaken one peacekeeping deployment to Kazakhstan in 2022. Priority action areas for the regional force include cooperation on counterterrorism, countering narcotics, peacekeeping, and addressing the instability in Afghanistan instigated by the Taliban's 2021 takeover of the country. The CSTO will hold joint military exercises in Kyrgyzstan in late 2023 due to conflicts surrounding CSTO's "zone of responsibility," which include Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the increasing number of extremists emerging from an unstable Afghanistan. (Sources: [United Nations Security Council](#), [Anadolu Agency](#))

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Kyrgyzstan has conducted joint counterterrorism exercises with China and Russia. Around 2,000 Russian and Kyrgyz troops participated in joint counterterrorism exercises in eastern Kyrgyzstan in 2019. The exercises involved simulated terrorist attacks as well as performing drills countering the threat of Islamic terrorists across Central Asia. The exercises reportedly continued regularly through the 2020s. In 2019, Kyrgyzstan conducted its first counterterrorism training exercise with China, launching the exercises at a training base in northwest China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The exercises included 150 personnel from China's Police Force and the National Guard of Kyrgyzstan. Activities included basic technical training and cooperative tactical training. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also has an office in Bishkek that responds to various concerns of domestic security. The range of security issues include countering terrorism, human trafficking, combatting corruption at all levels, and supporting justice reform. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Xinhua](#), [Radio Free Europe](#))

### **Public Opinion**

In a 2018 survey of 1,500 Kyrgyz conducted by the Baltic Surveys and the Gallup Organization on behalf of the International Republican Institute, 49 percent of listed violent religious extremism as a very serious threat to the country, while 28 percent said they considered extremism to be somewhat serious. (Source: [International Republican Institute](#))