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SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS IN KYRGYZSTAN

The End of the Japarov-Tashiyev Era

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Introduction

Kyrgyzstan was once viewed as the “island of democracy” in Central Asia. That changed in the last five years due to the tandem of President Sadyr Japarov and head of the State Committee for National Security (GKNB) Kamchybek Tashiyev. They greatly weakened the roles of opposition political organizations, civil society, and independent media, the three areas that for decades had distinguished Kyrgyzstan from its authoritarian neighbors.

There have been other developments in those five years that have improved the situation in Kyrgyzstan and even if the country is no longer as democratic as it once was, it has been, arguably, more stable than at any time in its nearly 35-year history as an independent state.

This period of stability might be coming to an end after Japarov dismissed Tashiyev on February 10. Japarov has repeatedly downplayed the move and remarked that he and Tashiyev are and will remain close friends. But after Tashiyev’s firing, there was a wave of officials sacked, starting with the GKNB, and a restructuring of departments to bring them under the control of the president, indicating that something far more serious than a rift between two friends was happening.

Tashiyev, while voicing his continued support for the president, kept his comments about his dismissal to a minimum before leaving Kyrgyzstan on

February 17. Tashiyev is one of the best-connected and most powerful figures in Kyrgyzstan. He has been a force in Kyrgyzstan’s political world for some 20 years, most of that as an opposition leader. Tashiyev returned to Kyrgyzstan on March 19 and was questioned as a “witness” by the Interior Ministry about an investigation into corruption that appears involve members of Tashiyev’s family and their associates.¹ Tashiyev has not commented publicly about the case, but it could herald the beginning of a major upheaval in the country.

Eki Dos

Japarov and Tashiyev were both born in 1968 (December and September, respectively). Japarov is from the Issyk-Kul area in northeastern Kyrgyzstan and Tashiyev is from the southern Jalal-Abad Province. Both served in the Soviet Army from 1987 to 1989. Japarov was stationed in Novosibirsk. It is unclear where Tashiyev was stationed.

Both were elected to Kyrgyzstan’s parliament in the controversial elections of 2005 that sparked the country’s first revolution (called by some the “Tulip” Revolution) in late March 2005 that chased Kyrgyzstan’s first president, Askar Akayev, from the country. One of the earliest reports about “Eki Dos” (the Two Friends) comes from not long after. Tajikistan’s independent media outlet Asia-Plus reported on September 21, 2006, that Tashiyev and Japarov were



Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov (right) and security service chief Kamchybek Tashiev seen here attending a March 25, 2022, ceremony in Bishkek to hand over new equipment to the Ministry of Emergency Situations and border guards. (president.kg)

driving outside Bishkek late at night when they encountered a group of “six or seven” men whose vehicle was blocking the road. An argument broke out and the men dragged Tashiyev and Japarov from their car and started beating them. During a fight, which Tashiyev and Japarov said lasted about one hour, the two finally gave a “worthy rebuff” to the attackers and left the scene.²

Both were supporters of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who became Kyrgyzstan’s president after Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan. From 2007 to 2009, Tashiyev was Minister of Emergency Situations. During that same time, Japarov was an advisor to President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Starting in 2008, Japarov was a senior official in the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption, and he headed the agency in 2009–2010. The period Japarov served

in the anti-corruption agency is regarded by some to have been the most corrupt period in Kyrgyzstan’s history, as members of the president’s family seized the country’s prime businesses and assets.

Bakiyev was overthrown in the protests of April 2010 that left 89 people dead. He fled Kyrgyzstan, eventually making his way to Belarus. Japarov and Tashiyev’s political careers had taken off under Bakiyev and suddenly their futures were in doubt.

Tashiyev helped co-found a political party called Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) in 2006. Japarov joined Ata-Jurt (also seen as Ata-Zhurt) in 2010. Ata-Jurt called for ousted President Bakiyev’s return to power. The party won the most seats (28 of 120) in the October 2010 parliamentary elections and Japarov and Tashiyev filled two of those seats.

Eventually, Ata-Jurt was included in the majority coalition in parliament, but some of the party's members, Japarov and Tashiyev among them, continued to act as an opposition. In early October 2012, a crowd of more than 1,000 people gathered outside the government building in Bishkek to protest against Canadian company Centerra's majority ownership of Kyrgyzstan's most lucrative enterprise, the Kumtor gold mine. Tashiyev and Japarov led a group of demonstrators, some of them armed, over the gates surrounding the government building. Both were arrested and charged with trying to overthrow the government. The two, along with another deputy from Ata-Jurt, Talant Mamytov, were convicted on that charge, but only sentenced to 18 months in jail (Mamytov was only sentenced to 12 months). In the end, all three were free by summer 2013, though they were stripped of their parliamentary seats.

Before the end of 2013, Eki Dos would split, and would not reunite for seven years.

Sadyr Japarov

As mentioned, Japarov was from the Issyk-Kul Province of northeast Kyrgyzstan. He was born in the village of Keng-Suu in the Tup district on the eastern side of Issyk-Kul, the massive alpine lake that is Kyrgyzstan's premier tourist site. Up in the mountains from the south shore of Issyk-Kul, at an elevation of some 12,000 feet, is the Kumtor gold mine, which has been Kyrgyzstan's most lucrative enterprise



Sadyr Japarov (Facebook/Kyrgyz President)

since the late 1990s.

Cameco, the original Canadian partner, owned 33 percent of the Kumtor project, and the state-owned company Kyrgyzaltyn owned the remaining 67 percent. But in 2003, as Cameco was in talks to sell off its Kumtor assets to another Canadian firm—Centerra Gold—the Kyrgyz government formed a commission to revise the contract. The commission decided to decrease Kyrgyzstan's stake in Kumtor. Centerra bought out Cameco and also purchased all but 33 percent of Kyrgyzaltyn's stake.³ In 2009, Cameco divested its remaining Centerra holdings and that same year, Kyrgyz authorities eased rules on dumping waste onto glaciers at the mining site, which hastened

the melting of the glaciers and polluted the streams that flowed down into villages on the southern shores of Issyk-Kul.

That started protests over environmental damage. The dumping of waste and Kyrgyzstan's minority stake in its own gold mine were the issues that brought Japarov, Tashiyev, and Mamytov to the government building in October 2012.

After Japarov was released from custody in 2013, he went back to the Issyk-Kul area and resumed protesting against the Kumtor mine. On October 7, during a protest in the town of Karakol, demonstrators clashed with police and tried to storm the administrative building. When the provincial governor showed up, some of the protesters seized him, put him in a vehicle, and drove away.⁴ Order was eventually restored, the governor was released, and after an investigation, Kyrgyz authorities blamed Japarov for being one of the main organizers of the governor's kidnapping, charges Japarov has always denied.

However, rather than wait to be arrested and put on trial, Japarov fled Kyrgyzstan. He finally returned in late March 2017 and was immediately detained as he crossed the border from Kazakhstan into Kyrgyzstan.⁵ He was convicted of kidnapping the Issyk-Kul governor in 2013 and sentenced to 11.5 years in prison.



Kamchybek Tashiyev in 2017. (Wikimedia)

Kamchybek Tashiyev

Tashiyev was born in the village of Barpy in the Suzak district of the southern Jalal-Abad Province. He is pugnacious and his appearance is intimidating. The hour-long fight he and Japarov were reportedly engaged in outside Bishkek in 2006 was only one example of Tashiyev resorting to violence. As a member of parliament in 2011, he and another deputy, Altynbek Sulaimanov, exchanged punches during a session of parliament.⁶ Years later, in June 2022, Member of Parliament and leader of the Butun (United) Kyrgyzstan party Adakhan Madumarov delivered a report criticizing the GKNB's battle against smuggling. Tashiyev was present and threatened to break Madumarov's arm



Omurbek Babanov (right) In October 2011. (premier.gov.ru/Wikimedia)

and throw him in jail.⁷ In the run-up to the parliamentary campaign in 2015, Tashiyev toured the country warning officials and businessmen about violating the law. When an unidentified person whom Tashiyev claimed had already broken the law was apprehended, Tashiyev ordered to “tie him to a pole, leave him there for a day and a night, and don’t give him any food!”⁸

After he, Japarov, and Mamytov were freed from prison, Tashiyev returned to politics, though his deputy’s mandate remained stripped due to his conviction for trying to overthrow the government in October 2012. He struck up an alliance with businessman Omurbek Babanov, a rising politician who was Kyrgyzstan’s prime minister from December 2011

to September 2012. Babanov was the leader of the Respublika party and in 2014, Respublika merged with Tashiyev’s Ata-Jurt party and competed in the 2015 parliamentary elections as the Respublika-Ata-Jurt party, winning 28 seats, the second most behind the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (which took 38 seats).

Babanov ran for president in 2017 and though pre-election polls showed him leading the pack, he lost to incumbent President Almazbek Atambayev’s chosen successor, Sooronbai Jeenbekov. By Central Asia’s standards of presidential elections, the Jeenbekov-Babanov race was very close with Jeenbekov receiving 54.67 percent of the vote and Babanov 33.77 percent. Tashiyev was a candidate

early in the campaign but dropped out less than a month before election day.

Babanov faced legal problems after his defeat in the presidential election and he left the country in late 2017, traveling to Russia where he spent more than two years before returning to Kyrgyzstan.

Tashiyev stayed in politics in Kyrgyzstan, mainly as a critic of Jeenbekov's policies. The Respublika-Ata-Jurt party split several months before the 2020 parliamentary elections. Respublika competed on its own in those elections but failed to win any seats. Tashiyev switched to lead the Mekenchil (Patriot) party, a party he and Japarov had created in 2010 even while they remained Ata-Jurt party members. Mekenchil also failed to win any seats in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

However, the campaign and voting were rife with irregularities and violations. When the results of the October 4, 2020 elections were announced, it confirmed the worst fears of many people participating in or watching the elections.

Two parties known to support Jeenbekov, Birimdik (Unity) and Mekenim (My Homeland) Kyrgyzstan, won a combined 91 of the 120 seats. On October 5, protests broke out in Bishkek that would quickly topple the government and change the fortunes of Japarov and Tashiyev.

Together Again

By the evening of October 5, the government was evaporating. Many officials resigned and others fled. Protests in the Kyrgyz capital by various groups and political parties continued throughout October 6. As had happened in the revolutions of 2005 and 2010, leaders from the top opposition parties met to discuss cobbling together an interim government. But there was another group, much better organized, working in the background.

Several well-known imprisoned politicians were freed by the protesters on October 5. One of them was Japarov. On the evening of October 6, a group of some 30 parliamentary deputies and others forced their way into the conference hall at Bishkek's Dostuk hotel, which was simultaneously surrounded by rough-looking men in black coats.⁹ There were accusations that criminal figures organized the meeting.¹⁰ The group inside the hotel voted for Japarov to be prime minister—however, they lacked a quorum.

A larger group deputies gathered again at the presidential residence outside Bishkek on October 10, and elected Japarov as prime minister. There were complaints that only 51 deputies were present at the presidential residence and 10 more had voted in favor but not been there personally. Another meeting with more than required majority of 61 of 120 deputies was arranged on October 14 to confirm Japarov as prime minister. The notice of the change was immediately



Tashiev (left) and Japarov (right) in 2023. (Facebook/Kyrgyz Presidential Administration)

sent to Jeenbekov for signing. The next day, Jeenbekov resigned, and Japarov became acting president in addition to being prime minister. It had only been 10 days since Japarov was freed from prison.

On October 16, Japarov named Tashiyev to be the head of the GKNB (and Mamytov was elected speaker of parliament in early November). Eki Dos were together again, and they set out to radically change Kyrgyzstan.

Japarov won the snap presidential election, as the candidate from the Mekenchil party, on Jan. 10, 2021, but less than 40 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. The same day, there was a referendum asking voters which system of government they wanted—presidential or parliamentary. More than 84 percent

of those who cast ballots chose the presidential system of government. That required a new constitution that vastly enhanced the powers of the executive branch. A national referendum on the new constitution was conducted on April 11, 2021. It was approved, but only 36.65 percent of eligible voters took part.

One of Tashiyev's first tasks was to improve the GKNB and more generally, the country's law enforcement agencies and military. Among the more memorable images of the 2005 and 2010 revolutions were crowds holding batons and shields taken from police and security force members, or photos of packs of civilians chasing small groups of law enforcement members down the street. Demonstrators had once again pushed past militia and GKNB forces and stormed the government

building in Bishkek on October 5, 2020. There was also the botched raid on the home of the former President Atambayev in August 2019 that resulted in six members of GKNB's elite unit being captured by Atambayev's security guards and supporters and held inside the house until their release could be negotiated.

Tashiyev set out to make the GKNB a more reliable force for maintaining order. He worked to boost morale, raising salaries and funding construction for new GKNB headquarters and offices around the country. When Tashiyev attended the official opening of a new GKNB building in the southern Nookat district in September 2022, media noted it was the 13th new GKNB building to open since September 2021.¹¹ New living accommodations were constructed for GKNB¹² and border guards,¹³ as the State Border Guard Service had been moved under GKNB jurisdiction after Tashiyev became security chief. In a June 2022 interview, he was asked about the possibility of another revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Tashiyev said, "we will take harsh, legal measures against those who want to foment a revolution."¹⁴

While Tashiyev worked to strengthen the GKNB, he also faced challenges improving the Border Guard Service and this became a priority when a conflict between Kyrgyz and Tajik border forces broke out on April 28, 2021. The situation along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border had been tense for more than a decade, usually due to land or water use issues. There were frequent

clashes, mostly villagers on either side of unmarked and still disputed areas of the border throwing sticks and stones at one another. In January 2014, the situation escalated when a clash erupted between the two countries' border guards and Tajik forces used mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. After that incident, weapons were increasingly used in isolated border disputes between communities and border guards.

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On April 28, 2021, there was an incident involving a water intake station that serves both sides of the border. Harsh words turned into punches and stones being thrown, as had happened dozens of times along the border. Then, shooting started. Previously, such clashes were confined to the immediate area of the conflict, but on that day fighting spread along the long section of the border. Tajik troops, both border guards and soldiers, entered parts of Kyrgyzstan in armored vehicles, supported by heavy machine-gun and artillery fire, and in some cases attack

helicopters. Kyrgyz forces returned fire, but when the fighting stopped two days later, it was clear Kyrgyzstan had suffered more damage in terms of casualties (Kyrgyzstan had 36 dead and 190 people wounded, Tajikistan had 19 dead and 87 wounded) and destruction of property.

On October 21, 2021, Tashiyev announced Kyrgyzstan was buying Bayraktar TB2 military drones from Turkey and Orlan drones from Russia for deployment among Border Guard forces.¹⁵ He and Japarov attended a ceremony that December where the first drones were handed over to the Border Guard Service.¹⁶

Negotiations on delimiting unmarked areas of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border took on a new urgency after the April clash.

Negotiations on delimiting unmarked areas of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border took on a new urgency after the April clash. The two sides met more frequently and Tashiyev and the head of Tajikistan's security service, Saimumin Yatimov, often led these talks.

However, problems continued along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and on September 14, 2022 fighting broke out along a longer stretch of the frontier than in 2021. The scenario was similar to the events of April 2021, with Tajik forces crossing

into Kyrgyz territory in several places. Kyrgyz forces were better equipped than in 2021 and when the Kyrgyz side unleashed their newly acquired Turkish drones on the third day of the conflict it shifted the momentum of the battle to the Kyrgyz side and hastened the cease-fire agreement Tashiyev and Yatimov signed on September 20.

A different border problem emerged soon after as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan approached a final agreement on one of the last disputed sections along their common border. Kyrgyzstan had agreed to hand over the small Kempir-Abad reservoir to Uzbekistan. Members of a Kyrgyz community near the reservoir held a public meeting on October 15 and demanded Tashiyev resign.¹⁷ Toward the end of October, a group of politicians, activists, journalists, and bloggers formed the Committee to Save Kempir-Abad. Two days later, police in Bishkek raided the homes of many of the committee members and more than two dozen people were detained, most of whom would remain in custody for months. Small protests continued in towns around Kyrgyzstan and by the end of the month a planned visit by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to sign the border agreement was postponed.

As the head of Kyrgyz border guards and chief Kyrgyz negotiator in border talks with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Tashiyev was often the target of criticism inside Kyrgyzstan. Undaunted, Tashiyev expanded the GKNB's area



Protesters hold a rally to demand of authorities to hand over weapons to volunteers willing to support residents of Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken province following clashes with Tajik troops, near the government house in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, May 1, 2021. REUTERS/Vladimir Pirogov

of responsibility. But when both sets of talks were finally concluded, Tashiyev received much of the credit from people in Kyrgyzstan.

He launched a GKNB campaign against organized criminal groups. Such groups have plagued Kyrgyzstan since independence and infiltrated the government. One example is Raimbek Matraimov, a former deputy chairman in Kyrgyzstan's Customs Service who was able to take hundreds of millions of dollars out of Kyrgyzstan and is also suspected of being one of the people who supported Japarov's rapid rise to power in October 2020. Besides Matraimov having occupied an official post in the Customs service, his brother Iskender was a deputy in parliament. Another brother, Tilek, was head of the Kara-Suu district, on the

border with Uzbekistan, where the largest bazaar in Kyrgyzstan is located.

The battle against organized crime culminated in the killing of the top crime boss in the country, Kamchybek Asanbek, aka Kamchy Kolbayev, aka Kolya Kyrgyz, at a restaurant in Bishkek on October 4, 2023.¹⁸ According to authorities, when a GKNB unit went to detain Kolbayev, he offered armed resistance and was killed in return fire. In January 2025, Tashiyev said, "I had to take the decision to liquidate (Kolbayev)... for the sake of the state. And I made this decision, and we eliminated him."¹⁹ Within 48 hours, Tashiyev walked back his statement, explaining, "There was no personal order to liquidate Kolbayev,"²⁰ and claiming, "Some journalists, especially Western journalists wanted to twist what I said."²¹ Japarov supported Tashiyev,

publicly repeating the official version that Kolbayev started shooting and was then killed by GKNB commandoes.

After Kolbayev's death in October 2023, Tashiyev said the days of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan were coming to an end.²² The GKNB investigated government officials for connections to criminal groups. Of the 90 deputies elected in the 2021 parliamentary elections, 27 either stepped down or were forced to relinquish their mandates before the 2025 elections, some due to ties to organized criminal groups or underworld figures.²³ The GKNB also broke up the activities of organized criminal organizations in Kyrgyzstan's prisons. In December 2024, Tashiyev announced there were no longer any large organized criminal groups operating in Kyrgyzstan.²⁴

Many people in Kyrgyzstan fear the rising influence of China in their country.

The GKNB continued expanding the scope of its operations. Starting in late 2024²⁵ and lasting through 2025,²⁶ the GKNB led raids on brothels. In late August 2025, Tashiyev learned the company Beta Group that was given the contract to repave some roads in the northern city of Naryn was unable to finish the work. He ordered the arrest of the head of the company and warned the leadership of

the Transportation Ministry that if work was not completed in 10 days, they would be held accountable.²⁷ Speaking to the media in November 2025, Tashiyev remarked on the need for the country to conserve electricity and criticized businesses that operated late at night. The GKNB chief reminded there was a law "on quiet" after 22:00 and said that law would be enforced. "Once 10:00 pm arrives," Tashiyev said, "the lights in the restaurants will be turned off."²⁸ Authorities in Bishkek and Osh dutifully fulfilled Tashiyev's orders, prompting a rare instance when Japarov intervened and told officials in the two cities to show some common sense and allow establishments such as fast-food restaurants to remain open after 22:00.²⁹

Many people in Kyrgyzstan fear the rising influence of China in their country. In a move at the end of 2025 that was guaranteed to earn him public support, Tashiyev chided Chinese company China Road. "Why haven't you learned Kyrgyz yet? China Road, how many years have you been working in Kyrgyzstan? Twenty years! And you still can't speak Kyrgyz? Learn it!"³⁰

Tashiyev compiled a list of accomplishments; he led the talks that resulted in finally establishing the borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, he strengthened the country's security structures, eliminated criminal organizations that had plagued Kyrgyzstan, and removed criminal elements from the government.

Sadyr Japarov

Japarov has also been very visible publicly and receives generous coverage from the media. Japarov attended some of the openings of new facilities for GKNB, including the Border Guard Service, and for the military, but he has focused more on construction of new buildings and facilities, and important infrastructure projects.

Japarov brought the Kumtor gold mine under total Kyrgyz ownership. By April 2022, Kyrgyzstan had forced out Centerra.³¹ Since then, the Kyrgyz government, and often Japarov himself, have remarked on many occasions how much more money Kyrgyzstan is now taking in from Kumtor since becoming the sole owner.³²

Under Japarov, Kyrgyzstan has finally seen progress on two important projects that have repeatedly been delayed.

The first is the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) railway. The three countries have been discussing the project since the mid-1990s, but it was given new life after the full-scale war Russia launched on Ukraine in February 2022 and subsequent move to open up the Middle Corridor to facilitate trade between China and Europe while avoiding Russian territory. Every Kyrgyz president has voiced support for the railway, but previously China had shown only minimal interest. The railway project is only some 325 miles, but almost all the Kyrgyz

section, some 190 miles, passes through mountains and will require construction of at least 29 tunnels and 50 bridges.³³ The new railway would end at Andijan, Uzbekistan where it would connect to Uzbekistan's network that goes west to Caspian Sea ports in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well as railroad lines going through Iran and south into Afghanistan. The CKU railway will be some 560 miles shorter than the existing route from China through Kazakhstan and into Uzbekistan, and could reduce transit time in some cases by up to eight days.³⁴ On Dec. 27, 2024, Japarov attended the launch of construction on the Kyrgyz section of the railway in the village of Tosh-Kutchu, in the Jalal-Abad Province.³⁵

The other large project is the Kambar-Ata-1 hydropower plant (HPP). This Soviet-era project was a victim of the collapse of the USSR in late 1991. Since the early 1990s, Kyrgyz presidents have called for construction of the HPP to move forward and there was some work done with Russian partners who later withdrew from the project. Alone, Kyrgyzstan is far short of the money needed to build Kambar-Ata-1.

Plans call for the plant to generate some 1,860 megawatts (MW). Some Kyrgyz officials say the completion of Kambar-Ata-1 will end Kyrgyzstan's need to import electricity. While this might be overly optimistic, it will certainly be sufficient to greatly ease domestic electricity shortages during the winter and provide extra electricity for export in spring and

summer.

Under Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan opposed construction of Kambar-Ata-1 on the grounds that during the time the reservoir was filling, downstream countries Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan would have reduced water supplies leading to agricultural shortfalls. After Mirziyoyev became Uzbekistan's president in late 2016, both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan joined the HPP project. Japarov attended the ceremony in June 2022 to restart construction of the project.³⁶ Several international financial organizations, including the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Islamic Development Bank, and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank helped establish a Donor Coordination Committee for Kambar-Ata-1.³⁷

Together, Eki Dos have neutralized a once energetic political opposition. The leaders of several political parties that were critical of government policies have been detained and held in custody for long periods.

Japarov regularly checks on the Balykchy-Kochkor-Kara-Keche railway line,³⁸ promotes construction of small³⁹ and

medium-sized⁴⁰ HPP projects around the country, supports building "world-class" stadiums⁴¹ and other new buildings, especially for the capital Bishkek. Japarov had grand plans for construction of Asman city on the shores of Issyk-Kul that aimed to be environmentally friendly, powered to the greatest extent possible by renewable energy sources. However, costs proved prohibitive, and the plans have been postponed.

Together, Eki Dos have neutralized a once energetic political opposition. The leaders of several political parties that were critical of government policies have been detained and held in custody for long periods. In March 2024, Madumarov, the leader of the Butun Kyrgyzstan party whose arm Tashiyev had threatened to break, was convicted of financial fraud and ignoring Kyrgyzstan's interests while signing a Kyrgyz-Tajik border deal in 2009 when he led the country's Security Council. He was released as the statute of limitations had expired but was stripped of his deputy mandate.⁴²

In late November 2025, several leaders in the opposition Social Democrat party were detained on charges of plotting "mass unrest" a week before snap parliamentary elections.⁴³ Those elections were conducted under new regulations approved in June 2025⁴⁴ that dispensed with election by party lists, which had been used since the 2007 elections. That was replaced with elections in single-mandate districts that opened the field to all comers and at the same time

diminished the role of once-powerful political parties.

Some independent media outlets came under pressure or were shut down. Kloop Media was one of the leading investigative news organizations in Kyrgyzstan and often reported on corruption in the government. The state brought Kloop to court in August 2023. The Bishkek prosecutor claimed Kloop's reporting "has a negative emotional-psychological effect on society... generating fear, anxiety, despair, and panic among a huge number of people."⁴⁵ A Bishkek court finally ordered Kloop to be closed down because the organization's "activities go beyond the scope of the [its] charter," essentially ruling that Kloop Media violated the law by reporting news.

Bolot Temirov ran the YouTube program "Temirov Live" that focused on government corruption. Family members and acquaintances of Tashiyev and Japarov regularly featured in reports. Police raided the offices of Temirov Live in January 2022 and arrested Temirov for narcotics possession.⁴⁶ Temirov said the drugs were planted on him and that charge was later dropped. New charges of having falsified documents were brought against Temirov and at a trial in November 2022, a court ordered Temirov to be deported. He was taken from the courtroom to the airport and put on a flight leaving the country.⁴⁷

Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz service, Azattyk, had its website blocked and its bank accounts frozen

in October 2022 over coverage of the second Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflict that the organization refused to remove from its website. The block was lifted, and the bank accounts unfrozen in July 2023 when the content was finally taken down. In a January 2024 interview, Japarov said Azattyk was against him coming to power and added that Kyrgyzstan's people hated Azattyk and no longer trusted the outlet's information.⁴⁸ Azattyk was rated the most-read media outlet in Kyrgyzstan in a poll conducted by the research and consulting company M-Vector and Internews in late 2023.⁴⁹

The GKNB raided the office of media outlet 24.kg in January 2024 and interrogated its top managers. In March that year, the outlet came under the ownership of Almasbek Turdumamunov, a former press officer for Kurmanbek Bakiyev.⁵⁰ Reports about possible state mismanagement or corruption vanished from the reporting of 24.kg.

In March 2022, a small group of people demonstrated against Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine outside the Russian Embassy in Bishkek. Kyrgyz authorities quickly banned public protests or gatherings in many places around Bishkek and in other cities.⁵¹ The ban was for three months, but it has routinely been extended and remains in effect in 2026. This rule has prevented civil society and political opposition groups from conducting demonstrations as they had frequently done since independence.

The End of the Tandem

On February 9, 2026, a group of 75 former officials and notable public figures released an open letter calling on President Japarov and Speaker of Parliament Nurlanbek Turgunbek uulu to “immediately” name a date for a snap presidential election.⁵² The reason given was the uncertainty in Japarov’s term in office. Japarov was elected under the constitution from 2010 that stipulated a person could be elected to one six-year term as president. The same day Japarov was elected president, a referendum approved the country changing to a presidential system of governance and in April that year a new constitution was approved through another national referendum. That constitution allowed an individual to serve up to two five-year terms in office.

It quickly became apparent there was more behind the letter than just seeking to clear-up Japarov’s term in office, when Japarov surprisingly fired his friend Tashiyev on February 10.

Japarov’s press secretary Askat Alagozov posted on Facebook that some of the authors of the letter had been calling members of the newly elected parliament and other influential people to convince them to “come over to the general’s side.”⁵³ The “general” was Tashiyev, whom Japarov promoted to colonel general on Kyrgyzstan’s Independence Day (August 31) 2024.⁵⁴ When announcing Tashiyev’s

dismissal, Japarov said it was “in the interests of our state, in order to prevent a split in society, including between government structures.”

Tashiyev was in Germany when the announcement was made. He went there on February 6 for a medical check-up, as he has regularly done since having heart surgery in Germany in February 2021. Japarov said he spoke with Tashiyev before announcing he was relieving Tashiyev as GKNB head, but Tashiyev said “I was relieved of my post, and it came as a complete surprise to me.” Tashiyev added he would respect the president’s decision.

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In Kyrgyzstan, Japarov was moving quickly after the announcement about Tashiyev. Three GKNB deputy chairmen were also fired on February 10, Japarov moved the country’s Security Council secretary over the head the GKNB, and five of the signatories to the letter to Japarov and Turgunbek uulu were detained. Control of the Border Guard Service was removed from the GKNB and transferred under the authority of the president. Japarov also created an investigative committee that



President Sadyr Japarov (Facebook/Kyrgyz President)

will report directly to the president.⁵⁵

The sackings continued for days. A deputy prosecutor general was dismissed, the head of the GKNB's Bishkek office, who had just assumed that post in December 2025, was arrested and soon after, some of his deputies were taken into custody also. The heads of the GKNB in Osh city and province and in Jalal-Abad Province were also fired. Three ministers, for Natural Resources, Ecology, and Technical Supervision, for Transport and Communications, and for Emergency Situations, and later the mayors of Kyrgyzstan's second largest city, Osh, and third largest city Manas (formerly Jalal-Abad), were also dismissed. Later the ministers of Agriculture and of Health were sacked.

Turgunbek uulu was in Turkey when Tashiyev was dismissed. Upon his return to Kyrgyzstan on February 12, Turgunbek uulu resigned and also gave up his seat in parliament.

Tashiyev returned to Kyrgyzstan on February 13. He did not speak with the media or attend any public events. He met briefly with Japarov on February 15, who said Tashiyev would not be returning to a state post. The day after that meeting, Japarov commented, "Of course, he (Tashiyev) won't say thank you now; he'll be upset. But years from now, he'll say, 'Friend, you did the right thing back then,' and he'll be grateful."⁵⁶ Japarov also added there will be no coups in Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁷

Tashiyev “temporarily” departed Kyrgyzstan on February 17. There was no word on where he was going or how long he might be gone.⁵⁸ The dismissals of Tashiyev’s supporters continued and extended to eight newly-elected deputies in parliament, one of whom was Tashiyev’s brother Shairbek.

The allegation is that Kyrgyzneftegaz sold oil to private companies owned by Tashiyev’s relatives and associates who then sold the oil back to Kyrgyzneftegaz for a higher price.

Shairbek Tashiyev received the most votes of any candidate running in the November 2025 parliamentary elections. Asked during his brother’s brief return to the country in February whether he was considering giving up his deputy’s mandate, Shairbek replied that only the people who cast votes for him could force him to leave parliament.⁵⁹ That changed when the Interior Ministry summoned Shairbek for questioning on March 13.⁶⁰ The next day, Shairbek signed a statement resigning from parliament.⁶¹

It became clear that an investigation was underway regarding corruption in Kyrgyzneftegaz, the state-owned company that on March 17 State Tax Service chief

Almambet Shykmamatov said “was under the complete control of the GKNB.”⁶²

The allegation is that Kyrgyzneftegaz sold oil to private companies owned by Tashiyev’s relatives and associates who then sold the oil back to Kyrgyzneftegaz for a higher price.

The accusations were nothing new. Bolot Temirov had reported on exactly this topic just before the offices of Temirov Live were raided, leading to Temirov’s eventual expulsion from Kyrgyzstan.

The former GKNB chief’s nephew Baigazy Matisakov was detained on March 18,⁶³ and Tashiyev’s son Tay-Muras was questioned by the Interior Ministry.⁶⁴

But this chain of events brought Kamchybek Tashiyev back to Kyrgyzstan on March 19. He went the Interior Ministry and was questioned, again as a witness, and left. Tashiyev attended prayers the next day to mark the end of Ramadan and told the media, “I have forgiven everyone who spread rumors and slandered during the holy month... I hope next time they won’t do this and spread information that is not true.”⁶⁵ It seemed he is free to move about the country and meet with whomever he wishes.

The Calm Before the Storm?

Japarov's professions of continued friendship with Tashiyev cannot mask all the changes in personnel and the structure of the security service that accompanied Tashiyev's dismissal. Something serious was happening or about to happen that prompted Japarov to fire so many officials that reports mentioned were mostly people close to Tashiyev.

When Japarov was freed from prison, Tashiyev was a nexus for gathering support for Japarov's meteoric rise from prisoner to president.

Though Japarov and Tashiyev have been close for some time, and both are seen as Kyrgyz nationalists, the image they have from the last five years is very different. Media has reported often on Japarov's penchant for expensive clothing, while Tashiyev usually opted for military clothing after becoming GKNB chief. Japarov has become more diplomatic and refined in the language he uses since becoming president, while Tashiyev always remained gruff in his comments.

Clearly, the GKNB was growing stronger and expanding its area of responsibilities.

Even Japarov commented that GKNB raids on brothels would have been better left to the police. As GKNB chief, Tashiyev made a lot of enemies in Kyrgyzstan among government officials past and current, and certainly in the criminal world. He probably earned as many new supporters for his campaigns against corrupt officials and organized crime networks.

When Japarov was freed from prison, Tashiyev was a nexus for gathering support for Japarov's meteoric rise from prisoner to president. Bridging the north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan's politics has always been complicated but critically important for governing the country. Socially and economically, northern and southern Kyrgyzstan are two different regions, but Tashiyev, a southerner, has proven as adept as anyone in independent Kyrgyzstan's history at galvanizing support in both parts of the country. And he has been a constant in Kyrgyzstan's political world for 20 years.

Japarov fled Kyrgyzstan in late 2013 and was outside the country until March 2017. When he returned, he was imprisoned until October 2020, so he was essentially out of Kyrgyz politics for seven of the last 12-plus years.

Japarov has moved to boost his own image and support base since firing Tashiyev. He appointed nine new generals⁶⁶ on February 23, and officials in Manas city handed over keys to new flats to 167 soldiers the same day.⁶⁷ Later in the month, Japarov noted more than

300 members of organized criminal organizations had been brought to justice in 2025.⁶⁸ He also updated the country on profits from the Kumtor gold mine, saying that since taking over the operation in 2021, production amounted to some \$5.115 billion, of which some \$1.176 billion went to taxes, and the state dividend was some \$441 million.

With Tashiyev at his side as GKNB chief, Japarov seemed assured of victory in that election. Now that is no longer certain.

There were also reports in Kyrgyz media that in first two weeks after Tashiyev's dismissal, the prosecutor general's office received some 500 complaints about the work of the GKNB.⁶⁹

Perhaps the most significant of Japarov's moves was appointing Adilet Orozbekov to be the new Security Council secretary. Orozbekov graduated from Russia's Federal Security Service Academy⁷⁰ and it could be a sign that Japarov is counting on Russian support to keep him in power.

After the incident with the letter to Japarov and Turgunbek uulu, Japarov called on the Constitutional Court to rule on the presidential term. The court decided that Japarov was serving a six-year term in accordance with the old constitution but

could stand for re-election to a second term of five years in accordance with the current constitution. The date for the next presidential election is Jan. 24, 2027.

With Tashiyev at his side as GKNB chief, Japarov seemed assured of victory in that election. Now that is no longer certain. Tashiyev has said as recently as December 2025 that he was not interested in running for president, but he was a presidential candidate for several weeks during the 2017 campaign. Despite the recent dismissals, Tashiyev's influence inside Kyrgyzstan is huge and even if he remains outside Kyrgyzstan, he could use that influence to garner support for a candidate of his choice to compete against Japarov.

Japarov will surely be watching for signs of this as the election day draws nearer and it could be that the next chapter in the tale of Eki Dos will be their battle for power.

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