

Kyrgyz Republic

I. Summary

The Kyrgyz Republic continues to have minimal internal production of illicit narcotics or precursor chemicals, but it is a major transit country for drugs originating in Afghanistan and destined for markets in Russia, Western Europe, and America. Experts estimate that 20 metric tons (20,000kg) of narcotics transit through Kyrgyzstan each year. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (GOKG) attempts to combat drug trafficking and prosecute offenders, but is constrained by limited resources. The GOKG has been supportive of international and regional efforts to limit drug trafficking and has supported major initiatives to address its own domestic drug use problems. The GOKG recognizes that the drug trade is a serious threat to its own stability and is continuing efforts to focus on secondary and tertiary drug-related issues such as money laundering, drug-related street crime and corruption within its own government.

While the GOKG has been a supporter of counter-narcotics programs, it is still struggling to deliver a clear and consistent counter-narcotics strategy to either the Kyrgyz people or the international community.

II. Status of Country

The Kyrgyz Republic shares a common border with China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Mountainous terrain, poor road conditions, and an inhospitable climate for much of the year make detection and apprehension of drug traffickers more difficult. Border stations located on mountain passes on the Chinese and Tajik borders are snow covered and unstaffed for up to four months of the year. These isolated passes are some of the most heavily used routes for drug traffickers. Government outpost and interdiction forces rarely have electricity, running water or modern amenities to support their counter-narcotics efforts. The Kyrgyz Republic is one of the poorest successor states of the former Soviet Union, relying on a crumbling infrastructure and suffering from a lack of natural resources or significant industry. Unlike some of its Central Asian neighbors, the Kyrgyz Republic does not have a productive oil industry or significant energy reserves. The south and southwest regions--the Osh and Batken districts--are important trafficking routes used for drug shipments from Afghanistan. The city of Osh, in particular, is the main crossroads for road and air traffic and a primary transfer point for narcotics into Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and on to markets in Russia, Western Europe and the United States. The Kyrgyz Republic is not a major producer of narcotics; however, cannabis, ephedra and poppy grow wild in many areas.

III. Country Actions against Drugs in 2008

Policy Initiatives. There were no new policy initiatives in 2008.

Law Enforcement Efforts. The Drug Control Agency (DCA) was established in 2003 with the Assistance and funding of the U.S. Government and UNODC. It has become a lead agency that coordinates all drug enforcement activities in the Kyrgyz Republic. To stop illegal transnational drug crime, the DCA continues to work with its counter-parts in Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In August 2007, 32 Kyrgyz law enforcement officers from the DCA, Ministry of the Interior, Customs Service and Border Guards were trained and completely outfitted with equipment to form the first four Mobile Interdiction Teams (MOBITS). The teams were deployed in September 2007 after the completion of five weeks of training. Their mission is to identify drug trafficking targets and seize any and all illicit narcotics. Their mobility allows these teams to travel into remote southern areas between fixed border posts along the Kyrgyz border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. As with the DCA, the MOBITS have suffered from a lack of effectiveness. Even after providing two in-country advisors residing in Osh with the teams, the teams

have been unable to move forward. The next step for enhancing the MOBITS capability will be the introduction of in-country DEA agents working closely with the DCA and MOBITS.

In calendar year 2007, the DCA registered 87 seizures, but the quantity of drugs seized during each seizure diminished. As of September 30, 2007 the DCA had seized only 117kg of heroin, 26kg of opium, 673kg of marijuana, 5kg of Psycho-tropics and .33kg of hashish a negligible percentage for the volume of narcotics estimated to be trafficked through this country. For January to September 2008, drug seizures fell to extremely low levels: 55kg heroin, 27kg opium, 184kg hashish, 754kg marijuana and 295 pills defined as psychotropic substances. These statistics indicate almost a 50% reduction in heroin seized which is of grave concern and allows the most profit to the traffickers. Other substances such as marijuana, though illegal narcotics, do not pose the immense threat that heroin and opium do. In September 2008, a change in the DCA Director as well as the MOBITS commander became effective. This change resulted in several significant investigations that have resulted in the seizures of an additional 34kg of heroin and over 100kg of opium through November 2008.

Corruption. In 2008, four Kyrgyz law enforcement (MVD) officials were identified as participants in narcotics trafficking in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the chief of the MVD Narcotics Investigation Branch was shot and killed. Corruption remains a serious problem and a deterrent to effective law enforcement efforts. The Kyrgyz DCA possesses a relatively good reputation, and its staff goes through a very thorough vetting procedure and receives substantial salary supplements from the UN/US counter narcotics project. The MOBITS Units are also vetted and receive a polygraph test, as do all DCA agents. As a matter of policy, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic does not encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

Agreements and Treaties. The Kyrgyz Republic is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, as amended by the 1972 Protocol and the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. The Kyrgyz Republic is also a party to the UN Convention against Corruption and the UN Convention against Transnational Crime and its Protocols on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.

Cultivation/Production. While there is no significant commercial production of drugs in Kyrgyzstan, cannabis and ephedra grow wild over wide areas, especially in the Chui valley region, and around Lake Issyk-Kul. In the past, Kyrgyzstan used to be a major producer of licit opium, and was the Soviet Union's main source of ephedra plant for decades. However, with the skyrocketing of opium production in Afghanistan, it has become less risky and easier to import drugs from Afghanistan via Tajikistan than to produce them locally. The Kyrgyz government carries out yearly eradication campaigns against illicit crops.

Drug Flow/Transit. Due to a very limited and rudimentary transportation system, traffickers mostly utilize lengthy overland routes leading through Afghanistan's neighboring countries. A large part of the drugs smuggled through Central Asia in 2008 entered the region through Tajikistan. Together with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan represents the main conduit for onward smuggling of opiates. In the last few years, trafficking activities have increased on the long and mountainous border between the Tajik Garm region and Batken in Kyrgyzstan. Onward smuggling through the Kyrgyz Republic takes drugs mainly to the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley, and across the Northern border into Kazakhstan.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. Existing economic problems and budget constraints do not allow the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to effectively address the quickly aggravating drug abuse and HIV/AIDS

problem. Insufficient allocation of budget funds is hampering the prevention and treatment programs and training of professional staff. Although for the past few years funding for international financial and technical assistance programs to address HIV/AIDS problems in Central Asia has increased considerably, the Kyrgyz have devoted insufficient attention to the conceptual and strategic development of a modern drug treatment service capable of stemming drug abuse and/or the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The programs for drug users in the Kyrgyz Republic are conducted by state institutions in partnership with civil sector organizations. UNODC also has a number of drug treatment assistance programs.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs.

Bilateral Programs. During this last year, the DCA has lost some momentum in their quest to become a solid and respected law enforcement organization in the field of drug enforcement for the Kyrgyz Republic. Fortunately with the new leadership, DEA providing in-country assistance and an opportunity for getting this agency back on track, many achievements can be met in this coming year.

Road Ahead. The assistance of the Nebraska National Guard (NG) in providing assessment, training and guidance to the DCA has been invaluable. In August 2008, the Montana National Guard assumed this responsibility. Presence on the ground is of great value in forming working relationships with the DCA. Another initiative during 2008 was the assignment of two liaison officers (retired DEA Agents) to work with the MOBITS headquarters in Osh and to provide guidance, mentoring and technical assistance for the MOBITS teams. The most significant ongoing program in terms of funding is the MOBITS. This \$1 million project, funded by CENTCOM, will give Kyrgyz law enforcement entities the capability to strike against narco-trafficking anywhere in their country. The US will also urge DCA's adoption of a recommended policy to dismiss immediately any DCA employee who fails their polygraph. The US also urges a review of all narcotics trafficking investigations and tracking of all seizures and court cases as a result of those seizures.