



United States Mission to the OSCE

Border Clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

As delivered by Political Counselor Michael Kelleher
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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The United States is deeply concerned by fatal clashes between border security forces of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that have occurred over the past two months in the Ferghana Valley, including an exchange of fire in early July between border officials in the vicinity of Vorukh, as well as an incident in late August on the border between Leilek, Kyrgyzstan and Bobojon Gafur, Tajikistan. These clashes follow a similar confrontation in January, also in Vorukh.

These clashes are symptomatic of a larger problem in which the borders of these two states in the Ferghana Valley are still not demarcated, and the cross-border communication, management, and cooperation between border guards in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is woefully inadequate. Rather than eyeing each other across disputed territory, the border guards of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should be cooperating to limit the flow of illicit trade – in drugs, weapons, and humans – that transits the Ferghana Valley, and which undermines our common security throughout the OSCE space.

We urge the governments of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to work together with the OSCE Office in Tajikistan and the OSCE Center in Bishkek to find ways to apply the OSCE's considerable body of knowledge and expertise on border management to address this chronic problem. One way forward might be for the two OSCE field missions to host strengthened, meaningful conversations between border officials in the field, not just in the capitals. Another might be to expand the highly successful OSCE Patrolling, Programming, and Leadership project to include Kyrgyzstani border guards alongside their Tajikistani and Afghan peers. There are surely other activities we could take to build confidence and reduce tensions along the borders. Whatever path we take, the OSCE should act quickly to assist Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to resolve the underlying issues fueling these clashes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.