



Conflict Factsheet

## Dam conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

Type of conflict <b>Main</b>	Intensity <b>1</b>
Conflict Locality <b>Central Asia</b>	Time <b>1980 –ongoing</b>
Countries <b>Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan</b>	Resources <b>Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water</b>



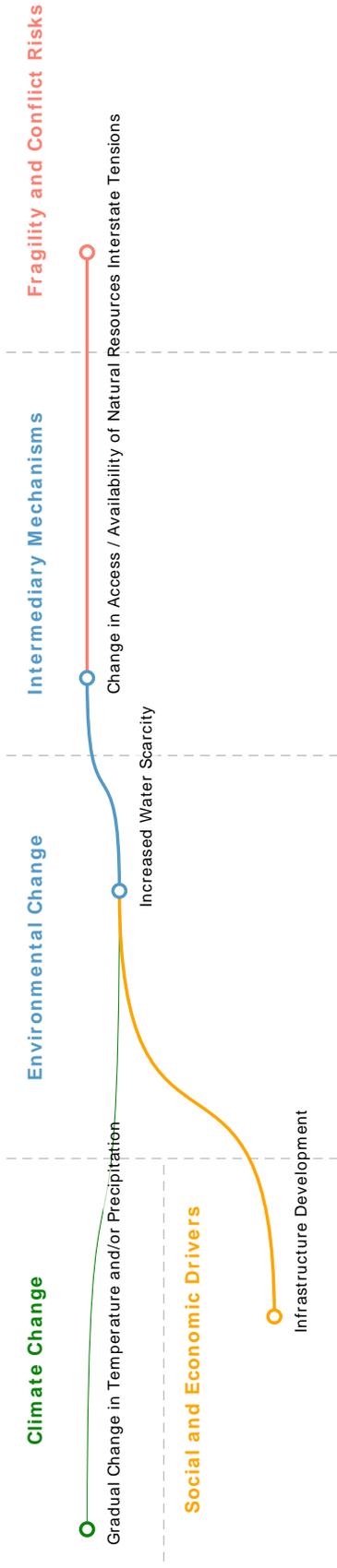
Transboundary  
water  
management

### Conflict Summary

The proposed Kambar-Ata-1 Dam situated on the Naryn River in central Kyrgyzstan has been a source of tension between upstream Kyrgyzstan and downstream Uzbekistan. Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations have been characterized by long-running disputes over water. These disputes, intensified by global climate change, have the potential to engulf the Central Asian region. At present, the conflict remains unresolved.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



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## Conflict History

The underlying cause of the conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is the dissolution of the resource-sharing system imposed on the region by the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991. The disintegration of Soviet-era barter deals essentially eroded Kyrgyzstan's ability to meet its own domestic energy demands, especially during the winter season when temperatures regularly fall below freezing ([International Crisis Group, 2014](#)). On the one hand, officials in Kyrgyzstan believe that the costly Kambar-Ata-1 Dam is crucial for economic development, securing domestic requirements and providing an energy surplus for export. On the other hand, officials in Uzbekistan contend that the water flowing from Kyrgyzstan is vital for agricultural irrigation in order to secure the Uzbek cotton sector which is the primary export - and that the proposed dam threatens Uzbekistan's agricultural base because it would allow Kyrgyzstan to release the water in winter (when it needs the energy) rather than during summer (when Uzbekistan needs it for irrigation).

### Historical Context

The Kambar-Ata-1 Dam was initially conceived in the 1980s. The proposed dam, if constructed, would be the tallest in Kyrgyzstan with a height of 275 metres and an output of 1900 MW, adding significant capacity to Kyrgyzstan's fragile energy network. Although the Kambar-Ata-1 idea appeared in the 1980s, the project re-emerged in 2009 under then-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, supported by \$1.7 billion in Russian financing. This financing did not materialize, however, and Bakiyev was overthrown in 2010, reportedly with undisclosed approval from the Kremlin ([Kalybekova, 2014](#)). Political analysts in Bishkek believe Moscow punished Bakiyev and his administration for failing to evict American forces from the Manas air base outside of the capital Bishkek, whilst simultaneously accepting the offer of Russia aid in the region of \$2.15 billion ([Trilling, 2010](#)). In 2011, President Almazbek Atambayev came to power. In recent years, there has been a regular output of reports in the Kyrgyz press about new negotiations concerning the dam project.

### The Realization of the Project

The realization of the dam still appears a distant prospect, a factor further complicated by tensions with Uzbekistan ([Kalybekova, 2014](#)). Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan, strongly opposes the project and has publically denounced the proposed hydro-electric power station on the Naryn River. Karimov has been quoted by the KyrTAG agency as saying that 'the situation could deteriorate beyond only religious opposition to war' ([Fergana News, 2012](#)). In 2013, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov requested a binding UN evaluation of the Kambar-Ata-1 project. The tense situation has the potential to be further exasperated by climate change in the medium- to long-term, as shifts in river runoffs threaten the already vulnerable Uzbek part of the Syr Darya catchment, thus impacting on already strained relations between the two countries ([Bernauer, 2012](#)).

In April 2014, Gazprom bought Kyrgyzstan's state-owned and indebted Kyrgyzgaz. Up until then, Uzbekistan had been the primary supplier of gas to southern Kyrgyzstan, but reacted to the transaction by stopping to supply gas to southern Kyrgyzstan, which in turn has aggravated internal Kyrgyz tensions ([International Crisis Group](#)). The Kyrgyz government reacted by mooting the closure of the Big Namanan canal "for maintenance", which would have had serious repercussions for irrigations in parts of the densely



populated Ferghana valley ([Water Politics, 2014](#); [International Crisis Group, 2014](#)). That did not happen, and at the end of 2014 Uzbekistan resumed gas deliveries ([Radio Free Europe, 2014](#)).

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## Resolution Efforts

The conflict remains unresolved and the Kambar-Ata-1 Dam in the preliminary stages of construction. Uzbekistan remains insistent that the dam project will further aggravate the already tense water management situation in the region.

The World Bank has suggested numerous 'next steps' in order to more efficiently co-ordinate the water and energy nexus in Central Asia, with a view to reducing the tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It notably recommended that Uzbekistan substantially improve its water sector in terms of irrigation efficiencies, and that Kyrgyzstan improve its energy efficiency to reduce electricity needs during winter ([World Bank, 2004](#)). At present, the uptake of these recommendations seems like a distant prospect.



## Intensities & Influences

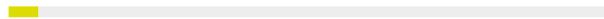


### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

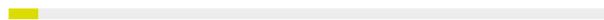


Human Suffering



### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Diplomatic Crisis

Threat of violence by a country



Violent Conflict

No



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



## Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

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Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been completely ignored.

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Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

### Improving infrastructure & services

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In order to encourage a sustainable cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the World Bank has suggested that measures be taken by both parties to improve the water use-efficiency of their energy and agricultural sectors respectively. However, the uptake of these recommendations seems like a distant prospect.

## Resources and Materials

### References with URL

[Water Politics \(2014\). Conflicts in Kyrgyzstan: Foreshadowing Water Wars to Come?](#)

[Trilling, David \(2010\). Kyrgyzstan: Is Putin Punishing Bakiyev?](#)

[Kalybekova, Asel \(2014\). Russia Holds Kyrgyzstan's Hydropower Dreams Hostage](#)

[International Crisis Group \(2014\). Water Pressures in Central Asia](#)

[Ferghana News \(2012\). Uzbekistan's President talks tough against Kambarata and Rogun hydroelectric power](#)

[Bernauer, Thomas \(2012\). Climate change and international water conflict in Central Asia](#)

[World Bank \(2004\). Water Energy Nexus in Central Asia: Improving Regional Cooperation in the Syr Darya Basin](#)

[Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty \(2014\). Uzbekistan Renews Gas Supplies To Southern Kyrgyzstan, December 30, 2014](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/dam-conflict-between-kyrgyzstan-and-uzbekistan>