

Violence Coalesces on Canadian-Run Kyrgyz Gold Mine

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Kyrgyzstan's president on Tuesday demanded the organizers of a protest against a contentious Canadian-run goldmine that descended into violence this week be brought to justice, as continuing demonstrations in the Central Asian nation once again led to the closure of a major highway.

"It is unacceptable that certain groups of people and those standing behind them dictate their conditions and interests to the whole country," President Almazbek Atambayev said.

The Kumtor mine, one of the largest in the region, has for the past year been at the center of a tussle between Toronto-listed Centerra Gold and Kyrgyzstan, which has fought to boost its control over the project.

While government opponents insist Kyrgyzstan should have an even greater stake in Kumtor than the 33 percent negotiated, the authorities accuse the opposition of exploiting popular

sentiment over the mine in their bid for power. Critics of Kumtor maintain that it represents a grave environmental risk and that its revenue has not been fairly shared with the Kyrgyz people.

Local news agency AKIpress reported Tuesday that demonstrators had used vehicles to block the road linking the nearby town of Karakol and the capital, Bishkek. Other Kyrgyz media reported that some in the crowd had set a car alight.

Police intervened Monday to break up a gathering in Karakol after demonstrators took a provincial governor hostage in a demand for a radical change to the ownership structure at Kumtor. Police detained about 20 people involved in the ensuing riots.

In May, residents in the Issyk-Kul province, where Kumtor is located, blocked a road leading to the mine. Fifty five people were injured in the subsequent clashes between law enforcement officers and protesters. The unrest prompted the authorities to call a state of emergency and enforce curfews.

Centerra Gold estimated that the impasse cost it about \$4 million.

Under a deal reached in 2009, Kyrgyzstan secured a 33 percent share in Centerra Gold, which controls Kumtor and another less lucrative concession in Mongolia.

In September, after months of negotiations, Kyrgyzstan and Centerra agreed on a new arrangement that would give the government parity ownership of the project.

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