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How did the media cover the 2021 conflict in the Vorukh exclave?

Vorukh exclave is a small piece of land in Tajikistan, surrounded by the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Over the past 10 years only, there have been more than 150 conflicts with victims from both sides. This article describes how Kyrgyz and Tajik media covered the conflict, which occurred in the Vorukh exclave from April 28 to May 1, 2021. For this purpose, the researchers analyzed the media reports from April 28 to May 1 of three Kyrgyz media, which are "Kaktus.media", "Turmush", "24.kg", and three Tajik media, which are "Asia-Plus", "Khovar", and "Avesta". The analysis of collected data demonstrated that the tendency for unilateral coverage of the conflict from both sides existed. Moreover, the Kyrgyz media agencies were more open and tried to cover the incident in detail, while some Tajik media agencies limited publications regarding the incidents. The results contribute to a better understanding of processes that needs to be considered to find solution for the annual conflicts on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

Keywords: Kyrgyz-Tajik border, Vorukh exclave, border issues, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, conflict, clashes, Golovnoi water intake facility, exclave, enclave, media, news agencies, Asia-Plus, Khovar, Avesta, Kaktus-media, Turmush, 24.kg.

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Introduction

Currently, the Vorukh exclave is one of the main causes of disputes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. This is a small piece of land in Tajikistan, surrounded by the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Over the past 10 years only, there have been more than 150 conflicts with victims from both sides [1].

However, the conflict that occurred in 2021 was one of the most violent in the history of clashes. As a result of the conflict, two dozen people were killed and at least 150 people were injured [2].

The conflict happened from April 28 to May 1 until the parties agreed on a complete ceasefire. The reason for the clashes between Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens, as well as border services, was the "disputed" territory, which is the Golovnoi water distribution facility near the Vorukh exclave.

Both parties agree that the incident appeared because the Tajik side began installing surveillance cameras near the Golovnoi water intake facility. Nevertheless, further versions of the conflict on both sides differ. This probably encouraged some Kyrgyz and Tajik media to cover the conflict unilaterally, especially in the first publications.

This study examines how some Kyrgyz and Tajik media covered this incident.

Experimental

For this purpose, the researchers analyzed the media reports from April 28 to May 1 of three Kyrgyz media, which are "Kaktus.media", "Turmush", "24.kg", and three Tajik media, which are "Asia-Plus", "Khovar", and "Avesta". According to their publications, the researchers restored the conflict chronology and analyzed how Kyrgyz and Tajik media covered these clashes.

Results

Beginning of the incident — April 28. Kyrgyz version. According to the reports of the Kyrgyz "Kaktus.media", "Turmush", and "24.kg", published on April 28 with reference to the government representative office in the Batken region, after the Tajik side tried to install surveillance cameras, the border service of Kyrgyzstan demanded to suspend the works. Further, representatives of Kyrgyz and Tajik sides started the negotiation process, reported media agencies [3–5].

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Later, “Kaktus.media”, “Turmush”, and “24.kg”, without indicating the source, stated about the shot fired from the territory of Tajikistan. The latter media agency also noted that it was done by the Tajik law enforcement agencies in the direction of Kyrgyz citizens who were there at the moment of incident.

Then, all three agencies, citing various sources from residents to the border service of Kyrgyzstan, reported that citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan gathered from both sides and started throwing stones at each other. “24.kg” and “Kaktus.media” noted that from 100 to 150 people participated there [6–8].

On this day, these were the last reports of Kyrgyz media agencies. However, almost simultaneously the Tajik media provided a different version of the conflict on April 28, which none of the three Kyrgyz media indicated in their publications. Only the day after the incident, “Kaktus.media” and “24.kg” reported on the Tajik version, while “Turmush” did not provide it even on the day after [9, 10].

Tajik version. According to the Tajik version, published by “Asia-Plus”, “Khovar”, and “Avesta” on April 28, with reference to the border service of Tajikistan, the conflict happened because the Kyrgyz side mobilized its citizens from remote villages to provoke this incident.

Furthermore, Tajik media agencies in their publications provided information that, in accordance with the maps of 1924–1927 and 1989, this hydraulic facility is located completely on the territory of Tajikistan. Therefore, the Tajik representatives had every right to install surveillance cameras there.

However, it is important to note that “Asia-Plus” and “Avesta”, unlike their Kyrgyz counterparts, published the opposite version of the incident in their reports on April 28. At the same time, “Khovar” decided to cover this incident unilaterally on this day and even on the next day did not provide the Kyrgyz version [11–13].

Escalation — April 29. Kyrgyz version. On April 29, "“Kaktus.media”, “Turmush”, and “24.kg” reported that the situation in the Batken region (Kyrgyzstan) deteriorated. Citizens of Tajikistan began throwing stones at residents of Kyrgyzstan and their houses.

Further, the border service of Kyrgyzstan accused their Tajik colleagues of trying to seize the Golovnoi water intake facility. “Turmush” and “Kaktus.media” reported with a reference to the Kyrgyz border service that the Tajik militaries at 14:05 began a massive attack of the hydraulic facility, using mortars and machine guns.

At the same time, “24.kg” provided more neutral message. The media referencing to State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan stated that skirmishes between units of both sides started in the area of the water distribution facility.

Later, all three media informed, citing the Kyrgyz border service, that at about 17:00 the Tajik side attacked the Kapchygai, Min-Bulak, Dostuk border posts, as well as the Kozhogar and Bulak-Bashi border posts of Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the mortar attack, the building of the Dostuk frontier outpost was on fire, reported media agencies.

Then, all three news agencies reported with a reference to the Kyrgyz State Committee for National Security that in response to the actions of the Tajik side, Kyrgyz special purpose detachment “Boru” seized the border outpost Khoja Alo of Tajikistan.

On the same day, all three agencies noted that skirmishes between Kyrgyz and Tajik militaries also started in the Leilek district of Kyrgyzstan.

The last messages from media agencies were how representatives of both sides agreed on a ceasefire from 8 p.m. of that day [6, 14–18].

In addition, it is also important to mention that the Tajik Border Service published the opposite version of the incident on this day. However, none of the three Kyrgyz media provided it on April 29-30.

Tajik version. According to the Tajik version, which was published by “Asia-Plus”, “Khovar”, and “Avesta” on April 29, with reference to the Tajik border service, the military personnel of Kyrgyzstan at 1 p.m. were the first to open fire on Tajik militaries near the Golovnoi water distribution facility.

This is where on this day the messages of Khovar”, and “Avesta” about the incident ends. Further, the history of the incident can be seen only through the reports of “Asia-Plus”.

According to it, after skirmishes on the hydraulic facility, the Kyrgyz militaries opened fire on the bridge located on the territory of Tajikistan. Then, the news agency informed that skirmish moved to the area of Vorukh exclave.

Later, “Asia-Plus”, citing the Kyrgyz border service, provided the Kyrgyz version of the incident, according to which the Tajik side was the first to begin fire.

Nevertheless, a few hours later, the news agency, citing the source in law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan, denied this information. According to media, “these days the Ministers of Defense and the Secretar-

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ies of the Security Councils of the CSTO have gathered in Dushanbe". Therefore, the Tajik officials "did the best to avoid the conflict and tried to convince everyone to show restraint".

Then, "Asia-Plus" referencing to the head of the jamoat, Abdukhamid Odinaev, reported that nearly at 5.30 p.m. the skirmishes started in Ovchi-Kalacha area of Tajikistan, which is located near the Leilek district of Kyrgyzstan.

Two hours later, "Asia-Plus" correspondent in the conflict zone informed that Kyrgyz snipers do not allow residents of Khoja-Alo village to cross the main road towards Vorukh exclave. According to the media, for several hours, the main road Khoja-Alo-Vorukh remains blocked, and Kyrgyz snipers began shooting at residents and vehicles trying to cross the road.

Finally, at 8 p.m., "Asia-Plus", citing the Tajik Foreign Ministry, provided information that both sides had agreed on a ceasefire [19–22].

It is also important to mention that "Asia-Plus", referring to the border service of Tajikistan, reported that the information about the seizure of the Khoja-Alo border outpost by the Kyrgyz side was fake.

In addition, it can be seen that the other two media agencies had few reports relating to the conflict. Therefore, one might get the impression that they preferred to limit the Tajik version of the incident.

Continuation — 30 April — 1 May. Kyrgyz version. On April 30, despite the reached agreements day before, the shootout repeated again in the Leilek district on Kyrgyz-Tajik border, messaged "Kaktus.media", "Turmush", and "24.kg".

In addition, all three news agencies, citing various sources, provided information about the seizure of villages in the Leilek district by Tajik citizens. "Kaktus.media" and "Turmush" also reported that the head of the "Internatsional" village in the Leylek district became hostage of the Tajik side. However, later "Kaktus.media" denied this information referring to the administration of Isfara region (Tajikistan).

Further, Kyrgyz media agencies in their messages provided information that the chairman of the State Committee for National Security, Kamchybek Tashiev, held a meeting on neutral territory with his colleague, head of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan, Saimumin Yatimov. As a result of this meeting, the Kyrgyz official promised to resolve completely the issues, reported all three news agencies.

Almost simultaneously, the above-mentioned news agencies provided information that citizens of Tajikistan on bulldozers were destroying buildings in the villages of the Leylek district and were shooting at Kyrgyz citizens.

Later, "Kaktus.media" and "24.kg" in their publications announced about the telephone conversation of Kyrgyz and Tajik presidents, where both sides discussed the ways of conflict resolutions on the border.

Further, on May 1, "Kaktus.media" and "24.kg" reported that shootouts were continuing in the Leylek district. They assumed that these are citizens of Tajikistan. However, almost immediately "Asia-Plus" with reference to the residents denied this information.

Later, all three media reported that the heads of the State Committee for National Security of both states held negotiations, as a result of which the parties agreed on a complete ceasefire and made a joint statement on delimitation and demarcation at the border area [23–33].

Tajik version. On the Tajik side, on April 30, only the "Asia-Plus" news agency covered the conflict, while "Khovar" and "Avesta" did not publish reports related to the conflict.

Therefore, further the authors had to rely on the publications of "Asia-Plus".

On that day, the media reported that in the jamoat of Ovchi-Kalacha of Bobojon Gafurov district, which borders the Leylek district of Kyrgyzstan, skirmishes began again, after several hours of signing a ceasefire document.

Further, "Asia-Plus", citing the administration of the Sughd region of Tajikistan, provided information that the Tajik side was preserving the ceasefire regime and was maintaining peace on the border area. The news agency also messaged that media in the neighboring country were using the situation as incitement.

Then "Asia-Plus" reported about negotiations between the heads of the State Committee for National Security of both countries. The media also noticed that the head of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan, Saimumin Yatimov, refused to comment about these talks.

It is important to say that while the Tajik side remained silent and did not comment on the results of the meeting, the head of the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan, Kamchybek Tashiev, immediately after the meeting, gave an interview to several Kyrgyz media, reported "Asia-Plus".

On May 1, "Asia-Plus" referencing to Tajik border guards and residents of the border regions of Tajikistan denied the information of the Kyrgyz border service that Tajik side attacked the residential buildings of the Kyrgyz people

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Later, “Asia-Plus”, citing “24.kg” news agency, announced the start of negotiations on the demarcation and delimitation of the border and a ceasefire [21].

On this day, there were fewer controversial points on both sides. With an exception of the last incident before a ceasefire, Tajik side decided to apply “defense” strategy and denied the Kyrgyz version. A similar situation also occurred on April 29, when the Tajik side denied the capture of the Khodja-Alo outpost.

Discussion

In general, it can be said that there is a tendency for one-sided coverage of the conflict.

From the Kyrgyz side, we see how on April 28 there was a fact of unilateral coverage of the conflict, mainly during the first publications. In addition, in the case of “Turmush”, the coverage was unilateral completely without providing a Tajik version of the incident. Moreover, it is important to mention that all three media covering the continuation of the conflict on April 29 probably decided to limit themselves to only the options of the Kyrgyz side, which also proves that there is a tendency of one-sided coverage of the incident.

On the Tajik side, we also see that there is also a trend towards one-sided coverage, e.g., as in the case of “Khovar” on April 28 or “Avesta” and “Khovar” on April 29. However, we also see the absence of “Avesta” and “Khovar” publications on the April 30 conflict. Therefore, it can be assumed that the unilateral coverage on April 28-29 was due not to the reluctance to publish the opposite version, but due to some restrictions from third parties.

Furthermore, it important to note that during this conflict, the Tajik side, represented by its border guards or other representatives, preferred to work more in a “defense” position as in the case of Khoja-Alo seizure and events of May 1. We also see unwillingness of Tajik side to comment the process of negotiations, which probably demonstrates some secrecy of Tajik side.

Unlike the representatives of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz side was less constrained in actions and openly presented various cases that occurred during conflicts.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the authors would like to mention that each of these media has a specific audience and each publication forms the opinion of this very audience. In this regard, in the future, we would like the news agencies of the two states to work together and cover conflicts, providing both versions of the incident, responsibly realizing that they have a huge impact on the minds of people, a person and can change not only their thoughts and ideas, but also behavior as well. A good coverage would help the audience more objectively assess the situation and reduce the degree of tension in society. We think that media representatives should take into account the traditionally difficult relations between neighboring states as much as possible and try to be more open and unbiased.

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Ворух анклавындағы 2021 жылғы қақтығысты бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары қалай көрсетті?

Ворух анклавы — Қырғызстан территориясымен қоршалған Тәжікстанның шағын жері. Тек соңғы 10 жылда онда екі жақтан да құрбандар болған 150-ден астам қақтығыс болды. Мақалада 2021 жылдың 28 сәуірі мен 1 мамыры аралығында Ворух анклавында болған қақтығысты қырғыз және тәжік бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары қалай жариялағаны сипатталған. Ол үшін зерттеушілер 28 сәуір мен 1 мамыр аралығындағы үш қырғызстандық бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарына, атап айтқанда «Kaktus.media», «Turmush», «24.kg» және «Азия-Плюс», «Ховар», «Авеста» сияқты үш тәжікстандық бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының ақпараттарына талдау жасаған. Одан әрі жинақталған мәліметтерді талдау барысында екі жақтан да жанжалды бір жақты көрсету үрдісі бар екені дәлелденді. Оның үстіне қырғызстандық ақпарат құралдары ақпаратты сараптау бойынша барынша ашық болып, оқиғаны егжей-тегжейлі көрсетуге тырысқанын, ал кейбір тәжікстандық бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары шектеулі ақпараттарды ғана жариялағанын байқаймыз. Бұл зерттеудің нәтижелері қырғыз-тәжік шекарасындағы жыл сайынғы қақтығыстардың шешімін табу үшін қажет процестерді жақсырақ түсінуге ықпал етеді.

Кілт сөздер: қырғыз-тәжік шекарасы, Ворух анклавы, шекара мәселесі, Қырғызстан, Тәжікстан, жанжал, қақтығыстар, «Головной» су алу станциясы, эксклав, анклав, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары, ақпарат агенттіктері, «Азия-Плюс», «Ховар», «Авеста», «Кактус-медиа», «Turmush», «24.kg».

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Как средства массовой информации освещали конфликт 2021 года в анклаве Ворух?

Анклав Ворух — это небольшой участок земли в Таджикистане, окруженный территорией Кыргызстана. Только за последние 10 лет там произошло более 150 конфликтов с жертвами с обеих сторон. В статье описано то, как кыргызские и таджикские средства массовой информации (СМИ) освещали конфликт, произошедший в анклаве Ворух с 28 апреля по 1 мая 2021 года. Для этого исследователи проанализировали сообщения СМИ с 28 апреля по 1 мая трех кыргызских СМИ, которыми являются «Kaktus.media», «Турмуш», «24.kg», и три таджикских СМИ, такие как «Азия-Плюс», «Ховар» и «Авеста». Результаты анализа собранных данных показали, что существует тенденция к одностороннему освещению конфликта с обеих сторон. При этом кыргызские СМИ были более открытыми и старались подробно освещать инцидент, в то время как некоторые таджикские СМИ публиковали ограниченное количество сообщений. Результаты данного исследования способствуют лучшему пониманию процессов, которые необходимо для того, чтобы найти разрешение ежегодных конфликтов на кыргызско-таджикской границе.

Ключевые слова: кыргызско-таджикская граница, анклав Ворух, пограничные вопросы, Кыргызстан, Таджикистан, конфликт, боестолкновения, водозабор «Головной», эксклав, анклав, СМИ, информационные агентства, «Азия-Плюс», «Ховар», «Авеста», «Кактус-медиа», «Турмуш», «24.kg».

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