



The April 2010 Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests

Jim Nichol

Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs

April 12, 2010

Congressional Research Service

7-5700

www.crs.gov

R41178

CRS Report for Congress
Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress

R11178008

Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 12 APR 2010	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The April 2010 Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Ave, SE, Washington, DC, 20540-7500		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 15	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Summary

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country in Central Asia that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union (see **Figure A-1**). It has developed a notable but fragile civil society. Progress in democratization has been set back by problematic elections (one of which helped precipitate a coup in 2005 that brought Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power), contention over constitutions, and corruption. The April 2010 coup appears to have been triggered by popular discontent over rising utility prices and government repression. After two days of popular unrest in the capital of Bishkek and other cities, opposition politicians ousted the Bakiyev administration on April 8 and declared an interim government pending a new presidential election in six months. Roza Otunbayeva, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the United States, was declared the acting prime minister.

The United States has been interested in helping Kyrgyzstan to enhance its sovereignty and territorial integrity, increase democratic participation and civil society, bolster economic reform and development, strengthen human rights, prevent weapons proliferation, and more effectively combat transnational terrorism and trafficking in persons and narcotics. The significance of Kyrgyzstan to the United States increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The Kyrgyz government permitted the United States to establish a military base at the Manas international airport outside Bishkek that trans-ships personnel, equipment, and supplies to support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. The former Bakiyev government had renegotiated a lease on the airbase in June 2009 (it was renamed a transit center), in recognition that ongoing instability in Afghanistan jeopardized regional security. The lease is up for renewal in July 2010. Otunbayeva has declared that the interim government will uphold Kyrgyzstan's existing foreign policy, including the presence of the "transit center," although some changes to the lease may be sought.

Cumulative U.S. budgeted assistance to Kyrgyzstan for FY1992-FY2008 was \$953.5 million (FREEDOM Support Act and agency funds). Kyrgyzstan ranks third in such aid per capita among the Soviet successor states, indicative of U.S. government and Congressional support in the early 1990s for its apparent progress in making reforms and more recently to support anti-terrorism, border protection, and operations in Afghanistan.

As Congress and the Administration consider how to assist democratic and economic transformation in Kyrgyzstan, several possible programs have been suggested, including those to buttress civil rights, bolster political institutions and the rule of law, and encourage private sector economic growth. (See also CRS Report RL33458, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, by Jim Nichol.)

Contents

Background	1
The Coup and Its Aftermath	1
Bakiyev’s Ouster	2
Implications for Kyrgyzstan	4
International Response	5
Implications for Russia and Other Eurasian States	5
Implications for China.....	7
Implications for U.S. Interests	7
The U.S. Transit Center and Northern Distribution Network.....	8

Figures

Figure A-1. Map of Kyrgyzstan.....	12
------------------------------------	----

Appendixes

Appendix A. Opposition Leaders in the New Government	11
--	----

Contacts

Author Contact Information	12
----------------------------------	----

Background

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor Central Asian country that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The United States has been interested in helping Kyrgyzstan to enhance its sovereignty and territorial integrity, increase democratic participation and civil society, bolster economic reform and development, strengthen human rights, prevent weapons proliferation, and more effectively combat transnational terrorism and trafficking in persons and narcotics. The United States has pursued these interests throughout Central Asia, with special strategic attention to oil-rich Kazakhstan and somewhat less to Kyrgyzstan. The significance of Kyrgyzstan to the United States increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The U.S. military repaired and upgraded the air field at the Manas international airport outside of the capital, Bishkek for aerial refueling, airlift and airdrop, medical evacuation, and support for U.S., NATO, and coalition personnel and cargo transiting in and out of Afghanistan. In 2010, the Manas Transit Center hosted about 1,100 U.S., Spanish, and French troops and a fleet of KC-135 refueling tankers.¹

The Coup and Its Aftermath

According to most observers, the proximate causes of the April 2010 coup include massive utility price increases that went into effect on January 1, 2010, during the height of winter weather, and increasing popular perceptions that President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's administration was rife with corruption and nepotism. The latter appeared to include Bakiyev's appointment of his son Maksim in late 2009 as head of a new Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation. It was widely assumed that Maksim was being groomed to later assume the presidency. On March 10, 2010, demonstrators held massive rallies in the town of Naryn, calling on the government to withdraw its decision on price increases and the privatization of energy companies. This demonstration appeared to exacerbate security concerns in the government about other protests planned by the opposition and triggered added efforts to suppress media freedom. Several internet websites, including opposition websites, were closed down, rebroadcasts by RFE/RL and the BBC were suspended, and two opposition newspapers were closed down. At an opposition party bloc meeting in Bishkek on March 17, participants accused the president of usurpation of power, political repression, corrupt privatizations, and unjustified increases in prices for public utilities. They elected Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the Social Democratic Party faction in the legislature, as the leader of the opposition bloc and announced that nationwide rallies would be held to demand reforms.

President Bakiyev had presumed that a planned annual meeting of the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan (a consultative conclave composed of representatives of ethnic groups) on March 23 would result in an affirmation of his policies, but many participants harshly criticized his rule. He complained that the participants from rural and mountainous areas who were critical were uninformed, and that legislators should visit the areas to educate the voters. He claimed that the Assembly had endorsed plans to change the constitution to reorganize the government to elevate the status of the Assembly as part of a new "consultative democracy." Elections would be

¹ Biography of Col. Blaine D. Holt, U.S. Air Force, at <http://www.manas.afcent.af.mil>. See also CRS Report R40564, *Kyrgyzstan and the Status of the U.S. Manas Airbase: Context and Implications*, by Jim Nichol.

abolished and the “egoism” of human rights would be replaced by “public morals,” he stated. These proposals appeared similar to those taken in Turkmenistan by the late authoritarian president Saparamurad Niyazov. Bakiyev also had moved the Border Service and Emergencies Ministry headquarters to Osh and was planning on moving the Defense Ministry offices there, claiming that more security was needed in the south. Other observers viewed the moves as a means of shifting some economic power and authority to the south of the country.

Problems of democratization and human rights in Kyrgyzstan were highlighted during a visit by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on April 3, 2010. He stated in a speech to the Kyrgyz legislature that “the protection of human rights is a bedrock principle if a country is to prosper.... Recent events have been troubling, including the past few days.... All human rights must be protected, including free speech and freedom of the media.” He also reported that during a meeting with President Bakiyev, he “urged the president to orient his policies to promote the democratic achievements of Kyrgyzstan, including its free press.”²

Bakiyev’s Ouster

Faced with the rising discontent, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov ordered the government on April 5 to pay half the power bills of rural households. However, the next day a reported 1,000 or more protesters stormed government offices in the western city of Talas. Security forces flown from Bishkek retook the building in the evening, but were forced out by protesters. Responding to the violence in Talas, government security forces on April 6 reportedly accused the head of the Social Democratic Party and former presidential candidate Almazbek Atambayev of fomenting the unrest and detained him. Other opposition leaders also were detained, including Temir Sariyev, the head of the Ak-Shumkar Party; Omurbek Tekebayev, head of the Ata Meken Party; Isa Omurkulov, a member of the legislature from the Social Democratic Party, and others. Police released them the next day.

On April 7, unrest spread to the Naryn, Chui, Talas, and Issyk-Kul regions, where regional and district government buildings were overrun by protesters. Even some district administrations in southwestern Jalabad Region, President Bakiyev’s home region, were occupied by protesters. In Bishkek, police and about 400 protesters violently clashed on the morning of April 7 outside the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party in Bishkek. Prime Minister Usenov declared a nationwide state of emergency. Hundreds of protesters then gathered and soon overwhelmed the police, taking control of two armoured vehicles and automatic weapons.

The protesters, now numbering between 3-5,000, surrounded the presidential offices. They asked President Bakiyev and Prime Minister Usenov to come out and talk to them, and after the two leaders refused, the protesters stormed the building. After tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades failed to disperse the protesters, police reportedly opened fire with live ammunition, killing and wounding dozens. Later that day, demonstrators led by Tekebayev occupied the legislative building, other protesters seized the state television and radio building, and the Defense Department and attorney-general’s offices were in flames. Protesters marched on a prison holding former defense minister Ismail Isakov, who had just been sentenced to eight years in prison on corruption charges, and the prison released him.

² U.N. Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General. *Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 April 2010: Secretary-General’s Remarks to the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament of Kyrgyzstan)*, April 3, 2010.

Late on April 7, Temir Sariyev and Roza Otunbayeva held talks with Prime Minister Usenov at the government building. Otunbayeva announced early on April 8 that Usenov had tendered his resignation, that his cabinet ministers had been dismissed, that the sitting legislature had been dissolved because it had been illegitimately elected, and that an interim government had taken over the powers of the prime minister, president, and legislature. Otunbayeva announced that her government included First Deputy Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev, in charge of economic issues; Deputy Minister Temir Sariyev, in charge of finances and loans; Deputy Minister Omurbek Tekebayev, in charge of constitutional reform and planning for the future of the country; and Deputy Minister Azimbek Beknazarov, in charge of public prosecution, courts and the financial police. She stated that the interim government would rule until presidential elections are held in six months. As one of her first acts as prime minister, she announced that the prices paid for water, electricity, and heat would be rolled back to last year's prices.

She also announced that:

- “We will hundred percent comply with all international agreements of the republic.”
- The status of the U.S. transit center at Manas (airbase) would not immediately be affected. However, she appeared to hint that possible corruption involving commercial contracts with the airbase and the airbase leasing arrangements would be examined.
- The Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovations, formerly headed by President Bakiyev's son, was abolished.
- The existing constitution would remain in place until a new one is drafted and approved by the citizenry. A new electoral code also would be written.
- Bakiyev had fled first to Osh and then to Jalabad, where he was attempting to raise forces for a counter-coup.

In addition, Ismail Isakov was reappointed defense minister to consolidate the interim government's control over the security apparatus. This appointment seems to have secured the support of the Uzbek military for the interim government. Bolot Sherniyazov, who had been named the acting interior minister, warned that in order to reestablish calm, he had authorized the use of firearms against looters. It was widely reported that the scant police presence in Bishkek on April 7-8, had given impetus to looting and arson. New Deputy Prime Minister Atambayev stated that the government already was working on a new constitution, electoral code, and law on peaceful assembly.

Baytemir Ibrayev, who had been appointed as the interim prosecutor-general, issued a warrant for the arrest of Usenov and several relatives of Bakiyev on charges of corruption or involvement in the deaths of protesters. Former President Bakiyev was said to have immunity from prosecution as a past head of state, but Otunbayeva called for him to cease his alleged efforts to foment a counter-coup or civil war and to leave the country.

Implications for Kyrgyzstan

The coup resulted in relatively large-scale casualties and much property damage, compared to the 2005 coup that brought Bakiyev to power.³ The health ministry reported that 81 people had been killed and some 500 injured. There was extensive damage to government buildings in Bishkek and elsewhere that will take some time to repair.

While some observers argue that economic discontent reached a tipping point that resulted in a spontaneous uprising by mainly unemployed or underemployed youth, others suggest that political opposition leaders planned and instigated the takeover. The periodical *Eurasia Insight* has suggested that the events precipitating the uprising included the late March meeting held by Bakiyev, which showed his weakness, and heavy criticism of Bakiyev by Moscow.⁴

There are parallels between the coup in 2005 and the most recent coup. Both arguably were revolts against increasingly authoritarian regimes rife with corruption and nepotism. Analyst Alisher Ilkhamov has pointed out differences between the two coups, including a higher level of casualties during the most recent coup, since government security forces opened fire on many demonstrators. He also argues that the 2005 coup was led by disaffected elites, while the most recent coup was more a grass-roots effort and was more chaotic in execution. Just as the opposition leaders were not in control of the uprising, they are having difficulty in restoring peace, he states.⁵

Analyst Monika Shepherd argues that in the face of the global economic downturn—which heavily impacted Kyrgyzstan because of the decline of remittances from migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan—Bakiyev did not meet with opposition leaders or otherwise reach out to the population but instead increasingly used repression to quell discontent.⁶

Bakiyev's refusal to resign could exacerbate north-south tensions, possibly even leading to civil war, some observers warn. Bakiyev is a southerner, and virtually all of the disorder that led to the overthrow of Bakiyev took place in the north. Others discount this concern, asserting that Bakiyev will not be able to gain wide southern backing for (counter)-insurgency.⁷

The disruption of the coup is likely to add to Kyrgyzstan's economic problems. The interim government has called for the international community to provide immediate and long-term assistance.

³ CRS Report RL32864, *Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications*, by Jim Nichol, April 14, 2005.

⁴ "Kyrgyzstan: Bakiyev Confronts Political Crisis," *Eurasia Insight*, April 6, 2010.

⁵ Alisher Ilkhamov, "Not the Tulip Revolution All Over Again," *Transitions On Line (TOL)*, April 8, 2010.

⁶ Monika Shepherd, "Regime Change in Kyrgyzstan: A New Beginning or More of the Same?" *The ISCIP Analyst (Caucasus/ Central Asia): An Analytical Review*, April 8, 2010.

⁷ David Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan: Experts Voice Concern About Possibility of Prolonged Strife," *Eurasia Insight*, April 8, 2010.

International Response

During the violence on April 7, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, called for the Bakiyev government to cease censorship and allow journalists to report on the situation in the country. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated on April 7 that he was “shocked” over the deadly clashes in Kyrgyzstan just days after his visit and appealed for concerned parties to show restraint. The next day, he announced that he would send a special envoy to Kyrgyzstan, Slovak diplomat Jan Kubis. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office has appointed Zhanybek Karibzhanov as a special envoy to Kyrgyzstan. In addition, Adil Akhmetov, a member of the Kazakh delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was appointed a Special Envoy to Kyrgyzstan by Assembly President Joao Soares. It was agreed that the envoys would coordinate their efforts. EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton stated on April 8 that “I welcome the early signs of stabilization in Kyrgyzstan and an end to the confrontation.... The EU stands ready to provide urgent humanitarian assistance if necessary.”⁸

Implications for Russia and Other Eurasian States

During the initial violence, Russia urged restraint between Kyrgyz authorities and the opposition and called on them to resolve their disputes through democratic means instead of violence. Indicating a bias against Bakiyev, President Medvedev reportedly stated on April 7 that “this situation is Kyrgyzstan’s internal affair but the form in which the protests erupted testifies to the utmost degree of discontent that the actions of the authorities produced among the rank-and-file people.”⁹ After the coup, Prime Minister Putin publicly denied that Russia had any direct role in the coup, but he moved quickly to recognize the new interim government and to offer humanitarian assistance.¹⁰ Otunbayeva and Tekebayev praised Putin for quickly offering humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. On April 11, Atambayev visited Moscow and reported that Kyrgyzstan had been offered a multimillion dollar grant of humanitarian aid.

Some Western and Russian media and Russian analysts have asserted that Russia largely orchestrated the coup because of dissatisfaction that Bakiyev had not closed the Manas Transit Center as promised.¹¹ In contrast, the coup in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 was attributed by some officials in Russia and Central Asia to influence by the United States through pro-democracy assistance to non-governmental organizations. The United States denied any direct influence. According to this Russian triumphalist view, however, Bakiyev’s ouster represents the removal of a regional leader who had been backed by the United States. They point to what they claim were successful Russian machinations in Kyrgyzstan to warn other regional leaders, particularly President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia, that they must pursue pro-Russian policies.

Months before the coup, Prime Minister Putin had indicated that \$1.7 billion of a pledged \$2 billion in loans to Kyrgyzstan (proffered the same day that Bakiyev had announced that the airbase would be closed) would not be forthcoming. According to one article in the Kyrgyz press, Prime Minister Putin allegedly raised concerns with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Usenov that “talk is

⁸ *Agence France Presse*, April 8, 2010.

⁹ *ITAR-TASS*, April 7, 2010.

¹⁰ *ITAR-TASS*, April 8, 2010.

¹¹ Philip Pan, “Russia Is Said to have Fueled Kyrgyz Unrest,” *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2010.

reaching me of family business in Kyrgyzstan at state level. What is going on? How should this be understood?... I wish to remind you also that one of the conditions for receiving the loan was the withdrawal of the U.S. military base from Kyrgyzstan.”¹² In another move viewed by many in Kyrgyzstan as retaliation against Bakiyev, Russia had announced in late March 2010 that it would greatly increase customs duties on gasoline exported to members of the Commonwealth of Independent States that did not belong to a customs union (members of the customs union include Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). The increased duties disrupted supplies to Kyrgyzstan in early April, causing increased prices. On April 8, a Russian official reportedly renewed the call for Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas Transit Center (see below).¹³

On March 29, 2010, Nikolay Bordyuzha, the secretary general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO; a Russia-led military cooperation group that also includes Armenia, Belarus, and the Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan), visited Kyrgyzstan and stated that “there are no grounds to speak about any kind of chill in Russian-Kyrgyz relations... The Russian and Kyrgyz presidents have a busy schedule working [together].” Bakiyev reported that Bordyuzha, contacted him during the uprising, but he did not mention whether Bordyuzha had offered the CSTO’s assistance in quelling it. Bordyuzha led a CSTO delegation to Bishkek on April 9 to assess the situation and make a report to the CSTO Collective Security Council. Tekebayev stressed that Kyrgyzstan would only permit CSTO peacekeepers into the country in the extreme case that Bakiyev caused more bloodshed.¹⁴ The Chief of the Russian General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, reported that President Medvedev had ordered that two paratroop companies comprised of 150 officers and men be deployed to the Kant airbase (a Russian airbase east of Bishkek) “to protect the families of [the Russian] military there, if need be, and they are on the way.” The Russian government stressed that the paratroopers were carrying only small arms. Further troops reportedly were deployed on April 11, 2010.¹⁵

Kazakhstan closed its borders after numbers of Kyrgyz reportedly attempted to cross the border to find refuge in Kazakhstan. On April 9, however, it indicated that it would soon reopen the borders and pledged humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan also closed its borders and official media paid scant attention to the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan, in what seemed like a replay of its reaction to the 2005 coup, which it feared could have contagion effects. The border closures exacerbate already problematic inter-regional trade and economic cooperation and could affect the land transport of U.S. and NATO supplies to Afghanistan (see below). Georgian officials raised concerns about Russia’s reputed involvement in the coup, but visiting Kyrgyz officials reportedly stated that the coup was “a result of the accumulated discontent of the Kyrgyz people with actions of the former authorities, in particular the difficult social and economic situation, nepotism and corruption.”¹⁶

¹² *CEDR*, December 7, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-9008.

¹³ “U.S. Air Base at Center of Kyrgyz Crisis,” *MSNBC*, April 8, 2010.

¹⁴ *ITAR-TASS*, April 9, 2010.

¹⁵ *ITAR-TASS*, April 8, 2010.

¹⁶ Statement of the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, reported in *CEDR*, April 12, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950029.

Implications for China

China is concerned that the coup could lead to a more democratic Kyrgyzstan that would inspire Chinese democrats and embolden some ethnic Uighurs (a Turkic people) who advocate separatism in China's Xinjiang region bordering Kyrgyzstan. Groups such as the East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM; designated by the United States as a terrorist group) have bases in Central Asia. China may also be concerned that peaceful Uighurs within a democratic Kyrgyzstan might become more politically active in advocating for their kin in Xinjiang. There was some looting and destruction of Chinese businesses in Kyrgyzstan during the coup that might be classified as hate crimes. China is also concerned that instability in Kyrgyzstan could result in increased cross-border smuggling and other crime. More widely, instability in Kyrgyzstan could spread to other Central Asian countries, harming regional trade relations with China.

China has stressed that its paramount concern is that law and order be reestablished in Kyrgyzstan and that “good neighborly relations” between the two states continue, including cooperation in combating terrorists. The latter includes work within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO; formed in by China, Russia, and most of the Central Asian states), headquartered in Bishkek. Matching in some respects Russian concerns about the CSTO, the coup reportedly raised questions in China about the effectiveness of the SCO’s emergency consultation provisions.

Implications for U.S. Interests

The U.S. embassy in Bishkek on April 7 issued a statement raising deep concerns about the unrest in some Kyrgyz cities and calling on all parties concerned to solve their conflict within the framework of the rule of law. White House National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer similarly stated that the United States was closely following the situation and felt concerned about reports of violence and looting, and urged all parties to refrain from violence and exercise restraint. After the announcement that an interim government had been formed, U.S. Embassy Chargé d’ Affaires Larry Memmott met with Otunbayeva on April 8, reportedly to urge nonviolence and a quick restoration of order and democracy. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Otunbayeva on April 10, and Michael McFaul, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Russian Affairs, reported that he also had talked to Otunbayeva. On April 12, President Obama raised concerns about Kyrgyzstan with visiting Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Maksim Bakiyev, Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev, and other Kyrgyz officials had traveled to the United States for meetings, including with Administration officials as part of bilateral dialogues with Central Asian countries launched last year. The bilateral dialogue was “postponed,” according to the State Department, although a brief meeting was held between Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake and Sarbayev.

The United States recently had decided to allocate \$5.5 million for the construction of a counter-terrorism training center in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan. Russia had objected, since Kyrgyzstan earlier had balked (including because Uzbekistan had strongly objected) at permitting Russia to establish another airbase there. The status of plans for the counter-terrorism training center is now uncertain.

Unlike Russia, the United States hesitated to recognize the interim government. McFaul stated on April 8 that “the people that are allegedly running Kyrgyzstan—and I emphasize that word because it’s not clear who is in charge right now—these are all people that we’ve had contact with for many years.... This is not some anti-American coup. That we know for sure and this was not a ‘sponsored by the Russians’ coup.” Instead of competition between Russia and the United States over influence in Kyrgyzstan, McFaul suggested, President Medvedev had “pulled the President aside” during their meeting in Prague on April 8 to discuss developments in Kyrgyzstan and possible cooperative actions, including the involvement of the OSCE in facilitating peace.¹⁷

If a more democratic and stable Kyrgyzstan emerges, many observers argue, it could more effectively combat cross-border terrorism and drug trafficking that could have a positive effect on internal developments in Afghanistan.

The U.S. Transit Center and Northern Distribution Network

The Manas Transit Center near Bishkek (see **Figure A-1**) plays a vital role in the U.S. surge in Afghanistan. Most U.S. troops enter and leave Afghanistan through the Transit Center. U.S. and French KC-135 tankers based there provide refueling services for U.S. and NATO aircraft flying missions in Afghanistan. In addition, the Transit Center plays a vital role as part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a number of rail, road, and air routes transiting the Caspian region to deliver supplies for U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. Some weapons and classified cargoes are sent via air routes to the Transit Center, and thence to Afghanistan. In addition, some supplies are sent by land through Kazakhstan to the Transit Center, where they are then flown to Afghanistan, although this is not a major NDN land route. In March 2010, about 50,000 troops passed through Manas, en route to or out of Afghanistan, according to the Air Force, a substantial increase over the average number of troops transiting per month in 2009.¹⁸

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman reported on April 8 that “currently there are limited operations at the Manas airfield,” but that the Transit Center hoped to “be able to resume full operations soon.” He also stated that in the meantime, alternative transit routes would be used.¹⁹ According to a U.S. Central Command spokesman, troop flights through the Transit Center were again temporarily interrupted on April 9, but resupply and refueling missions continued. Troop flights were renewed by April 12.

The Transit Center leasing arrangement comes up for annual review in July 2010, and some officials in the interim government have stated or implied that the conditions of the lease would be examined. Otunbayeva warned on April 8 that questions of corruption involving commercial supplies for the Transit Center would be one matter of investigation. Analyst Deirdre Tynan has reported that a company with a contract to supply jet fuel to the airbase may be linked to Bakiyev.²⁰

¹⁷ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs Holds a White House News Briefing*, April 8, 2010.

¹⁸ Staff Sgt. Carolyn Viss, “LRS breaks 2 of their own records,” *376th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs*, April 5, 2010.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Defense. American Forces Information Service, *Press Release: U.S. Afghan Supply Mission Continues at Manas*, April 8, 2010.

²⁰ Deirdre Tynan, “Kyrgyzstan: U.S. Air Base Contracts To Face Scrutiny,” *Eurasia Insight*, April 8, 2010.

Among other statements:

- Otunbayeva stated on April 12 that she realized that 2010 was a seminal year for U.S. operations in Afghanistan and that President Obama planned on drawing down troops thereafter. She implied that ultimately she hoped there were no bases in the country.²¹ In March 2009, she had voted against closing the Manas airbase when the legislature decided to rescind agreements with the United States and other NATO countries on the use of the airbase. At that time, she raised concerns that Russia would gain undue influence in Kyrgyzstan as a result. She also has stated that the lease and other payments for use of the Transit Center benefit Kyrgyzstan's economy.²²
- Tekebayev has suggested that Kyrgyzstan may decide not to renew the lease on the Transit Center as a sign of gratitude for Russia's support for the interim government.²³
- In late March 2010, Sariyev had been detained during an unauthorized demonstration that among other issues had denounced the planned U.S. facility at Batken.
- Following Bakiyev's announcement in early February 2009 of his intention to close the airbase, Beknazarov had called for also closing Russia's Kant airbase and for Kyrgyzstan to adopt a neutrality policy.²⁴
- Atambayev has asserted that the leasing arrangements for the Transit Center would be examined, but like Otunbayeva he acknowledged that President Obama planned to reduce the numbers of troops in Afghanistan in coming years.²⁵

Some observers argue that the United States de-emphasized its concerns over human rights and democratization problems in Kyrgyzstan in order to maintain good relations with the Bakiyev government and retain leasing rights for the Transit Center.²⁶ The U.S. State Department and other observers, however, disagree that the United States de-emphasized concerns over human rights and democratization.²⁷ These observers also argue that, while some Kyrgyz politicians decry an alleged de-emphasis, they do not equally criticize Russia for not emphasizing human rights and democratization in its relations with Bakiyev. Also, Russia is not being asked to close its airbase at Kant as a result, while the United States is being asked to close its Transit Center, they point out.

²¹ Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), April 12, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-600.

²² *CEDR*, March 6, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950134; June 24, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-358001.

²³ Philip Pan and Craig Whitlock, "Fate of U.S. Base in Kyrgyzstan Uncertain," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2010. In an interview on April 8, however, Tekebayev stated that "I have a pretty good attitude toward the United States, but I would like to state that we are all pro-Kyrgyz politicians. Opinions concerning the future of Manas in the provisional government differ, and there is no one position as yet. There will be discussion, this is for certain." *CEDR*, April 9, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-49005.

²⁴ *CEDR*, February 4, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950035.

²⁵ *CEDR*, April 12, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950139.

²⁶ Alexander Cooley, quoted in *The Washington Post*, April 9, 2010.

²⁷ Tekebayev stressed on April 9 that the United States and Europe had criticized the 2009 presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, while Russia had praised it as "fair and just." However, he praised the Russian government for changing its view and making contact with the political opposition in Kyrgyzstan. *CEDR*, April 9, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-49005.

Reporting on the meeting between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in Prague on April 8, McFaul asserted that Russia had changed its view of the Manas airbase from that it held in February 2009, when it offered \$2 billion in aid to Kyrgyzstan as an implicit quid pro quo for closing the airbase. Instead, the two Presidents had held “an entirely different conversation today. We have interest in stability. We want to make, we want to monitor that the troops stay where they are.” In response to a question about an alleged statement by a Russian official that Moscow would urge that Kyrgyzstan close the “Transit Center,” McFaul stated that “I was standing next to the two Presidents discussing Kyrgyzstan and the notion that we need to close the ... Manas Transit Center was not discussed. That [alleged statement] just simply seems spurious to me.”²⁸

²⁸ The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. *White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs Holds a White House News Briefing*, April 8, 2010.

Appendix A. Opposition Leaders in the New Government

Roza Otunbayeva, head of the Social Democratic Party. She was a former deputy prime minister, foreign minister, ambassador to the United Kingdom and the United States, and U.N. emissary.

Temir Sariyev, the leader of the Ak-Shumkar party. He ran as an opposition candidate in the 2009 presidential election.

Omurbek Tekebayev, head of the Ata Meken Party. He was a former speaker of the legislature. He is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Almazbek Atambayev, head of the Social Democratic Party. He served as prime minister under President Bakiyev in March-November 2007. He resigned and accused the Bakiyev government of corruption and nepotism. He was the main opposition candidate in the 2009 presidential election. He is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Azimbek Beknazarov, leader of the People's Revolutionary Movement. He was a former prosecutor-general. He is a member of the United People's Movement opposition bloc of parties.

Figure A-I. Map of Kyrgyzstan



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (K.Yancey 10/3/05)

Author Contact Information

Jim Nichol
Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs
jnichol@crs.loc.gov, 7-2289