

## Kyrgyz Quandry

Robert P. Finn

April 8, 2010

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The governmental overthrow in Kyrgyzstan marks the culmination of growing dissent against authoritarian practices and economic difficulties under the regime of Bakiyev, who came to power in a 2005 color revolution and quickly began to adopt the policies and practices of his exiled predecessor in a more extreme mode. Family connections, open corruption, misuse of governmental resources and a fake democracy that copied the Russian model exasperated Kyrgyz who had brought Bakiyev in on a reform platform. Tension has been simmering in Bishkek for the last few months, and a March national council or kurultai which was meant to celebrate the successes of the regime instead turned into an open critical discussion of its failures.

The immediate cause of the outbreaks was an increase in heating and other prices, but the basic economic pressures have been building since before Bakiyev took over, as Kyrgyzstan's early promise as the "Switzerland of Asia" disintegrated in the face of economic realities and political improprieties in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia promised a 2 billion dollar-plus aid package in early 2009 to keep Bakiyev afloat, and he obligingly announced the U.S. base at Manas would leave the same day. His subsequent deal with the U.S. to let NATO stay infuriated the Russians, who stopped the second \$1.7 tranche of the loan in February and who raised tariffs on gas and oil 30 percent April 1, thus bringing on the current crisis.

Adding to the pressure has been severe and constant Russian media criticism of Bakiyev, who was likened in the government-controlled Russia media to Turkmenistan's late unlamented leader, Turkmenbashi. As payback, Russian journalists in Kyrgyzstan have been physically attacked. One prominent Russian journalist was dropped to his death from a six-story apartment house while on a visit to neighboring Almaty. Russians accuse Bakiyev of having come to power with U.S. assistance, and use Kyrgyzstan and the other color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine as examples of U.S. misbehavior in their conversations with other Central Asian countries. It doesn't help that fuel for the base at Manas has been supplied by a firm owned by Bakiyev's son-in-law, just as fuel for the U.S.-built electrical generator in Kabul is supplied by a brother of Afghanistan's Vice-President Fahim..

Moreover, Kyrgyzstan also agreed for the U.S. to build a training center in western Kyrgyzstan, near the city of Osh where President Bakiyev and his family took refuge on April 7. The Russians were annoyed at the placement of the U.S. training center in the region where they opened a base last year under the auspices of the post-Soviet Collective Security treaty. At the time, the U.S. made no objection a second Russian base in Kyrgyzstan. The Russians had earlier set up a base near the NATO installation at Manas. Russian irritation with the Kyrgyz took the forms of trying to renege on the aid deal, and a 2009 cipher attack that paralyzed Kyrgyzstan's servers for two days, including those that served the U.S. bases and the media barrage.



government may find that there is less reward funding available. In addition, the ongoing U.S. presence in-country means that any new regime will still have to deal with pressures from two sides. It will be a long time before Kyrgyzstan can settle down.