

Kyrgyzstan's 'Roza Revolution': Russia and the Future of Kyrgyzstan

Washington, Moscow, Beijing and the Geopolitics of Central Asia. Part III

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Region: [Asia](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

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What happens in Kyrgyzstan is clearly also of utmost strategic importance to Moscow. The fact that Russia has been swift to establish recognition of the new provisional government in Bishkek and to extend financial aid clearly signal the importance of politics in that country for Moscow. Not only was Kyrgyzstan an integral part of the Soviet Union before 1991, it remains a key geographic region. Whether friendly to Moscow or hostile, Kyrgyzstan can be of immense help in stabilizing the Central Asian periphery of Russia, or in destabilizing it.

Clearly the Medvedev-Putin regime is creatively using every level — from energy pipeline deals with the state-owned Gazprom, to military trade — to rollback the threatening NATO encirclement that reached its peak in 2004-2005 with Washington's 'Color Revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and finally Kyrgyzstan, the Tulip Revolution that brought strongman Bakiyev into power.

As noted in a previous article, *Ukraine Geopolitics and the US-NATO Military Agenda: Tectonic Shift in Heartland Power*,^[1] the outcome of Ukraine's presidential elections earlier this year was a significant positive development from the standpoint of Moscow's military security. The threat of Ukraine's joining NATO is now off the table, as well as threats to further disrupt Russia's gas pipelines that pass through Ukraine to Germany and other parts of western Europe, a residue of the Soviet era of economic integration.

In January Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan all signed a Customs Union agreement. Belarus is a vital partner to Russia on her western border with Ukraine and Poland. Kazakhstan is a pivotal former Soviet state between Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and source of major energy supply to China as location of vast oil and other resources. It is also the world's largest uranium miner.

The creation of a neutral regime in Kyrgyzstan friendly to both Kazakhstan and Russia would open up a major zone of potential economic development for Russia, as well as helping to stabilize the volatile Ferghana Valley, the agriculturally rich population center of Central Asia bordering Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia.

On April 19, according to Moscow's RIA Novosti, Kyrgyzstan's First Deputy Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev said after meeting with Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov that his country wants to join the Russian-led customs union. He stated, "We have a common past with Kazakhstan and Russia and obviously our future will be with them in a common economic space and a common customs space." Atambayev also said Russia and Kazakhstan were not behind the recent events in Kyrgyzstan. "Russia and Kazakhstan are

not involved in any intrigues, they just want to help [Kyrgyzstan],” he said. [2]

For Moscow, having a pro-Moscow or even a rigorously neutral Bishkek constitutes a major repositioning on the Eurasian chessboard. As of this writing, the situation remains unstable from all accounts, and Russian President Medvedev has sounded a note of caution during an important press conference with Uzbek President Islam Karimov in Moscow. “Russia has given humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan, but full-fledged economic cooperation is possible only after the institutions of state are restored,” Medvedev said. [3]

Uzbekistan warms to Moscow

One significant apparent gain for Moscow following the turmoil in Kyrgyzstan is a clear warming of previously uneasy relations between Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov and the Moscow regime.

On April 20 Karimov flew to Moscow to hold talks with Medvedev and told the Russian press that the two sides had set aside various disputes and shared a common concern about the danger of the instability in Kyrgyzstan spreading. If the Kyrgyz unrest spins out of control, Karimov reportedly fears Uzbekistan might be next. [4] Just weeks before the ouster of Bakiyev in April, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke had paid a visit to Karimov in Uzbekistan as part of a careful US attempt to woo him back into the US camp. That seems now to have gotten a significant setback. [5]

Since 2003 Russia has enjoyed its own military basing rights at Kant airbase near Bishkek. It was the first established by Russia outside its borders since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In addition to the airbase, Moscow also has a strategic base at the eastern end of Lake Issyk-Kul where Russia tests submarine and torpedo technology including the super-cavitating VA-111 Shkval torpedo designed originally to sink US aircraft carriers, travelling at a speed of more than 200 knots. Russia signed an indefinite lease for the base in March 2008 for an annual lease of \$4.5 million.[6]

Russia’s 2003 airbase agreement with Kyrgyzstan was one reason Washington initiated its Tulip Revolution in order to bring in the Washington-friendly Bakiyev regime in 2005.

Some observers were initially convinced that the new transitional government of Roza Otunbayeva would move to cancel US basing rights at Manas on the urgings of Russia. Surprisingly, however, Otunbayeva appears to have reversed an initial commitment and has stated that the base will remain open to the US Central Command, and there has so far been little reaction in Moscow.

Russian sources close to the government report that Moscow is considering whether it might gain more by letting Manas airbase continue to supply the US war effort in Afghanistan for the next couple of years. In exchange, Moscow would step up recent demands on Washington to stop opium flows from Afghanistan into Russia.[7] “The airbase will not be closed,” this source stated, “but will be used as a lever to influence Americans about narcotics, among other things. In a few months the yearly contract (for Manas-W.E.) ends, and it is an occasion to put some conditions to them.” [8]

In October 2009 then-Kyrgyzstan President Bakiyev disbanded the country’s Drug Control Agency that had been responsible for intercepting illegal drugs transiting from Afghanistan to Russia. Reports are that Bakiyev’s brother thereby consolidated control over Afghan drug

flows through the country.[9] Whether that played a role in Moscow moves to unseat Bakiyev this Spring is not clear.

Whatever the actual thinking in Moscow about Manas as a bargaining chip, both China and Russia having clear strategic interests in a stable and friendly Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, with the three countries along with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan all founding members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization — the emerging Eurasian economic and military cooperation organization — the significant gains for Russia from closer cooperation with Kyrgyzstan lead some to call it Moscow's 'rollback' of Washington's encroachment into the Eurasian space.[10] How that develops in the months ahead remains to be seen.

What then are the stakes now for Washington's Central Asia and Eurasia strategy of Full Spectrum Dominance? This we examine in Part IV. The answer is: everything.

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Notes

[1] F. William Engdahl, *Ukraine Geopolitics and the US-NATO Military Agenda: Tectonic Shift in Heartland Power*, Global Research, March 16, 2010, accessed in <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18128>

[2] ASTANA, *Kyrgyzstan wants to join Russian-led post-Soviet customs union*, April 19, 2010, Moscow, RIA Novosti.

[3] RIA Novosti, *Kyrgyzstan must restore state institutions - Medvedev*, Moscow, April 20, 2010.

[4] Alexander Osipovich, *Uzbekistan: Spooked by Kyrgyz unrest, Karimov warms to Russia*, Moscow, April 21, 2010, RIA Novosti.

[5] Dawn, *US not to use Uzbek base, says Holbrooke*, Astana, February 21, 2010, accessed in

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/07-us-not-to-use-uzbek-base-says-holbrooke-ha-01>

[6] John C. K. Daly, op. cit.

[7] 'Epiphanes,' *Russian blog comments from former FSB officer on Kyrgyzstan events*, April 8, 2010, writing in <http://www.warandpeace.ru/ru/news/view/46021/>

[8] Kyrgyzstan National Security Service 'source' writing in <http://www.warandpeace.ru/ru/news/view/46021/>

[9] Erica Marat, *Kyrgyzstan Relaxes Control over Drug Trafficking*, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.7, Issue 24, February 4, 2010.

[10] K. Gajendra Singh, op. cit.

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