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Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications

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Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications

Summary

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. It was long led by Askar Akayev — who many observers warned was becoming increasingly autocratic — but the country was still considered “the most open, progressive and cooperative in Central Asia,” according to the U.S. Agency for International Development. 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 that trans-ships personnel, equipment, and supplies to support coalition operations in Afghanistan.

Many people both inside and outside Kyrgyzstan were hopeful that the national legislative election on February 27, 2005 would strengthen political pluralism, easing the way for a peaceful handover of executive power in late 2005 when President Akayev was expected to step down. The legislative race proved highly contentious, however, and necessitated a second round of voting on March 13. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe tentatively concluded that serious irregularities took place in the first round. After the February 27 vote, protestors occupied government offices in the southern part of the country, and protests spread throughout the rest of the country after the second round of voting. On March 24, thousands of protesters stormed the presidential and other offices in the capital of Bishkek and Akayev and his family fled. He resigned as president on April 4. Acting president Kurmanbek Bakiyev has pledged to focus on combating corruption that siphons away investment capital, and stressed that foreign policy would not change, including Kyrgyzstan’s close relations with Russia and the United States. Looming challenges to Kyrgyzstan’s stability include a planned presidential election, possible legislative by-elections to fill seats under dispute, and a possible referendum to adopt democratic changes to the constitution.

Indicating early support for democratization and continued security ties, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld briefly visited Kyrgyzstan on April 14. Cumulative U.S. budgeted assistance to Kyrgyzstan for FY1992-FY2004 was \$749.0 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 for anti-terrorism and border protection. Of this aid, 14.6% supported democratization programs. While this aid has bolstered the growth of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, the Administration also has stressed that the United States did not orchestrate the coup. 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, construct a federal government, and bolster private sector economic growth. (See also CRS Issue Brief IB93108, *Central Asia*, updated regularly.)

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Coup in Kyrgyzstan: Developments and Implications

Background

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union.¹ It was long led by Askar Akayev, who initially was widely regarded as a reformer but in recent years appeared increasingly autocratic. Despite this, the country was still considered “the most open, progressive and cooperative in Central Asia,” according to the U.S. Agency for International Development.² 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 regional-power Uzbekistan, 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 for trans-shipping personnel, equipment, and supplies to support coalition operations in Afghanistan and the region. In early 2005, the base hosted about 800 U.S. and 100 Spanish troops.³

The Coup and Its Aftermath

Many people both inside and outside Kyrgyzstan were hopeful that the national legislative election on February 27, 2005 would strengthen political pluralism, easing the way for a peaceful handover of executive power in late 2005 when President Akayev was expected to step down. Nearly 400 prominent politicians and businessmen and 40 parties (many united in blocs) ran for 75 seats in the highly contentious race. Many in Kyrgyzstan thought it unseemly that the president’s and prime minister’s children were running for seats, along with many other family

¹ It is small in terms of its population of 5.1 million and its size of 77,415 sq. miles (similar to that of North Dakota), and poor in terms of many natural resources and its high rate of poverty, estimated at 30-50% of the population. For background information, see CRS Report 97-690, *Kyrgyzstan*.

² USAID. *Budget Justification to the Congress: Annex III, Europe and Eurasia, FY2005*, p. 325.

³ The State Department. *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations for FY2006*.

members and friends of high officials. Balloting resulted in the filling of less than half the seats, with run-offs held on March 13 in districts where no one candidate received over 50% of the votes cast. On March 22, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) announced that results for 71 districts were valid. Less than 10% of seats were won by opposition candidates, although there reportedly were many close races where they “lost” only by a few votes. These results incensed many in the opposition camp, who alleged massive vote fraud. An initial report by election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Parliament fueled this discontent by stating that serious irregularities had taken place, including the questionable exclusion of several opposition candidates from running, biased state-controlled media and other heavy government use of administrative resources, and problematic voter lists.⁴

After opposition candidates won only two seats in the first round, opposition party-led demonstrators called for a new election and for Akayev to resign. In southern Kyrgyzstan, protestors stormed and occupied government facilities, including in the regional centers of Osh and Jalalabad. Many of these southerners (including a majority ethnic Uzbek community) viewed themselves as discriminated against both economically and politically by a central government dominated by northerners.⁵ Some counter-demonstrations in support of the government also were reported. Protests widened throughout both the north and south in the wake of the March 13 run-off. Akayev hastily convened the new legislature immediately after the CEC announced voting results on March 22, and urged the public to focus on the upcoming planting season rather than a past election. He blamed foreign NGOs and religious extremists for the protests, and his spokesman warned that the unrest marked efforts by drug lords and terrorists to take power.

Akayev’s Ouster

Kyrgyzstan’s capital Bishkek remained relatively calm until an opposition rally on March 23 was successfully dispersed by police and armed Akayev supporters. The next day, thousands of angry demonstrators converged on government offices. According to one account, a violent attack on the protesters by some of Akayev’s supporters enraged the demonstrators and they stormed and occupied the presidential and other offices. Akayev fled the melee and he and his family soon flew to Moscow. Akayev’s prime minister resigned. The protesters released opposition party leader Feliks Kulov from prison, where he had been held on embezzlement charges that many observers had deemed politically motivated. Going to the occupied compound, he hailed the “revolution made by the people.”⁶

⁴ OSCE. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Parliamentary Elections, the Kyrgyz Republic: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, Feb. 27, 2005. Observers from several members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) declared the voting “transparent, open, and legitimate.”

⁵ Ethnic Uzbeks constitute 13.9% of the population, according the Kyrgyz Statistics Committee (2001 estimate).

⁶ The coup was variously called the “tulip revolution,” the “yellow revolution,” the “lemon revolution,” and the “pink revolution” by opposition groups and commentators.

Indicative of the chaotic legal situation, the Kyrgyz Supreme Court on March 24 recognized the former legislature as still duly empowered. Deputies from the former legislature met that night. They were shocked by rampant looting in Bishkek, and appointed Kulov to oversee the Security, Interior (police), and Defense ministries. They also appointed opposition figure Kurmanbek Bakiyev acting prime minister, and the next morning named him acting president as well. Bakiyev quickly proposed a provisional government composed of opposition politicians, most prominently Roza Otunbaeva as acting minister of foreign affairs; Adakhan Madumarov, acting deputy prime minister; and Azimbek Beknazarov, acting prosecutor-general (for further information on selected politicians, see the *Appendix*). The old legislature wrangled with Bakiyev over the appointments, perhaps spurring him to decide to dispense with it and endorse the powers of the new legislature.

Over the weekend, the Constitutional Court, Bakiyev, Kulov, and a newly appointed head of the CEC proclaimed that the new legislature was constitutionally legitimate and should be empowered, although granting that twenty or more district races might need to be held again. The new legislature met on March 28 and elected Omurbek Tekebayev as speaker and reaffirmed Bakiyev as prime minister and acting president. The interim government has announced that a presidential election will take place on July 10, 2005.

Akayev's formal resignation as president on April 4, 2005, was a major boost to the legitimacy of the interim government. The resignation agreement called for Akayev to fore swear running for president again and for the new Kyrgyz authorities to respect existing law that grants retired presidents immunity from prosecution. Russia pledged to assist the parties in honoring their commitments. The Kyrgyz legislature accepted Akayev's resignation on April 11.

Among early policy decisions, Bakiyev on March 29 stated that he would combat corruption that siphons away investment capital and compromises the educational and legal systems. He also announced that personnel in the former government responsible for electoral fraud and attacks on demonstrators would be prosecuted, and that some property belonging to the Akayev family might be confiscated. Both Bakiyev and Otunbayeva stressed that Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy would not change, including its close relations with Russia and the United States and the presence of their military bases in the country.

Implications for Kyrgyzstan and the Region

Observers remain divided on prospects for Kyrgyzstan, with some suggesting that it will continue to democratize because it has a relatively vibrant civil society, compared to the rest of Central Asia. Others are less optimistic, pointing to the economic development challenges facing Kyrgyzstan and the high level of disaffection among its population. They also point to the social fragility of a country where the north and south have differing interests and where even ground transport back and forth is difficult during the winter because of mountainous terrain.

The main division among the groups vying for power and influence during the late March events appeared to be between pro-Akayev regional, clan, and family groups — which together constituted the political and economic elite — and other regional, clan, and family groups that felt deprived of their share of political and economic power. Ethnic issues appeared at least initially less significant, since many ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan joined other southerners in toppling the regime. However, ethnic tensions remain of concern. Beyond their anti-Akayev stance and demands for redistributing political and economic power, the opposition parties mostly lack well-developed policies and strategic plans for the future of Kyrgyzstan. Some observers have raised concerns that interim government leaders are engaging in nepotism and other corrupt practices rather than combating them.

Several commentators view the coup as involving two anti-regime groups, the dispossessed and the political opposition. To some degree, the former are younger and the latter are older. The former were the active agents in taking over government offices, and reportedly were motivated more by poverty and unemployment than by opposition politics. Otunbayeva stressed that “mainly poor people” rather than party stalwarts stormed the government complex on March 24. These commentators warn that if a new government fails to remedy economic distress, more violence could occur.⁷ Other analysts have placed less credence on the “poor people” theory, suggesting that at least some of the political opposition may have planned to forcibly oust Akayev on March 24.⁸

No one opposition leader appears to enjoy overwhelming public and elite support, although Bakiyev’s influence appears to have grown in recent months.⁹ As was the case in Georgia, some of the most influential opposition leaders appear at least initially to be cooperating in running the government. However, the planned July presidential election appears to be accentuating tensions within the opposition camp, in particular between Bakiyev and Kulov.¹⁰ Bakiyev, representing southern

⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report* (hereafter, *FBIS*), Mar. 28, 2005, Doc. No. EUP-17; Mar. 29, 2005, CEP-19; Mar. 29, 2005, CEP-213.

⁸ Daniel Kimmage, *RFE/RL Report*, Apr. 4, 2005. The role that political youth groups such as Kel-Kel played in storming government offices is uncertain, but their activism has not resulted in notable representation in the government, as occurred in Georgia and Ukraine.

⁹ *FBIS*, Feb. 26, 2005, CEP-139.

¹⁰ According to a January 2005 poll of the Kyrgyz elite, Bakiyev was the most popular politician in the country. Otunbayeva was among the top ten and Kadyrbekov among the

interests, seeks to enlarge his power base by wooing northern politicians (such as Otunbayeva and many of those elected to the new legislature). Such actions could reduce Kulov's strong appeal in the north. On the other hand, many of the oppositionists remain outside the Bakiyev government, and at least some may unify to support Kulov in a prospective presidential race. Kulov also is trying to woo former Akayev supporters by endorsing Akayev's immunity from prosecution. However, some pro-Akayev and northern interests have created the Akyykat (Justice) political movement to challenge opposition candidates in the election.

Some observers raise the specter of a highly contentious and problematic presidential election that may deepen civil disorder. Another source of likely disorder may then come to the fore later in the year if the 15-20 or more disputed legislative seats are re-contested, or if a new election of the whole legislature is carried out. Unless these elections take place, however, the legislature will remain illegitimate in the eyes of many Kyrgyzstanis. Calls by some in Kyrgyzstan for rewriting the constitution to remove what are viewed as illegitimate changes made during Akayev-orchestrated referenda create still more uncertainties about Kyrgyzstan's stability during the next few months. Some optimistic observers suggest that the relatively bloodless March coup (3 deaths were reported) and reduced public passions after Akayev's ouster may bode well for the avoidance of violence or political instability in the near term.¹¹

Other observers who caution that political disorder may deepen suggest that Islamic extremists could bid to take power. They maintain that Hizb ut-Tahrir and other Islamic extremist groups have gained members in Kyrgyzstan in recent years, and warn that such groups are anti-American and anti-Russian.¹²

Before the coup, there appeared to be some cooperation among ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in protests in Kyrgyzstan's south, in contrast to inter-communal violence there in the early 1990s. Many ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz joined in supporting ethnic Uzbek opposition leader Anvar Artykov in Osh. The emergence of such cooperation appeared buttressed by region-wide parades and other celebrations to mark Akayev's overthrow. However, while some ethnic Uzbeks have supported Bakiyev, others have criticized him for appointing people to leading government posts whom they regard as Kyrgyz nationalists and for not appointing enough ethnic Uzbeks.¹³

Regional Implications

The coup in Kyrgyzstan appears to have belied the views of some who asserted that the relatively authoritarian regimes in Central Asia would endure for the foreseeable future. The coup has galvanized opposition throughout the region and

top twenty. *FBIS*, Feb. 26, 2005, CEP-139. Since he was freed from prison, Kulov has been depicted by the Kyrgyz media as a prominent opposition figure, and his prison record may make him appear more genuine to many disaffected Kyrgyzstanis.

¹¹ *FBIS*, March 28, 2005, CEP-106; *ITAR-TASS*, Mar. 28, 2005.

¹² Zeyno Baran, *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 29, 2005.

¹³ *AFP*, Mar. 24, 2005; *FBIS*, Mar. 27, 2005, CEP-98; *Eurasia Insight*, Mar. 31, 2005.

caused palpable unease among regional elites, who unanimously condemned it as a bloody putsch. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, for example, told his citizenry that the coup was the work of 5,000 convicts who had escaped from jail and were looting Kyrgyzstan.

Some observers suggest that Kazakhstan might be the most likely candidate among the remaining Central Asian states where the opposition could influence political change, because Nazarbayev has not completely crushed civil society. However, he appears to be taking measures to head off a Kyrgyz-type coup. He has, for example, raised salaries and pensions. Among security measures perhaps inspired by the Kyrgyz coup, the legislature quickly approved electoral law changes banning political rallies immediately after an election. Zamanbek Nurkadilov, a leader of a newly formed opposition bloc, called in late March for Nazarbayev to step down when his term expires in 2006, so that a democratic and non-violent leadership transition may occur.¹⁴

In late 2005, Tajikistan faces a planned presidential election which the incumbent authoritarian leader Emomali Rakhmanov is expected to win. Although some political opposition parties were legalized as part of the 1997 settlement of Tajikistan's civil war, they have faced increasing harassment. The OSCE and the Tajik opposition have criticized the Rakhmanov government for gross interference in past elections, including the February 2005 legislative race, but the opposition has not reopened the civil war. Following the events in Kyrgyzstan, however, the Tajik opposition may consider the conduct of the 2005 presidential race as a decision point for its future cooperation with the government.¹⁵

In Uzbekistan, the government strictly censored news about the Kyrgyz coup, restricted public gatherings in regions near Kyrgyzstan, and closed the border. President Islam Karimov harshly condemned the coup as an illegal act. Some Uzbek opposition leaders hailed events in Kyrgyzstan as a call to arms in Uzbekistan, but most of the major opposition leaders are in exile and little political expression is allowed within the country.

The coup in Kyrgyzstan at least temporarily set back the already limited cooperation among the Central Asian states, with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan putting restrictions on cross-border trade and travel, some of which remain in place. The regional presidents have contacted the interim leaders of Kyrgyzstan to establish working relations to replace initial strains. These strains at times appeared to be exacerbated by statements made by the interim Kyrgyz leadership. While Otunbayeva at the end of March assured the regional leaders that "the guidelines of our diplomacy will not change," it appeared that she may have been advocating the export of revolution when she added that "I hope that our neighbors will experience the same thing ... that the other countries in central Asia will follow our path."¹⁶

¹⁴ *Le Monde*, Mar. 28, 2005, p. 4; *FBIS*, Mar. 31, 2005, CEP-53; *Eurasia Insight*, Apr. 1, 2005; Jeremy Bransen, *RFE/RL Report*, Mar. 31, 2005.

¹⁵ Baran, *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 29, 2005.

¹⁶ *FBIS*, Mar. 29, 2005, EUP-68.

While opposition forces in the region include those espousing democratic principles, they also include Islamic extremists and ultra-nationalists. It appears unlikely that Islamic extremists soon could come to power, many observers argue. More likely, Islamic extremists could use a weakened Kyrgyzstan as a base to support affiliated groups throughout the Fergana Valley (which is shared by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), thereby enhancing threats to the regimes of these countries.¹⁷ Another possibility could be the rise to power of an ultra-nationalist regime. If such a regime came to power, many observers suggest, there might well be increased discrimination against ethnic Uzbeks, Russians, and other minorities that could lead to violence. Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations with neighboring countries could also suffer if it pressed sensitive border claims or stopped cooperating as a critical source of water supply for the downstream countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Implications for Afghanistan

The coup does not appear to have affected the operations of the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan in support of coalition actions in Afghanistan. A more democratic and stable Kyrgyzstan might be considered for longer term pre-positioning of military supplies or other enhanced use. The change of government in Kyrgyzstan could result in greater efforts to combat cross-border criminal, terrorist, and drug smuggling activities that conceivably could have a positive effect on Afghanistan. Drug traffickers, however, could switch to other routes out of Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan might also cooperate in bolstering democracy in each other's countries and throughout the region.

Implications for Russia and Other Eurasian States

Some analysts view the coup in Kyrgyzstan as a harbinger of political transformations in other Soviet successor (Eurasian) states. Others view it as prompting tougher repression by authoritarian leaders intent on retaining power. Russia quickly shifted in late March from harsh criticism of the Kyrgyz opposition to offers of aid to the interim government. This *volte face* was made easier after Bakiyev and others pledged that Kyrgyzstan would remain Russia's "strategic partner." Some observers suggested that Russia had realized that its heavy-handed approach to political liberalization in Ukraine and Georgia was only making these countries more determined to gravitate toward the West. Putin reflected this stance when he allowed that while "it is regretful that once more in a country in the post-Soviet area, political issues are decided by unlawful means," he hoped that he could work with the new leaders, many of whom he had amicably worked with in the past.¹⁸

Although Putin appeared to be putting the best face on the impact of the coup on Russia's regional influence, others in Russia raised concerns that the coup marked a further decline in Russian influence in other former Soviet successor states.

¹⁷ Luc Perrot, *AFP*, Mar. 24, 2005; *FBIS*, Mar. 30, 2005, CEP-229.

¹⁸ *FBIS*, Mar. 28, 2005, CEP-202.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, General Secretary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization of the Commonwealth of Independent States,¹⁹ raised concerns that the CSTO had proved impotent, since Akayev had refused an offer of help from the CSTO in the days before the coup, and the interim leaders of Kyrgyzstan also were ignoring it. Perhaps portending greater tension in U.S.-Russia relations, some state-owned television commentators in Russia alleged that the coup was simply another example, after similar coups in Georgia and Ukraine, of U.S. meddling in Eurasia. Reflecting an ultranationalist perspective, one private Russian newspaper even darkly warned that the U.S. goal was “direct control over Eurasia,” including Russia, and that Russia appeared to lack the political will to resist.²⁰

Other authoritarian states in Eurasia have followed Uzbekistan’s example and cracked down on civil society rather than liberalizing. In Belarus, President Aleksandr Lukashenko ordered military exercises on March 28 that he stated would “make sure [that people] are afraid of replacing the authorities” by attempted force.²¹ In Azerbaijan, the government moved even before the Kyrgyz coup (perhaps in response to democratization events in Ukraine) to restrict youth participation in future electoral campaigns. Azerbaijan’s opposition Musavat Party head Isa Gambar hailed the Kyrgyz coup as proving that Muslim countries could roll back dictatorship, and called on opposition parties to unite in bringing a “democratic revolution” to Azerbaijan by winning legislative elections scheduled for November 2005.²² Leaders of Moldova’s Transnistria and Georgia’s Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions in April appeared concerned about Russia’s seeming impotence in influencing events in Kyrgyzstan. Perhaps uncertain about Russia’s continued de facto support for their separatism, they pledged to help one another militarily if they were attacked.²³

In contrast to these leaders, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili hailed the Kyrgyz coup and dispatched their foreign ministers to Bishkek at the end of March to offer advice and support to the interim leadership. The ministers proposed that Kyrgyzstan join a “Democratic Choice Coalition” just formed by the two presidents to cooperate on democratic reforms. Reportedly, democratic activists from both countries had traveled to Kyrgyzstan before the coup to give advice to activists there.²⁴

¹⁹ The Collective Security Treaty was signed by several Soviet successor states in 1992. They pledged to consult in the event of a threat to one or several members, and promised mutual aid if attacked. The members agreed in 2002 to set up a permanent secretariat. Current members are Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

²⁰ *Izvestia*, Mar. 29, 2005, pp. 1 - 2; *Rossiia*, Mar. 31, 2005, p. 4. Indicating a minimalist rationale, Putin has argued that the CIS has served mainly to ease the “divorce” of the republics of the former Soviet Union. *Interfax*, Mar. 25, 2005.

²¹ *FBIS*, Apr. 1, 2005, CEP-234.

²² *FBIS*, Apr. 1, 2005, CEP-138. The Chairman of the Duma’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachyov, likewise blamed Russia’s loss of influence in Ukraine on its exclusive focus on ties with existing Ukrainian leaders, rather than blaming it on U.S. and Western efforts to overthrow these leaders. Arkady Orlov, *RIA Novosti*, Apr. 6, 2005.

²³ *AFP*, Apr. 4, 2005.

²⁴ See also CRS Report RL32845, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution and U.S. Policy*.

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. Akayev had reached agreement with China in 2003 to step up cooperation in combating these groups, and China is anxious that such cooperation continue. China may also be concerned that peaceful Uighurs within a democratic Kyrgyzstan might become more politically active in advocating for their kin in Xinjiang.²⁵ Apparently, there were some attacks on Chinese businessmen 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.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman on March 29 stressed China's paramount concern that law and order be re-established with Kyrgyzstan and that "good neighborly relations" continue, including cooperation in combating terrorists.²⁶ 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. Administration has considered Akayev's government as less objectionable than others in Central Asian, and hoped that a planned late 2005 presidential race would become "a model for peaceful, democratic transfer of executive power in the region."²⁷ In line with these hopes, the Administration and others were focusing on civil society aid to facilitate a free and fair presidential election late in the year, so Akayev's ouster caught the United States and virtually all observers by surprise.

Cumulative U.S. budgeted assistance to Kyrgyzstan for FY1992-FY2004 was \$749.0 million (FREEDOM Support Act and other agency funds). Kyrgyzstan ranks third in such aid per capita among the Eurasian states, indicative of U.S. government and Congressional support in the early 1990s for its apparent progress in making reforms and more recently for anti-terrorism and border protection. Of this cumulative aid, 14.6% supported democratization programs, including legal and judicial training, legal support for NGOs, advice on party and electoral legislation,

²⁵ For background, see CRS Report RL31213, *China's Relations with Central Asian States*, Oct. 7, 2002.

²⁶ *Asia Pulse*, Apr. 5, 2005; *Hong Kong AFP*, March 29, 2005; Matthew Oresman, *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 6, 2005.

²⁷ Department of State. *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations for FY2006*.

training for political parties, support for independent media, and the dissemination of civics textbooks.²⁸ Estimated aid for FY2005 (FREEDOM Support Act and other foreign aid, excluding Defense and Energy Department aid) was \$36.4 million. The Administration requested \$35.7 million for FY2006, and on March 24 stated that it would “continue to support economic and democratic reform in Kyrgyzstan, including elections, humanitarian assistance, law enforcement, and security, and will carefully watch for emerging needs” as political developments there unfold.²⁹

Reportedly, opposition leaders Tekebayev and Otunbayeva have stated that U.S. democracy assistance was helpful to their endeavors. For example, both were participants in the International Visitors Program to observe the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Other aid included a printing press operating since November 2003 that prints all opposition newspapers, which earlier had faced obstacles in obtaining services at state-controlled facilities. In the run-up to the legislative race, one opposition newspaper did an expose on the alleged wealth of the Akayev family. Akayev denounced the article as libelous. A few days later, electricity mysteriously was shut off to the press. The U.S. Embassy strongly protested and lent generators to continue operations until power returned a week later.³⁰

Although accepting some credit for the role U.S. democratization aid has played in facilitating the development of civil society in Kyrgyzstan, the Administration has been careful to stress that it did not “mastermind” the coup. Secretary Rice also has tried to reassure Russia that the United States and the West are not attempting to “encircle” Russia by instigating democratic “revolutions” throughout Eurasia, but that these are indigenous developments that will benefit Russia as these countries become more stable and prosperous.³¹

The Administration at least initially appeared to follow the European Union and other international institutions and governments in cautiously assessing developments in Kyrgyzstan during the chaotic period leading up to the coup. Concerns that disorder and violence might increase were foremost and the Administration urged peaceful negotiations between the Akayev government and opposition forces. Reportedly, U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Stephen Young soon after the coup told Bakiyev that the United States would provide added aid to bolster a democratic transition. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick on March 29 endorsed a significant role for the OSCE in facilitating talks among pro-Akayev and opposition leaders to ease the transition of power and in facilitating support for the transition among regional OSCE members, including Russia.³²

²⁸ For Eurasia, democratization programs accounted for 10.5% of all cumulative aid, indicating that slightly more attention was placed on such programs in Kyrgyzstan.

²⁹ Department of State. Office of the Spokesman, Mar. 24, 2005.

³⁰ Steve Gutterman, *AP*, Apr. 1, 2005.

³¹ Department of State. Office of the Spokesman. *Interview, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice with the Washington Post Editorial Board*, Mar. 25, 2005

³² *FBIS*, Mar. 31, 2005, CEP-136; *AFP*, Mar. 29, 2005; Department of State, *Regular News Briefing*, Mar. 31, 2005.

Some in the Administration have suggested that the Kyrgyz coup is part of a worldwide trend of democratization, following in the footsteps of those in Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Secretary of State Rice stated on March 24 that “the Kyrgyz people have a desire and an aspiration for freedom and democracy, as do people around the world. The responsibility of the international system ... is to help people when they express this to channel this into a set of processes that then lead to stable institutions.” Deputy Secretary Zoellick similarly asserted that the Kyrgyz, like “people in very diverse parts of the world, whether it is Ukraine, Georgia, Iraq, Afghanistan or the Palestinian elections ... desire to be free....”³³

Indicating support for democratization and continued security ties, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld briefly visited Kyrgyzstan on April 14. He thanked the interim leadership for Kyrgyzstan’s support for the Global War on Terror and stated that he told them that “the United States is wishing them well in the important work that they’re engaged in building a stable and modern and prosperous democracy.” Bakiyev assured Rumsfeld that U.S. basing rights would be upheld.³⁴

While the Kyrgyz interim government has pledged to continue Akayev’s foreign policy of good relations with both the United States and Russia, it is uncertain whether this might change in the future. The interim leadership appears to support important U.S. interests in the region. Kulov seems to be strongly pro-U.S., but he also has argued that up to one million Kyrgyz (20% of the population) may be working in Russia, that their repatriated earnings constitute a major portion of the Kyrgyz budget, and that Russia provides oil, so “we cannot quarrel with Moscow.”³⁵ Some observers suggest that even if Kyrgyzstan endeavors to maintain close relations with China, Russia, and the United States, a strong Kyrgyz state would serve U.S. interests in the region by more effectively combating terrorism and drug and human trafficking emanating from Afghanistan.

The United States has been building twenty troop barracks at the U.S. airbase at Manas to replace tents, anticipating that the base will continue to be a major transshipment point for personnel and equipment for operations in Afghanistan. According to a March 2005 report by Kyrgyzstan’s Foreign Ministry (later denied by both U.S. and Kyrgyz authorities), the government had received requests from the United States and NATO regarding the possibility of deploying airborne warning and control systems planes (AWACS) at Ganci. The government denied the requests, however, ostensibly because of its commitments to the CSTO and the SCO. Although the interim government has stated that it will uphold the existing balance

³³ The State Department. Office of the Spokesman. *Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice And Greek Foreign Minister Petros Molyviatis After Their Meeting*, Mar. 24, 2005; AFP, Mar. 29, 2005. That same day, State Department spokesman Adam Ereli stressed that “our overall approach ... is to support the efforts of the Kyrgyz people to build a stable and prosperous democracy.” He argued that where “you’ve got election fraud,” that is “not dealt with openly, transparently and consistent with commitments that the government has to its people, then there is going to be a negative reaction” by the public, and “what we’re seeing in Kyrgyzstan is a reflection of that....” *Daily Press Briefing*, Mar. 24, 2005.

³⁴ *American Forces Press Service*, Apr. 14, 2005.

³⁵ *FBIS*, Mar. 28, 2005, EUP-17.

of security ties with Russia, China, and the United States, a more Western-oriented government might eventually reassess such ties.

As Congress and the Administration consider how to assist democratic and economic transformation in Kyrgyzstan, several possible programs have been suggested by observers in Kyrgyzstan, the United States, and elsewhere. At the same time, these observers have cautioned that developments in Kyrgyzstan remain fluid and that a democratic transformation is not assured. These observers suggest that one sign that the new leaders are committed to democratization would be a free and fair presidential election. Among possible programs, former Kyrgyz foreign minister Muratbek Imanaliyev has called for the creation of an advisory group of international experts to examine how Kyrgyz politics might become more inclusive of both northern and southern interests and how Kyrgyzstan might step up its pace of private sector economic transformation. In Congress, the newly established House Democracy Assistance Committee is examining possible inter-parliamentary technical assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Other observers have called for Kyrgyzstan to soon be designated a country eligible for aid from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation. The International Monetary Fund views Kyrgyzstan as making important recent progress in fiscal reforms, GDP growth, and poverty reduction, and calls for international financial institutions to continue to support the country in coming years.³⁶

³⁶ International Monetary Fund. IMF Country Report No. 05/119. *Kyrgyz Republic: Sixth Review*, Mar. 29, 2005.

Appendix

Opposition Leaders in the New Government

Kurmanbek Bakiyev, prime minister 2000-2002. Then-President Askar Akayev blamed him for a government crackdown on a protest in the south that led to several deaths, and he was forced to resign. He became head of the opposition People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK) bloc in late 2004. He lost his bid for a legislative seat in the March 2005 run-off.

Azimbek Beknazarov, head of the nationalist Asaba Party. In 2001 he harshly criticized President Akayev for agreeing to border adjustments deemed favorable to China and Kazakhstan, allegedly contributing to his arrest in 2002. In late 2004, he became deputy head of PMK. He won a legislative seat in the March 2005 run-off.

Murtabek Imanaliyev, foreign minister 1997-2002. He heads the Jany Bagyt (New Direction) Social and Political Movement.

Feliks Kulov, head of the Ar-Namys (Dignity) Party. He was imprisoned in 2001 on corruption charges that some observers viewed as politically motivated. His party is prominent in the north but has members all over the country. He was released from prison during the demonstrations on March 24, 2005, and the Supreme Court threw out all charges against him on April 11.

Adakhan Madumarov, co-head of the Ata Jurt party bloc and For Fair Elections Movement. He contested his "loss" in the March 2005 run-off and was declared the winner by the CEC.

Roza Otunbayeva, former deputy prime minister, foreign minister, ambassador to the United Kingdom and the United States, and U.N. emissary. In late 2004, she became co-chair of the Ata-Jurt party bloc. The CEC refused to register her as a candidate in the recent legislative election.

Omurbek Tekebayev, heads the Ata Meken Party. He won a legislative seat in the March 2005 run-off.



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (08/02 M.Chin)