

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



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Synopsis

Kyrgyzstan is a small and poor country in Central Asia that gained independence in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. 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. A referendum on a new constitution establishing a parliamentary form of government is scheduled to be held on June 27, 2010, to be followed by parliamentary elections on October 10, 2010, and a presidential election in December 2011. On the night of June 10-11, 2010, ethnic-based violence escalated in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, and over the next few days intensified and spread to other localities. The violence may have resulted in up to a thousand or more deaths and injuries and up to 100,000 or more displaced persons, most of them ethnic Uzbeks who have fled to neighboring Uzbekistan. 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 the Manas Transit Center), in recognition that ongoing instability in Afghanistan jeopardized regional security. 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 in the future. She also has launched an investigation of corrupt dealings by the previous government on fuel contracts and other services for the transit center. 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.)

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