

Kyrgyzstan: internal instability and revolt in 2010

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Introduction

On April 7, 2010, following huge anti-governmental protests that left more than 200 people dead and numerous others injured, the ruling government in Kyrgyzstan was ousted. The unrest in society that led to these circumstances mainly stemmed from growing social deprivations and choler against President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's administration.

A day earlier, on the 6th of April, protesters had taken control of a government office in Talas and on April 7, clashes with the police in the capital Bishkek turned violent. Compared to the Tulip Revolution of 2005, this resulted in even greater human casualties and caused significant damage to infrastructure in both state-owned and private properties.¹

President Bakiyev fled to Osh, a major city in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, while the opposition leaders formed a transition government headed by former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva.² A week after the protests, Bakiyev left the country for Kazakhstan, and afterwards went on to Belarus,³ subsequently resigning from his already defunct role as President.

Roza Otunbayeva, after being selected to head the new interim government, in an interview for *Newsweek* in April, mentioned a number of reasons for the revolt that had taken the country by storm. She pointed out that,

There was a lot of corruption: in terms of transparency, Kyrgyzstan is 166th out of 180 countries. We are a country with such a low quality of life. But since Jan. 1, President Bakiyev started to raise the price for utilities [and] taxes on real estate. Then they started to sell strategic companies. A very big electricity company, which supplied electricity to Bishkek [the capital], was sold for \$3 million, which is nothing. And they were corrupt—in fact, the utility company was sold to the son of Bakiyev. And political repression and such a dramatic fall of human rights in my country.⁴

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Kyrgyzstan is one of the former states of the Soviet Union with a population of 5.36 million and an area covering 19,995 km². It lies in the peripheries of the region that was once referred to as a 'geographical pivot'. Landlocked and highly mountainous, the once-strategic country has again been thrust into a pivotal role as it has become a key area for rivalries of nations around the world.⁵

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Since 9/11, the geopolitical importance of Kyrgyzstan has grown remarkably. It is the only Central Asian country with both Russian and American bases. According to H. Mackinder, "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island controls the world,"⁶ thus enhancing the geopolitical importance of Kyrgyzstan's territory.

U.S. interests in Kyrgyzstan have increased a great deal in the last decade after the 9/11 terrorists attacks. It joined the war against terrorism by allowing U.S. to use its land as an air base, and a transit hub viewed crucial to NATO efforts in Afghanistan. These developments added much to Kyrgyzstan's regional standing as the efforts in the global war against terrorism were further enhanced by President Bush when he declared to world, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."⁷

Others, including Russia, China, and India have their own interests in Kyrgyzstan; indeed, according to one analyst, "Kyrgyzstan is a hub of competing interests involving both regional and extra-regional powers."⁸

This is not too difficult to fathom. Kyrgyzstan shares borders with China's Xinjiang province (a highly strategic point for Beijing) in the east, with the oil-rich Kazakhstan in the north, Tajikistan in the south, and Uzbekistan in the west. The social uprising is bad signal for all the neighbouring countries, especially for the Central Asian states as there is a possibility that the chaotic situation might reinforce the activities of terrorist organizations in other countries. Moreover, it also can accelerate the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Movement (IJM), and the militant groups of the United Opposition of Tajikistan, which are already fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In discussing and analyzing the current situation then, this paper is divided into three parts followed by a conclusion. The first section provides a brief overview of the history of Kyrgyzstan while the second section takes a more detailed look at the factors behind the instability and revolt in 2010. The third section deals with the interests and actions of the international community, while the final part provides a brief conclusion of the overall situation and offers some recommendations.

Section I

The following table shows the demographic, geographic, economic and strategic outlooks of Kyrgyzstan, all of which are important characteristics as we develop a stronger understanding of the country.

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Area | 199,951 sq.km |
| 2. | Capital | Bishkek |
| 3. | Border Countries | China 858 km (East and Southeast), Kazakhstan 1,224 km (North), Tajikistan 870 km (South), Uzbekistan 1,099 km (West) |
| 4. | Population | 5.36 Million |
| 5. | Ethnic Groups | Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uyghur 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census) |
| 6. | Languages | Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungan 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census) |
| 7. | Religion | Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5% |
| 8. | GDP – Per Capita | \$2,200 |
| 9. | Natural Resources | Abundant hydropower; significant deposits of gold and rare earth metals; locally exploitable coal, oil, and natural gas; other deposits of nepheline, mercury, bismuth, lead, and zinc |
| 10. | Form of Government | Republic |
| 11. | Year of Independence | 1991 |

Table 1: Kyrgyzstan at a glance⁹

Historical background

Kyrgyz nomads were once part of Genghis Khan's Golden Horde.¹⁰ The people of nomadic tribes who moved through the eastern and northern parts of present-day Central Asia are the very people of today's Kyrgyzstan. The Khanate of Kokand ruled the southern part of what is now Kyrgyzstan in the early 19th century; then, in 1876 the Russian Empire took over the territory and in the process stirred up many revolts against the Tsarist authority.¹¹

The Kyrgyz nation carried out a major revolt against the Tsarist Empire in 1916, leading to the death of almost one-sixth of the Kyrgyz population, while many also migrated to China. Kyrgyzstan soon became part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Federation on April 30, 1918,¹² and the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was brought into existence within the Russian Federal Socialist Republic in 1924 (until the mid 1920s, the term Kara-Kyrgyz was used by the Russians to differentiate them from the Kazakhs).¹³ It became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1926, and a decade later, on December 5, 1936, it became a full Union Republic of the USSR.¹⁴ The early years of the glasnost¹⁵ in the late 1980s had minor effects on the political environment in the Kyrgyz Republic.¹⁶

In June 1990, economic stagnation resulted in tensions between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic groups, especially in an area of Osh Oblast in the south where the former were in majority. This resulted in a violent confrontation that erupted like a volcano and a state of emergency was declared; law and order was not restored until August 1990 and this development caused immeasurable change to the Kyrgyz Republic as regional and tribal power politics once again came into play. The government announced elections for October because of the Osh riots and severe political infightings.¹⁷ Askar Akayev was elected as a President by the Supreme Soviet on October 28, 1990, and his regime lasted until Kurmanbek Bakiyev became the second elected president of Kyrgyzstan after the Tulip Revolution in 2005.

The country had been facing tremendous socioeconomic problems, thus fuelling tensions between the people and the government. And thus, in March 2005, the people of Kyrgyzstan followed a trend initiated by Georgia and Ukraine, revolting against the post-Soviet administration and calling for a more democratic system. As a result of the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev, the leader of the Popular Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan at the time, demanded that the following steps be taken:¹⁸

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1. The resignation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic,
2. The holding of early presidential elections,
3. Cancellation of the first round of parliamentary elections, and
4. Convening an extraordinary session of parliament of the old convocation to solve all these problems.

Due to protest and tensions, Akayev gave up his regime and fulfilled the Kyrgyz peoples' will by resigning from the post. The reasons behind his ouster were corruption, poverty (especially in the rural areas), mass unemployment, and flawed elections in 2005.¹⁹ Kurmanbek Bakiyev was elected as President of Kyrgyzstan following the Tulip Revolution through a free and fair poll and 'promised to curtail presidential powers and eradicate the corruption and nepotism under his predecessor.'²⁰

Section II

Structural impediments

Before going into the details of the recent revolt in 2010, it is necessary to take into account the structural weaknesses that led to the internal instability. Kyrgyz society has been facing political, economic and social problems since independence, and many factors led to the protests; these included the following:

Strong presidency and weak parliament

Despite a well-built government structure, the President enjoys rights that make him the most powerful person in the country. For instance, he can appoint the Prime Minister, the ministers of the cabinet, and also the judges of the Supreme Court with the approval of parliament. He also has the power to shape the government structure and acts as the head of regional administrations.

In spite of reforms and strong presidential powers, Bakiyev failed to solve was unsuccessful in handling socio-economic weaknesses, rising black markets and also the corruption issues haunting his regime.

Under Askar Akayev, constitutional amendments were introduced in 1996, 1998, and 2000. As a result, presidential power considerably increased while the power of the parliament decreased substantially.²¹ A similar policy was adopted by Bakiyev in 2006 and 2007 as a lust for power prevailed and the struggle between the parliament and the president resumed. In spite of reforms and strong presidential powers, Bakiyev failed to solve was unsuccessful in handling socio-economic weaknesses, rising black markets and also the corruption issues haunting his regime.

a) Clanism: the chronic illness of Kyrgyz politics

The political system of Kyrgyzstan, which was rife with corruption, nepotism, and ‘clanism’ in the pre-Soviet era, has prevailed in the post-Soviet era as well. It not only constrains the democratic advancement of the country but also negatively affects socioeconomic developments and governance.

Clanism is one of the key elements of Kyrgyz society, which is comprised of three clan groups, also known as ‘wings’. They are the right (Ong), the left (Sol), and the Ichkilik, which is neither. The right wing has one clan only i.e. the Adygine (southern based) whereas seven clans from the west and the north make up the left wing. The Ichkilik has strong ties to southern Kyrgyzstan and is made up of many clans, ‘some of which are not of Kyrgyz origin, but all of which claim Kyrgyz identity.’²²

Political tensions in Kyrgyzstan are also a result of clan rivalries as power sharing becomes a major issue. Clanism is the root cause of corruption and nepotism and has also weakened the governance and public administration systems in the country. Bakiyev was also involved deeply in such clanism. His family filled all key positions of the government; his brother Janysh was first deputy chairman of the National Security Services and his elder son Marat was the head of one of its internal wings. A second brother was State Trade Representative to China and another, Marat, served as a Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to Germany and Norway. A fourth brother headed a village administration and a fifth was a businessman in Jalalabad. Bakiyev's second son, Maxim, the richest man in Kyrgyzstan, was in charge of the State Investment and Development Agency.²³

Apart from occupying key positions, Bakiyev adopted the tactics of former president Akayev by enhancing presidential powers, establishing power centers, and promoting his own clan. The dominance of Bakiyev's family in political as well as economic sectors had a major role to play in the April 2010 crisis.

b) Nepotism and corruption

Other than weak governance and clanism, the other major issues that disturb the political system of Kyrgyzstan are nepotism and corruption. While all these are interrelated and feed off each other, the most important factors, and also the crux of the revolt in 2010, are poor governance and a corrupt authoritarian regime.

The corruption rate in Kyrgyzstan, as mind-boggling as it before, was extremely high during Bakiyev's rule. The trends were remarkably similar. For instance, while Akayev gave his son most of the contracts to provide jet fuel for the nation's airport, President Bakiyev's younger son Maxim was in charge of the State Investment and Development Agency and also signed opaque business deals with China, transferring assets to overseas tax havens. In addition, privatization schemes led to suspicious ownership structures of electronic utilities. According to Russian state television, "Maxim Bakiyev was siphoning off as much as \$8 million each month from companies supplying the air base with fuel."²⁴

Moreover, the politicians - especially those belonging to the north - who left Bakiyev, were of the view that his regime was "nothing more than stacking the government with his own people to the exclusion of other."²⁵

As a result of this nepotism, corruption, clanism and poor governance, distrust and discontent increased in Kyrgyz society and led to the overall situation worsening day by day. It was only inevitable that something unique would rise from the situation. And once again, history repeated itself with public tolerance giving way to protests, as a struggle began in the capital Bishkek and spread to massive protests and ethnic riots in the southern part of the country later.

Weak military and poor law enforcement

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent distribution of land amongst the former states, the foremost problem for Kyrgyzstan was an ethno-territorial issue as the divided ethnic groups posed a threat to the stability of the new state. Since independence, the country's military has been kept busy with handling and managing border issues and disputes.²⁶ This keeps it away from settling internal issues. Moreover, the Kyrgyz police force too has not been effective in controlling the internal instability.

With law enforcement agencies and the military both weak in settling internal issues, solutions have proved elusive. In fact, the law enforcement wing of the Kyrgyz Republic is too fragile to even enforce the rule of law; collectively, the organizations responsible for maintaining security, law and order and development in the country have been incapable of curbing problems, with one major reason being poor administration.

Economic problems

Despite economic reforms and backing from western donors, Kyrgyzstan has faced multiple economic problems since independence, and the situation has worsened in recent times. Inflation, poverty, corruption, power shortage, and unemployment all increased in 2009 and 2010; while the economy had been suffering during Akayev's regime, it did not fare much better in Bakiyev's time either.

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Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest countries in Central Asia. It has a weak economy that is dependent on international assistance and external factors. After independence, it suffered economically with the collapse of the USSR, and the newly-formed government had to find solutions for a growing number of socio-economic problems. This included joining the World Trade Organization on December 20, 1998; however, it was unable to benefit from this move due to a lack of proper economic structures.

The living standards of the people of Kyrgyzstan are very low; irregularities in the economic system and high inflation mean that poverty is rampant. About 40% of the population lives below the poverty line and the inflation and unemployment rates are 24.8% and 18% respectively.²⁷ Overall, the strengths of the economy include its 'agricultural self-sufficiency, privatization of land since 2000, hydropower potential, and gold and mercury exports'²⁸ while the vulnerabilities are its 'dominant state and collective farming mentality, high inflation, and political instability.'²⁹ Clearly, the strengths were not being put to good use, and were rather being suppressed due to the weaknesses in the economic and governance systems.

Attempts had been made to put things right as economic reforms were adopted for 'liberal legislation on investments, customs regulation, insurance of private business, mortgage of real estate, privatization of enterprises, and a legal basis was prepared for land reforms and the creation of a new banking system.'³⁰ However, in 2007, the economy suffered from external as well as internal jolts as 'global inflation of food commodities and oil products, a sharp widening of the current account deficit [the country is a net fuel and food importer], severe power shortages, and the spillover effects of an economic slowdown in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation'³¹ led to Kyrgyzstan facing severe economic strife.

In 2009, the real gross domestic product growth decelerated to 2.3% as opposed to 7.6% in 2008. Inflation, poverty, corruption, unemployment and power shortage all increased. Bakiyev's regime took steady steps to overcome the fiscal deficit and bridge the gap between revenues and expenditures as the government and international financial institutions worked together on an inclusive strategy for reducing poverty and enhancing economic growth. This led to steps for curtailing corruption, establishing domestic industry, and attracting foreign investment, but all in vain. Other more promising development initiatives also fell apart once they fell into corrupt hands.

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has suffered as a result of its weak economy and resorted to asking international financial institutions for assistance time and again. However, reforms have never been successful due to a highly unstable political system, and consequently led to a frustrated society. This became visible in early 2010 as energy and inflation crises fuelled widespread unrest, ultimately leading to structural change in Kyrgyzstan.

The revolt of 2010

The revolt started on April 6, 2010 in the western city of Talas and the capital Bishkek before spreading to the entire country, leaving about 200 people dead and hundreds injured. Bakiyev was blamed for not fulfilling promises made towards reducing presidential power, strengthening the parliament, and rooting out corruption and crime. Thus, the government was confronted with a political crisis in which thousands of people participated in a series of rallies in Bishkek.

Hundreds of protestors stormed the government office in Talas and some in the capital also gathered to join the cause. The first day's protest was somehow controlled, but later the situation changed and the protestors overwhelmed security forces, taking control of armored vehicles and many other automatic weapons. A large number of demonstrators gathered in Ala-Too Square and surrounded the president's house on April 7 as stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets of security forces all failed to overcome them.³²

President Bakiyev initially resisted resigning from his post but later agreed with some conditions from the protesting people. He said, "First of all, they should guarantee that in Kyrgyzstan there are no more people walking around with weapons, and no seizures or redistribution of property. Also, I need to know that my own security and the security of members of my family and those close to me will be assured."³³ The revolt that toppled the autocratic president confirmed that 'all authoritarian regimes are eventually overthrown by a wave of public wrath if they are

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unable to resolve the internal problems peacefully and do not encourage political and socio-economic modernization.³⁴ With the resignation, the uprising was practically over; however, it gave birth to a new set of problems as ethnic clashes began to surface once again.

Ethnic tensions following the uprising

Ethnic discrimination and social inequality in Kyrgyzstan have led to resentment on a large scale. Tensions following the revolt erupted on June 10, 2010, in the southern part of the country. Approximately 200 people died, a number of people were injured and numerous fled to bordering countries, especially Uzbekistan. The lack of nationalism and a coherent goal-oriented national ideology contributes to the ongoing chaos,³⁵ and leads to several very pertinent questions as it leaves the country unstable.

Post-independence Kyrgyzstan is characterized by severe social fragmentation and the question of national identity poses a big challenge to a country with a complex national composition. National identity in Kyrgyzstan is broadly represented by its history, culture, tribalism, ethnicity, language, ideology and regionalism.³⁶ However, it is bound to be a complicated issue in a total population of 5.36 million, of which 64.9% is ethnic Kyrgyz, 13.8% Uzbek, 12.5% Russian, 1.1% Dzungars, 1% Ukrainian, 1% Uyghurs, and 5.7% belongs to other unclassified groups.³⁷

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Ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan have a long history; time and again, tensions between the majority Kyrgyz and minorities, especially Uzbeks, have erupted in violence with the bone of contention being water and land resources in the Ferghana Valley. For these ethnic groups, heterogeneity becomes a hindrance as it brings about a unified “we” against the purportedly unified “they”.³⁸ This phenomenon gives rise to a very fragmented society with deep reservations such as those that exist between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz people in a form of latent hostility since the Soviet period. For instance, in 1989, an Uzbek-rights group known as Adalat called for local Uzbek autonomy in Osh and wanted Moscow to consider its annexation by nearby Uzbekistan.

One of the long-standing issues behind ethnic riots is land.³⁹ There is a clear-cut north and south divide in the country geographically as well as demographically. The north bears a dense Kyrgyz population that is rich, economically developed and less religiously devout, whereas the south holds a heterogeneous population with an Uzbek majority that lives in poverty, and is more conservative and traditional.

The southern region also has a history of ethnic conflicts – for instance, the 1990 ethnic clashes in Osh between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, as a consequence of which several hundred people died.⁴⁰ The people of the south view the north as more prosperous and see themselves subsequently at an extremely disadvantageous position. Thus, the north-south divide has worsened social problems and led to inter-ethnic discord.

Developments in political system after revolt

The interim government led by Roza Otunbayeva promised to overhaul the political system by decreasing presidential powers and also pledged to prevent any leader from building up power by appointing clan and family members in key positions. Soon after the revolt, a new constitution was adopted and ratified by the June 27 referendum, resulting in the reduction of presidential power while Otunbayeva was recognized as the interim president for the term of eighteen months.⁴¹ The participation of the people in the constitutional referendum is an omen for peace and security and the international community too has praised Kyrgyzstan for its new stance despite the chaotic situation and welcomed the new government in power.

The interim government chose a new parliament in October 2010. And according to the October 10, 2010 parliamentary elections result, as ‘the opposition nationalist party, Ata Zhurt, had the most votes but failed to win an outright majority,’ parties had to form a governing coalition.⁴²

Election results

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | Ata Zhurt, 8.47% of the votes - 28 seats |
| 2. | Social Democrats, 7.83% - 26 seats |
| 3. | Ar-Namys, 7.57% - 25 seats |
| 4. | Respublika, 6.93% - 23 seats |
| 5. | Ata-Meken, 5.49% - 18 seats |

Twenty-nine parties participated in the parliamentary elections; out of these, only five fulfilled the 5% threshold to win the seats. Akylbek Sariyev, the head of the Central Election Commission said that, “Two pro-government parties - Ata-Meken and the Social Democratic Party - and also three opposition parties - Ar-Namys, Ata Zhurt and Respublika - will join the newly-elected parliament.” Roza Otunbayeva will remain as acting president until December 31, 2011.

Section III

External factors

Given the strategic importance of Kyrgyzstan, the situation created by the revolt in 2010 has once again led to apprehensions in the west since many great powers, including Russia, the U.S. and China, have interests in the region, and subsequently in the country.

Russia

The mountainous terrain of Kyrgyzstan, in addition to providing unusual beauty, also has great strategic importance as it offers a means of enhancing security;⁴³ indeed the country could also be used to strengthen and secure Russian power in the region. Russian regimes overtly or covertly still see the security of Russia and Central Asia as tied to each other and are concerned with the presence of other stakeholders in the former Soviet states.

To secure its position in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow announced an aid package worth approximately \$2 billion in February 2009, the chief motive behind which was to influence the government to close the U.S. base.

After 9/11, Moscow’s interests in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan increased dramatically. Russia established its base in Kant (east of Bishkek) and after the Tulip Revolution, it saw a new opening to enhance its power and influence, consequently bringing in more funding, trade opportunities, investments and aid. Such moves have not gone unnoticed; Bakiyev once revealed in an interview that, “Just like when the Soviet Union was still alive, everything still remains the same when Moscow would decide everything for us, despite our 20 years of independence.”⁴⁴ He further noted that, “Russia’s leadership was irritated, annoyed by the presence of the base and this factor also played a certain role.”⁴⁵ To secure its position in Kyrgyzstan, Moscow announced an aid

package worth approximately \$2 billion in February 2009, the chief motive behind which was to influence the government to close the U.S. base.⁴⁶

The revolt in April placed Russia in a critical position. The chaotic situation gave Moscow a good opportunity to exhibit its potentially positive role in the region. For this, it needs to develop good relations with the new Kyrgyz government, which it recognized and declared support for soon after it was established, while also pledging a \$50 million financial aid package for Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁷

The new government is also inclined towards seeking Russian help for stabilizing the country. However, during and after the revolt in 2010, it became clear, with its inability to curb the turmoil in different parts of Kyrgyzstan, that Russia was only facilitating its own interests.⁴⁸ It did not agree to send its troops to settle the violence, contending that while it will offer technical assistance, its military will not be involved in what it views as Kyrgyzstan's internal matters. Thus, Moscow, in dominating the Collective Security Treaty Organization is "providing aid to Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies, including helicopters, military vehicles and fuel."⁴⁹

United States

Central Asia, once a part of the Soviet Union and now a neighbouring region of Russia, has always been an area of concern for the United States, which sees it as one of the primary locations to expand its influence in this part of world. After 9/11, the importance of the region, particularly Kyrgyzstan, amplified dramatically as Bishkek declared its support for Washington's plans for targeting terrorism and permitted the use of its airbase. A decade later, the U.S. is still using the Manas airbase near Bishkek, which the focal point of conducting operations in Afghanistan.

The U.S. base added \$64 million to the Kyrgyz economy in fiscal year 2008, whereas foreign aid by the U.S. between 1992 and 2008 had amounted to \$953.5 million.⁵⁰ Early 2009 was a crucial time for the U.S. since Bakiyev announced an intention to close the airbase in February – a move for which Russia promised to give approximately \$2.5 million. But the entire situation changed with a new agreement between the Kyrgyz government and the U.S. that allowed the base to continue, albeit with a new understanding.

According to the agreement, the Kyrgyz government allows transit of personnel and nonlethal cargoes without any inspection. This was

accompanied by a visible increase in airbase rent, which increased to \$60 million up from \$17.4 million per year. Moreover, about \$36 million for infrastructure enhancement at Manas, \$30 million for new navigational equipment, \$20 million for development purposes, \$21 million for controlling drug trafficking and \$10 million for combating terrorism was also pledged by the U.S.⁵¹

The revolt in April 2010 posed many questions for the United States. Unlike Moscow, Washington kept silent on the issue of recognition of the interim government soon after the coup. Instead, it called for the promotion of peace and the restoration of democracy in Kyrgyzstan - as James Collins, a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow noted, "Our interests are to have good relations with the government of Kyrgyzstan -- whatever that emerges to be. So it's tricky. It is important for the American side not to get drawn into the fight, because no matter what happens, we are not going to be very important in shaping the outcome. We want to see Kyrgyzstan continue to develop on a path to democracy."⁵²

Despite announcing \$48 million as humanitarian aid for the displaced people in the south of the country,¹ it remains more concerned with its own interests and wants to ensure that they are unaffected by the political and social chaos in Kyrgyzstan.

Presently, the only major U.S. interest in Kyrgyzstan is its Manas airbase. Despite announcing \$48 million as humanitarian aid for the displaced people in the south of the country,⁵³ it remains more concerned with its own interests and wants to ensure that they are unaffected by the political and social chaos in Kyrgyzstan.

China

As a rising economic power, Chinese interests reflect its ambitions and Kyrgyzstan is no different. The two are immediate neighbours and enjoy good economic relations, which blossomed and developed significantly during Akayev's regime. China's interests are varied as it wants to access not only the markets but also the natural resources of the Kyrgyz Republic. Moreover, with both American and Russian presence in the country, it has now also developed more strategic interests.

The decision to allow a U.S. airbase in Kyrgyzstan was a worrisome matter for neighbouring China. Along with Russia, through the platform of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), it opposed this move but failed in its endeavours. Kyrgyzstan's growing relations with the U.S. then, led to some discontent for both Moscow and Beijing.

The presence of the U.S. is also a matter of great concern for China's national security. As the border it shares with Kyrgyzstan is porous and allows cross-border movements, Beijing has worries that U.S. intelligence and military may lead to some destabilizing factors. China is skilled at playing its cards and the strongest card it holds is its economy. Hence, to secure its interests, it is strengthening economic ties and investments with Kyrgyzstan while maintaining good relations with the Kyrgyz government.⁵⁴

China has “decided not to wade into the crisis, instead adopting a stance of non-interference, despite the high stakes for China's vital interests.”

Like the U.S., China did not take any immediate step regarding recognition of the new government soon after the coup. China has “decided not to wade into the crisis, instead adopting a stance of non-interference, despite the high stakes for China's vital interests.”⁵⁵ A statement, issued from the Chinese Foreign Ministry noted that “China was ‘deeply concerned’ and hoped that Kyrgyzstan will restore peace soon and maintain stability ... China hopes that relevant issues will be settled in a lawful way.”⁵⁶ China's humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan in these circumstances was limited to five million Yuan.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Kyrgyzstan has seen continuous strife since its independence in 1991. The country is struggling in its quest for a national identity, and finding it difficult to secure its sovereignty due to internal strife. Since independence, it has seen two revolts - first in 2005 and then again in April 2010, with governments being ousted on both occasions. However, in comparison to the Tulip Revolution of 2005, the recent revolt was more costly and deadly; more than 100 people died and numerous were injured in the latter while in the former, only five people were killed.

After the Tulip Revolution, Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power. However, as President, he strengthened his stronghold by all possible means and ignored the promises made earlier while leading the 2005 revolts. Thus it was in 2010 that the frustrations in the Kyrgyz society that had ripened in the last five years led to another revolt and ended ultimately with the overthrowing of the ruling elite.

The government led by Roza Otunbayeva that came to power then, has a weak command structure and is trying to secure its power. One reason for the ethnic riots that erupted soon after the revolt was the weak administration in the early days of the interim government. Other issues included perceived social and political exclusion of the Uzbek minority as well as the differences between the north and south.

Unrest in different parts of the country, particularly in the south still continues, albeit with low intensity. The government is trying its best to control the situation but “struggling to win credibility in the south—especially among ethnic Uzbeks, for whom it is unable to ensure security.”⁵⁷ Askar Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev and now Roza Otunbayeva, all have the same stance but different methods to achieve their goals. The people of Kyrgyzstan, who are fighting against corruption, nepotism, clanism, inflation, and poverty, are once again looking forward to living in a prosperous, peaceful and stable state.

For future stability, developments in socioeconomic and political sectors are very crucial for both internal and regional stability as the uprising has also presented a warning signal to other Central Asian states. In addition, for internal stability, the question of interethnic linkages and minorities should be addressed as a priority. If the chaotic situation goes on and economic and political vulnerabilities also increase, then Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan may also become attractive outposts for terrorist organizations. Thus, internal stability is not just important for Kyrgyzstan but for other countries as well.

One reason for the ethnic riots that erupted soon after the revolt was the weak administration in the early days of the interim government. Other issues included perceived social and political exclusion of the Uzbek minority as well as the differences between the north and south.

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