

KYRGYZSTAN: AFTER THE REVOLUTION

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KYRGYZSTAN: AFTER THE REVOLUTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The March 2005 popular revolt ended President Askar Akaev's increasingly authoritarian fourteen-year rule and gave political and economic progress a chance. However, the new leaders face significant obstacles. If the situation is mishandled, and people conclude nothing has changed except the names at the top, Kyrgyzstan could become seriously unstable.

When Akaev came to power at independence in 1991, he seemed an ideal president: young, energetic, and apparently committed to political change and an open economy. He encouraged economic reform and a certain political openness, at least relative to his Central Asian neighbours. However, following his controversial 2000 reelection, he moved in a more authoritarian direction, and his popularity faded.

Above all he failed to stem corruption or develop the rule of law. Instead the political system was increasingly dominated by his family and a small group of supporters. The corruption which developed around Akaev's family was a main cause of his fall.

Akaev overcame challenges through co-option of elites and occasional repression of opponents. His main rival, former Vice President Feliks Kulov, was imprisoned on trumped-up corruption charges in 2001 and remained there until March 2005. Key media outlets, except for a few opposition newspapers, were almost completely under government control.

The president survived politically in 2002 when six people were shot dead by police in the southern Aksy district, leading to several months of protests. But the government did not learn its lesson, and Akaev increasingly seemed out of touch with reality, promoting unrealistic programs and not understanding the socio-economic crisis besetting the population. He had always been much weaker in the south but was losing popularity even in the north. This regional divide, though sometimes exaggerated and manipulated, remains important in political life.

The ouster of Akaev should not have been entirely unexpected. He had not only lost popular support, but

also was increasingly losing the backing of key national and regional elites, who were irritated at family control of the economy and rising corruption. There had been many warnings¹ that unfair elections could create a climactic crisis, but Akaev and his aides had become complacent about their ability to manipulate and suppress opposition.

Akaev failed to develop key state institutions. When protests started in the wake of parliamentary elections in February, it was quickly clear the state was weak, and few elites were willing to defend the president. At the end, the regime collapsed in a few hours.

As they prepare for presidential elections in July 2005, Kyrgyzstan's new leaders face critical challenges that risk undermining the country's important step toward real democracy:

- ❑ the need for political reform, particularly to redress imbalances created by Akaev's centralisation of power in the presidency and the weakness of state institutions;
- ❑ a looming economic crisis that could be worsened by tax collection problems and weak administration;
- ❑ a crisis over land seizures, squatters and enduring problems with land tenure; and
- ❑ the growing security risk from criminal groups with economic and political power.

Bishkek/Brussels, 4 May 2005

¹ For example, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°81, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, 11 August 2004.

KYRGYZSTAN: AFTER THE REVOLUTION

I. INTRODUCTION

With parliamentary elections due in February and presidential elections in October, prospects for political upheaval in 2005 were always considerable. According to the constitution, Akaev was to retire but there was widespread suspicion he would seek to retain his family's political and economic dominance.²

Adding to the pressure on Akaev was the example of other former Soviet republics, where leadership change had already occurred. In Georgia and Ukraine long-time presidents, similarly accused of corruption and authoritarianism, had been thrown out by popular opposition. These examples worried the presidential family but it drew the wrong conclusions, accepting the argument, popular in Russia in particular, that the upheavals were U.S.-inspired and funded and would have been impossible without external aid. Akaev began openly criticising U.S. policy and putting more pressure on Western-funded NGOs. But he attacked the wrong target: such NGOs and civil society had only a limited impact on the March 2005 events.

The real problems for Akaev were his unpopularity, particularly in rural areas and the south, and growing disenchantment among elites, particularly over his family's role in business and politics. His wife, Mairam Akaeva, had always been accused of excessive interference in government, particularly in official appointments. His children had begun carving out their own political careers; elder daughter Bermet and elder son Aidar, who had already established themselves as significant informal players in business and politics, decided to run for parliament to legitimise their behind-the-scenes influence, and build the base for one to emerge as a future leader. Bermet established a pro-government party, *Alga Kyrgyzstan*, that was expected to dominate the elections and ensure that the Akaevs retained

effective political control even if the president stepped down. Other family relatives and close friends also joined the race.

Akaev had always been a superb tactical politician, frequently wrong-footing the opposition. However, the new electoral system, designed to make it easier for the family to control parliament,³ was a mistake. Under the new rules, parties played almost no role (they nominated only 18 per cent of candidates), and most races were dominated by local bread-and-butter issues. The system encouraged local authority figures -- businesspeople and informal leaders, some with links to criminal groups -- to run in their neighbourhoods, ensuring that kinship and clan links would be key elements.

Local businesspeople, some of distinctly shady reputation, were encouraged to run against potential opposition figures in the hope that money would play better with voters than opposition ideals; and there was extensive gerrymandering. The constituency map put out by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and confirmed by parliament was in many cases drawn to ensure that particular candidates could benefit from kinship loyalties.

This system turned out to be a fatal blunder. In small, single-mandate constituencies, almost any candidate could bring 1,000 supporters onto the streets, and during the course of the campaign many pockets of protest emerged. Candidates who believed they had lost the vote unfairly were able to mobilise friends, relatives and neighbours in their support.

In addition, the reduction in the number of seats in the legislature from 105 to 75 left many elite figures running against each other. As a result, many significant political players would be left out of parliament, almost ensuring that some of them -- let alone ordinary voters -- would be dissatisfied by the election results.

² For background on Akaev's Kyrgyzstan, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°81, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, 11 August 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°37, *Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy*, 20 August 2002; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°22, *Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the "Island of Democracy"*, 28 August 2001.

³ The new system called for election of a unicameral parliament in 75 single-mandate constituencies. Previously there had been a party list in addition to local constituencies, and there were more deputies, divided into an upper (45 deputies) and a lower chamber (60 deputies).

Long-term problems of corruption, socio-economic decline and ineffective governance had long ago caused much of the population, particularly in the poorer, more conservative south, to oppose Akaev. The family's role and the potential exclusion of many influential figures from the post-election political process ensured trouble among the elite. But the presidential family believed it could keep a monopoly on political and economic power, partly because it miscalculated the strength of the opposition.

II. THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

A. THE OPPOSITION

The complacency of President Akaev and his family was understandable. Some formal opposition unity was achieved in September 2004, when a new coalition, the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, accepted former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev as de facto leader.⁴ In late October parliamentary deputies Alevtina Pronenko and Alisher Abdimomunov, and former Education Minister Ishengul Boljurova joined the new group.⁵ Nevertheless, the opposition remained very divided, and its best known leader, Feliks Kulov, remained in prison.

The opposition gained another significant leader when Roza Otunbaeva, former foreign minister and ambassador to the U.S. and the UK, returned home and on 13 December 2004 announced the establishment of another opposition grouping, Ata-Jurt, together with deputies Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, Adahan Madumarov, and Omurbek Tekebaev.⁶ Ata-Jurt signed a partnership agreement with the People's Movement to coordinate policy in the run-up to the parliamentary elections.⁷

Despite these formal agreements, opposition personalities continued to promote different agendas, with only a limited attempt to promote a united slate of candidates. One opposition leader admitted:

To be honest, we, the opposition, never really sat down together. There were never any discussions; nobody spoke out about serious questions, about the presidency, about our programs. We didn't speak about a [single] leader.⁸

Long-standing personal differences and a division between the older figures and those who had joined

⁴ "New political bloc emerges in Kyrgyzstan", Bishkek, RFE/RL, 27 September 2004, available at <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2004/09/2-TCA/tca270904.asp>; on the opposition, see Crisis Group Report, *Political Transition*, op. cit.

⁵ "Kyrgyz opposition groups unite", RFE/RL Newsline, Vol. 8, No. 201, 22 October 2004, available at <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2004/10/221004.asp>.

⁶ "Dvizhenie 'Ata-jurt' namereno zanyat 1/3 mest v budushchem parlamente", AKIpress, 13 December 2004, available at http://www.akipress.kg/_ru_news.php?id=16251.

⁷ "Kyrgyz opposition groups form partnership", RFE/RL Newsline, Vol. 8, No. 236, RFE/RL, 17 December 2004, available at <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2004/12/2-tca/tca-171204.asp>.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 3 March 2005.

more recently, plagued the opposition during the campaign. Its chance of promoting a broad slate was damaged in January 2005 when some candidates were not permitted to register under residency requirements that were interpreted to disqualify diplomats who had worked abroad. This excluded, among others, Otunbaeva, who had planned to run against Bermet Akaeva in Bishkek's university constituency. When the candidate list was finalised, opposition claims they would gain 25 of the 75 seats seemed ambitious. It was not even clear they had 25 candidates.

B. THE CAMPAIGN

Most candidates were local businessmen, some also holding local administrative posts. Those thought to have the best chance were those with money and connections to help constituents materially. Government aid was also important, although more important still was for government not to hinder a candidate. Candidates promised to build bridges, improve roads and renovate schools -- all things the state should do, but its weakness and poverty were such that people saw deputies as more likely to act.

Most candidates spent significant money buying support from local leaders and voters directly. Others paid opponents to withdraw. Few could get elected without significant funding: only the most popular opposition leaders could expect much support simply on personality. Some, convinced opposition to the government would be enough, were disappointed.

A leading figure who was defeated commented:

Money and administrative resources⁹ decide everything...[Money] simply swept away my supporters like water. Even on election day, my opponent gave 200-1000 soms [\$5-\$25] to voters. My voters asked me directly: "what will you give us?" I would talk about my program, and they would say, "we've heard that for the last fifteen years....our people....would sell themselves for ten soms, but we made them like that ourselves."¹⁰

Bakiev, who had been prime minister under Akaev, was shocked by the extent to which the government worked against him:

I worked in the government and I am well aware what "administrative resources" can mean. But even I did not expect that level of pressure. They even artificially caused a snow avalanche to stop me going to my constituency.¹¹

Independent candidates also had to fight a one-sided media: state television attacks were particularly virulent. The only easily accessible independent media for many was U.S.-funded Azattyk (Radio Liberty) and the BBC Kyrgyz-language service, both widely popular. Several Russian-language opposition newspapers continued to be published in Bishkek, notably MSN; the internet and e-mail played a role, although access was limited.¹²

CEC Chairman Sulaiman Imanbaev repeatedly claimed the elections would be free and fair and agreed to some requests from international organisations for technical changes, including the use of transparent ballot boxes and marking voters' hands with special ink to limit multiple voting. An amended electoral code also made traditional forms of vote-fixing more difficult.¹³ Imanbaev claimed that unlike at previous elections, candidates would not be deregistered on flimsy grounds.¹⁴

However, one week before the election candidates were deregistered in two constituencies (Ton district and Tyup district) in Issyk-kul province, and in Kochkor and Naryn provinces. In Tyup, Sadyr Japarov was deregistered by a local court in a contest against the sister of Mairam Akaeva, Ukon Isaeva; in Ton, Aslanbek Maliev was ousted, and in Kochkor Akyzbek Japarov (no relation to Sadyr Japarov) was deregistered, along with two others, in a contest against former Communist Party head Turdakun Usubaliev. In each case local courts ruled on largely anecdotal evidence of vote-buying.

¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 3 March 2005.

¹² The internet was influential enough for somebody to try and block several sites. A group of hackers, apparently based in Ukraine, attacked opposition sites, www.msn.kg and www.respublika.kg. "Key interim findings: Kyrgyz election internet monitoring project", OpenNet Initiative (ONI), 12 April 2005.

¹³ Parliamentary deputy Kubatbek Baibolov argues that paradoxically the technical election day voting improvements -- many of which he was responsible for introducing -- actually provoked more popular dissatisfaction with the elections than previously. More malpractice took place during the campaign phase, which meant it was more visible to voters, who were angered by overt malpractice. Previously it had been easier to falsify the results out of sight of the public, in local or central electoral commissions. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 20 April 2005.

¹⁴ Sulaiman Imanbaev, speaking at the meeting of the Election Coordination Group, Bishkek, 11 February 2005.

⁹ The term "administrative resources" in this sense means the use of government, particularly local government, to support candidates by forming "helpful" electoral commissions, working on voters lists, putting pressure on state employees, denying opposition candidates use of state buildings or facilities, and so forth.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 2 March 2005.

Supporters of the deregistered candidates protested and blocked roads in Ton and Tyup districts, awaiting appeals to the supreme court. Akylbek Japarov's followers set up road-blocks in Kochkor, halting traffic on the main road to China. Thousands protested in the centre of Kochkor. There was no police intervention, indeed almost no sign of any state presence. Protestors in Kochkor chased the regional governor out of town -- he apparently escaped by jumping over a fence. "He's a sportsman, you know", young men at the protest explained, "he was too fast for us".¹⁵ The rapidity with which state power evaporated once protestors took to the streets would be repeated in February and March.

The supreme court reinstated Sadyr Japarov in Tyup, but in Kochkor and Ton the decisions went against the deregistered candidates, despite almost complete lack of substantive evidence against them. These were the first in a series of dubious judicial decisions that undermined any credibility in the judicial system. Akylbek Japarov asked his supporters to unblock the road but urged them to vote against all other candidates.¹⁶

The moves against centrists such as Akylbek Japarov and Maliev, and even against pro-government figures such as Sadyr Japarov, were a first sign the government was itself unwittingly splitting the elite and losing supporters among them rapidly. Even more surprising was the defection of Ravshan Jeenbekov, once a favourite of the presidential family, who held the key position of chairman of the state property committee before running for parliament.

Jeenbekov fell out with the Akaevs apparently because he refused to make way for Mairam Akaeva's sister to run in his Talas constituency. He experienced serious government pressure during the campaign. But an attempt to unseat him through the courts failed when he brought out hundreds of protestors to surround the local courthouse, and he was converted into an opposition politician:

I was one of the close circle around the Akaev family, but after what they have done to me after my participation in the elections, I will never work with them or this government again. They built me up, and then gave me over to the opposition.¹⁷

Opposition also emerged from an even more unlikely source, Jenishbek Nazaraliev, a Kyrgyz psychiatrist who had achieved international fame (and considerable wealth) through unique methods of treating drug addiction. On

23 February 2005, he published an open letter in MSN, asserting he would leave Kyrgyzstan and take his medical clinic with him unless Akaev left office. His entry into politics seems to have been the culmination of years of frustration with the regime. He claimed the Akaevs had never liked his celebrity. Now he was convinced they had to leave: "I want to help those who are against the Akaev regime: I can raise 50,000 young people for a demonstration".¹⁸ Not only did his declaration do considerable damage to Akaev's image inside the country, but he later used his wealth and authority to promote demonstrations against the government. Roza Otunbaeva commented:

I had several underground meetings with Nazaraliev in the weeks running up to the revolution, when we were both in hiding. He was very helpful to the opposition. The problem was it was very difficult for us to shake up the population throughout the country. The cultural intelligentsia all tended to support Akayev. Nazaraliev, on the other hand, came up with some really shocking statements. He is a fashionable figure, so he was very influential with young people.¹⁹

For the first time, the opposition was getting real support from cultural and political elites. Once loyal allies were distancing themselves from Akaev. Alga Kyrgyzstan, which had initially claimed it would contest all 75 constituencies, only formally proposed eighteen candidates. Several members preferred to run as independents, concerned that too close a link with the pro-presidential party would damage them.

The government did not take the initial protests in Kochkor and Issyk-Kul very seriously and did little to resolve the problem. But the fact they were in the north, which traditionally was less volatile than the south, should have been a warning. Instead of compromise, however, the government continued to pressure the opposition, now concentrating on the media. In late February electricity to an independent U.S.-funded printing press in Bishkek was cut off, apparently to stop opposition newspapers like MSN. Azattyk (Radio Liberty) was also blocked in much of the country, just ahead of the first round of voting.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Kochkor, February 2005.

¹⁶ One option on the voting ballot was to vote "against all candidates".

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Talas, 26 February 2005.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Jenishbek Nazaraliev, Bishkek, 24 February 2005.

¹⁹ Julian Evans, "I made this revolution", *Spectator*, (UK), April 2005.

C. VOTING

Election day, 27 February 2004, passed peacefully. In Kochkor supporters of Akylbek Japarov voted against all candidates in an unprecedented show of rebellion. According to the law, that election in Kochkor would have to be rerun. In another surprising result, Bermet Akaeva failed to win in the first round against journalist Bolot Maripov despite intense pressure on students to vote for her.²⁰

Most races went to a second round, indicating real competition. There were outright victors in only 31 of 75 constituencies, mostly local businessmen who seemed likely to support Akaev. Only the most powerful opposition candidates got through in the first round, notably Azimbek Beknazarov in Aksy district. However, several others reached the run-off.

The elections were monitored by an unprecedented number of observers. The NGO Coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society" fielded 1,735, and there were observers from each candidate at each polling station. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had over 175 observers, and other international NGOs also sent missions. There were also observers from diverse pro-government sources, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and China, as well as several organisations previously unknown in Kyrgyzstan.²¹

The OSCE mission called the election more competitive than previous polls but criticised "deregistration of candidates, interfering with independent media, vote buying and a low level of confidence in electoral and judicial institutions on the part of candidates and voters".²² The CIS mission said the vote had been free and fair, and any slight problems had not influenced results.²³

Protests began quickly, however. On 28 February 2005, a crowd of 3,000 gathered in Aravan constituency to demonstrate against alleged malpractice by Mahamadjan Mamasaidov, rector of the Osh Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, who had received most votes. They blocked the main Aravan-Osh road until the next day, when the Aravan district court agreed to hear the case.²⁴ On 2 March, 400 in Kogart constituency, Jalalabad region, protested measures against opposition candidate Jusupbek Jeenbekov.²⁵ On 4 March 3,000 supporters of opposition figure Dooronbek Sadyrbaev blocked the main Osh-Bishkek road in Nooken constituency, Jalalabad region.²⁶ In Naryn supporters of Ishenbai Kadyrbekov, who was disqualified on dubious grounds after the first round, blocked the main road to China.²⁷

Not all protests pitted opposition against government. In Osh supporters of powerful local businessman Davran Sabirov faced off against several hundred supporters of city police chief Polotbek Tolonov. In Karasu constituency, Arap Tolonov complained of mass fraud by his opponent, Bayysh Yusupov, including the bussing in of high school students to cast absentee ballots.²⁸ Yusupov was seen as the government candidate but Tolonov, an ally of Bayaman Erkinbaev, a parliamentary deputy and businessman reputed to be one of the richest people in the south, was hardly a classic opposition leader.²⁹

This contest exacerbated differences between Erkinbaev and the presidential family. In this way, the opposition was potentially gaining support from influential figures who were opposed to the government and Akaev but far from members of the democratic opposition. Erkinbaev later claimed he sent fighters from his martial arts school

²⁰ The law requires a run-off between the first two candidates when no one receives a first-round majority.

²¹ Among these were the so-called London Institute of Democracy, the American Institute of Democracy and a UK-based organisation called Consent International. It seems likely these groups were created especially during the election campaign in Ukraine in 2004 to act as a counterpoise to OSCE and Western criticism of the elections there.

²² "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions", OSCE/ODIHR, 28 February 2005, available at <http://www.osce.org/item/13831.html>. Russia subsequently protested the OSCE conclusions as potentially destabilising. Vladimir Socor, "Moscow criticises EU and OSCE over election", Eurasia Daily Monitor, 25 March 2005.

²³ See Gulnoza Saidamizova, "OSCE Election Observers Criticise Elections", RFE/RL, 28 February 2005, available at

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/02/2f30bd15-0a49-42b7-9f01-6a1e0ec92e01.html>.

²⁴ "Aravanskii sud nachal rassmotrenie dela po dvyum kandidatam", AKIpress, 28 February 2005, available at http://fergana.aki.press.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=15656.

²⁵ "V Suzakskom raione piketchiki trebuyut smenit sostavy izbiratelnykh komissi kogartskogo okruga", No.31, AKIpress, 2 March 2004, available at http://fergana.aki.press.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=15674.

²⁶ "3,000 storonnikov kandidata v deputaty D.Sadyrbaeva perekryli dorogu Bishkek-Osh", AKIpress, 4 March 2005, available at http://fergana.aki.press.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=15690.

²⁷ Kadyrbekov was later reinstated.

²⁸ "V Karasuu i Aravane prodolzhayutsya massovye aktsii protesta protiv itogov golosovaniya po dvyum okrugam", AKIpress, 1 March 2005, available at http://fergana.aki.press.org/_ru_f_news.php?id=15657. "The Unsung Role of Kung Fu in the Kyrgyz Revolution", Agence France-Presse, 28 March 2005, available at http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/afp/20050328/lf_afp/kyrgyzstan_politics_050328194347.

²⁹ Agence France-Presse, op. cit.

to protect Tolonov's supporters at the demonstration.³⁰ Erkinbaev himself won a virtually unopposed first round victory with 95 per cent of the vote in his Kadamjai constituency.³¹

Most protests had been peaceful, but on 4 March around 1,000 supporters of Jusupbek Bakiev, brother of the opposition leader, along with other opposition forces seized control of the regional administration building in Jalalabad. Over 100 protestors occupied the site for two weeks, with the authorities unable or unwilling to do anything about it. This was an important step up in the pattern of protests, and opposition forces began to develop parallel power structures in some regions.³²

The second round of elections on 13 March 2005 seems to have involved more malpractice than the first, perhaps because the stakes were higher, and there were fewer international observers.³³ As results were announced, it quickly became clear that several leading opposition politicians had either lost or were losing. Kurmanbek Bakiev lost his constituency, and popular leader Adahan Madumarov also initially did not win. Other results were in dispute.

Bermet Akaeva won her Bishkek constituency, although there were new allegations of irregularities. Several opposition deputies did win, including Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, Omurbek Tekebaev, and Bolotbek Sherniyazov; but attention was now focused not on the results but on the growing protests in the south, in Talas and elsewhere.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Erkinbaev's popularity confounds some observers but he does have genuine support from constituents. In a system in which neither government officials nor most parliamentary deputies do much for the people, informal authority figures are sometimes perceived by voters as Robin Hood figures. A constituent says: "He will always help out, in any case; he can even physically defend you. So what if some people say he broke the law, he is the best deputy and many residents in other constituencies envy us. He is really for the people, for ordinary people, and not just rhetorically like other deputies". Crisis Group interview, Osh, March 2005.

³² On 9 March 2005, the OSCE issued a statement criticising the opposition for seizing buildings and blocking roads. This was cited extensively by the government in its propaganda and did nothing to calm the situation.

³³ Most OSCE observers had left after the first round.

III. THE POPULAR UPRISING

The initial protests had been about local issues, mostly conducted by supporters of individual candidates, in Kochkor, Naryn, Talas and the south, who had been the victims of deregistration or some clear campaign malpractice. But gradually the wider opposition joined in, and the agenda broadened to national issues, in the first place, the resignation of President Akaev.

A. THE SOUTH

Two close results provoked instant protests. In Uzgen (Osh province), supporters of Adahan Madumarov seized administration buildings in Uzgen to force the electoral commission to declare him the winner in a close race. Supporters of Marat Sultanov in Alay constituency blocked the main road to Osh after the initial results showed him losing. A similar protest broke out on 14 March in Talas, where up to 5,000 supporters of losing candidate Ravshan Jeenbekov blocked roads and protested in front of government buildings. The next day they seized one of the buildings and held the governor and another official hostage for 24 hours.

The closely contested races dragged through the courts and the CEC for weeks, but the first impact was to get thousands of dissatisfied voters onto the streets. The opposition gradually began to take advantage of this widespread dissatisfaction. Leaders, including Bakiev, Otunbaeva, Bektur Asanov, and Beknazarov, converged on Jalalabad (where the opposition still held the regional administration building) on 15 March for a Kurultai (traditional popular meeting). Participants called for rerunning the elections and Akaev to resign.

The Kurultai elected a Coordinating Council for National Unity; ex-candidate Jusupbek Jeenbekov was chosen chairman and "people's governor" for the Jalalabad region,³⁴ but the real leaders were Bakiev and other opposition figures, as well as local informal leaders such as Bayaman Erkinbaev, who offered to assist. Kurultai participants began to remove Akaev posters from city billboards.

The next step was in Osh, where on 18 March protestors seized the government administration building and on 21 March held a Kurultai, which appointed an ethnic Uzbek leader, Anvar Artykov, as "people's governor", partly to

³⁴ Alisher Saipov, Sultan Kanazarov, "Kirgiskaya oppositsiya vyvela svoikh storonnikov na ulitsy...", Fergana.ru, 16 March 2005, available at <http://www.fergana.ru/detail.php?id=63508180830.71,604,4991909>.

ensure an Uzbek share in the opposition.³⁵ This meant there were parallel administrations in both southern cities, posing a direct threat to the regime's control of the country.

There was popular support for the demonstrations, particularly among rural voters. In Osh supporters of Anvar Artykov and Duishengul Chotonov were particularly in evidence. Voters from Kara-Kulja and Karasu districts also were numerous. Their motives were more than just support for individual candidates: "We came here not because our candidate lost, but because there were fraudulent elections. And while Akaev is in power, the elections will never be honest".³⁶ The main organisers were aides of candidates, who also arranged food and other support. There was little sign of the Western-funded NGOs or other foreign organisations that the government alleged were promoting revolution. A minority, particularly in cities, were less enthusiastic. Students watching on the central square in Osh said: "Nothing will change". A worker added: I don't believe in the opposition, in five years' time they will do exactly the same, they simply want to seize power".³⁷

Officials were surprised and baffled by the opposition's unexpected strength. On the eve of the storming of the Osh administration, they sat, waiting on events. "They sent Jumaliev [minister of transport, trusted friend of Akaev] here, who has been sitting in the governor's office for a whole month and can't resolve anything, can't conduct negotiations with these people on the square".³⁸ Other officials recognised they were already powerless. "We tried to calm people down, but they do not believe us. They only believe their own [parliamentary] candidates".³⁹

The security forces (mostly special forces, *spetznaz*) finally responded by storming the occupied government headquarters in Osh and Jalalabad early on 19 March. Protestors were injured, firearms were not used.

In retrospect this was the signal for a much more radical stage of the revolution. In Jalalabad the police did not control the regional administration building for long. The next morning as many as 10,000 people retook it and set fire to the local police station and other government buildings. The police fired warning

shots, but then fled, leaving the city largely in control of the protestors, who quickly seized the airport to prevent the government from flying in new troops. At this point the protests seemed to move out of control of any formal opposition: young men with petrol bombs and wielding sticks ruled the streets.

The same events were soon played out in Osh so that most of the south was effectively in opposition hands. It was not always clear who was organising the protestors. In some cases, there was spontaneity about their actions that left the formal opposition far behind.

In some ways the revolution in the south was much more a people's movement than the ousting of Akaev in Bishkek. Local people replaced Bishkek appointees with their own representatives, some of whom had little time for democratic procedures or constitutional niceties. It was democratic in the sense of returning government to the people, but it seemed likely also to emphasise more conservative, southern values.

Problems quickly emerged that would beset the new authorities for some time. In Jalalabad those authorities demanded that businesspeople and ethnic minorities declare their support. Some businessmen resisted: "How are they better than the old authorities if they force us to give money as well?", said one.⁴⁰ Groups of bazaar traders came to the square to announce they were supporting the revolution and offer contributions of about 1,000 soms (\$25). "What could we do?" said one, "Representatives of the new authorities came to the bazaar and asked us, 'Are you with the people or against?'".⁴¹

Most protests and even building seizures and the Jalalabad riots were without significant violence. There were reports of some looting, although this was quickly quashed. Most people seemed to support the changes, although there was some disquiet among the police and state officials at new appointments being made without reference to Bishkek. With Osh and Jalalabad under control, the opposition began moving quietly to Bishkek for the next stage.

B. BISHKEK

The capital had remained remarkably calm. There were small opposition rallies but nothing like the large numbers in the south. On 23 March 2005, President Akaev finally decided a harder line was required. He replaced the interior minister and the prosecutor-general with

³⁵ Despite Artykov's involvement, the number of ethnic Uzbeks in the demonstrations remained low, although many more than at any previous opposition events. Ethnic Uzbeks generally mistrusted the southern Kyrgyz leadership of the opposition but had become increasingly disenchanted with Akaev.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, protestor, Osh, 21 March 2005.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, students; accountant, Osh, 21 March 2005.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Osh, 17 March 2005.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Jalalabad, 17 March 2005.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, businessmen, Jalalabad, 22 March 2005.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, Jalalabad, 22 March 2005.

hardliners, Keneshbek Dushebaev and Murat Sutalinov respectively. Sutalinov announced he was opening a criminal case against Bakiev. On 23 March, police broke up an opposition rally of about 500 in central Bishkek organised by the youth group KelKel and opposition candidate Bolot Maripov. Several activists were briefly detained.

But it was too late. It was already clear that the regime was faltering, and all attempts to arrange negotiations led nowhere. Cholpan Baekova spent two days fruitlessly trying to see Akaev to attempt negotiations but he refused to see her.⁴² Others also sought to promote negotiations behind the scenes. A potential interlocutor said later:

Everybody in his circle knew that this could not all continue....but even their sense of self-preservation had gone. They didn't even agree to negotiations. They just thought: they're all a bunch of cattle, and we are the elected gods.⁴³

Opposition politicians agreed on a major rally in Bishkek on 24 March, gathering supporters from the regions and trying to mobilise support in the capital. In the morning several thousand people gathered in front of Nazaraliev's medical clinic in the suburbs of Bishkek and then headed in the direction of the White House. A large group of Almaz Atambaev's supporters converged on the main Ala-Too square from a different direction.

The protestors were very diverse: Bakiev, Usen Sydykov and Beknazarov brought their supporters; Roza Otunbaeva helped transport activists from the south; Jeenbekov brought people from Talas and Japarov from Kochkor, while supporters of Atambaev and Melis Eshimkanov came from their villages near the capital. Workers at bazaars, many of them from the south, joined in. There were also young people from groups such as KelKel, and other urban residents attracted by Nazaraliev's appeals for support.

The demonstrators gathered on the square close to the presidential administration building looked ready for a long wait. KelKel activists tried to organise tents and food for a sit-in.⁴⁴ Opposition politicians made speeches, and the atmosphere was largely peaceful. Police made little attempt to intervene until young men, apparently provocateurs,⁴⁵ began throwing stones at the demonstrators, who responded in kind.

The rally resumed in a slightly tenser atmosphere. Some emotionally charged young people were no longer interested in listening to speeches and moved away. Cheering began as several hundred protestors from Osh arrived.⁴⁶ They marched straight past to the White House, despite appeals from opposition leaders to join the peaceful rally. Many young people joined them.

A fight ensued between these youths and the riot police outside the White House. The police managed to force the protestors back twice, but having been given an order not to use arms, they realised they could not keep control, and they fled. Within minutes, the protestors were inside the White House compound, and soon within the White House itself, throwing papers and chairs out windows. A battalion of about 30 young soldiers was led away, protected by KelKel members among others.

Belatedly, opposition leaders tried to take control. Bakiev arrived, stating he had not meant for this to happen, pleading with the crowd to stop looting, and saying Kulov would be released from prison. Around this time, state television headquarters was seized and the opposition broadcast called for calm.⁴⁷

Akaev and others had departed the White House, apparently earlier that day. Conflicting reports suggested they left the country by helicopter; others claimed they drove off in a seven-car convoy to the Russian military base at Kant, from where Akaev flew to Russia. With him, it seems, were his wife, and son and daughter, Aidar and Bermet.

Some other regime members also left the country. Others were not so lucky. Presidential administration head Bolot Januzakov was captured by the crowd inside the presidential administration and beaten badly before journalists rescued him. Presidential press secretary Abdil Segizbaev and General Abdygul Chotbaev, head of the National Guard, were also badly beaten.

Some who had stormed the White House and other young people who now joined in, roamed the city, smashing shops and looting. Businesses thought to be controlled by the Akaev family, including a chain of supermarkets, were targeted as well as some Turkish

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Cholpan Baekova, Bishkek, 19 April 2005.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, April 2005.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, KelKel activists, Bishkek, 12 April 2005.

⁴⁵ These young men, marked out by their white caps, had also been present at the opposition demonstration the day

before. They seem to have been organised by criminal leaders linked to the presidential family.

⁴⁶ Some of these may have been supporters of Bayaman Erkinbaev: he claimed they were first to break into the White House, although he himself was in Osh at the time. Agence France-Presse, op. cit; Crisis Group interview, Bayaman Erkinbaev, April 2005.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group observation, 24 March 2005.

businesses. Other ethnic minorities seem to have suffered disproportionate losses.

Through much of the next day, there was little sign of order on the streets, with looting continuing in many stores. Kulov was released from prison on 24 March, and his intervention seems to have calmed the situation and stopped the looting, although it took several more days for the security situation to return to normal. Kulov took command of the security forces for several days before stepping down once order had been restored.

The old regime made no real attempt to reassert control. It had been deserted by the security forces and most of its political allies. However, for several days there was a fear of violence breaking out between the opposition and members of Akaev's clan from Kemin, perhaps one of the few places where the president's ouster was greeted with more fear than rejoicing. A local official described the scene:

We were sitting in the yard making *plov*, we hadn't eaten for days....and suddenly we heard [that the White House had fallen] -- one of the girls read it in the internet....we didn't believe it -- some sort of joke. Then we found out it was true. Nobody wanted any *plov*. We lost our appetite.⁴⁸

Residents of Kemin went into the streets, fearing that protestors would advance on their territory from Bishkek. In the capital the new authorities feared that groups from Kemin would try to retake control. Feliks Kulov, constitutional court Chair Cholpan Baekova and others held talks with Kemin leaders to stabilise the situation.⁴⁹ Kemin leader Temirbek Akmataliev was left as head of the ministry of emergency situations, presumably to avoid potential opposition.⁵⁰

The speed with which the government collapsed surprised almost everybody, including opposition leaders, who claimed that they were prepared for several days of protests on the square. If there was a prearranged plan, they seemed unaware of it.

The reaction of the security forces suggests they knew there was little point in opposing the protestors. Some have suggested there was an informal agreement but there is no hard evidence of this. At the end, the regime was simply very weak, having been deserted by almost all its allies. Although this ensured a quick collapse, it

also meant the new government inherited a situation of virtual anarchy.

In some ways it was less a revolution than a process of state collapse. At the end, the Akaev regime consisted of less than ten people. When they left the country, their place was taken by a confused collection of opposition activists and former government officials, trying to restore some order in a dangerously unstable situation:

Now we have to prove that we are able to build a state. On 24 March we showed the world that there was no state: we overthrew it in 40 minutes.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Kemin, 27 March 2005.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, mayor's office, Tokmak, 27 March 2005.

⁵⁰ He was finally dismissed on 29 April 2005.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Bakyt Beshimov, Kyrgyz ambassador to India, 23 April 2005.

IV. AFTER THE REVOLUTION

A. THE NEW GOVERNMENT

The opposition had little immediate idea what to do. There seemed to be two paths. One was to continue the revolution, dissolve the new parliament, and start changing the system with little regard for constitutional niceties. The other, supported by Kulov in particular, was to recognise parliament and stick as close as possible to the constitution.

This second path was chosen, perhaps because the other threatened even more turmoil and, potentially, serious opposition to the new authorities. The outgoing parliament was dissolved; the new one recognised Kurmanbek Bakiyev as prime minister and acting president. Other opposition figures were sidelined. Kulov stepped down as coordinator of the security services and said he would not work with the new authorities.⁵² In truth, he was never really invited: they hardly talked to him. Others such as Atambaev and Nazaraliev quickly faded from the scene.

Thus, the first chance to form a coalition government of all opposition forces was lost, and Bakiyev quickly began appointing new officials, a mixture of opposition leaders and former office holders. He relied on former allies for his cabinet. Usen Sydykov became head of the presidential administration, and the Akaevs' former friend, Dastan Sarygulov, became state secretary. Roza Otunbaeva became foreign minister again; Boldjurova initially returned to her post as minister of education, then was promoted to deputy prime minister in charge of social questions. Opposition businessman Daniyar Usenov became deputy prime minister in charge of the economy.

Azimbek Beknazarov took over as prosecutor-general, and the former occupant of that position, Myktybek Abdylbaev, became minister of internal affairs. In a move that disappointed many who were concerned about how strong the new government would be on human rights, Tashtemir Aitbaev, a Soviet-era KGB officer and a former security chief under Akaev, became head of the National Security Service (SNB).

The new government had few new faces: most had served in previous administrations. This provided much experience but some of the initial euphoria of the revolution was lost in this return of old officials. The administration was notably lacking younger faces,

despite youth involvement in the protests. A disillusioned opposition leader said:

To change anything fundamentally you need to appoint young people. Not because they're young, but because it's the only way [to change things]. But now ... it's like a gathering of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.⁵³

Often there was little information about the new appointments. Deputy Alisher Sabirov complained that even the barest biographical details were often missing.⁵⁴ The new government was also not united. Bakiyev's position as acting president limited his ability to shape his own government team. Overall, the new appointments damaged his reputation, suggesting the new administration would be as occupied with dividing up power as its predecessor.⁵⁵

Part of the problem was that a presidential contest was already developing. Bakiyev was attempting to ensure support in different regions, and from different elite groups. Adahan Madumarov was enticed back into the government and persuaded to drop his bid for the presidency with the offer of a vice premiership. Mayor of Bishkek Medetbek Kerimkulov, not previously known as an opposition supporter, was appointed first deputy prime minister. His place in the capital was given to businessman and former Governor of Naryn Askarbek Salymbekov, who had been involved in a much-disputed election in that region.

In the south, too, there was a battle for control, mostly outside constitutional bounds. New mayors were often appointed without regard for law. New *akims* (heads of local government) gained selection largely by turning up with crowds of supporters, or on the "suggestion" of informal leaders. The town of Bazar-Korgon at one point had four competing *akims*.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, April 2005.

⁵⁴ Parliamentary speech, 12 April 2005.

⁵⁵ The case of Akylbek Japarov, appointed minister of finance, generated particular protest from journalists and civil society. He was accused of appointing relatives to key posts in customs and the financial police. He took several members of the financial police as personal bodyguards to Kochkor, where they were allegedly involved in a shooting incident with his opponents. One person was wounded. Bakiyev removed customs and financial police from his control but he remained acting minister. Japarov argues he had little choice but to appoint his brother and other trusted allies. "Who else could I appoint, when the minister of finance had fled, and the banks were not working? We took in 74 million soms in taxes that day". Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 21 April 2005. Use of relatives because they could be trusted was widespread, and in some cases understandable, but it increased the impression of nepotism.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, Feliks Kulov, Bishkek, 25 March 2005.

Similar "popular" appointments were made to state enterprises. In the joint-stock company Kyrgyz Neftegaz in Kochkor-Ata, Jalalabad region, representatives of the new authorities arrived five minutes after the White House was stormed and announced a new director. The objection of the incumbent, Azizbek Orokov, that a new director could only be elected by shareholders was ignored by the rather threatening group of revolutionaries, who finally left when workers backed Orokov.⁵⁶

In Mailii-suu representatives of the new authorities told the mayor: "We have been monitoring the situation, and you have the respect of the people, so we are leaving you in place. But if the people are against you, we will appoint a new mayor".⁵⁷ An *akim* was also confused:

Initially one group entered my office and introduced themselves as the new authorities. Almost immediately afterwards another group came in and said exactly the same. And both groups cited decisions of the Coordinating Council and the new governor.⁵⁸

Similar situations were evident all over the country.

The problems with appointments were partly because the opposition was not ready for power and feared the return of Akaev supporters. To ensure control they put trusted allies in key posts, sometimes relatives, and the result was a government that looked like the product of too much nepotism. An NGO leader commented:

The chaos in the appointments process has undermined the image of Bakiev....Who has come to power? The old Communist Party nomenklatura, the Akaev nomenklatura, and those who participated in the storming of the White House, or who joined the people's movement for a few days.⁵⁹

There was some rational basis for the argument of the new authorities that they needed these supporters around them but it meant they were operating in the same way as the outgoing administration, which it had criticised for nepotism. The optimistic view was that after an election, a properly elected president would be able to escape dependence on relatives and long-time supporters and make more independent appointments in both the central government and the regions.

B. NEW PARLIAMENT

An initial demand of protestors had been for new parliamentary elections, but once the parliament had formed, leaders found it impossible to oppose its legitimacy. In many cases, the elections had been no worse than to the previous parliament, but the composition of the legislature was very different. Some deputies had been re-elected, but many were new and had only limited experience. The election of opposition leader Omurbek Tekebaev as speaker of the parliament gave the legislature some additional legitimacy.

There was no real system of party groups in the new parliament. Even the deputies elected from Alga Kyrgyzstan were unlikely to continue to use that label. Instead the parliament was characterised largely by region (north against south), background (former deputies, business, semi-criminal leaders) and financial or other links deputies had to each other.

It quickly became clear the parliament was not pro-Akaev as early commentators had suggested. The majority of deputies were "businesspeople", a term that covered a range from effectively criminal authority figures to fairly well respected entrepreneurs. They seemed likely to support whichever authorities would serve their interests best. What did seem true was that the parliament was in some sense representative of power distribution under Akaev, including the leading financial and political power brokers from each region.

Some in the government suggested the parliament might be dissolved after the presidential election but deputies who had spent much money and effort seemed unlikely to yield their positions easily. Any attempt to force early parliamentary elections seems likely to risk renewed instability.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group observation, Kochkor-Ata, 24 March 2005.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group observation, mayor's office, Mailii-Suu, 24 March 2005.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, *akim*, Jalalabad region, March 2005.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, NGO leader, Bishkek, 30 March 2005.

V. KEY ISSUES

A. POLITICAL REFORM

Presidential elections provoked intense discussion among politicians about what kind of presidency they wanted. Many were afraid that any victor would be tempted to repeat Akaev's mistakes, simply because of the broad powers of the office. The constitution itself had been adopted in a dubious referendum in 2003.

Constitutional court head Baekova and others promoted the idea of a constitutional assembly to rewrite the constitution. Most supporters of this idea desired a reduction in presidential powers and an increase in the powers of government and parliament. But the new government had little to gain politically from engaging in constitutional reform, and Bakiev publicly was lukewarm about constitutional amendments ahead of the presidential election. Some parliamentarians were also unenthusiastic, suspecting constitutional change would lead to new parliamentary elections.

Nevertheless, the parliament appointed a constitutional assembly in late April that included 37 deputies, a broad range of civil society and political party leaders, and ten representatives from government structures, including Bakiev. At its first meeting Bakiev proposed that any change should ensure that the executive branch retained strong powers, but suggested that there should be additional deputies in the parliament and that deputies and some other state officials should lose their immunity from prosecution.

The constitutional assembly needs to solve a number of outstanding political issues:

- ❑ the presidency's overwhelming power and its tendency to develop into a ruling family;
- ❑ the difficulty of developing a truly national base given the country's regional divisions;
- ❑ excessive regionalism, promoted by the single constituency parliamentary system;
- ❑ the lack of state institutions independent of political personalities;
- ❑ the lack of effective local government responsive to people's needs;
- ❑ excessive corruption and bureaucracy;
- ❑ the court system's dependence either on the government or wealthy individuals and inability to arbitrate political disputes; and

- ❑ the apparent growing criminal influence on the political system, and the weakness of unreformed security forces.

According to the constitution, an acting president cannot initiate constitutional changes or call a referendum. However, there is pressure to start constitutional discussions to ensure voters are aware of the attitudes of presidential candidates.

Although the Bishkek intelligentsia is already discussing the finer points of constitutional change, legal aspects of reform are not a critical issue for most of the population. For them, socio-economic issues and the actions of state organs -- the state's effectiveness in solving their problems -- are much higher on the agenda. But the kind of state that would respond adequately to people's problems is only possible with systemic change and a new type of civil service.

The problem for the government is that faced with immediate challenges it was forced to fall back on old methods. Most officials were used to working within the existing system and saw little real need to address systemic change. At times it appeared the most pressing need was simply to ensure that the state, with all its ills, did not collapse. In essence, any new constitutional arrangement has to ensure not only that the emerging system is more democratic than the old, but that it is stronger. Democracy and state-building need to go side-by-side.

B. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

The social legacy Akaev left behind threatened to overwhelm the new government. Many who participated in the revolution were society's poorest, often rural voters who remained marginalised despite overall economic growth, and who expected immediate improvement in their lives. They had two major demands -- land and jobs -- but it seemed unlikely the new government could satisfy either fully.

1. Land

In early April 2005 people began seizing land around Bishkek, defying residents and local authorities. There were reports of seizures in seventeen places, involving at least 30,000 people. Often residents said the land belonged to their farms, and they would drive the newcomers out. In some places there was an ethnic undercurrent: Kyrgyz in dispute with Turks, Dungans and Koreans, who had often rented the land for crops.

The government was slow in addressing the problem. On 10 April Bakiev and other ministers finally toured some of the disputed lands, and once they had seen the

scale, they started trying to resolve the issue through negotiation and promises of house building and credit arrangements. However, other leaders, particularly Kulov, called for stronger measures against the squatters. The government was concerned about using the police, particularly with presidential elections ahead. It also worried that force would provoke anti-government sentiment and result in further unrest.

This social upheaval was not surprising. While Akaev had developed grandiose development schemes, often in coordination with international organisations, many problems had been ignored. Many migrants to Bishkek had lived for years in squalid conditions, finding casual work where they could. Some had finally found an outlet for their discontent in the revolution. Their next step was to demand land.

Part of the problem with land distribution was the favouritism and corruption that had accompanied past construction. One person trying to get land for his family said:

In the Asanbai district, people tell us that this is a park zone. But why have they got permission to build a casino there? Why are there houses of parliamentary deputies here? The mayor could not answer why he allowed people to build a casino, a café, a garage and mansions here. He ran away from us.⁶⁰

Many opponents of the seizures claimed most people already had land in their own villages, or were part of criminal groups attempting to get land for resale. Others claimed conspiratorial groups were provoking the seizures to destabilise the new government. Some semi-criminal groups were involved, and not all the participants were homeless but such views masked real social issues that had remained unsolved under Akaev.

At the Dordoi district, a squatter said:

We do not believe anyone; they will deceive us again....We do not have work, and we are not able to rent apartments. The revolution was for the people. We stormed the White House. But nobody thinks about us. The authorities have never even come to see us, although we have been standing here a week already. You're the first person to talk to us.⁶¹

Many among the squatters had stormed the White House or otherwise protested in Bishkek. They were

now disappointed that the new government could not give them what they saw as their reward.

Gradually the tension over land in Bishkek subsided in late April as the authorities and some local residents began to move people off the land while persuading them to sign up in the proper way for land distribution. The government promised to construct apartment buildings in Bishkek accessible to poor people and to make cheap credit arrangements. However, some of these plans seemed likely to be difficult to achieve without additional financing.

2. The economy

The March events passed off without provoking a financial crisis: the exchange rate and inflation remained stable. However, economic turmoil was still possible, with many businessmen worried about the government's approach. Relations with the IMF and other international financial institutions were almost immediately strained by Vice Premier Usenov's suggestion that some agreements with the IMF and World Bank might be renegotiated.

Although the government argued tackling corruption would bring in more tax revenues, most independent observers feared that lower economic growth, some tax uncertainty and the lack of control in some regions could actually lead to lower revenues. Since the government will be tempted to raise pensions, welfare payments and salaries, spending is likely to increase. Fiscal crisis later in the year cannot be excluded.

The government and any new president need to reassure donors they are serious about maintaining macroeconomic stability and meeting targets for better governance. The unstable political situation demands some sympathy and flexibility from donors but any serious reneging on commitments, particularly on governance, could lead to a serious drop in assistance.

On the other hand, a successful political transition and a government committed to improving the business environment, enforcing rule of law, and tackling corruption should receive increased support. Such a Kyrgyzstan could be eligible for further debt relief, and if some much harder conditions are met, it could be included in the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account aid program, which helps countries with democratic political systems and strong anti-corruption credentials.

So far, the signs have not been very positive. Although ministry of finance officials claim to have stemmed some illegal flows of funds, there is no systemic attempt to seek out corruption. There are several separate investigations, into Akaev property and business, and into the airport and state airline, for example, but these are not by independent

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, 13 April 2005.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, 15 April 2005.

auditors so there is a possibility they will simply lead to a transfer of control to other political players.

A way of giving a fresh start to the whole state financial system would have been to request an international audit, which might have been extended to offshore funds allegedly belonging to the Akaev family. This would have produced a clear picture of the holes in the state budget and given the new regime an instant reputation for integrity. Such an approach might still be taken by the next president.

Bakiev has attempted to raise hopes of new jobs by announcing several projects, including the possibility of a pharmaceutical factory and an aluminium plant. A former factory director, Bakiev tends to favour large industrial projects. However, there is some scepticism about such plans: "We will have at least three more presidents by the time they build an aluminium factory", sighs a deputy.⁶²

In reality, much of the government's time will be taken up with the electoral campaign and consequent political issues. A crackdown on corruption and some repayment of tax by businesses may provide some additional funds. But unless there is reform of the whole system, it seems unlikely that even the best intentioned politicians will be able to resist the resurgence of corruption and with it the possibility of disappointments that again could lead to unrest.

C. SECURITY ISSUES

Criminal groups have always operated in Kyrgyzstan, some with more legal businesses than others. They developed strong connections with some members of the Akaev regime and were largely left alone as long as they did not threaten the regime itself. With Akaev gone, they have taken on a more public profile: several parliamentary deputies have been accused of links to criminal structures.⁶³

During the chaotic events in the south some criminals were released from prison, 59 reportedly in Jalalabad, including nine held for murder. The allegation was that they had been sentenced unfairly and so were freed by the revolution.⁶⁴ There were also several reports of arms being "liberated" from security forces, or bought both

legally and illegally. One observer comments: "There is now a huge amount of arms being sold. Everybody is getting armed now".⁶⁵

Two murders in the first two weeks after the revolution seemed to confirm the existence of a struggle for control among different criminal groups, or between state organs and such mafias. Colonel Uran Aliev, head of the regional police department responsible for fighting organised crime, was shot dead in Osh on 5 April 2005. A few days later, Usen Kudaibergenov, who had led protestors defending businesses from looters and was an ally of Feliks Kulov, was shot dead in Bishkek. The immediate suspicion was that he had been killed by racketeers attempting to move in on businesses his supporters were guarding. On 28 April, controversial deputy Bayaman Erkinbaev was slightly wounded in an apparent assassination attempt in Bishkek, which he alleged was politically motivated.

Businessmen reported criminal elements were trying to launch new rackets in Bishkek and elsewhere. In Osh Uzbek businessmen reportedly were subject to new informal taxes. The departure of the presidential family and chaos inside the security forces left not only a political vacuum but also a criminal vacuum. Businessmen had long complained that members of the presidential family in effect ran rackets requiring payment of protection money. With their departure, more traditional criminal groups were moving in.

These criminal groups had been expected to provide significant support for particular candidates at the presidential election. In many cases, they had the best access to finance and were more popular in their regions than either politicians or officials. Their influence over the political process was a concern, not least because several were believed to be deeply involved in drugs trafficking. Some observers argued their inclusion in the political process was a lesser evil than open conflict between state and organised crime as the state was so weak.

Other potential points of conflict involved a potential battle between northern and southern organised crime groups. Two of the most significant groups seemed at least to be respecting each other's spheres of influence, but changes in the political constellation could provoke more antagonistic relations.

The security forces were largely powerless against this rise of organised crime. Some police chiefs had been replaced by representatives of local "informal leaders", leading to disquiet among the police that they would be

⁶² Crisis Group interview, T. Kereksizov, 21 April 2005.

⁶³ The appointment of Tynychbek Akmatbaev as head of the committee on law and order in parliament raised eyebrows. A deputy from Balykchy, he is the brother of Ryspek Akmatbaev, long sought by the police on suspicion of involvement in a triple murder and other serious crimes.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior police officer, Jalalabad, March 2005.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, opposition leader, April 2005.

unable to tackle any serious crime. In several cases this gave rise to conflicts between the police and the new authorities. Some officers refused to accept the new chiefs. A police station head said:

People came into my office from the new authorities and told me to free my post. When I objected and said, "I am not against the new authorities, but I was appointed by the minister, let him dismiss me", they sent fifteen youths in and beat me up.⁶⁶

Professional officers worried about the trend and blamed the interior ministry leadership:

Police officers see how criminal elements have started to control things: yesterday they pulled him in, opened charges against him, and today he's a popular hero....The leadership of the MVD [interior ministry] has simply sold us out. When I give orders to my subordinates, I feel they are actually supporting someone else. The police have been divided into those who have gone with the new authorities, those who do not like this new government because of the new appointments and their methods and those for whom everything is sickening -- both the old lot and the new. And they're also divided regionally: into northerners and southerners.⁶⁷

The new government's priority has to be reassertion of central control over the police and a rapid start to serious reform of the security forces with the aim of ensuring their neutrality and eventually their ability to combat organised crime. Bakiev has asserted support for a program of reform through 2010 but in the present context any reform will be difficult.

The other problem for police is how to deal with public order, particularly in a volatile election. They were reluctant to act during many protests after the parliamentary contest and often either announced support for protestors or privately agreed not to act against them. They mostly had little choice unless they were prepared to use weapons, and they feared the consequences of excessive force. "They [the government] let us down after the Aksy events, and we do not want to end up between the government and the people again", said a senior officer.⁶⁸

All were afraid of the reaction of ordinary people if they fired on the crowds and of the possible legal consequences. An officer said: "We have the right to use arms if someone attacks the police station, but ... the police are defenceless -- it's better to get a couple of stones thrown at your head than be dragged through the procuracy".⁶⁹ The frustration over being constantly at the mercy of either the authorities or protestors is widespread. The government has responded with pay raises and promises of better conditions, but the police will remain unreliable during the next election campaign.

D. MEDIA FREEDOMS/HUMAN RIGHTS

An immediate gain from the political changes was sudden media freedom. For the first time in years, television news began showing real events and different opinions. State Radio and Television (KTR) tends still to support the government but offers broader coverage. KOORT, a channel formerly controlled by the president's son-in-law Adil Toigonbaev, has begun to provide more objective news reports, as has the independent Pyramida channel.

These new freedoms came by default, not systemic change. The president of Pyramida admitted there was positive change but was wary that television's continued dependence on the government for technical services (there is only one, government-owned, broadcasting station) and licensing would still make true independence difficult.⁷⁰ Others were less optimistic, particularly staff at KTR, who claimed that unofficial political pressure was continuing.⁷¹

Newspapers came under new editorship, but in many cases there is little significant change. The best reporting remains from former opposition newspapers, such as MSN, Respublika and Agym, and internet news agencies, such as AKIpress. There are few truly independent media outlets, and the presidential campaign threatens to polarise opinion, with the majority supporting the government.

Poor reporting was a major problem throughout the events of January-March 2005. In many cases few knew what was happening in other parts of the country. Even within the restrictions of government control over much of the media, there were still opportunities for opposition newspapers and the internet. But most of the time few local journalists covered protests. Partly this was due to

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, police station head, southern Kyrgyzstan.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, former police chief, regional level, Bishkek, 30 March 2005.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, police officer, Jalalabad, March 2005.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Kemin, March 2005.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, President Adylbek Biynazarov of Pyramida Television, Bishkek, 22 April 2005.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, KTR staff, 27 April 2005.

financial difficulties, but there was also reluctance to make extra efforts to cover events outside Bishkek. A television journalist admitted: "[Journalists] didn't want to go; you know, it's cold, it's winter, it's a long way..."⁷² Despite considerable donor investment in journalist training and media support, there were few exceptions to the generally low level of reporting.

Editors and journalists have begun to demand changes to legislation on slander and other methods by which previous governments pressured the media. Several journalists have argued that state television should become public television but there seems little enthusiasm for the idea among KTR's new leaders.⁷³

Continued monitoring of the media will be needed as presidential elections approach to avoid a return to old methods of informal pressure. Television is more vulnerable but with competing channels it will be difficult for the government to control them all. In reality, it will be sufficient to control KTR, which has nationwide coverage. Other channels tend to be viewed only in Bishkek and Osh.

A KelKel activist finds the new human rights situation liberating: "Before we even took out the batteries of our mobile phones, because we were sure they were listening to our conversations. Now we can sit around and talk about anything".⁷⁴ Activists no longer fear the SNB or other security forces are following them. These are real gains.

However, the new freedoms have not yet been embedded in law. Human Rights Watch, among others, has recommended changes in legislation relating to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression that should be high on government and parliament agendas.⁷⁵ In the foreseeable future, the main threat to human rights may come not from government agents, but from informal and criminal authorities, who may use repressive measures against journalists or activists deemed to be threatening. In other cases, political activists may be in danger of reprisals from political opponents.

E. ETHNIC MINORITIES

The opposition made several attempts to include ethnic minorities in the campaign against Akaev, particularly Uzbeks in the south, but the great majority of protestors were ethnic Kyrgyz, many from the south, which has traditionally been more nationalist than the more multiethnic north.

In the days after Akaev's overthrow, ethnic minorities in the capital felt threatened. Koreans, Uighurs and Turks suffered disproportionately from the looting and land seizures. Russian-speakers and ethnic minorities were often faced with ethnic Kyrgyz squatters. There were reports of occasional fights, and in mid-April leaflets were said to be distributed in some areas of Bishkek calling on Kyrgyz not to buy property from Russians, "because they would be leaving anyway".

Open enmity did not break out, and these attitudes have little support from the vast majority in the capital, but there was certainly an increase in nationalist feeling. Some of the new officials were much more nationalist than the old regime, although they were careful in public statements not to inflame opinion. In particular, they tried to calm Russian-speakers but some ethnic Russians began to leave, fearing more political upheaval and interethnic tensions.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, April 2005.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Sultanbek A. Abdyrakmonov, President of Kyrgyz Television and Radio, Bishkek, 16 April 2005.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, 16 April 2005.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Kyrgyzstan: Protecting Rights should Top the Agenda", 13 April 2005, available at <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2005/04/12/kyrgyz10473.htm>.

VI. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A. AKAEV'S RESIGNATION

The constitution requires an election within three months of the president's resignation. Akaev formally resigned on 4 April 2005 after meeting with a parliamentary delegation led by Tekebaev. He attached conditions to his resignation meant to assure him of immunity, though the constitution already guarantees ex-presidents immunity from prosecution and mandates the state to provide for them and their families after leaving office. A further law provides additional privileges for Akaev, though it was amended in April by parliament, which was concerned there would be a strong popular reaction to news that the state would continue to fund the presidential family.

Deputies were divided on whether to accept Akaev's resignation or impeach him. Some argued that if the resignation was not accepted, elections could still be held in October 2005 as the constitution stipulates. Increasingly the debate involved the calculations of the potential candidates about whether it would be advantageous to delay the presidential election until October or proceed as quickly as possible. In the end, the parliament accepted the resignation and set the election for 10 July 2005.

On 14 April 2005, despite her father's resignation, Bermet Akaeva shocked the country by returning to parliament. She appeared shaken by the opposition this provoked, again demonstrating that the family is out of touch with the popular mood. It is unclear whether she can regain any real political status but at the least, its ability to raise funds for potential candidates or for other political activities means the Akaev family remains a potential source of destabilisation.

B. POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

Political alliances are in flux but there appear to be two leading candidates, and a number of others capable of commanding meaningful blocs of votes.

Kurmanbek Bakiev. The acting president and front-runner is opposed by some other southern politicians, particularly Tekebaev. He will be hurt by the interim government's deficiencies but is still likely to receive overwhelming support in the south. He has worked hard to attract leading elite figures to the government but he will struggle to get wide support from the north and from ethnic minorities. Any government crisis would seriously damage his position. He is likely to run in tandem with Vice Premier Daniyar Usenov as his choice for prime minister.

Feliks Kulov. The head of the Ar-Namys party is popular in Bishkek and the north but may struggle to get significant support in the south. Some businesspeople and northern criminal groups fear him, while some in civil society suspect he is a hardliner and doubt his commitment to democracy. He has few significant political allies and limited support from some regional elites but is likely to get help from ethnic minorities. His lack of significant clan ties and political debts would make it easier for him to form a more independent government team, which may make him attractive to technocrats and the urban elite.

The lesser candidates include:

Almaz Atambaev. A northerner and long-standing opposition businessman, he ran previously for president as the head of the Social Democratic party. He has expressed discontent with the new government of which he surprisingly is not a member. He has considerable support in the Chui region and other parts of the north but he is likely to step aside in favour of Kulov. His youthful image appeals to many Kulov supporters who are tired of the old elite.

Jenishbek Nazaraliev. The wealthy psychiatrist who influenced the revolution in Bishkek was disappointed in the new government, and announced in April that he would run as an independent. He has no obvious political team, and his reputation is stronger in Bishkek than in rural areas. But he has access to funding and good ties in Russia; dissatisfaction with the interim government could help him but his target electorate will probably prefer Kulov.

Bayaman Erkinbaev. The controversial parliamentary deputy and southern businessman announced his candidacy in late April, the day after he escaped an apparent assassination attempt. He could gain considerable support in parts of the south but is eventually likely to give his support to one of the two leading candidates. He claims to respect both but says, "If [Bakiev] will work for the people, I will support him. If he turns out like Akaev, I will be against".⁷⁶

Other potential candidates include Temirbek Akmataliyev, the hardline former police chief, and leading member of Akaev's Kemin clan. He is unlikely to get much popular support outside his native region and is likely running to retain a public profile and acquire some political protection. He probably will back Kulov in the end.

Omurbek Tekebaev ran strongly in 2000 but he likely will be satisfied to remain speaker of the parliament and

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, 14 April 2005.

may offer to help Kulov in the south. Cholpan Baekova of the constitutional court,⁷⁷ Kubatbek Baibolov, an independent-minded businessman and parliamentary deputy,⁷⁸ and Foreign Minister Otunbaeva say they will not run.⁷⁹

A rich businessman who might stand is Urmat Baryktabasov, a largely unknown multimillionaire from Issyk-kul region, whose program is based on business development,⁸⁰ but he is most likely to lend his financial support to one or other of the leading contenders. Nurbek Turdukulov, a smart representative of younger business groups, announced his candidacy in early April, but apparently mainly to protect his commercial interests and raise his political profile.

Additional candidates may yet appear but none are likely to match the political weight of Kulov or Bakiev in the short time ahead of the poll.

Many moderates are concerned that a Kulov-Bakiev contest could be so intense as to result in violence.⁸¹ Adahan Madumarov suggested a gentlemen's agreement that the loser would not protest. Bakiev and Kulov agreed to a memorandum of understanding to regulate conflicts⁸² but such agreements, formal and informal, were mostly ignored during the parliamentary elections.⁸³

As in the parliamentary elections, much of the campaign was expected to revolve around support from unofficial local leaders. Many of Bakiev's early appointments appear intended to gain him such help but reliance on old methods may hurt him with those who expected the revolution to change political culture. Bakiev has said there will be no government interference, but support from local authorities for an incumbent president is almost inevitable.

The two main candidates have different support bases -- Kulov's mostly northern and urban, Bakiev's southern and rural. An early April opinion poll in Bishkek where he is very popular gave Kulov 52.2 per cent, Bakiev a

mere 18.3 per cent. No other candidate got more than 3.7 per cent (Almaz Atambaev).⁸⁴ With north and south equally split, the Uzbek vote could be key to victory. Ethnic Uzbeks have tended to support northerners in the past as less nationalistic but some at least view Bakiev as acceptable. However, several of his team are considered nationalists by Uzbeks, especially Usen Sydykov and Adahan Madumarov.

Bakiev's best chance is for the government to produce some stability and positive change felt by ordinary people but he will have to overcome negative perceptions over its formation. The more likely scenario of a fairly troublesome lead into the elections and continued social unrest would probably benefit Kulov as the "law and order" candidate.

C. ELECTORAL PROCESS

Few changes are expected in the electoral system itself. Turgunaly Abdraimov (formerly assistant to the previous chairman) has become head of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) but its membership is otherwise unchanged, despite calls for it to resign. He has announced some small procedural changes, including public display of voter lists, a source of complaint in the last election.

Other changes are needed. In particular, the role of the judicial system needs to be examined. The local courts and the supreme court were influenced by corruption and political pressure during the parliamentary elections. After more than a month of protests and calls for his resignation, supreme court chairman Kurmanbek Osmonov finally stood down in late April, when protestors occupied the court building. The whole court should resign, and a new, more respected membership be appointed. Otherwise, in the event of electoral disputes, there will be no widely trusted independent body to adjudicate.

The constitution requires presidential candidates to prove command of the state language, Kyrgyz, before a language commission. This in effect discriminates against ethnic minorities, who seldom know it, and also against some Kyrgyz who grew up in the city, were educated in Russian schools, and have a poor command of their native language. In the past, this requirement was used to exclude opposition candidates, including Kulov. The language commission should be abolished and replaced with simple televised statements by each candidate to satisfy the constitutional requirement.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, 19 April 2005.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, 20 April 2005.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, 25 April 2005.

⁸⁰ Press Conference, Bishkek, 20 April 2005. Like some other potential contenders, he may fall foul of a legal requirement for candidates to have resided fifteen years in Kyrgyzstan to be eligible to run for the presidency.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Kubatbek Baibolov, 20 April 2005.

⁸² Press conference, Feliks Kulov, Bishkek, 25 April 2005.

⁸³ For example, an agreement between Madumarov and Mamat Orozbaev, which failed to prevent unrest. Crisis Group interview, Mamat Orozbaev, Kurshab, 16 March 2005. A similar agreement broke down in Kochkor.

⁸⁴ Opinion poll conducted by Sotsinformburi, funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 5-7 April 2005 in Bishkek, among 630 respondents [margin of error not reported].

Additional issues highlighted by the OSCE and other election observers include:

- ❑ the role of the CEC itself, and its working methods. It is to move to a new building to symbolise its separation from government but it also needs to operate more transparently; and
- ❑ the composition of local electoral commissions, which will be critical in ensuring less government interference. There is little sign of any major changes.

The OSCE and the UN Development Program (UNDP) have proposed other small technical changes, without amendment of the electoral law. In fact, the technical side of voting is probably hard to improve significantly before the election. The real problem in the parliamentary elections was the campaign.

Vote-buying is particularly difficult to tackle, although more information in the media, more stress by candidates on programs, and much more coverage of campaigns, particularly in the regions, would help. The rules on coverage have been restrictively interpreted in the past, and journalists are wary of being critical lest they be charged with supporting a particular candidate. The CEC should issue liberal guidelines.

Overall, much will depend on candidate conduct, with recent events a sharp reminder of the dangers of fraud. Any new unrest over the presidential election would almost inevitably reflect the sensitive north-south divide, so it is imperative the election is perceived as fair, and candidates are prepared to accept defeat.

VII. INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

Following Akaev's fall there were the usual ill-informed accusations of a U.S. hand. Much of this was in the Russian press but some Western commentators indulged in the same speculation.⁸⁵ President Akaev accused Washington, but only a small proportion of the protestors were connected to Western-oriented NGOs or even students. Most of those on the streets were as far as could be imagined from the English-speaking younger generation. They were poor, badly educated and predominantly southern. They had almost no geopolitical agenda but rather a feeling of having been cheated by a corrupt and autocratic regime. The U.S. has funded electoral programs and for years given grants to media and civil society. But in many ways, Western-funded civil society was sidelined by the March events; there was certainly no evidence of foreign funding for the opposition. An opposition leader, who himself provided some money for organising demonstrations, insisted later: "This was the cheapest revolution ever. There was no American money, not a single cent!"⁸⁶

Once it became clear he was in trouble, Russia refused to intervene to support Akaev.⁸⁷ Moscow announced it would work with the new authorities, informal delegations began talks with Bakiev, and Russia sent humanitarian aid as a goodwill symbol. Foreign Minister Otunbaeva announced there would be no foreign policy change, and Russian and U.S. military bases would continue to operate.

There is little real scope for geopolitical competition around the presidential election. There is no contest between pro-Western and pro-Russian candidates as there was in Ukraine. Neither Kulov nor Bakiev is seen as likely to shift Kyrgyzstan's orientation. Russia, China and the U.S. are all disturbed by the potential for regional destabilisation, which unites them in the short term.

The new government needs donor aid but it should be carefully conditioned against actions. There is scope for support of attempts to promote democratic change, free elections, economic reform and state-building but aid has to be directed carefully to avoid encouraging the kind of corruption that existed under Akaev.

⁸⁵ For example, Craig Smith, "West plays key role in Kyrgyzstan", *The New York Times*, 30 March 2005.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, April 2005.

⁸⁷ Russia took part in the CIS observation mission, which attempted to support the government's view of the elections as free and fair. But after similar announcements in Ukraine, Georgia and elsewhere, its credibility was low, and it was not taken seriously by much of the population.

The OSCE is trying to develop an assistance package, concentrating on security issues through its hitherto problem-ridden police program; support for free elections through legal and political support and a monitoring mission from ODIHR⁸⁸; and support for longer-term economic development. A big monitoring mission for the presidential vote is vital, but this must include any second round this time. More monitoring of the campaign is also necessary: most abuses in February took place before polling day.

Longer-term aid will be necessary. Some officials have suggested that tackling corruption and tax revenues will boost the budget and allow extra expenditures. There may be some slight improvement from such efforts, but instability has so far undermined economic growth and probably damaged tax income. In reality, the economy is likely to suffer in the short term.

For the long term, the government should request a donors conference to highlight priority areas, with increased aid going to the south and support for genuine job opportunities and infrastructure development. However, aid needs to be conditioned on real plans to improve governance, in terms not only of transparency and democracy but also effectiveness on the ground. President Bakiev and others have already stressed their commitment to fight corruption. This needs to be followed up with a serious program, strict implementation of existing governance commitments, and commitment to prosecute the worst offenders.

A new administration will need to address a wide range of reform demands. Highest priority are the security forces, including the intelligence service, the courts, economic management and local government. There are ways donors can help in all these areas but the government must commit to new ways of working and real, not rhetorical, reform.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Kyrgyzstan's revolution was not a U.S.-inspired coup or simply an insiders' revolt. Popular dissatisfaction was utilised by members of the elite, who realised Akaev's time had come. His overthrow was the first necessary step but the new authorities must now pay close attention to promoting true political and economic change in the system they inherited.

The first priority is re-establishing control throughout the country and free and fair presidential elections. Whoever wins the presidency will need to support an inclusive process of constitutional change to ensure Akaev's system is not resurrected, simply with new officials in place. So far the government has shown little willingness to embrace such far-reaching change.

Political differences among the elite need to be overcome to avoid a more serious regional split, which the election could worsen. An informal agreement among leading politicians would help but only serious constitutional change to establish mechanisms inclusive of all political forces and able to resolve disputes would make a long-term difference.

The ousting of Akaev is a major step forward in Kyrgyzstan's political development but it has opened up a vast range of political and social problems that the government needs to address as soon as possible. There is only a limited amount the international community can do to help resolve these problems. The Kyrgyz have created their chance to move forward. It is up to their leaders to make sure there is more than just a change of personnel at the top, and ordinary people see real differences in the political and economic systems.

Bishkek/Brussels, 4 May 2005

⁸⁸ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF KYRGYZSTAN



APPENDIX B

KEY MEMBERS OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Myktybek Abdylbaev. Minister of interior affairs. Born 1953 in Chui province. Made his way up through police, internal affairs and national security structures; Prosecutor General, 2004-2005, but viewed as independent; dismissed by Akaev on 23 March 2005.

Tashtemir Aitbaev. Chairman of the National Security Service. Born 1943 in Naryn province. Studied in Moscow, worked in Communist youth organisation, Komsomol, and KGB; 1995-99, deputy minister of internal affairs; 1999-2000, chairman of ministry of national security; 2000-2002, minister of internal affairs; 2002, dismissed, appointed deputy minister of justice.

Kurmanbek Bakiev. Prime minister and acting president. Born 1949, Jalalabat province. Was factory director and involved in party work at end of Soviet era. Governor of Jalalabat province, 1995-1997, and of Chui province, 1997-2000; prime minister 2000-2002, resigned after Aksy events, continued as deputy, joining a centrist group. Became head of opposition People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan in November 2004. Failed to win seat in 2005 parliamentary elections but became prime minister and acting president when Akaev's regime collapsed. Plans to run for the presidency in July 2005 elections and is one of the favourites.

Azimbek Beknazarov. Prosecutor general. Born 1956 in Aksy District, Jalalabat province. Trained and worked in legal profession as prosecutor and judge; 2000, elected parliamentary deputy; arrested in January 2002 after becoming more opposition-oriented, particularly critical of border treaty with China; his imprisonment led to Aksy tragedy, when five protestors were shot dead by police; released later that year on appeal; reelected in first round in Aksy in 2005; influential opposition leader in March 2005.

Ishengul Boljurova. Deputy prime minister for social affairs. Born 1951 in Issyk Kul Province. Worked as an academic until 2002, when she became minister of education. Left the post in 2004 and later that year became involved in opposition; worked as opposition co-ordinator, did not stand in the 2005 elections. Initially reappointed minister of education by Bakiev, before being promoted to her current position.

Akylbek Japarov. Finance minister. Born 1964 in Issyk Kul province. 1992-1996, held various posts in presidential administration and for the Social Democratic Party; 1997-2000, worked in ministry of finance. Parliamentary

deputy from 2000. In 2005 disqualified in Kochkor seat, provoking huge protests before the first round of the election.

Ishenbay Kadyrbekov. Minister of transport and communications. Born 1949 in Naryn province. Trained and worked as architect before entering politics. A member of three post-independence parliaments, he was speaker of the Upper House in the third parliament (2000-2005). Disqualified in second round of voting in 2005, then reinstated, but results disputed.

Adahan Madumarov. Deputy prime minister for mass media and communications. Born 1965 in Kurshab, Osh province. 1991-1995, worked as journalist; 1995-2005, parliamentary deputy; charismatic opposition leader; initially declined government post and declared he would run for presidency; subsequently agreed to vice premiership and declared support for Bakiev.

Roza Otunbaeva. Minister of foreign affairs. Born 1950 in Osh. Academic, Soviet diplomat; 1992-2002, alternately foreign minister and ambassador (to the U.S. and then to UK); 2002-2004, Deputy Special Representative of UN Secretary General to Georgia; December 2004, announced creation of Ata-Jurt oppositional movement, which soon allied with Bakiev; disqualified from parliamentary elections; central figure in the opposition's Coordinating Council.

Daniyar Usenov. Deputy prime minister for economic affairs. Born 1960 in Bishkek. Studied in Bishkek. Worked as mining engineer, Kara-Balta, and in local government, Kara-Balta and Chui region. Rich businessman and a founder of Eridan Corporation, with interests in banking and construction; member of second parliament (1995-2000), became deputy speaker. Forced out of parliamentary election in 2000, after opposing Akaev, and business interests attacked by authorities.