

Pros, cons of sending Russian peacekeepers to Kyrgyzstan weighed

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Full text

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[Report by Viktor Sokirko and Vladimir Vorsobin: „What Russia Wins and Loses From the Insertion of Peacekeepers Into Kyrgyzstan“ (This translation provided to OSC by another government agency.)]

The disturbances of neighbours might painfully affect our country as well [but what do you think?]

Viktor Sokirko - 15 June 2010

Osh and Bishkek are only distant from Russia at first glance. It would seem that the consequences of the internal Kyrgyz conflict might heavily affect many countries.

In the first place, the burgeoning ethnic conflict in this Central Asian republic could provoke massive migration into Russia, both on the part of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. This is all the more likely because both these groups already have „historical roots“ in our country in the form of migrant workers who have settled in many cities. This is an obvious minus of the bloodbath in Osh.

Secondly, on the global level, we can expect destabilization of the situation in the entire region, which has always been considered a zone of Russian influence. Whoever plants himself in the position of policing Kyrgyzstan if the conflict continues will in theory remain there in the future as the one in charge of the situation.

The question naturally comes up: is it worth it for Russia to enter into an armed conflict zone as part of ODKB [Collective Security Treaty Organization -CSTO] forces? As yet, there is no answer. But the topic is being rigorously discussed at all levels, from the desks of the highest-placed bureaucrats to regular folks around the kitchen table.

Our military presence in Kyrgyzstan is currently limited to a paratroop battalion at Kant Airbase, and so far, in the opinion of the Ministry of Defence leadership, this is quite sufficient.

During a similar ethnic conflict in the Kyrgyz towns of Osh and Uzgen, and in the Uzbek town of Fergana in June of 1990, units and subunits of the 76th and 106th Divisions of the VDV [Airborne Troops], the 56th Brigade, and the 387th Separate Paratrooper Regiment were deployed there at the time. The grouping had insignificant losses from attacks by both sides and was in the conflict zone until July 1990.

This is more than just a ditch. This is the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which refugees from the conflict zone are storming across. Uzbekistan closed this border yesterday.

Pluses and minuses of an RF military presence

PLUSES_MINUSES

1. Prevention of mass killings - a 10,000-strong troop grouping will be required (based on the experience of 1990) to ensure security in South Kyrgyzstan. 1. Political responses - opposition parties and movements might organize protests and accuse the new government authorities of Kyrgyzstan of „selling out the country.“
2. Preservation of Russia's influence in the region - after all, Kyrgyzstan may appeal to the United States or China for military assistance, and they will remain in the country for a long time. 2. Experience of the Chechen wars: The Russian Army will be opposing both sides, Kyrgyz and Uzbek, the local population (a piece of cake in the daylight, a knife in the back after dark).
3. Economic gain - the largest operations in Kyrgyzstan are managed by RAO YeES [Russian Joint-Stock Company Unified Energy Systems], involving the delivery of electrical power to China. Industrial export - gold, mercury, uranium. So far, the proportion of investments from Russia is just 3.3 per cent of the total volume of foreign investments in Kyrgyzstan. And that is very little. 3. Death of Russia soldiers - losses in Kyrgyzstan will not be too large, but this is the death of our citizens.
4. Mass illegal migration - according to forecasts, the number of refugees fleeing from Kyrgyzstan to Russia may sharply increase by 100,000 persons.

VIEW FROM THE 6TH FLOOR Having overthrown „president and dictator“ Bakiyev, the temporary government of Kyrgyzstan proclaimed a policy of democracy and a parliamentary republic. But instead of this, it got a bloody mess. But have Central Asian states become ripe for democratic changes?

AGAINST

Does Asia Need Democracy?

Viktor Sokirko

The East in Central Asia is much larger than the East that is considered to be a tricky matter. It is more patriarchal and committed to an age-old mentality that has never comprehended the principles of democracy.

The Aqsqals in Kyrgyzstan have traditionally professed a general and authoritative opinion, which they profess to this day, and it is to them that ears are turned. And the bai [rich landowner] here has remained as such, only occupying public office in order to use it for his own ends. There simply are those who have already been able to break through to the „feed trough“ and those who are actively striving towards this. As a rule, behind every bai there stands a clan or kin who actively support him on the path to power, using any means and methods for this.

So, before 2005, there was the „enlightened bai,“ Askar Akayev, in Kyrgyzstan. His proclaimed democracy was dubbed akayevshchina which became a generic designation for the transformations occurring in the country. Akayev's relatives were in a position of favour and occupied many public offices, directed commercial structures, having essentially privatized Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the Tulip Revolution, a new „coarse bai,“ Kurmanbek Bakiyev, came to power and also proclaimed his democracy. How did this play out? Today's leader of the future „parliamentary republic of Kyrgyzstan,“ Roza Otunbayeva, accused Bakiyev of exactly the same nepotism - he, as well, had not given his relatives short shrift. Has anything changed? Not much. What is Kyrgyzstan today? It is a poor nation with poorly-developed industrial and agricultural sectors, a small amount of mining and the transport of energy products across its territory. From whence comes a passion for democracy in

poor people when they have more of a desire to eat than to have freedom? And so, for promises of a full stomach and a life of ease, they are ready to go and spill blood in order to find a new bai that will be better than the former one.

Here, much is condoned for a strong and just bai, even a totalitarian regime. But a „parliamentary republic“ may not be forgiven if a whole bunch of small bais, patently weaker than a single bai, show up in the government. And there is no point in being surprised or saddened by this - the mentality of the people here is just that way. And it seems as though many more decades will pass before it changes. That's the East... [ellipses as published throughout]

Viktor Sokirko

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Going First is Always Difficult

Of course, there is little that is pleasant to see in the pangs of Kyrgyz democracy. It reminds one of an unwanted and sickly child who, amidst its mild-mannered and rosy-cheeked, stocky neighbours, looks like a living reproach to Europe. The mayhem in Osh would seem to demonstrate that, to Asia, democracy is not merely an organically foreign thing. It is medically contraindicated.

By the way, the first bourgeois revolution, the ancestress of the European democracies, looked just as pathetic. While supposing that the guillotine looks a lot more elegant than the stones and tire irons of the Kyrgyz practitioners of pogroms, this does not change the essence of things. The enlightened Europe of the 18th century firmly disapproved of the barbarity of the French. The monarchs intimidated their subjects by using Jacobins while understanding deep down inside that they were dealing with a serious adversary. But they did not have any suspicion that the French freak of nature would master Europe and, after agonizing revolutions and other woes, it would at last obtain a modern social structure - democracy. And even though the power of the people is oftentimes abominable, Churchill was right: humanity has not come up with anything better...

And I am in no way romanticizing the Osh and Bishkek bandits covered up to their elbows in blood. And I am all for the insertion of international military forces to stop the ethnic bloodbath. But it is historically stupid to buffalo people with a choice. Either you have tyranny with its graveyard permanency and inevitable fellow travellers: total corruption and petty high-handedness of authorities uncontrolled by the people. Or you have a parliamentary republic (and, more broadly, democracy) with its civil freedoms, but a permanent bloody mess. For many thousands of years now, history has shown that it is not so straightforward. And it may yet give the Kyrgyz a chance to create a splendid country in Asia, instead of the usual sultanate. Going first is always difficult...

Vladimir Vorsobin

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