

**POLITICAL PROCESS TODAY****COLOR REVOLUTIONS  
IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN CONTEXT:  
KYRGYZSTAN-UZBEKISTAN-KAZAKHSTAN****Sergey LUZIANIN**

*Professor,  
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University),  
RF Foreign Ministry,  
President of the Oriental Studies Support Foundation  
(Moscow, Russia)*

**T**he rapid developments in some of the Central Asian countries—the power change in Kyrgyzstan that took place on 24 March, 2005; the bloodshed in Andijan, Uzbekistan, on 13-14 May, Tashkent’s withdrawal from

GUUAM, and other events have brought the problems created by the varied regional processes and policies pursued by Russia, China, the U.S., and the European Union into the limelight.

**Color Revolutions  
in the CIS as Viewed  
by the Expert Community**

Today, Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet expanse, Central Asia included, and their prospects have caught the attention of political scientists, historians, and economists. The events of the last two years have widened the field of discussion by adding to it the fairly complicated and sensitive topic of when, how, and in what way the regimes in Central Asia might be renewed. The discussion began even before the Bishkek and Andijan events added new dimensions to the possible options of trans-

formation and democratization of the local states, and of the possible political reforms there. The process was triggered by the deployment of American troops in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan and stirred up by the need to ensure the region's security and develop adequate methods of struggle against terrorism and religious extremism. The need to change political elites was also discussed, albeit in vague and cautious terms. Naturally enough, the change of power in Kyrgyzstan and the events in Uzbekistan added more vigor to the discussion, in which three aspects can be distinguished.

### The First Aspect

It relates to the CIS's future as a whole. The post-Soviet expanse, which in the last two years has witnessed the events in Tbilisi, Kiev, Kishinev, and Bishkek not sanctioned by Moscow, is shrinking rapidly. Centrifugal economic and political trends are gaining momentum before our very eyes. In the future they might destroy the already fragile structure called the Commonwealth of Independent States. There is talk in Russia and abroad about the de facto death of the CIS, the emergence of an informal Georgia-Ukraine-Moldova structure as an alternative to the Kremlin, and of the 6 or 7 states still loyal to Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the case (either formally and informally), Russia will not benefit from the process. While the Western structures represented by the EU, NATO, OSCE, and the United States are steadily building up their influence and military-political presence in various regions, the CIS included, the Russian leaders either "lose battles" and beat a retreat, or stick to their defenses in the still relatively manageable CIS zones. This naturally poses the question: What is in store for the CIS? Which of the future development options can be discerned today with due account of Russia's economic and political interests and security considerations?

There are three possible options in the mid- and long-term perspective.

- First, there is the possibility of complete disintegration of the CIS, which can be described as the worst option from the point of view of Russia's prestige and security. It means that sooner or later the various actors (NATO, the EU, OSCE, and the U.S.) will begin a new round of bidding on re-institutionalization of the CIS expanse, in which Moscow will be forced to take part on an equal footing with the others. With the present worldwide balance of power, the conclusion is foregone.<sup>2</sup> There is a fairly widely accepted opinion that the CIS is outside the zone of America's priority interests. But for my part I am convinced that it will spare no efforts or resources to set up an "axis of benevolence," American-style, on post-Soviet territory. Russia might become its important yet equal member. Its chances of victory, or of a greater role, will depend on many factors, on the post-2008 political and economic situation in the first place.
- Second, the present, "trimmed" Commonwealth might be cemented by the combined resources of Russia and China. In theory, the bilateral and multilateral mechanisms coupled with Beijing's increasing potential might allow it to extend its "responsibility zone" not only to Central Asia, but also on to the CIS. The options and dates of this extension in the long-term perspective will depend, in particular, on the possible integration of the CSTO, EurAsEC

<sup>1</sup> See: *Iuzhniy flang SNG. Tsentral'naiia Azia-Kaspy-Kavkaz: vozmozhnosti i vyzovy dlia Rossii*, ed. by M.M. Narinskiy and A.V. Malgin, Moscow, 2003; V.M. Kulagin, "Rezhimniy faktor vo vneshney politike postsovetsskikh gosudarstv," *Polis*, No. 1, 2004, pp. 115-124.

<sup>2</sup> See: D. Furman, "Divergensia politicheskikh sistem na postsovetsskom prostranstve," *Svobodnaia mysl XXI*, No. 10, 2004, pp. 14-24.

and SCO into a single structure, which will allow Russia and China to create a new integration expanse between the Belarus borders and China and to obtain more geopolitical and economic advantages in their rivalry with the West.

Strange as it may seem this option echoes the well-known Russian doctrine of a strategic “arc of stability” stretching from Eastern Europe to Xinjiang in China via Central Asia. This option has its obvious faults: it will be dominated by China, while Russia and other CIS members will be left doubting China’s aims—the “Chinese challenge” is the talk of the day around the world. The Russian Federation will hardly risk transforming the CSTO lest its defense be crippled. Today this option can be described as a hypothetical one, while the expert community may merely discuss its individual components—the SCO’s expansion, as well as its possible limited realization in Central Asia at a much later date, say after 2010-2015.

- Third, the CIS expanse may be divided into several projects with Moscow’s involvement in each of them, which is not bad at all from Russia’s point of view. Today, we can identify several basic elements which could be used for several cooperation models: Russian-Belorussian cooperation and the relationships in the Russia-Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and Russia-the Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia) systems. If realized in the context of complete fragmentation, this option might bring about qualitative and quantitative changes within well-established institutions, such as the CSTO, EurAsEC, GUAM, CAECO, the SES project, etc.

This option is not free of shortcomings either: the CIS’s disintegration (which I mentioned above) might add vigor to the rivalry with the West; besides, this option is primarily limited to economic cooperation. Its advantages, however, are great: it will create geo-economic and regional specialization based on joint projects irrespective of the nature of the local regimes. Indeed, it is very hard today to bring together the integration interests of, say, Belarus and Tajikistan, or Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan within the CIS. The CIS’s subregionalization will impart these interests with geographical meaning and logic. As distinct from the first two options, this one meets the interests of medium and small countries (in Central Asia and outside it) by boosting their role, which will probably remove the still lingering suspicions about Russia’s “imperial designs.” By the same token, the project will diminish the “big brothers” capacity to manipulate the small republics and give the “former” or “failed” CIS states another lease on life. Full-scale bilateral and subregional cooperation models will most likely appear in the mid-term perspective: Russia-Ukraine, Russia-Georgia, Russia-the Baltic states, Russia-Moldova, and Russia-Turkmenistan.

Even though the options are merely forecasts, each has its own philosophy and methodology in the CIS countries. The first is based on the ideology of “conformism,” which expects American domination in the system of international relations and in the existing or planned regional projects. This approach predominates in Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and some other post-Soviet countries.

The second option (the Russian-Chinese renovation of the CIS) is very close to the philosophy of alarmism. Today, confrontation between the great powers is developing in an international context which, although it differs from the classical Cold War patterns, is still alive but less obvious. Moscow, Beijing, and Washington are well aware that under the conditions of globalization and integration, the level of political and economic relations between the leading and developing states should be fairly high. The struggle for energy, transport, and other resources may develop into bitter rivalry, especially when national and security interests clash in strategic responsibility zones. Today, the CIS’s territory is the best example of latent confrontation among several powers, including Russia, the U.S., China, and NATO.

The third option (fragmentation) is based on the “cooperative” methodology and is, in fact, an attempt to build relationships on the basis of pragmatic and mutually advantageous cooperation. This means that countries should abandon old ambitious schemes for the sake of new, less ambitious, but much more efficient patterns. So far, pragmatism does not always dominate in political decision-making. In the future, however, it might prove highly promising in the CIS from the point of view of further cooperation and the quest for new resources of Russia’s cooperation with its CIS neighbors.

### *The Second Aspect*

The expert community is obviously trying to analyze the reasons for the Color Revolutions. Today, this community is divided into those who support the idea of “external conspiracy” (Western money, Western PR techniques, and other resources) and those who seek the causes inside the countries. Russian political scientist Stanislav Belkovskiy, for example, belongs to the latter group. He has identified 10 basic factors relating to the Color Revolutions, nine of which are determined by domestic political and economic processes:

- (1) blocked off vertical mobility;
- (2) crisis of the regime’s legitimacy;
- (3) serious contradictions inside the ruling elite;
- (4) the absence of positive images of the future which the authorities are promising;
- (5) the presence of an opposition movement as a political entity and its leaders;
- (6) the unwillingness of the authorities to use force;
- (7) unresolved regional and ethnic problems;
- (8) the merging of big bureaucrats and the political elite;
- (9) outside interest in a change of regime; and
- (10) crisis as a “trigger”.<sup>3</sup>

Belkovskiy uses these factors to enumerate the countries where revolutions are possible: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan; according to him, revolutions are probable in Russia and Azerbaijan and “next to improbable” in Belarus and Turkmenistan.<sup>4</sup> Even though this is debatable, the very attempt to systematize the highly contradictory domestic motivations of protest movements in the CIS is welcome.

### *The Third Aspect*

This relates to the radical Islamic movements and the impact of revolutions on a wide range of domestic economic, political, social, and other processes in the Central Asian countries. It was comparatively recently that political science turned its attention to the influence protest movements are

---

<sup>3</sup> S. Belkovskiy, *Reyting pretendentov na revoliutsiu* [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20050522021033988>], 5 June, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

exerting on the traditional Central Asian structures; many of the trends are only just developing, they have not yet been properly understood and, as a rule, are unfolding in the shadowy spheres of public life. One thing is clear, however: the events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan gave fresh impetus to the “re-traditionalization” processes. Professor Irina Zviagelskaia has rightly noted that their real and potential consequences (which have already been demonstrated to varying degrees in all the Central Asian states) are highly ambiguous. The current strengthening of clan, family, and neighborhood (mahallia) relations is going on under the impact of social and economic circumstances, rather than in a quest for identity. Prof. Zviagelskaia has written: “All Color Revolutions are triggered by the weakness of the authorities, which is obvious to all of their political rivals waiting to seize the chance as soon as it presents itself. All traditional clan and/or regional groups connected with the opposition are stirred into action in a situation in which the president, while deciding not to run for another term, fails to appoint a successor (this was what Akaev did). All of them move forward to support their power-hungry fellow countrymen.”<sup>5</sup>

The new approaches to interpreting the radical Islamic challenges are equally important. Radical Islam has not left the region. In fact, it has come to stay—the majority of the expert community shares this conviction. At the same time, the extremist organizations—the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut-Tahrir and others—have preserved only part of their transnational agenda aimed at fighting the “world evil.” Today, they are moving away from the “global jihad” idea for the sake of striking root in national soil, consolidating their ranks and, in some places, even entering into a dialog with the authorities.<sup>6</sup> The new tactics, however, have not changed the final aim: Islamic caliphates in Central Asia and removal of the present secular regimes. It is highly important, in this context, to analyze the activities of the Aqramiyya organization, which detached itself from Hizb ut-Tahrir in 1996. Being convinced that the Hizb ut-Tahrir tactics tailored to mid-Eastern conditions could not be successfully applied in Central Asia and that Islamic governance should be local rather than centralized, its leader, a businessman from Andijan Aqram Iuldashev (currently imprisoned) set up a new organization.<sup>7</sup>

Most Russian and Central Asian experts rightly believe that the current political crisis in Uzbekistan and the regime change in Kyrgyzstan are not, in the final analysis, a continuation of democratic peaceful revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. They are rather the result of clan struggles, the border cases of secular and religious protest movements.<sup>8</sup> This is especially typical of Uzbekistan: the expert community has not yet agreed on whether the Andijan riot was started by Islamic extremists and the local drug mafia or was a social and secular protest exploited by Aqramiyya and other organizations.<sup>9</sup>

There is the opinion that the problem of correlating the Islamic and secular dimensions is a fairly simple one: in the countries where Islam plays a considerable role (such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) any protest movement inevitably develops into an Islamic one. This, however, does not reflect the entire spectrum of protest and opposition sentiments and motivations. The events in Uzbekistan clearly demonstrated that, along with the traditional Islamic factor (extremist organizations), they were triggered by acute social problems: dire poverty, a harsh authoritarian regime, and the rigidly structured clan society. As soon as the riot was suppressed, another mechanism—blood feud—came to the fore: President Karimov acquired hundreds and thousands of new enemies who have nothing in com-

<sup>5</sup> *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 May, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See: D. Makarov, “Islamskiy ekstremizm v Tsentral’noy Azii: vnutrenniaia ili vneshniaia ugroza bezopasnosti?” *Transformatsia tsentral’noaziatskikh obshchestv i regional’naia bezopasnost*, Moscow, 2005, pp. 95-106.

<sup>7</sup> See: A. Lukoianov, “Komu i zachem byl nuzhen Andijan?” [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20050522020506169>], 5 June, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> See: A. Makenov, “Andijan v traure. Revolutsii ne budet. No budet novy president” [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20050519020522974>], 5 June, 2005.

mon with the radical Islamic organizations. We can obviously say that there are two simultaneously operating trends—radical Islamic (terrorist) and secular social movements. The boundary between them is vague; the movements tend to merge either deliberately or spontaneously.

### The Fourth Aspect

It is important to study how drug trafficking influences the region and the political processes in each of the countries. The drug-related pyramid which has appeared in Central Asia and across the post-Soviet expanse is becoming stronger. As distinct from financial pyramids, this one has a real structure devouring millions of new victims. It is based on the vast poppy fields of Afghanistan, a wide network of drug dealers, and the well-trodden routes crossing Central Asia before they reach Russia and Europe. According to Russian experts, in 2004 up to 430 tons of hard drugs (heroin) crossed the region: about 70 tons of this amount were used in Europe, the rest (350 tons) remained in the CIS, Russia included. There is the opinion that the drug mafia of the South of Kyrgyzstan was behind the regime change in Bishkek.<sup>10</sup> Some members of the expert community believe that the same mechanism was in play in Andijan; this needs further investigation. One thing is clear, however: the shadow economy and drug-related business have at all times pursued their own interests in Central Asia. It would be wrong, however, to look at these developments through the prism of the drug mafia's interests alone.

## **The Regime Change in Kyrgyzstan: Domestic and Sub-Regional Dimensions (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan)**

An off-year presidential election was supposed to be held in Kyrgyzstan on 10 July.<sup>11</sup> The pre-election alliance between Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiev and General Felix Kulov stabilized political situation, yet hypothetically events might follow one of possible options.

- First, there is an “alarmist forecast” based on the conviction that the “second radicalization wave” mounting in the South will “remove the present leaders,” plunge the country into a civil war, Tajik or any other style, and split Kyrgyzstan, de facto and de jure, into the North and the South. There is the opinion that like President Karzai of Afghanistan, Bakiev controls the Kyrgyz capital and nothing more. There are objective factors of possible radicalization, yet the Tajik option is still far away. The present Kyrgyz leaders have enough resources to preserve the status quo; in fact, Bakiev's opponents will not profit from destabilization either. The Andijan events forced Bakiev and Kulov to close ranks.
- Second, the “authoritarian forecast” (frequently associated with Felix Kulov and his supporters) is based on the opinion that those who favor dictatorship will reap the fruits of instability and disturbances. It should be added that at all times charismatic leaders enjoyed

<sup>10</sup> See: E. Djumabaev, “Revolutsia maka. Kyrgyzstan: problema geopoliticheskogo vybora” [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20050519020522974>], 5 June, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> The article was written before 10 July and could not naturally take into account the results of the off-year presidential election, therefore the individual assessments should be treated as forecasts.—*Auth.*

immense popularity in Central Asia, therefore Kulov, despite his temporal compromise with the acting president, has a good chance of realizing this option. None of the key political forces, however, wants or needs destabilization.

- Third, the “Islamic forecast” says that radical Islamic forces (Hizb ut-Tahrir) may join the power struggle. Much was said about this during the March 2005 events. Popular political analysts appeared on almost all of Russia’s TV channels to predict an Islamic Revolution and an Islamist march on Bishkek, even though we were obviously watching a secular process of the regime change. It can be said that as distinct from Uzbekistan, the role of the secular opposition in Kyrgyzstan is much more prominent, therefore the events of 24 March in Kyrgyzstan and 12-13 May in Uzbekistan (Andijan) were not identical. Theoretically, the radical Islamic organizations of Kyrgyzstan, especially those based in the south, in the Fergana Valley, may show much more activity, especially if power becomes completely decentralized.
- Fourth, we are talking about a “constructivist forecast,” which should have come into being after 10 July, 2005 within the framework of legitimate presidential power; in the future, the republic’s constitution might be amended. This option will be to the benefit of all the political forces. The republic might hold a referendum on a new law on parties and political alliances.

This option has its vulnerable spots, partly because the Bakiev-Kulov tandem has failed to agree on the political platform formulated when Akaev was still president. The planned constitutional amendments will give much more power to the premier in the economic and political spheres, ranging from forming the Cabinet of Ministers to appointing, together with the president, heads of local administrations. The head of state will preserve control over the power-wielding structures and foreign ministry. The planned reform will change Kyrgyzstan from a presidential into a parliamentary republic—the option Felix Kulov has always favored. Kurmanbek Bakiev is less enthusiastic about changes—he prefers a gradual process.<sup>12</sup>

The Bakiev-Kulov tandem is the best option for the country’s political future, yet because of their high political aspirations their union might prove short-lived. The current ratings point to Bakiev as the future president. While Kulov’s personality is his strong side, Bakiev has a strong team of weathered politicians. In April-June he did a lot of preparatory work, therefore the Kulov-premier-Bakiev-president option might prove the best. It is highly important for them to keep their personal political contradictions within limits in order to prevent armed clashes between their supporters. This cannot be excluded, however, because of their southern temperaments and the very special nature of clan relations in the country. Both politicians should, first of all, stay together and avoid the use of force and provocations. The main question is: will new marches on Bishkek be prevented? If not, the presidential election might turn into a counterrevolution that will destroy the results of everything achieved by the present Kyrgyz leaders.

At the first stage, immediately after 24 March, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan proffered fairly guarded comments. Astana had many things in common with Akaev’s regime, so it took some time to restore trust in the moral-psychological and economic sphere. Tashkent’s position was also far from clear because the relations between the two countries were far from simple, to say the least. Some Russian experts believed that Tashkent might exploit the situation in the south of Kyrgyzstan to consolidate its influence in Kyrgyzstan through the Uzbek diaspora.<sup>13</sup> In April, however, both countries extended humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan; Kurmanbek Bakiev paid an official visit to Astana, where he met

<sup>12</sup> [[http://www.ng.ru/courier/2005-05-23/11\\_bakiev.html](http://www.ng.ru/courier/2005-05-23/11_bakiev.html)], 5 June, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> [<http://www.saturn-ural.ru/analit/2.html>].

with President Nazarbaev, while Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbaeva visited Uzbekistan. The Andijan crisis set the relations between Bishkek and Astana on a higher level. The new Kyrgyz leaders supported Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov; and representatives of both countries carried out several coordinating measures to preserve stability at the border.

The sub-regional effect of the Kyrgyz revolution has not yet been fully studied; but one thing is obvious—it affected the situation in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the way that can be described as a latent domino effect. This means that the opposition movements favoring a regime change strengthened their position, which is especially important for Kazakhstan, where the political spectrum is much more complicated than in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Four key elements connected in one way or another with the Color Revolutions can be conventionally identified.

1. Secular, political, and economic groups with their own ideas about the country's future. According to experts, a possible revolution in Kazakhstan will develop not only as a conflict "between the authorities and the opposition, but also among influential clans which will use any method to preserve power and, more importantly, property."<sup>14</sup>
2. The authorities and pro-governmental forces prepared to move against the opposition according to the preliminary plans designed to forestall its actions. For example, two pro-presidential parties—the Agrarian and the Civilian—united into the People's Democratic Front. Its leaders announced that they were prepared to rise up in arms and defend "the country's sovereignty and freedom of choice of its citizens."<sup>15</sup>
3. Exacerbated confrontation between the North and the South, in which the industrial North of Kazakhstan is represented in the Majilis (parliament) by the recently created AIST bloc which closed ranks around Kazakh billionaires Patokh Shodiev, Alijan Ibragimov, and Alexander Mashkevich.<sup>16</sup>
4. The opposition consolidated around the Ak-zhol Party, also known as the Young Turks, and the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces was set up.

Akejan Kajegeldin, one of the most prominent opposition members and former premier of Kazakhstan, is now in emigration. Galymjyan Jakianov, leader of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan Party, who enjoys widespread popularity in his country, is still in prison, this fact cannot help but bring to mind the situation in which General Kulov found himself under Akaev's regime.

On the other hand, the country's economy is an important instrument of political struggle used by the leaders to ensure victory. In 2004, high oil and gas prices and the fairly efficient management of large companies were responsible for Kazakhstan's economic success, expressed in annual GDP growth of 9.5 percent. Several reforms—in utilities and housing, pensions, and other spheres—were successfully completed. At one time, the Kazakhstani leaders made a strategic mistake by signing several investment contracts with Western companies, under which the larger share of oil and gas profits was siphoned off to the West. Today, Astana is doing its best to remedy the situation by revising the contracts. In response, several European organizations and the U.S. Congress took up arms against President Nazarbaev by accusing him and his closest circle of corruption (the so-called Kazakhgate), violation of democratic principles, and domination of certain clans in the republic's leadership. Astana is trying to alleviate these contradictions by cooperating with Washington in the security and energy

<sup>14</sup> A. Subbotin, "Perspektivy revoliutsii v Kazakhstane" [[www.analitika.org/article.php?story=2005052202020722](http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=2005052202020722)], 5 June, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> The former two were born in Uzbekistan; the third represents the Jewish diaspora of Kyrgyzstan. This inevitably stirs up negative feelings among the Kazakhstan's traditional elite mainly "delegated" by the southern zhuz that congregates in Almaty.



spheres. On 20 May, 2005 President Nazarbaev attended the opening ceremony of the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and confirmed the possibility of sending oil from his country along this line. Washington is not completely satisfied, so attempts at a regime change according to the Ukrainian, Kyrgyz, or original Kazakh pattern (ranging from extremely radical to peaceful) can be expected late in 2005 or 2006 in the context of the coming presidential election, and because there is fairly strong opposition movement inside and outside the country.

Viewed at closer range, the relations among the Central Asian countries after the Bishkek and Andijan events reveal different confidence levels. On the one hand, the riots in the Ferghana Valley brought Tashkent, Astana, and Bishkek closer together on tactical matters. On the other, they did nothing to change the nature of the old (latent) conflicts. The present tension has its roots in the past and is caused by the still lingering border conflicts, contradictions over the use of water and energy resources, and ethnic contradictions. Conflicts have always emanated from the Ferghana Valley, the place where the state borders of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan meet. The relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are especially complicated. The Andijan events took place in an area of permanent tension, thus making the behavior of the Uzbek diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, of the refugees camping on the border between the two countries, and of the radical Islamic groups acting on both sides of the border even more unpredictable.

The Andijan events indirectly affected the relations between Tashkent and Astana and between Tashkent and Ashgabad. Throughout the 1990s, the relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were far from simple—they both claimed informal leadership of the entire region. Turkmenistan remained neutral. In November 2004, Turkmenistan President Niyazov paid an official visit to Bukhara where he and Uzbekistan President Karimov signed a treaty On Friendship, Confidence-Building, and Further Cooperation. The sides restored the relations Ashgabad had ruptured in 2002 and made a declaration about their “eternal friendship.” There is the opinion, however, that the friendship (obviously designed for bilateral political rapprochement) has anti-Astana undertones. In any case, the document testifies, first, that Ashgabad was stirred into political action and moved away to a certain extent from its policy of neutrality; second, that the structure of regional relationships has changed and that there are attempts to set up a new “center of power” represented by Tashkent and Ashgabad to oppose the Astana-Bishkek-Dushanbe triangle.

The above suggests that the events of 24 March in Bishkek and 12-13 May in Andijan were followed by changes in the structure of subregional relations. Kyrgyzstan obtained a new political team, on the one hand, while Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan preserved their old political leaders, on the other: the renovation processes there were either aborted or did not start at all. The Kyrgyz events forced Bishkek’s neighbors to move away from the country, even though all the Central Asian countries supported Islam Karimov in his efforts to preserve stability in the Ferghana Valley. Being aware of the need to act together against the threat of radical Islam, the subregion will probably remain divided into Kyrgyzstan, on the one side, and the other Central Asian states, on the other, for a fairly long time to come.

## **The Bishkek Events as Seen from China, the West, and Russia**

China proffered its fairly reserved comments on the events of 24 March in Bishkek. The official comment can be described as: peace, stability, and the previous level of bilateral relations between

Kyrgyzstan and its neighbors, as well as multilateral relations within the SCO should be preserved. It seems that Beijing was and remains apprehensive of Bishkek's foreign policy moves. Several days after the regime change, SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang spoke about "the need to preserve peace and stability in the region."<sup>17</sup>

This prompted expert assessments of the future of relations between Beijing and Bishkek. In summary, the comments of Chinese experts speak of China's apprehensions about (a) more active trans-border Uighur separatism following the events of 24 March in Bishkek; (b) the possibility of the new Kazakhstan leaders changing their attitude to their country's SCO membership; (c) a cutback in bilateral trade and possible revision of the fairly doubtful border agreements ratified by the Kyrgyz parliament under Akaev. The fears are well founded since the opposition now in power in Kazakhstan repeatedly stated that the border agreements should be revised; in the past, the opposition organized mass rallies in Bishkek to protest against their ratification.<sup>18</sup>

The American airbase in Manas is another of Beijing's concerns. China does not exclude the possibility that, its official aim—support of the counterterrorist coalition in Afghanistan—withstanding, it might be used for military-political containment of China and Russia, which will also involve other structures stationed in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Central Asia. (It should be said here that the new leaders confirmed the prohibition on America's use of the AWAKS reconnaissance planes introduced by Akaev.)

Chinese experts give more detailed comments on the causes of the regime change in Bishkek and its effects. The following causes can be described as the key ones:

- (1) The president was psychologically unprepared to use force to defend the constitutional order.
- (2) Georgian and Ukrainian experience was actively used with lavish funding from abroad.
- (3) Russia's weakness. Russia deliberately distanced itself from the crisis, thus making an unpardonable mistake. Political analyst Ji Zhitao wrote in the *Beijing Review* newspaper: "Russia should have used the Collective Security Treaty Organization to help Akaev and thus implement the conditions of the 1992 treaty. Russia will lose a lot if Akaev is replaced. The political coup in Kyrgyzstan is another indication of Russia's shrinking political influence in the former Soviet republics following the events in Georgia and Ukraine ruled by friendly regimes which were part of Russia's traditional sphere of influence."<sup>19</sup>
- (4) Possible victory of a pro-Western candidate in the presidential elections of 10 July.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, according to certain political experts, Beijing would like to see Russia as a "gendarme" of the Central Asian region which never hesitates to use force to protect the ruling regime with the help of the CSTO and other organizations. Beijing reserved itself the role of a passive onlooker and secret coordinator. Russian experts cannot agree with this: interference by Russia or any other state in the domestic affairs of the Central Asian countries is absolutely impermissible. Military-political aid extended by the CSTO or SCO to any of the local states can be discussed in the event of a real threat from radical Islamist organizations or of systemic destabilization in the region.

<sup>17</sup> Statement of SCO Secretary Zhang Deguang [www.csis.org/china/], 27 March, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> See: S. Luzianin, "Materials and Documents on the Kyrgyzstan-China Border. Executive Editor N. Kerimbekova, Bishkek, 2003, 248 pp. Review," *Far Eastern Affairs*. A Russian Journal on China, Japan and Asia-Pacific Region, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2005, pp. 153-155.

<sup>19</sup> *Beijing Review*, Sunday, 17 April, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

On the other hand, the expert and political communities in China are well aware that the echo of the Kyrgyz events in China has not yet been completely appreciated. Sun Zhuangzhi,<sup>21</sup> who specializes in Central Asia, has pointed out that the United States, which allocated \$31 million for developing democracy in Kyrgyzstan, was obviously counting on the victory of pro-American politicians at the 10 June elections. This will obviously question Kyrgyzstan's continued membership in the SCO and the planned deployment of a regional counterterrorist structure in its territory.

The border between China and Kyrgyzstan is over 1,000 km long; there are trade points along its Xinjiang stretch. China looks at the Kyrgyz Republic as a Central Asian buffer state designed to alleviate the threat of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism emanating from the region. The current chaos in the republic might negatively affect the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway now under construction. It was expected to become the shortest route between Xinjiang, the Middle East, and the Gulf area for reaching Europe; it was regarded as a new Silk Road which would connect Beijing with Paris. Today it looks as if the 600 km-long project might be postponed.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Beijing looks at the Kyrgyz challenge as a systemic one which may cripple several important projects: SCO integrity; security along China's western borders, and the transportation and energy corridors connecting Central Asia with China.

There are different opinions on the same events, however. Wang Wangcai, the Xinhua correspondent in Kyrgyzstan, has pointed out: "By itself the political coup does not threaten China. Business losses are inevitable in any country that becomes a scene of disturbances. The possibility of flights of American spy aircraft from Kyrgyzstan is another cause for concern, because they might cripple China's security."<sup>23</sup>

The fact that there are Russian and American military structures coexisting in the region did not escalate rivalry in the Cold War spirit. The Asian trip of NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in October 2004 to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan confirmed that his organization is not prepared to compete with Russia in Central Asia. The Russian airbase has been functioning in Kant (Kyrgyzstan) for over twelve months now, while the 201st Russian division deployed in Tajikistan was transformed into a permanent military base in October 2004. Typically enough, prior to the Kyrgyz events the leaders of these two republics looked at the Russian and American bases not only as a factor of their security, but also as a factor boosting the republics' political positions in the region.

Despite the events in Kyrgyzstan, Russia fully maintained bilateral and multilateral relations with this country; this is true of the CSTO, SCO, and EurAsEC for obvious reasons. Even before he came to power, Kurmanbek Bakiev repeatedly stated that all of the Akaev regime's foreign policy priorities should be retained and Kyrgyz-Russian ties strengthened. He confirmed his opinion in the wake of the 24 March events. Second, the regime change took only 2 or 3 days to complete; it soon became obvious that the republic had de facto acquired new political power. If the process had taken longer, Russia would have found itself with the problem of recognizing the new leaders. From Russia's point of view everything went smoothly and without political losses.

The relations between Moscow and Tashkent were not affected by the Andijan events: in 2004, while preserving its strong ties with its traditional partners (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan), Russia raised its political and economic contacts with Uzbekistan to the strategic partnership level inherent in the relations with other Central Asian states. In June 2004, the presidents of Russia and

---

<sup>21</sup> As the leading expert of the Institute for East European, Russian and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, he was one of the group of 14 Chinese observers the Foreign Ministry of China sent to Bishkek to observe the previous elections.

<sup>22</sup> See: *Beijing Review*, Sunday, 17 April, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

Uzbekistan met in Tashkent on the eve of the SCO summit for talks which confirmed the overall trend toward rapprochement. Moscow started using its economic resources more actively, probably because they were based on the rising oil prices, which added confidence to everything Russia was doing in Central Asia. In view of the Islamic threat presented by the radical extremist organizations, especially in the Ferghana Valley, the Russian Federation was on the side of Islam Karimov in the Andijan events. The Kremlin has made its choice between security and democracy in the Central Asian countries in favor of the present regimes in order to ensure the region's stability and security. Seen from Moscow, Islam Karimov is one of the key security factors.

There was another reason for Russia's unqualified support, which is probably connected with Uzbekistan's gradual drift away from the United States and its allies, including the pro-Western structures and organizations, which became obvious in the first half of 2005. Shortly before the Andijan events, Tashkent officially withdrew from GUUAM, which meant it was drawing closer to the CIS structures (the CSTO and EurAsEC). Although it is not a member, Tashkent may continue orienting toward them in the future. It is much more interested in the SCO, which it joined in 2001 as an equal member. President Karimov might look at the SCO as an obstacle to preventing Color Revolutions in the region. Uzbekistan probably left GUUAM for the same reason, since the organization looks like a breeding ground for Orange democracies (Georgia and Ukraine).

Moscow is also consolidating its regional position in the economic sphere within the framework of bilateral relations, especially with Dushanbe and Astana. The Russian company Russkiy aliuminiy is going to finish constructing the Rogun hydropower station in Tajikistan and also build two aluminum plants in the republic. Its total investments in the Tajik economy will reach \$1.3 billion. The level of economic relations between Russia and Kazakhstan is much higher—over \$5 billion. There are large energy projects in the offing in Kyrgyzstan and large investment projects in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In April 2005, Gazprom of Russia and the government of Turkmenistan signed an agreement in Moscow on gas supplies across Russian territory, as well as several other documents related to other investment projects. Russia's Central Asian policy is rooted in the traditional security system, which should be preserved, and in relatively new factors: the stronger role of the RF as an entity in bilateral economic formats and its flexible response to the new political challenges posed by the change in political elites.

### *S u m m a r y*

There are three major factors. First, the objective nature of the process of change in the ruling elites. It is gaining momentum across the post-Soviet expanse, the reasons for which differ from country to country (economic, ideological, gerontological, etc.) irrespective of whether the West is involved or not. Large nations are always very interested in the domestic processes going on in neighboring states; they are always eager to influence them through PR techniques, yet to be successful such techniques should be coupled with domestic opposition, mass discontent of the local population, corrupt regimes, and other objective factors.

Second, there are Central Asian specifics: authoritarian regimes will never let changes in the political elites slip from their control, but this can only postpone such changes for five or ten years at the most, they can never be totally avoided. It should be added that under such conditions the form of change could be totally unpredictable.

Third, there are Kyrgyz specifics: even if Western PR techniques and scenarios had been developed for Bishkek, they would most probably have been scheduled for October 2005 when the presidential election under Akaev was expected to take place. The events of 24 March took America and other countries by surprise. They were caused by a huge gap between the authorities (Akaev's

team) and the situation in the country. It seems that the former president could not accept the fact that his rating plummeted to the lowest possible level; and there were of course clan disagreements. The objective reasons for this process are too well known: corruption, nepotism, and a destitute population.