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Before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
United States Congress
Washington, D.C.
July 1, 2010

Co-Chairman McGovern, Co-Chairman Wolf and members of the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the growing political instability and recent deadly violence in Kyrgyzstan. I divide my remarks into three sections.

Kyrgyzstan's recent human rights violations are the product of state failure whereas the rights violations that typify other Central Asian states, most notably Uzbekistan, are the result of capacious autocratic governments. Section one of my comments provides a brief explanation for why state failure is a constant of Kyrgyz politics while strong autocracy is the norm in states like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In section two of my comments I demonstrate that state failure need not invariably lead to deadly ethnic riots. The June 2010 street violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad in many respects is puzzling. Kyrgyzstan has seen previous periods of executive overthrow and political instability, for example the toppling of President Askar Akaev in March 2005, yet these earlier events did not produce the horrific interethnic conflicts we witnessed last month. The solution to this puzzle, I argue, rests in what I call the double failure of Kyrgyz politics in the spring of 2010: (1) the collapse of the Bakiev regime in April and (2) the strategic shortsightedness of the successor regime that followed Bakiev and is currently in power in Bishkek.

Lastly, in section three, I explore the policy challenges Kyrgyzstan's state failure presents for international partners broadly and for the United States government in particular. Here I conclude by suggesting that while democracy is a goal that, with outside support, Kyrgyzstan might eventually reach, Kyrgyzstan's international partners must ensure that bilateral engagement does not further destabilize Kyrgyzstan's already tenuous political environment.

I. Enduring Kyrgyz Instability

Kyrgyz political instability and, in contrast, the comparative stability we see in neighboring Central Asian states like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is a direct legacy of the Soviet period. In the second half of the 1980s Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and the central

Communist party leadership intervened in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to restore political order in the wake of violent mass protests. Gorbachev intervened in Kazakhstan to restore order following the December 1986 mass uprising against the appointment of an ethnic Russian to the republic's top administrative post. Moscow intervened in the region again in June 1989 when ethnic riots in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley undermined First Secretary Rafik Nishanov's authority. Gorbachev did not intervene, however, in June 1990, when deadly ethnic riots on the Kyrgyz side of the Fergana Valley eroded the legitimacy of First Secretary Absamat Masaliev and led to the fragmentation of the Kyrgyz political elite.

In an effort to sideline establishment elites opposing perestroika reforms, in February 1990 Gorbachev decreed an end to the Communist Party's monopoly hold on power. Gorbachev's goal at the time was to revitalize the party and eliminate "dead wood" through political competition. In the Kyrgyz case, competition eliminated Masaliev and, with him, the elite unity that once characterized the Kyrgyz polity. Whereas Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbaev carried their united parties, albeit under new names, into the post-Soviet period, the new and narrowly elected Kyrgyz executive, Askar Akaev, struggled to solidify authority while balancing the competing interests of Kyrgyzstan's narrow and fragmented political elite.

These diverging legacies of perestroika have had a profound effect on how Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Kazakh elites make decisions. Coordinated attempts to overthrow the executive are considerably easier to mount when potential elites are few in number, as in the Kyrgyz case. Elsewhere I have likened the Kyrgyz executive to the pilot of a small Cessna airplane. The president must remain attentive to the demands of the few influential elite riding in the passenger cabin. Should the executive expropriate rather than share state wealth, this narrow Kyrgyz elite can readily coordinate a mutiny.

By contrast, coordinated collective action is a considerably more risky proposition in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Those who are lucky enough to find themselves in Karimov's and Nazarbaev's ruling coalitions are unlikely to revolt because these elites understand that the likelihood they will be brought back into the inner circle of the next leader is low. A small number of Karimov's or Nazarbaev's ruling coalition members may occasionally defect, but given the hundreds of party members in these executives' 747 passenger cabins, the ability of elites to coordinate a cascade of defection is limited. Karimov and Nazarbaev in turn, because they know ruling coalition elites are unlikely to defect, are considerably more free than their Kyrgyz counterpart to use state wealth as they desire—for personal enrichment, building coercive capacity, investing in public goods, or bids to advance their international prestige.

II. Explaining Variations in Post-Coup Kyrgyz Violence

Soviet legacies, though they help us understand frequent executive turnover in Kyrgyzstan, do not explain why deadly violence followed the April 2010 Kyrgyz coup while no such violence emerged following Akaev's overthrow in March 2005. Comparative analysis of the 2005 and 2010 Kyrgyz state failures suggests that the June 2010 violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad can be attributed to the following three factors:

1. *The 2010 interim government's near absence of links to regional and familial networks in Kyrgyzstan's south*
2. *The 2010 interim government's decision, immediately upon assuming power, to disband the parliament*
3. *Protestors' expectation in 2010 that, through violence, political change at the local and national level could be achieved*

Regionalism

Although Roza Otunbaeva, the leader of Kyrgyzstan's current interim government, was born in Osh, she has spent approximately half of the post-Soviet period abroad, serving as Kyrgyz ambassador to the United States, ambassador to the United Kingdom and as deputy director of the United Nations mission to Georgia. In contrast Otunbaeva's predecessor, Kurmanbek Bakiev, maintained deep connections to his home town, Jalal-Abad, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan's south. These diverging executive networks of regional influence have had profound effects on state-society relations. For example, whereas an Uzbek activist would not press the new Bakiev government in March 2005 for greater language and self-rule concessions, this same activist would see the 2010 Otunbaeva government, due to its lack of regional networks in the south, as less capable of dismissing ethnic Uzbek demands for greater rights.

The Uzbek politician Kadyrjan Batyrov appears to have done exactly this. In May 2010 Batyrov assembled what, in essence, was his own police force so as to protect ethnic Uzbeks living in Jalal-Abad. Ethnic Kyrgyz in Jalal-Abad not only perceived Batyrov's militia as an immediate threat, they also saw the militia as a threat that Otunbaeva, due to her weakness in the south, could not control. This spring 2010 combination of Uzbek elite's seeing the political environment as ripe for pressing for greater minority rights and of southern ethnic Kyrgyz fearing the interim government would be unable to limit growing Uzbek demands, activated an Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnicity cleavage that had long remained dormant.

The Parliament

Otunbaeva's and the interim government's comparative lack of southern ties, importantly however, was a challenge that could have been overcome had the interim government not issued a decree on April 7 disbanding the Kyrgyz parliament. Critically, disbanding the parliament was not a mistake that Bakiev made when he assumed power in 2005. Rather Bakiev turned to the parliament, a parliament that was overwhelmingly stacked with supporters of the ousted president, to negotiate deals with and thereby secure the allegiance of Kyrgyzstan's northern political elites.

Otunbaeva and the interim government, in contrast, unnecessarily hamstrung their ability to project power in the south by dismissing the parliament. In short, the interim government's April 7 decree eliminated any chance of using the legislature as a bridge to critical southern members of parliament who could have helped the interim government project power beyond Bishkek and into Osh and Jalal-Abad.

Protestors' Enhanced Sense of Agency

In March 2005 it took two weeks for the violent protests that began in the south of the country to unseat president Akaev in Bishkek. In April 2010 it took two days for the street violence that began in the western city of Talas to bring down the Bakiev government in Bishkek. Whereas the quickness with which Akaev fled likely surprised many in 2005, street protestors in 2010 fully expected that storming the Kyrgyz Whitehouse would lead to the quick toppling of the Bakiev regime.

The challenge that Otunbaeva and the interim government now must confront is that this newly developed sense of violent mob agency, the very force that brought them to power in April 2010, is the same force that helped spark the horrifically bloody riots in Osh and Jalal-Abad in June 2010. Disavowing elements of Kyrgyz society of their new penchant for violent protest will not be easy and will likely only be achieved if and when the interim government establishes a monopoly of force as well some degree of political legitimacy.

III. Policy Options

The United States government has provided democracy assistance to Kyrgyzstan for the better part of two decades yet Kyrgyzstan today is no more democratic and is considerably less stable than it was immediately following the Soviet collapse. Kyrgyzstan's autocracy and instability may not be a direct product of failed democratization assistance, but autocracy and instability has been enhanced by other forms of US engagement with Kyrgyzstan.

Prior to 2001, the lion's share of resources available to the Kyrgyz executive came from international economic and political reform aid. Reform aid is difficult for an executive to expropriate. The best president Askar Akaev could do, for example, was to appoint Kyrgyz elites as directors of the organizations targeted by this diffuse reform aid and thereby build his patronage network. In short, the nature of reform aid forced Akaev to share the wealth among Kyrgyzstan's narrow and fragmented political elite.

The post-September 11, 2001 arrival of readily exploitable financial flows in the form of executive-controlled fuel contracts for the U.S. airbase at Manas, in contrast, led to first president Akaev's and later president Bakiev's outright expropriation of state wealth. This disproportionate expropriation of wealth did not sit well with Kyrgyzstan's narrow political elite and, in short order, led to the overthrow of first Akaev and then Bakiev.

While I do not dismiss the possibility that sustained democratization assistance may eventually help bring about liberalization in Kyrgyzstan, US assistance will not be effective as long as Washington fails to address the destabilizing effects opaque Manas airfield payments have on Kyrgyz politics. Nonprofit governance organizations like the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute continue to work tirelessly to support political reform

efforts in Kyrgyzstan. All of these efforts will fail, however, if the US government does not first insure transparency in all financial transactions linked to the Manas Transit Center.