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President of Kyrgyzstan requests US support

During a visit to Washington on 6–10 March, the President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbayeva requested US assistance in the spheres of border protection and the fight against terrorism (in the form of an American anti-terrorist training centre in the south of the country). This new appeal to the West for enhanced cooperation (the latest in recent weeks, after another at NATO headquarters on 1 March), has inevitably hampered Bishkek's relations with Moscow, and has confirmed that Kyrgyzstan's position in security matters is very difficult (considering the threats of organised crime, terrorism, and the risk of new ethnic clashes in the south of the country), and that Russia has not been fulfilling the hopes placed in it.

President Otunbayeva met President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The United States announced comprehensive support for Kyrgyzstan (as the latter stated), including in the crucial sphere of security. Otunbayeva appealed for a return to the plan to establish an anti-terrorist training centre in the south of the country (which the previous president Kurmanbek Bakiyev had discussed before his ouster last April).

The high rank of the visit and the mass of official communiques may demonstrate that the USA will support Kyrgyzstan (Washington needs that country to remain stable, as back-up for its operations in Afghanistan). At the same time, however, increasing the US presence in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana Valley (the region borders Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and is key to the stability of all three countries) will certainly call forth a sharp reaction from Russia, which although it has not taken any concrete action itself to strengthen Kyrgyzstan's stability, is averse to the involvement of third parties in the region, primarily the US. For Bishkek, Russia's displeasure could mean not only the withdrawal (so far conditional) of Moscow's support for the present government, but also more severe actions against Kyrgyzstan (such as intereference in the sphere of the economy). As a result, the increase in the 'great powers' activity on Kyrgyzstan's territory may contribute to the further aggravation of the situation in that country. <mmat>