

Kyrgyzstan has terminated the agreement with the US on the Manas air base

Józef Lang, Kirgistan wypowiada USA umowę o bazie Manas

On 26 June Kyrgyzstan's president, Almazbek Atambayev signed the law which terminated the agreement signed with the US relating to the use of the Manas Transit Centre. Under this law the American military presence in the territory of the Manas international airport near Bishkek will terminate on 11 July 2014 and the transit centre in its present form will cease operation. At present it is not known what will be established at the site of the closing base: while Kyrgyz decision makers have been talking about the airport being used for civilian purposes, there is speculation about a future Russian presence or the establishment of a civilian logistics centre similar to the one that exists in the Uzbek town of Navoiy, which is serviced by Korean companies (with an alleged American presence) but in fact provides supplies to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

The law was adopted amid an atmosphere of intense American-Russian rivalry in Kyrgyzstan – before its adoption by parliament former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived in Bishkek on an unofficial mission on 20 June and on 25 June President Atambayev met Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu who confirmed that starting from 2014 Russian will begin the supply of military aid worth US\$ 1.1 billion to Kyrgyzstan

Commentary

- Kyrgyzstan's termination of the agreement is a serious blow to the US and NATO in the region. The Manas base is key to operations in Afghanistan – as a transit point for the overwhelming majority of US and NATO personnel in Afghanistan and as an important element in the supply chain of fuel for missions in Afghanistan. Not only does Bishkek's decision complicate the prospects for America's presence in Afghanistan after 2014. It may also hamper the withdrawal of the ISAF forces from Afghanistan in 2014. The conditions of this operation have not yet been finally determined.
- For Russia the question of the Manas base is of great importance both in terms of prestige and geopolitics as Moscow has been consistently calling for a maximum limitation on the presence of the West in Central Asia. After 2014 Russia would again be the only state from outside the region with a military presence in it – a rather small French base in Dushanbe will close down by the end of July this year and the German base in Termez in Uzbekistan is currently due to be in service until 2014. The Russian

policy towards Kyrgyzstan also has a regional dimension – since Uzbekistan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Moscow has been intensifying military contacts with Bishkek with the aim of applying pressure on Tashkent.

- It has to be borne in mind, however, that in the past Kyrgyzstan has taken similar measures with regard to the American presence in the Manas airport. In 2009 after Moscow's efforts (including the transfer of approximately US\$ 450 million in aid) Bishkek terminated the agreement but the US succeeded in preserving the base (under a changed name) due to increased fees for the lease paid to Bishkek. Currently, Washington pays US\$ 66 million a year for the use of the facilities, however the entirety of Kyrgyz revenues from the base (e.g. from selling goods and resources to the base) may even reach as much as US\$ 200 million a year. Due to the base's great economic importance to Kyrgyzstan and the rapidly changing policies of the Bishkek government, it cannot be ruled out that the American Manas base will remain in operation after 2014 in an altered form and under a different name.