

Hearing :: Instability in Kyrgyzstan: the International Response

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HEARING

COMMISSION ON SECURITY & COOPERATION IN EUROPE: U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION

INSTABILITY IN KYRGYZSTAN: THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

WITNESSES:

ROBERT O. BLAKE,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
STATE

ARSLAN ANARBAEV,
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES,
EMBASSY OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

MARTHA OLCOTT,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE,
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

BAKYT BESHIMOV,
VISITING SCHOLAR,
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

THE HEARING WAS HELD FROM 2:30 TO 3:39 P.M. IN ROOM 210 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE
BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C., [REP. ALCEE L. HASTINGS (D-FL), MODERATING]

TUESDAY, JULY 27, 2010

REP. ALCEE L. HASTINGS (D-FL): Mr. Pitts, thank you very much for being here. I'd like to open our hearing. Now, you all seem so far away. My goodness, I'm not accustomed to this hearing room. What is this here?

Anyway, welcome to the hearing on Kyrgyzstan. The country has been much in the headlines since the bloody uprising that brought down a president in April. In June, ethnic clashes in the south drew sad headlines all over the world. Apart from analyzing the causes of these events, this hearing is proposed to examine the prospects for better news in the future for Kyrgyzstan.

I've been to Kyrgyzstan several times and, considering how much promise the country held in the '90s, its arc since then has been marked by disappointment.

In Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan had the most highly developed civil society and seemed headed for democratic development.

But corrupt authoritarian rule, sadly typical of many states around the world and some of the post-Soviet states, led to clashes between the authorities and a civil society willing to defend its freedoms and prerogatives. The '05 Tulip Revolution that led to the ouster of former President Akayev brought no relief.

The tenure of his successor, President Bakiyev, was marked by centralization of power and even worse corruption, flagrant human rights violations and the criminalization of politics.

When demonstrations finally rose up against the regime in April of 2010, they were met by gunfire. Dozens died, ushering in a bloody beginning to a new chapter in Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet history. The interim government which came to power after President Bakiyev's flight knew firsthand the defects of top-down presidential rule. They decided to create a parliamentary system with checks and balances and announced plans to hold a referendum on constitutional changes along these lines.

However, on June 10, there was an outbreak of savage violence in several southern cities between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. In the worst interethnic bloodshed in decades, hundreds - and I'm not sure of the number. There are witnesses here who may give us a better idea as to how many people were killed or sometimes butchered, even, in the most horrific manner. And about 100,000 people fled to Uzbekistan, while 400,000 in all were displaced.

Nevertheless, the referendum went ahead on June 27, passing by wide margins, according to official tallies. As a result, Kyrgyzstan is going from a presidential to a parliamentary republic. The head of the interim caretaker government, Roza Otunbayeva, who was ambassador to Washington in the early '90s, is now the president for a transitional period, until 2012.

Mr. Secretary, I might add, she came to one of our OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting before these matters reached their head and was appealing tremendously to us to try and take actions. It was interesting to know how much energy she put in it. And it gives me hope that the OSCE may be able to play a substantial role.

Today, thankfully, the situation seemingly is more stable, but where we go from here is uncertain. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the region to shift the balance of power to its parliament and how the experiment will fare is difficult to predict. But we, at least, are well-acquainted with the problems that centralized and corrupt presidential rule has produced. Equally unclear is how well the country will manage to reconcile its citizens of diverse nationalities, which will be critical if long-term stability is to be achieved.

Our witnesses are superbly qualified to help elucidate the situation for us. But before turning to them, I would invite my fellow present panelists and my cosponsor - me being cosponsor of this resolution with reference to Kyrgyzstan - Congressman Pitts, to have any remarks he might wish to make.

REP. JOSEPH R. PITTS (R-PA): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your attentiveness, your leadership in regard to this matter and others, as far as the rule of law and promotion of democracy and freedoms all around the world. Thank you for holding this important hearing on Kyrgyzstan.

As you all know, Kyrgyzstan's interim government recently deposed the autocratic government of President Bakiyev. The interim government drafted a new constitution, shifting the balance of power in the nation from a centralized executive authority to its parliament. And this transition would make Kyrgyzstan the only country in the region to do so.

On June 27, Kyrgyzstan's authorities succeeded in creating the necessary environment for the conduct of a peaceful constitutional referendum. And I'm optimistic that the caretaker government will build on this foundation to ensure that parliamentary elections, planned for October, are conducted in full accordance with international standards.

These important steps - and I recently introduced a resolution with Chairman Hastings and Congressman Smith supporting the government reforms, while calling on the OSCE to continue its assistance in the region. It is my hope that the new constitutional order will provide greater freedom, democracy and human rights in Kyrgyzstan. However, I am very concerned about the ethnic tensions and the violence that has occurred in the southern portion of the country.

The outbreak of violence forced thousands of people to flee their homes. Several hundred or thousands - I'm not sure how many - were killed. Tragic ethnic hostility has threatened the livelihoods and safety of thousands of people. And the interim government has yet to fully extend its authority in the south and build the capacity that is needed to address the underlying social, political and economic tensions in that region.

The government must bring to justice those who took part in the recent violence and ensure that its military and police do not commit abuses. It must be steadfast in prosecuting those who committed these crimes. And the Kyrgyzstan government must offer equal protection under the law for all of its citizens. The OSCE has agreed to provide a policy advisory group to Kyrgyzstan, with the purpose of building trust among the people in the south.

And it is my profound hope they are successful and prudent in their actions. I look forward to hearing our witnesses today. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership and for scheduling this hearing. I thank all of those who've come for being here and I yield back.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Congressman. We'll start now with Assistant Secretary Robert O. Blake, who is the assistant secretary for South and Central Asian affairs.

And ladies and gentlemen, to allow that any of you that have an interest in the full biographies - it's not that he does not have a full one. Without me reading it into the record, it will be submitted. And at our desk outside are the biographies of the secretary, as well as the other fine witnesses we have here today. Mr. Secretary, the floor is yours.

ROBERT O. BLAKE: Mr. Chairman, Congressman Pitts, thank you very much for your invitation here today. I'm not sure if my speaker is working here. I'll pull it a little closer; there we go. And thank you very much for your leadership in organizing this hearing today. I'm very pleased to be here to give you our - (pause) - is that better?

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit Bishkek and visit Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan on July 18 to 19, so I'm very pleased to be here today to give you the administration's fresh perspective on events in Kyrgyzstan.

Again, I want to thank you and the committee members for your interest and for your continued engagement on U.S. policy in Central Asia. The Helsinki Commission has demonstrated exemplary leadership and bipartisan cooperation in helping us to forge a strong and sustained partnership between the United States and the five countries of Central Asia.

Mr. Chairman, Central Asia is a region of significant importance to U.S. national interests. Recognizing the uniqueness of each of the five Central Asian nations and their sovereignty and independence, U.S. policy supports the development of fully sovereign, stable, democratic nations, integrated into the world economy and cooperating with one another, with the United States and our partners to advance regional security and stability.

We are not in any competition with any country over influence in Central Asia. We seek to maintain mature bilateral relations with each country based on our foreign policy goals and each country's specific characteristics and dynamics. With regard to Kyrgyzstan, our primary foreign policy interest is to facilitate its development as a stable, democratic state that respects the rights of its citizens.

Kyrgyzstan is also a significant contributor to security in Afghanistan, by hosting the Manas Transit Center, through which nearly all U.S. troops enter and leave the theater. Maintaining the Manas Transit Center is an important national security priority for the United States, but that center can only be maintained if Kyrgyzstan itself is stable and a reliable partner and we ourselves are totally transparent in the functioning of that center. The center is an important part of our partnership, but our focus has been and remains developing our overall political, economic and security relationship.

Mr. Chairman, as you know and as you said, in April of this year, a populist uprising overthrew President Bakiyev - (audio interference). I think microphones must be allergic to me.

A popular uprising overthrew President Bakiyev and brought to power a provisional government headed by Roza Otunbayeva, an experienced diplomat and consensus-builder. As you both noted, clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan from June 10 to June 14 tested the provisional government. The violence killed an estimated 350 people and displaced about 400,000, with approximately 100,000 of those going to neighboring Uzbekistan. The security situation has since generally stabilized, although tensions still remain in the south.

Humanitarian organizations are currently transitioning from emergency relief to recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation. Of the 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks who fled to neighboring Uzbekistan, virtually all returned to Kyrgyzstan within two

weeks. On June 27, the citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic overwhelmingly voted to adopt a new constitution in a national referendum and affirmed Roza Otunbayeva as president for the transitional period, until December of 2011. And she was inaugurated on July 3.

While we are encouraged that there has not been a recurrence of violence since June, President Otunbayeva and the provisional government face daunting challenges. Fear and tension remain, especially among ethnic Uzbeks in the south.

In Uzbekistan's displaced persons' camps, although there were no reports of force to promote returns, reports of psychological pressure, monetary incentives, threats of loss of citizenship, coercion and/or encouragement to participate in the June 27 referendum and concerns about family members who remained in Kyrgyzstan all may have factored into the rapid repatriation of those who were displaced.

Most of the estimated 75,000 persons who remain displaced in Kyrgyzstan and those who returned from Uzbekistan currently reside with host families. Others are squatting in abandoned buildings or camping on the sites of their destroyed homes. An estimated 1,850 homes were burned or otherwise destroyed in Osh and Jalalabad. An undetermined number of homes are reported to be damaged and will need repair before they can be inhabited again.

Mr. Chairman, many ethnic Uzbek businesses in the south remain closed and some Uzbeks are unable to return to work while remaining with host families and in community shelters. Some, confronting the destruction of fields and crops, anticipate food insecurity in the fall and winter.

Reports that the Kyrgyz government intends to expropriate property in destroyed Uzbek neighborhoods as part of an urban-renewal effort - replacing traditional houses organized into ethnic neighborhoods with modern apartments for ethnically mixed communities - are feeding fears of disenfranchisement and possible renewed violence.

The United States supports a number of steps that we believe should be taken to promote reconciliation. Right now, our principal focus is on providing humanitarian assistance to all those who were displaced by the violence. We need to make sure that the people have the ability to return to their homes, to have shelter for the winter, to help schools reopen and to meet near-term needs.

As always in such humanitarian emergencies around the world, the United States has been one of the leading donors, committing up to \$48 million thus far to help the people of Kyrgyzstan. This aid is in addition to normal foreign aid levels, which will continue as planned. We've also been working with Kyrgyzstan's neighbors and the international community to support a high-level international donors' conference, which took place today in Bishkek.

As a second step going forward, we believe that security must be boosted to prevent future violence. The United States welcomes the decision by the OSCE during the recent informal meeting in Kazakhstan to agree to a police advisory group that will be deployed to Kyrgyzstan to support the efforts of the authorities to reduce interethnic tensions, restore public order and increase police capacities.

The OSCE and Kyrgyzstan concluded that the group would comprise 52 police officers, with a possibility of sending an additional 50 officers at a later stage. The group would be in Kyrgyzstan for four months, with a possibility to extend as needed. We hope the government of Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE can work together to ensure that this force is deployed as soon as possible.

A third step to ensure reconciliation is that the local Kyrgyzstan law enforcement and judicial institutions must be reliable and credible and have the confidence of the local people. The security services in Kyrgyzstan must fulfill their responsibilities in a professional and accountable manner so that they can win the confidence of all of Kyrgyzstan's communities.

In Osh, I heard many disturbing reports of arrests of human rights activists, arrests of Uzbek community leaders and reports of torture and other abuses

while in custody. I also heard complaints that the mayor of Osh does not act in a balanced manner and that he is pursuing a nationalist agenda. I shared these concerns with government officials and urged that they be addressed on an urgent basis. The United States is prepared to work with the government of Kyrgyzstan to deal with the challenges of strengthening the professionalization and accountability of the police.

A fourth and very important step for achieving reconciliation is that there needs to be a serious investigation launched into the causes of the violence in June, both to help understand how to prevent fresh outbreaks of violence, but also to ensure accountability for those who were responsible. A number of factors likely contributed to the violence, but what is important is to have a systematic and credible inquiry into what those factors were.

The United States welcomes President Otunbayeva's decision to establish a national commission of investigation, as well as her decision to ask Finnish parliamentarian and vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Kimmo Kiljunen, to constitute an international investigation with the support of the U.N., the OSCE and Nobel Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari, that will complement the national investigation in Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, one of our top priorities is to help Kyrgyzstan establish democracy. Part of the U.S. assistance package to Kyrgyzstan includes funding to support free and fair parliamentary elections in October.

The U.S. will provide assistance for central election committee capacity-building, local election officials' training, civil society support, elections outreach, journalist training, media monitoring and coverage, voter-list review, public information campaigns, election observation by domestic and international observers, parallel vote tabulation, dispute-resolution training and assistance and voter education. We are also providing long-term support to strengthen democratic governance, reconciliation, civil society, independent media and human rights.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the United States has a strong commitment to Kyrgyzstan. We and the international community want to work with the provisional government and with the people of Kyrgyzstan to help the nation establish democracy, provide assistance to all those who were affected by the recent violence and encourage reconciliation to assist the country's stabilization.

While we recognize that the situation remains very fragile and that there are real risks, we remain hopeful that with the goodwill and sustained efforts of all, including in the United States and the international community, the people of Kyrgyzstan can chart out for themselves a more hopeful, democratic and stable future.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your leadership today in hosting this hearing and I'd be glad to take any questions that you have.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. I'd like to begin questioning with my colleague, Congressman Pitts.

REP. PITTS: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your statement. A couple of questions: Relatives of both the previous Kyrgyz presidents were notorious for getting rich off of our base in Manas. How can we help President Otunbayeva to prevent the same thing from happening again?

MR. BLAKE: Thank you very much, Congressman, for that question. We are in the process now of renegotiating those contracts at the transit center in Manas. The Department of Defense has competitively rebid the Manas fuel contract. And we want to ensure that whatever contract is finally agreed on will be done in a very transparent and reliable manner.

And one of the things that we've done is that we've posted on our embassy's website in Bishkek information about our assistance but also about these fuel contracts so that there can be maximum transparency and so that we can, again, encourage the same from our friends in the government.

REP. PITTS: Parliamentary elections are scheduled for October. It is critical that these elections be, and be seen as, free and fair. What can the OSCE and the United States government do to help ensure that they are free and fair?

MR. BLAKE: Let me say, there are a number of things that I think we and the OSCE can do. First of all, with respect to the OSCE, the OSCE, as I said, is going to plan to deploy a police advisory group. We are hoping that that can be done by early September. And then there's an option to deploy more if they feel that those would be necessary.

I think that will help a lot to encourage, first, a more accountable police force, particularly in the south where it's going to be needed, and that will help to - voter turnout out there. The OSCE is also beefing up its own presence in Bishkek, where I think they have already played a very, very helpful role. And our embassy and the EU and others are working very closely with the OSCE, so we welcome that.

In terms of the elections themselves, of the \$48 million that the United States is providing now, about 5 million of that will be for democracy. And a significant portion of that money will be to support free and fair elections in October. I ran through in my statement some of the things that we're going to be doing to help ensure that.

But in that regard, we'll be working very closely with the OSCE and also with the U.N. and with the European Union, all of whom also plan to take very important and aggressive roles in this.

REP. PITTS: Now, various groups, including some government officials, have been protesting about the police advisory group sent in by OSCE. Will the police advisors be involved in training those police in the southern part of the country? Will they be involved in anticorruption training? What will be the extent of some of the training?

MR. BLAKE: Congressman Pitts, their mission is advising and monitoring. So they will basically be partnering with the police down in the south primarily, in Osh and Jalalabad, to go out on their patrols with them and, again, to mentor them as they go about their business. And hopefully, again, to provide some visible international presence down there, which we hope will, again, provide some confidence for the local communities but also help to prevent future violence.

REP. PITTS: Could these police face security problems of their own?

MR. BLAKE: They could. I mean, of course, they will be with the local police who themselves will be armed. So I think that, by itself, will ensure a measure of security for them.

REP. PITTS: Finally, how have the neighbors of Kyrgyzstan responded to the events since April? Is anything similar possible in other Central Asian countries? What's your take on progress -

MR. BLAKE: Well, let me take those in order. I think first, with respect to Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan behaved with great restraint and also, we think, very admirably. They were very quick to accept the 100,000 or so refugees that came streaming across from Osh and Jalalabad. They worked very cooperatively with the UNHCR, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which hasn't been in Uzbekistan since 2005. So they allowed UNHCR in, worked very cooperatively with them to establish camps for all of those who were displaced.

About a month ago I had a chance to visit those camps. And I must say, I was very impressed with what they had done in a very short time to accommodate those refugees. As I said in my statement that most of those went back in about two weeks. But when we met with members of the provisional government and President Otunbayeva last week, they were all very complimentary of the ongoing good communication that they have with the government of Uzbekistan.

REP. PITTS: What about the Kazakhstani (ph) chairmanship? How have they responded?

MR. BLAKE: Again, in their capacity as the OSCE chairman-in-office, I think

also Kazakhstan has played an important role. You know, again, they also were quick to help to respond to the April crisis and to help mobilize the OSCE as quickly as possible.

They have also been supportive of the police advisory group. It was during the ministerial that they hosted in Almaty that the ministerial approved that police advisory group. And I think their behind-the-scenes efforts to get that done were important.

But we're going to need to continue to see Kazakhstan's leadership on this because I think, as you say, there are still many, many challenges to be faced here. We may need to deploy more of that police advisory group, in which case that would have to be a decision that would be approved by the permanent council of the OSCE. Again, we'll need Kazakhstan's support for that.

And I think we'll need their support for keeping their own borders open. One of the things I heard when I was in Osh last weekend was that - or last week - is that they want to be sure that as the agricultural harvests come in, that they will be able to export both to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, both of which are important markets for them.

REP. PITTS: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HASTINGS: Very much, Congressman. Mr. Secretary, I have several questions, but I'm fearful about votes. And I'm going to truncate my requests and submit to you for you to follow up -

MR. BLAKE: Please.

REP. HASTINGS: - several written questions. I want to have an opportunity to, at the very least, have Congressman Pitts and I hear the other important witnesses here as well.

But I would ask about other actors. It is easy for you and for us here as policymakers to point to various countries and NGOs and subsets of groups. But during your entire testimony, I didn't hear the United Nations mentioned. And I did hear a reference, a positive one, to the European Union.

MR. BLAKE: Right.

REP. HASTINGS: I also did not hear - and believe - that India has a role to play. We, of course, have a base there, as does Russia. And we have tried to describe our efforts with Russia as some kind of pragmatic undertaking. And yet we know that this is a post-Soviet country and that Russia has played, for lack of a better expression - and I'm always careful when I speak about Russia but I can't help but believe, knowing what I do in Central Asia, that a portion of the role that they have played, by some, has been manipulative. And toward that end, it gives us a difficult picture and I'm just curious who is trying to coordinate the efforts.

If I could turn to another part of the world: Everyone in this room suffered in their hearts with the earthquake in Haiti. And the world responded in many respects by offering assistance. But as we speak today, there is a concomitant hearing going on that I can't participate in that I can assure you is going to identify that on the ground, those coordinated efforts are lacking and that the people are not receiving the benefits from the world's outpouring.

I daresay you could go through this United States Congress and get past the Helsinki Commission and the foreign affairs committee and couldn't find a hundred members that could point to Kyrgyzstan on the map. It seems so far away from us and yet so near and yet so critical with reference to Afghanistan. And yet, clearly, an interest area that is vital to us all.

I would underscore what Congressman Pitts pointed out to you as a key role that should be being played by the Kazakh chair-in-office. It's not as if Kyrgyzstan is not in their backdoor. And I also called for and would urge you in your capacity in Central Asia with my limited experience in the area, the one thing that I found is a lack of regional cooperation coming about largely because people haven't asked them.

We haven't asked - us I'm talking about, not you - but we haven't asked President Karimov what his real thoughts are with reference to how we handle this matter. The same would be for Nazarbayev or we hear from his chair-in-office, the foreign secretary - or foreign minister/secretary Saudabayev.

But this is a difficult problem. And here we have - I'm talking the United States now - an opportunity to really assist - no matter how it came about, whether people agree with the referendum, disagree with the referendum - the referendum at least speaks to where we come from in terms of our values with reference to a democracy.

And for a post-Soviet country to, whatever the motive, pass a measure that will allow for the development of a parliament that would control and not an autocracy, I think is complimentary. Never mind the motives. I get past that and get to what we ought to be doing to try to undergird what has happened at this point, recognizing all of the dangers.

Now, in there somewhere is a question. (Laughter.)

MR. BLAKE: Well, that's a terrific question. There are several questions in there, as you say. Let me try to answer them. First of all, with respect to the U.N. role. If I didn't mention the U.N., that was an oversight because the U.N., I think, has been playing quite a helpful coordination role. They've activated what they call their cluster system.

And when I was in Bishkek, I had several meetings where we met with the U.N., the U.N. resident representative, the head of the OSCE, the head of the EU there and many of the key donors. And they meet on at least a weekly basis and are very closely coordinated. The Kazakh ambassador is part of that, as is the Russian ambassador and the Kazakh chairman-in-office special ambassador also comes in very frequently.

So I think there's very good coordination now in the international community on this matter. And we intend to keep that up and, if anything, enhance it now because we've just had this very important donor's meeting today, which quite a large amount of money was pledged.

REP. HASTINGS: Pledged. Pledged.

MR. BLAKE: Exactly. (Chuckles.) You're recalling from your Haiti experience again. So I think we'll need to make sure that we remain very tightly knitted up and that we're not duplicating each other's efforts. And we intend to do that.

With respect to the Russian role, let me just say that, again, I think that we have all been very pleased with the good coordination that we've had with the Russians at many different levels, starting with the president and President Medvedev, but also in Bishkek, here in Washington, in Moscow - in many, many different areas.

And again, we've really made an effort to try to work with the Russians and I think the Russians have been very supportive. They have supported this decision to send a police advisory group. They have supported beefing up the OSCE presence. So again, I think the Russians have played, on the whole, a very constructive role. And we welcome that and we're going to continue to work closely with them.

One of the areas that we have talked about working is the United States perhaps helping to establish a more accountable and effective police force. And so that's something the United States is going to work on and we've sort of taken that on as something that we're looking at how we might be able to help in that respect. I think the Russians are going to do something slightly different, perhaps helping with some of the border security issues because they've got a lot of expertise in that area.

And there's, I think, particular concern about the southern border with Tajikistan and the possibility that some militants from Afghanistan might try to come up through that border to try to exploit the situation in Kyrgyzstan. So again, I think Russian cooperation on that would be very welcome and would

help the Kyrgyz a lot.

With respect to democracy, I just couldn't agree with you more, Mr. Chairman. I think we have a unique opportunity now to establish a parliamentary democracy in this country and to really bring the rule of law and something quite special and unique in this part of the world. And that's why we're putting considerable taxpayers' money into this because we think this is really a significant opportunity. And again, we're working very closely with the U.N., with the EU and with other donors to make sure that happens.

Lastly, just let me say with respect to the U.N. that we're - that the U.N., I think, is going to play an important role in this investigation that I talked about. There's both the domestic investigation that will go on and then there'll be an international investigation that will complement it, led by Mr. Kiljunen. And he has decided to draw upon the very considerable resources of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. So again, I think there'll be an important U.N. role there and they bring a lot of expertise to bear, as you know, on these issues.

REP. HASTINGS: Right. All of these things come around. I was just told by the staff director that Jan Kubis is the special envoy, who used to be the secretary general of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. And of course, Kimmo Kiljunen has played a significant role. Mr. Pitts and I know him. I know Kubis extremely well. But that's another things that I would urge the State Department to not ignore.

I appreciate your compliments to the Helsinki Commission. The staff here does an extraordinary job on staying on top of things around the sphere of the Helsinki groups. And please don't ignore us as a source of assistance as you move around.

I had the good fortune of working very actively on the same desk that you hold now through several of the crises. And I think that then-assistant secretaries will tell you that from time to time, I may have had a helpful hand. And I don't mean that with any suggestion that I hold any keys, but sometimes, it's good to hear other voices other than - I can't help but say to you that I think had I been listened to, we would be in a different position with Uzbekistan today. I try. And I'll try again - and again and again - on behalf of our great country.

Toward that end, Mr. Secretary, I thank you. Mr. Pitts, do you have any additional questions? I thank you so very much -

MR. BLAKE: Could I just make one comment about the Helsinki Commission because again, I really want to thank you for your engagement - your personal engagement, Mr. Chairman. It really does make a difference. And believe me, we take very seriously your advice. And the fact that you are interested and are very knowledgeable makes a big impact on these five countries that we're dealing with.

You may know, Mr. Chairman, that we just had our annual bilateral consultations with Turkmenistan about a month ago. And I was very happy to have one of your staff, Janice Helwig, along with us as a member of our delegation. So I hope we can do that in the future because that was very helpful. And it sort of underscores, I think, the bipartisan support for many of the themes that you stress every day in what you do. And I really appreciate that so I just wanted to say that.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you so very much, Mr. Secretary. It is deeply appreciated. All right, if our next panel would come forward - Mr. Anarbayev, Dr. Olcott and Dr. Beshimov - I would appreciate it.

Okay, if we can just hear from Mr. Anarbayev first, then. I'm running against the clock; they're running on protocol. (Chuckles.) But come on, please. Thank you so much. Mr. Anarbayev is the chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic, and we're deeply interested in what you have to say, sir, please.

ARSLAN ANARBAYEV: (Inaudible, off mike) - this very timely and important -

REP. HASTINGS: Would you pull the microphone a little closer to you, maybe, and speak directly into it? Thank you, sir.

MR. ANARBAYEV: Now is it okay?

REP. HASTINGS: Yes, sir, better.

MR. ANARBAYEV: So Mr. Chair, let me first to advise you in a very brief way about the current political and social situation in the country, and give a short description of my government's proactive measures to keep my country in peace and stability.

So the current situation is getting more and more stable but still remains fragile and shaky due to some objective potential destabilizing factors. We still have concerns about interethnic tension and distrust as well as persisting feelings of revenge and anger in consciousness of those who've suffered heavily from bloody events.

According to the updated information we just received today coming from the ministry of public health, as of today, death loss reached 355; non-identified dead bodies, 184; and about 50 people are still missing. The total number of wounded people stands for about 1,080. About 2,000 residential houses were burnt and destroyed.

Anyway, so far, Kyrgyz government has practical control over the territory of the whole country. Mr. Chair, I'd like to highlight some points indicating where we are today and what our government is going to do for the next three months until we elect a new parliament next October the 10th.

As you well know, we successfully held the referendum on new constitution, which is actually a good start for further steps in creation of all legitimate institutions. At this stage, we have legitimate president of Kyrgyzstan for transitional period as well as the so-called technical government that would act as executive power until we formulate the legitimate parliament.

Just recently, we succeeded in approving creation of national and international investigation commissions on tragic events in my country. Both investigation teams are of great importance in terms of building up bases for reconciliation between the two ethnic communities. And they are also important for us to answer the main question: why it happened in my country, and what should be proactively done not to have yet another terrible, bloody tragedy and dangerous destabilization in Kyrgyzstan and in the region as a whole.

We also succeeded in inviting OSCE special advisor police mission to assist national law enforcement bodies in conflict zones. This is really important for my country with respect to capacity-building of national law enforcement bodies and building up bases for reconciliation between the two ethnic communities and thus to secure stability and peace in my country.

State of emergency and curfew are still enforced in conflict zones, serving as impediment for would-be destabilization. Kyrgyz government has adopted national program on stabilization of social, political and economical (sic) situation. According to each, a number of top-priority tasks and objectives has been identified for their practical implementation in the following three months.

Today, as you might know, in Bishkek, we successfully held the first international high-level donor meeting to address a support package for Kyrgyzstan. In August, there would be yet another similar event in Almaty.

My president, Roza Otubaeva, in her statement at the said high-level donor meeting in Bishkek, highlighted the following top priorities for short and medium-term domestic sustainable development. First, political reforms and social development. Within this track, we will shortly develop and adopt national program called "back to democracy," which will lay a good base for restoration of genuine democratic values in Kyrgyzstan.

Second, conducting parliamentary elections in an open, fair and peaceful manner. We are committed to be effectively prepared for holding upcoming parliamentary elections, followed by legitimization of all governmental

agencies and state bodies.

Three, fight against corruption. Four, restoration of the fundamental democratic principle, the rule of law. And fifth, maintenance of competitive economy in my country.

And finally, one of the top priorities in implementing plan of proactive measures is ongoing national and international humanitarian aid activities to the local population in conflict zones with the focus on providing food, medical assistance and construction materials so that people can obtain their new residential houses before winter season comes. So we are encouraged by international support to restore and maintain social and economic sustainable development in my country.

So it's worth noting the role of OSCE in maintenance of stability in Kyrgyzstan. We do appreciate the role of OSCE in maintenance of stability in Kyrgyzstan. OSCE along with international community plays a crucial role in building up bases for interethnic reconciliation and further reinforcement of democracy, observance of human rights and the rule of law in Kyrgyzstan. With this in mind, we count on just recently approved OSCE decision on deployment of special advisory police mission in conflict zones in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

We also count on international investigation commission on events in Osh and Jallal-Abad oblasts under the auspices of OSCE to investigate and identify the real causes of the said tragic events with appropriate recommendations for new Kyrgyz authorities for its further activities in terms of maintenance of national and regional security.

As well-known OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights was and remains one of the main international bodies that provides reliable and internationally approved recommendations for preparations and holding free and peaceful election campaigns in OSCE countries. Hopefully, our close cooperation with ODIHR as well as IFES and others will bring good results in our joint preparatory work for upcoming parliamentary elections in my country to be held next October this year.

So I would like to make some short comments on the upcoming parliamentary elections. Kyrgyzstan attaches great importance to upcoming parliamentary elections keeping in mind that democratically elected parliament will serve as starting point for building up a new system of good governance in the Kyrgyz Republic.

One of the most important issues relating to preparatory and conducting elections is to secure personal and public security in the country. This is a crucial precondition to successfully hold these really important political events. To this end, we keep on attracting international assistance that might be as follows:

First, broad and timely information support for multinational population at large with focus on displaying vigilance to would-be provocations and any intentional attempts to defeat elections at various levels. For this, we might realize some joint projects. For example, it seems to be reasonable if we could manage to channel program translation in the form of appropriate spot advertising and infomercials, as well as billboards and flyers in the streets.

Second, personal precautions for all participants for national election campaign. Here, we need some assistance in support of would-be voluntary people's patrol in conflict zones, big cities and communities.

And third, with respect to would-be additional consultative and technical assistance in maintaining stability and peace in conflict zones, I would suggest to invite a group of experts from the Office of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to come and make on the ground some assessment of our urgent needs and develop a good program and recommendations for Kyrgyz government on proactive measures for reconciliation between the two ethnic communities.

Mr. Chairman, you may ask me a question: why Kyrgyzstan has chosen a parliamentary form of governance? This is still a very controversial matter, I should say. For Kyrgyzstan, it was actually an audacious step in the direction

of absolutely new form of governance, full of many unpredictable implications. But we did not have a choice and I will try to explain you why we stand for parliamentary republic.

For the last 19 years of the history of my country, as a newly independent country after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we did not succeed in achieving the main goal to build up a well-balanced system of good governance based on democratic institutions, justice, public accountability and transparency of governmental and state agencies.

Instead, we unfortunately have had bad experience with our two previous presidents who actually concentrated all powers in their own hands and gave high - gave, I'm sorry, birth to nepotism, high level of corruption, poverty and unemployment. So I share the common conviction that a 19-year experience of our not-successive presidential form of governance has become a main reason to change our constitution.

In conclusion, I would like once again to extend my high appreciation for the U.S. government for its generous help and support for my country. We are encouraged by ongoing well-coordinated international efforts to stabilize current fragile situation in Kyrgyzstan by means of capacity-building of law enforcement bodies and other governmental agencies as well as civil society sector. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HASTINGS: Your Excellency, thank you for your wonderful presentation. Congressman Pitts and I as well as other members of the commission may very well submit to you questions in writing. But today, we are operating with votes coming up in just a few minutes. So we are going to ask our other witnesses to come forward so that he and I might hear from them. And that way, you won't have to answer all of the hard questions that we were going to ask you right now. But seriously, thank you and I thank Kyrgyzstan government for your presentation, Mr. Charge.

MR. ANARBAYEV: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you. With that in mind, if we could hear from Dr. Olcott and Mr. Beshimov now. And I urge you all - you do have written statements - to the extent that you can, if you would summarize them, it would help us. Mr. Pitts and I are going to stay through the second bell. We expect it to go off real soon. But after that, we have to make our way to vote. So let's begin with you, Dr. Olcott, and ask you to abbreviate as best you can.

MARTHA BRILL OLCOTT: I'll try to be very, very fast so that Dr. Beshimov has some time. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today. And I'd just like to make some brief comments from my testimony.

The question before us is whether developments in Kyrgyzstan were the product of a pent-up thirst for democracy on the part of the population or are they a sign of state failure? I suggest in my remarks that they're really - the reality lies between the two, which really creates a dilemma and a challenge for U.S. policymakers in order to find ways to encourage - to try to rectify the situations without leading to state failure itself.

Let me just highlight a few points having to do with the violence in the south, the weakness of the interim government and what the international community might be able to do to speak to this.

Why the violence in the south? I think the interim government has been flawed in several important ways. It lacked and it continues to lack strong support from many of the prominent political families in the southern part of the country where Bakiyev had been strong and has lacked a figure that can command respect from the country's disparate and relatively disorganized security forces.

The events in mid-May when there was seizure of government buildings highlighted these problems. But unfortunately, the interim government chose to paper over - or was only able to paper over these tensions and competition between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups and within Kyrgyz groups rather than address them and failed to create a strong figure in the security - or, a

strong response and modify the security structure or begin the reform of a security structure.

The end result is well-known. And as we have heard today, in the aftermath of the ethnic violence, the - especially local groups in local government in Southern Kyrgyzstan has chosen to make the Uzbeks scapegoats for a lot of this violence, so I won't stay on this.

I don't think - while the violence has ended, I think that the leadership, as I have mentioned, continues to target the Uzbeks in the south. And unfortunately, the national leadership has de facto consented to the worsening - to the continued situation in the south, this continuation of finding blame among the Uzbeks through their silence on these questions. I'll come back to that at the very last minute.

Let me just pause on the referendum in the constitution briefly. The referendum, I think, has not solved the problems of governance in Kyrgyzstan. They've simply pushed them forward in time. The parliamentary government - the notion that this parliamentary system will succeed in providing checks and balances, I think, is somewhat naïve. It could well turn into a division of the spoils among Kyrgyzstan's leading political figures. That really will require scrutiny on the part of the acting president and those who come to power.

The competition over seats in the parliament because they will form the government is really going to create a real challenge for ODIHR. It will be critical that these elections be conducted in the most transparent fashion possible because of how much is at stake in terms of the election process itself. Whoever wins will get to try, at least, to form the government.

So to me, it's not a question of training, as Secretary Blake said. It's also a question of holding the government responsible for maintaining transparent elections and to think about using conditionality of some further assistance if the government doesn't meet the standards that ODIHR holds before them.

I think, finally, I think that the challenges before the current leadership are really considerable. Bakiyev was ousted because the population was led to believe that their lives were bad because their leaders were corrupt. There is nothing in the future scenario that implies that their lives are going to improve anytime soon.

The donors' conference that was held today has promised \$600 million of assistance this year, which even if it comes forward, is still less than the budget deficit that the Kyrgyz government faces for this coming year. The problems that they're going to face are really severe.

I think that it's impossible to expect the government now to begin telling the people that they have to do belt-tightening and expect hard times before the election. But I think that it's really incumbent upon this committee, the OSCE, the U.S., more generally, to make sure that a reality check is held for the Kyrgyz government and that the population begin to not only learn to live better together in a single state interethnically but that they realize that it's going to be a slow recovery period; that they won't even get to where they were before.

I do think - to highlight the question of a Kazakh chairmanship (sic), I think that it does give us opportunities to do more - to do even more with the OSCE than it's done. And I think that especially the bilateral Kazakh-Kyrgyz economic commission is really important to serve as a way to stretch and better target the assistance money that'll be coming forward. Thank you very much.

REP. HASTINGS: Dr. Beshimov, if you will go forward. Joe, if you have to go, I'll stay another five minutes but then I'll have to go.

BAKYT BESHIMOV: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the entire Helsinki Commission and you, personally, for positive support of a Kyrgyzstan which today has - (inaudible) - chance and a history of the Soviet Union to succeed in democratization.

Therefore, the content of my speech is motivated with a strong desire to set up

a prudent attitude to this situation to get rid from complacency and really do not miss where you need chance to set up the democratic institutions. Therefore, I will focus my attention to very important points. The written text of my speech has been distributed therefore I will just mention a few.

First of all, I would like to argue that it is essential for us all not to overestimate the referendum of June 23rd as a step forwards stability for it may not be. The referendum of June 23rd was a self-legitimizing initiative of the interim government. It took place only a week after the ethnic clashes when between 100,000 to almost a half-million citizens of Kyrgyzstan - mostly ethnic Uzbeks - had been displaced. Instead of postponing the referendum to focus squarely on addressing the magnitude of the tragedy

The referendum of June 23rd was a self-legitimizing initiative of the Interim government. It took place only a week after the ethnic clashes, when between 100,000 to 400,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan - mostly ethnic Uzbeks - had been displaced. Instead of postponing the referendum to focus squarely on addressing the magnitude of the tragedy, the interim government used the tragedy to pressure citizens to approve of the referendum. Members of the interim government frequently stated, if you are for peace, vote for the referendum.

This brazen manipulation occurred when most citizens, at least in the south of Kyrgyzstan, not only couldn't vote but simply couldn't make an informed decision. We know that even OSCE, fearing for safety, decided not to send a large observer mission, limiting to only 36 observers.

Being intimately familiar with politics in Kyrgyzstan, I can assure you that in the future, some political forces in Kyrgyzstan will use all these conditions under which the referendum took place - and really shouldn't have taken place - to question the validity of its results and the legitimacy of the current government.

Yesterday, almost half of influential parties who are running for election - they announced their disagreement with the shift to the parliamentary system and they announced that we'll urge the people of Kyrgyzstan to return again to a presidential system. And knowing this, how can anyone not only recognize the results of the referendum but also see it as a step toward stability?

Of course, it's most important for international community and very respected and esteemed international organizations as OSCE to support the Kyrgyz government after referendum. It was willingness to set up a positive attitude to interim government. But it's important to take into account what happened in our previous history.

In June 2005, the international community rushed to congratulate President Bakiyev, who won the presidential elections in the aftermath of March 2005 coup that violently overthrew the previous president. Unsurprisingly, Bakiyev then used his international support to strengthen his power through fabricated parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 and 2009, effectively denigrating the country to a de facto autocracy.

Still before, Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akaev, for years enjoyed the support, and almost adulation, of the international community, which he masterly manipulated to aggrandize his power and sow the seeds of pervasive instability in Kyrgyzstan.

I would like to underline what interim government has had hence on these ethnic clashes in the south because in the battle for power after the coup in April, they involved ethnic Uzbek community to political struggle. And this politicization brought Kyrgyzstan to this tragedy. Therefore, it is important to ask kindly the responsibility of provisional government and help them to be accountable before their citizens.

What happened in June in the south, it is a sign that despite two regime changes in the past five years, the nature of a ruling class in Kyrgyzstan remains largely unchanged: its interests, its survival and its enrichment remain far above the interests of its people. We all know that, that never leads to democracy or stability.

It's important for me to say about the role of external powers in Kyrgyzstan.

Leaders of both the United States and Russia suggest that they are pursuing a "pragmatic partnership" in their relations over Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a whole. However, the reality on the ground suggests that Russia is using this pragmatic partnership as a smokescreen to continue and intensify its strategy of reestablishing Central Asia precisely as its zone of privileged interests. The people of Kyrgyzstan would hope that while the U.S. pursues a partnership with Russia and Russia manipulates it, Kyrgyzstan would not terminally lose its sovereignty nor suffer intractable instability for years to come.

REP. HASTINGS: Doctor, I most regrettably have to proceed to cast a vote at this time. You did provide us with your written testimony. I do have a couple of questions and I would - I'll submit them to you - to you and Dr. Olcott. My deep apologies. And I'm fond of saying - and the staff gets tired of me hearing it - it's hard to apologize for working. Okay - (chuckles) - I'll talk to you. Thank you. The hearing is closed.

(END)