

U.S. Sees Stability After Kyrgyz Vote

October 17, 2010

The  Moscow Times

WASHINGTON — The United States hopes that any Kyrgyz government formed after Oct. 10's inconclusive elections will allow a U.S. air base to remain and it is ready to work with all the parties, a senior U.S. official said.

Asked whether he thought that a coalition formed by such a fractured electorate could govern effectively, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake said, "Certainly I do."

"There are many different permutations of parties that would enable a coalition to govern very effectively," said Blake, the top U.S. diplomat for South and Central Asia. "I don't see any real obstacles to that."

Kyrgyz voters cast ballots Oct. 10 to create what would be the first parliamentary democracy in Central Asia in an election that many hope can unite the poor, landlocked country four months after the worst bloodshed in its modern history.

Only five parties did well enough to win seats in the parliament, and none won more than 9 percent of the vote, necessitating a coalition government in a region long dominated by former Soviet strongmen.

"Having a coalition government will help to ensure that a wide range of views of the people of Kyrgyzstan are represented in the new government and will, in fact, enhance stability," Blake said in a telephone interview late last week.

The United States and Russia both have military air bases in Kyrgyzstan.

The Kyrgyz parliament voted in February 2009 to approve the U.S. base's closure after securing pledges of \$2 billion in aid and credit from Russia. Washington later agreed to pay Kyrgyzstan \$180 million in a deal to keep the base open until July 2011.

Blake shied away from saying whether Washington "expected" any new government to honor the deal, saying he did not wish to suggest that the United States was seeking to impose anything on the new government.

"I don't want to make any predictions about what the new coalition government will do about this or any other issue," he said. "We will be happy to discuss this matter with the new government if and when they would like to do so."

Blake said it was in U.S. and Kyrgyz interests to stabilize Afghanistan and to keep militants from moving to Central Asia, saying there were concerns that that may have happened in Tajikistan but no signs of it spreading as far as Kyrgyzstan.

"Certainly we hope they will honor it, but ... I am trying to say we are not trying to dictate terms or anything like that," he said. "As far as we are concerned, the agreement remains in effect until we are told otherwise."

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