

Kyrgyzstan Secures Russian Army Aid

January 18, 2012



Pronichev, second right, handing over the military aid to Atambayev, right. **Vladimir Pirogov**

BISHKEK — Kyrgyzstan received military trucks and communications equipment from Russia on Wednesday, the first part of an aid package to reinforce its fragile borders ahead of the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops from nearby Afghanistan.

Russia is supplying the equipment to the impoverished republic to increase security on the southern flanks of a region it still considers its sphere of influence.

The aid package, worth about \$16 million, reinforces ties between the two countries, whose newly elected president pleased the Kremlin by opposing the renewal of the lease on a U.S. military air base in the country beyond 2014.

"We have a shared past and, I'm sure, a shared future," President Almazbek Atambayev said at a ceremony attended by Kyrgyz border troops and the head of Russia's border service, Vladimir Pronichev.

"We know our history. We know our fathers and grandfathers fought for our shared motherland, the Soviet Union. I myself am the son of a front-line soldier who protected

the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War," Atambayev said.

Mainly Muslim Kyrgyzstan lies on a drug-trafficking route out of Afghanistan. Like Russia, it is also concerned about a possible spillover of Islamist militancy as NATO-led troops prepare to leave Afghanistan by 2014.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, secretary-general of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led regional security body, said last March that the withdrawal of NATO troops would create a threat to the entire Central Asian region.

The same month, Russia pledged technical and financial aid to Kyrgyzstan as part of a three-year program to fight the trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan.

Russia, like the United States, operates a military air base in Kyrgyzstan. Both countries have been in talks about the construction of separate training centers in the south of the country to counter the threat of crime and Islamist militancy. ☒

"Cross-border crime wants to stir up this region to create the conditions favorable for its needs," said Pronichev, head of the Russian Federal Security Service's border unit. "We are putting into action the decision of our presidents to reinforce the Kyrgyz Republic's border troops with modern technology."

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