

Kyrgyzstan Sets U.S. Air Base Closure Deadline

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BISHKEK — Kyrgyzstan on Thursday gave the United States until July next year to shut its air force base at Manas, a staging post for U.S. troops and supplies in the Afghanistan conflict but now deemed unnecessary as foreign forces pull out.

The move is likely to please Russia as it vies with the West and China for influence in the resource-rich region.

Troops from NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are preparing to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014, ending a costly and increasingly unpopular war launched after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by al-Qaida on U.S. cities.

The Manas Transit Center outside the capital city of Bishkek, is operated by about 1,000 U.S. servicemen and has been in operation since the end of 2001. The Kyrgyz government said in a note issued prior to a vote in parliament: "Further functioning of this facility is unnecessary."

Parliament passed the law by 91 votes to five, setting a deadline of July 11, 2014, for the base to close.

Russia secured an extension of the lease of its own air base in Kyrgyzstan last September.

Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev, elected in 2011, has staked heavily on closer ties with Russia and repeatedly assured Moscow that the U.S. air base would be shut in 2014.

Visiting Bishkek last September, President Vladimir Putin agreed to write off nearly \$500 million in debt from Kyrgyzstan in exchange for a package of deals that extended Moscow's economic and military foothold in the volatile nation.

This included a 15-year extension to Russia's lease of the Kant military air base outside Bishkek.

Ending its agreement on Manas with the United States, Kyrgyzstan will lose annually \$60 million paid by Washington for the lease and maybe more significant sums in indirect revenues from the base, parliamentarian Akmatbek Keldibekov said.

Kyrgyzstan is part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization of several post-Soviet states, which is led by Moscow. It is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization dominated by Russia and China.

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