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Kyrgyzstan Cancels Treaty With U.S. Over Awarded Dissident Controversy

By The Moscow Times

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Kyrgyz Prime Minister Temir Sariyev

BISHKEK — Kyrgyzstan canceled a cooperation treaty with the United States on Tuesday, raising the stakes in a diplomatic row triggered by the award of a human rights prize to a jailed dissident.

Kyrgyz Prime Minister Temir Sariyev ordered his cabinet to renounce the 1993 Bilateral Agreement with the U.S. It will not be valid starting Aug. 20, the government said in a statement.

The agreement provided for U.S. aid to Kyrgyzstan to be brought into and out of the country without the levying of taxes, customs duties or any other payment.

U.S. personnel located in Kyrgyzstan in connection with aid programs, both civil and military, were granted near-diplomatic status under that agreement.

Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Ministry on Friday protested to Washington over the award of a U.S. State Department human rights prize to Azimjon Askarov, a journalist and activist who is serving a life sentence for on charges of inciting ethnic hatred in the ex-Soviet republic.

International and local human rights bodies have demanded his release from jail.

The United States warned Kyrgyzstan on Monday that if it cancelled the agreement, it would undermine a wide range of aid programs varying from security to humanitarian issues and democracy.

The dispute takes place as Kyrgyzstan is being drawn deeper into the orbit of its former imperial master Russia.

Kyrgyzstan has just joined the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union, which critics see as Russia's attempt to restore as much as possible of the former Soviet Union.

Russia already has a military airbase near the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and has undertaken several large economic projects with the country. Hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz migrants work in Russia.

Kyrgyz government and U.S. Embassy officials could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

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