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U.S. To Continue Aiding Kyrgyzstan Despite Treaty Cancellation

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BISHKEK — The United States said on Wednesday it was disappointed by Kyrgyzstan's decision to cancel a cooperation treaty, but it would continue to provide assistance to the ex-Soviet republic despite a diplomatic row over a jailed dissident.

Kyrgyz Prime Minister Temir Sariyev ordered his cabinet on Tuesday to renounce the 1993 Bilateral Agreement with the United States, with effect from Aug. 20.

The agreement was the legal framework which facilitated U.S. humanitarian and technical economic assistance to Kyrgyzstan.

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 on charges of inciting ethnic hatred in the Central Asian nation.

"At times, we disagree, as we clearly have on this issue, but it is our ability to talk about our differences of opinion that have made the relationship strong," the U.S. government said in a statement published by the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek.

The U.S. has provided nearly $2 billion in assistance since the country's independence in 1991 "to support and strengthen Kyrgyzstan's democratic transition," it said.

The cancellation of the treaty threatens U.S.-funded programs in Kyrgyzstan, the statement said, but added: "We will continue to engage with and support the people of Kyrgyzstan." It gave no further detail.

The dispute takes place as chronically unstable 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.

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