

Kyrgyzstan: The Last Chance for Democracy in Central Asia

by

Ambassador Bakyt Beshimov

Bakyt Beshimov: First of all, I would like to thank the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute for inviting me and giving me this rare opportunity to speak before you. I'm delighted to be part of a very strong international team, from whom I've learned a lot of lessons, trying to set up an international university in Central Asia. I am very connected to this institute, and still get lots of interesting ideas and food for thought.

I am delighted to be here as the Vice-President of the American University of Central Asia. It is a unique academic entity in Central Asia. There you can see students from more than twenty countries—including all the Central Asian states, students from Afghanistan, from Turkmenistan, from Uzbekistan; and last year, our team made a visit to Mongolia in order to get some Mongolians. Our attempt to diversify our student body is important to us. We get inspiration and good ideas by talking to the young people from all the different countries of Central Asia.

I remember my first visit to the United States, it was in 1993. A man in New York, on Broadway, approached me and said, "Hey man, where are you from?" And it took time and effort to explain which country I come from. In the end, he did not understand me. And today, there are a lot of my countrymen in this audience, I'm happy to see the presence of a new generation of Kyrgyzstanis who will really change our country for the better and fulfill the hopes and high expectations of our

people. I am happy to see Professor Kazi and a lot of our American fellows who contributed a lot to the development of our country and are still generating new ideas and giving inspiration to the new generation of Kyrgyzstanis.

I'm glad to see my two sons. When I first visited the United States I visited Harvard University and many other universities, and I dreamed that my sons would have the opportunity to attend such a university in the future. Last year, my eldest son graduated from Harvard University and today he is a grown man, and my youngest son is an undergrad at Harvard. And this is how I understand American expectations and the American dream—it is real; it comes true. And I hope that if two Beshimovs can do this, many of our fellow Kyrgyzstanis can do even more. And in the future, I would like to see more university-educated Kyrgyzstanis who will bring prosperity and democracy to our very beautiful land.

I named my presentation "The Last Chance for Democracy in Central Asia," but I'd like to avoid any kind of populist approach and try to be rational and try to share with you my vision regarding the current situation, and also to talk a little bit about the future.

First of all, I would like to focus your attention on the structure of my presentation. It comprises three parts. In the first part, I'll talk about the big policy issues in Central Asia. And of course, I would like just briefly to share with you my

outlook regarding the role of major powers in Central Asian geopolitics. After that, I'll focus more on the Tulip Revolution. And my argument is different from the dominant opinion that the Kyrgyz Tulip Revolution was unsuccessful, that it is a source of instability, and it is something that is difficult to understand. In my view, it is simple to understand. It is a very important and a very positive movement in Central Asia. I'd also like to tell you about the relationship between energy security and democracy in Central Asia.

When I first received a letter of invitation for this seminar from Fred Starr, he said, "Please, would you tell us about the Tulip Revolution because many things are unclear and there is much contradictory information about this." I said, "Yes, I would like to do this and I would like to explain how I understand the situation." After that, I got a letter from Mr. Keiji Iwatake, who is here today, and he said, "Would you tell us a little bit about energy and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization" and I thought, "Ah-ha, how can I combine these two very important things?" And so, I decided to do two reports and then two presentations. And after that I decided, why not combine them and try to express my views regarding how energy security and democracy can highlight the situation in Central Asia?

Energy Resources, Democracy, and the U.S.

Let us move to the big question of oil in Central Asia. Central Asia today is emerging from a long period of obscurity due to its rich natural resources: oil, gas, hydropower, uranium. After that, we must consider its geographic location as a trade and transport corridor between China, Russia, and South Asia. And of course, Central Asia's unpredictable future is very

interesting for many experts. Is it a testing ground for secular democracy or autocracy? Which will prevail and how will we live in the decade to come?

I can explain in a few words the role of United States and its priorities in Central Asia: stability and security, sovereignty and independence, the right kind of integration, and trade and transportation corridors along the old Silk Road. And I am sure that you have heard about the research that occurs within the walls of this institute, and I heard that there was a very interesting presentation made by U.S. State Department officials regarding this very topic. In my view, the U.S. has a strong foundation upon which to build its relations in Central Asia: an attractive ideology and economic might. To be successful in its efforts, however, it needs to be cautious. As a more distant power, it is walking a tighter rope. For powerful states, it is very important to keep an account of each step and each policy approach.

The Roles of Russia and China

Regarding Russia, I can say that its goals are clear to us. They have many interests in this area and see it as part of their sphere of influence, and we can accept that. But we cannot accept other things, and I find them difficult to understand. For example, Vladislav Surkov, a Deputy Chief of Staff to the President of Russia recently expressed the following opinion with regard to CIS countries; I would like to quote him, "We have to remember that all these nations haven't been sovereign for a single day in their history. They do not have the skill of sovereign statehood. That is why it is quite clear that when Moscow is doing badly, they all without thinking run to another master. It is normal. They were a province of one country and can be a

province of another.” In our struggle for independence and sovereignty, which will take a long time, a lot of effort, how can we respect this kind of attitude, which can only be characterized as imperial?

I can say that today Central Asians see how different powers approach their region. One of them says that we would like to see these countries as sovereign and independent, integrated by their economic interests. But another power is saying that it is difficult for them in the near future to be independent.

Regarding China, I can say that it has only two goals in Central Asia. The first is to get access to energy resources, and the second is to counter support for Islamic terrorism and Uyghur separatism.

Let us now move to the Tulip Revolution, it is really the focus of my presentation.

Central Asian Political Systems

The Central Asian states, having chosen nation-state building as their priority in the post-communist period, differ in opinions regarding the role of democracy and market economy in this process. The ideas of liberalism are in demand in Kazakhstan. They found their way into the economy and will gradually come to life in the political life of Kazakhstan, but are totally rejected in other countries of the region. Kyrgyzstan is a separate story altogether.

As a result, these countries have various political regimes from despotic and dictatorial to semi-democratic. Even though Kazakhstan has achieved impressive economic successes and is recognized as having a market economy, the region is still a cause for concern because of the lack of stability and confidence regarding peaceful

development in the near future.

An Uncertain Future

You may ask, “What are the grounds for these concerns?” In the first place, the basic values that can engage states in mutually advantageous cooperation have not been established. No final agreement has been reached between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan regarding borders in the Fergana Valley, and dangerous conflicts continue to take place there. There are tensions between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan over border issues and raw materials. The Kyrgyz Parliament has not yet ratified the border treaty with Kazakhstan. The struggle for control of water resources has intensified. Despite the fact that Central Asian leaders always speak about regional security, their views regarding the safeguards of security and conditions of stability are more of a source of instability than ways to resolve these important problems.

“Color Revolutions”

In this connection, it is worthwhile to look at how the countries of Central Asia reacted to the “color revolutions” in post-Soviet countries and to the “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan. First of all, I would like to say something about the countries in the region: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. You know that an official in Moscow described “color revolutions” as an instrument of Western and particularly American influence, and all ruling elites in Central Asia have viewed the events in Kyrgyzstan with hostility and alarm. They focused only on disorder and disturbances. Mass media in the countries of Central Asia continue to report on the events in Kyrgyzstan in exclusively negative terms, in order to intimidate their own populations

and to create a bad image of “color revolutions.” The Shanghai Cooperation Organization recognized that Kyrgyz events are a dangerous source of instability, and they stressed in many meetings that the Andijan riots were directly influenced by the revolution. And in Russia, they even went further. They described the Tulip Revolution as a loss of sovereignty to foreign powers. Chinese analysts have come to the following conclusions, that color revolutions are exported from the West, namely from the United States.

Popular Participation and the Transfer of Power

But my view is very different. Serious internal problems, geopolitics, and the culture of Central Asia are the reasons for the disturbance in Kyrgyzstan. The idea of “color revolutions” supported by the West does not correspond to the realities of Central Asia in terms of geopolitics and culture.

I would like to raise the question of why our neighbors think this. The main sources of instability in Central Asia are the absence of peaceful democratic procedures for the transfer of power, and hostility toward dissent. I think that even in a good analytical report, the short-term negative consequences of the Tulip Revolution tend to obscure its essence in historical terms. I have visited remote regions in Kyrgyzstan and I have met a lot of ordinary people there, who, to my surprise, understand democracy and really respect their freedoms. In every town, they have low incomes, but they gathered small amounts of money, some of them giving a sheep or a goat, to help support the revolution. They want to help those who they supported and elected. It seems to me that democracy is about ordinary people taking care of their

country and respecting its movement to freedom.

In many countries that I have visited, in some Latin American countries and in our neighboring countries, you can see clashes between political groups with no participation of the people. But Kyrgyzstan is very different. In Kyrgyzstan, you can see how ordinary people actively participate in the political process. It seems to me that enabling them to express their own views is very important for the entire Central Asian region.

I would like to argue that the main source of instability is the absence of a power transfer mechanism. In Kyrgyzstan, Akayev came to power in 1991 and was forced to leave the country in 2005. But he strived to stay longer and to set up his own dynasty. In Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev came to power in 1990 and is still the President. You can say that Kazakhstan is more stable and successful as I stressed earlier. But what will happen in Kazakhstan in the near future if they do not establish legitimate rules to transfer power or to change the elites in power? In Uzbekistan, Karimov has been in power since 1991, and you know how they have treated their enemies and opponents.

I was surprised to read how he explained the events in Andijan in 2006. He said that the reasons for the mass disturbances were “dissatisfaction of the people with the local government.” He recognized the weaknesses of his own government and speaking at the session of the Andijan regional council of people’s deputies, he declared, “Extremists from the underground sect ‘Akramiylar’ and their foreign sponsors and patrons have taken advantage of a short-sighted policy of the local authorities.”

I was for two years the national manager of the UN Fergana Valley Development Program and I frequently visited the Uzbek side of the valley. And I can say they are hardworking people, very talented, but I saw a lot of heartbreaking situations. People can hardly stay alive in those extreme conditions, having an income sufficient to buy only five pieces of bread and, of course, they are under the total control of the local bureaucracy. What chance do they have? Therefore, the alternative to the Karimov regime could be Islamic socialism—it is a special theme which we can discuss later.

And you know that in Turkmenistan the President would like to stay in power for the rest of his life. In our university, I always feel uncomfortable when talking with Turkmen students because I always try to avoid asking questions about their home country. I realized that our Turkmen students never talk about the situation in Turkmenistan—never discuss it. But they are really happy to discuss the situation in Kyrgyzstan! It seems to me that this is our best contribution to the development of that country—the opening of the minds of Turkmen students; Professor Kazi told me that the Turkmen students are among the most talented students in our university.

In Tajikistan, as you know, Rahmonov intends to rule until 2020.

The “Tulip Revolution”

Therefore, I would like to once again focus your attention on the significance of the events in Kyrgyzstan. The most active section of the people of Kyrgyzstan put an end to the vicious and dangerous policies of a post-communist dictator. In Kyrgyzstan for the first time the people themselves decided to resolve the main question: Who

should govern their country?

This is the historic and political significance of the Tulip Revolution, and the major contribution by the people of Kyrgyzstan to spreading the idea of freedom in the region. The states of Central Asia will embark on the path of sustainable development, and a periodic change of leaders and governments will become a norm of political life. And the voice of opposition will become an indispensable component of political culture.

Stability is often discussed in our region and among various experts. In our neighboring countries, you can hear various definitions of stability, and it is frequently said that stability is their main priority—for stability, they must sacrifice everything. But I prefer the instability of Kyrgyzstan to the stability of some of our neighboring states. Because, I am sure, that our forward motion is better than their reversing to the past. Therefore, I would like to underline that the mass protests in Kyrgyzstan are a true sign of emancipation and enthusiasm for change in the country.

I myself participated in the demonstrations last November, and after that I went to Budapest to participate in a conference. And at that time in Budapest, the opposition organized a mass demonstration—parliament against the prime minister. I intentionally participated in this event in order to understand and to compare how the Kyrgyz organized demonstrations and how Hungarians are doing this kind of thing in order to get more experience. It seems to me that we are a little bit ahead. You can see why many foreigners believe that something is very dangerous about the events and demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan. But I can say that during the demonstration last year, not even a single window was

broken and not a single car burned. In Budapest it was different, but I do not want to say anything negative about the protesters in Budapest.

We would like to gain experience of democracy in practice, not long lessons in tyranny. And we have good momentum toward real democracy. One of our opposition leaders rightly expressed the view that both the authorities and the opposition gain experience from these demonstrations.

It is one thing when such moments take place in the Baltic countries and Eastern Europe, close to Euro-Atlantic civilization, in an area with accumulated experience of democratic development. The Kyrgyz events took place in the center of Eurasia, a region devoid of traditions of democracy and tolerance of one's opponents, which makes me believe that the main thing about the March events in Kyrgyzstan is not the disturbances, not the looting, and not the capture of the house of government, but lofty aspirations and a union of free citizens for a new democratic order. This is, indeed, the manifestation of democracy.

I would like to explain to you what happened after the Tulip Revolution. I like very much the definition of democracy given by the first president of Italy, Luigi Einaudi. He said that democracy is anarchy of the spirit under the rule of law. This could be applied to the Kyrgyz people, though without the phrase "the rule of law." One could say that the Kyrgyz are the main anarchists in Central Asia. The spirit of anarchy that is deeply rooted in us makes us free, but less successful in government building. We have created the strongest civil society in Central Asia. We have an active political opposition. We defend freedom of speech. We highly respect

human rights. But our government institutions are still weak and create many problems.

Many people forget that the Tulip Revolution was preceded by the Silk Revolution of 1990, when the top echelon of Communist nomenklatura was replaced with democrats under the pressure of mass demonstrations. I remember these events after the ethnic clashes in Osh. Young Kyrgyzstanis were gathered around the government building for one week—this was the first such event in Central Asia. After that, Communist Party domination was overturned. And Mr. Akayev, as the hope of the new Kyrgyzstan, was elected as the President. The second event, which today is forgotten, is that President Akayev was elected by the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic. At that time, the Kyrgyz Republic had a parliamentary form of government. But gradually, Mr. Akayev betrayed the ideals of the revolution, and he concentrated power in his hands. It seems to me that he made the biggest mistake of his life.

Energy Security and Democracy

The most difficult part of my topic is the discussion of the connection between energy security and democracy in Central Asia. Before I begin, I would like to tell you a story about how some presidents see their role in the life of their nations. It is a true story. I cannot say the names; you can just guess. One president was showing an important guest a statue of himself and said that his statue revolves around the sun. His guest spoke in excellent, flexible, and flattering terms and said, "No. It is the sun revolving around your statue." And the president of this country turned back to his subordinates and said, "Listen to him. He is a genius. Make a note of that for further

use.” If the people of their countries allow it, they will make sun revolve around themselves. This is the mentality of the dictators of Central Asia. Therefore, I’d like to once again underline that this is the main source of instability. It is their greed for power.

I said that it is not an easy topic because the situation is very complicated. And today, the developments in this area are giving us a lot of problems and raising a lot of questions to which we should give answers.

The Growing Presence of China

I would like to stress the growing presence of China. You know that China today is desperately looking for access to energy resources, and it is very active in Kazakhstan. Already, the Kazakh government has successfully implemented the project of a pipeline to Alashenkou worth more than U.S. \$2 billion. Second, they signed an agreement with the Turkmen government by which China will buy 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually. And of course, they are looking for hydroelectric power resources in Tajikistan and other countries.

Of course, these agreements have created concerns in Russia and the European Union. When Mr. Fradkov, the Prime Minister of Russia, visited Uzbekistan last year, he made a claim in his speech that the growing presence of China is creating more problems for Russia, so he really attempted to tighten up the relationship with Uzbekistan in order to get more gas for the pipelines of Gazprom and Lukoil.

Diversification of Export Routes

Another source of tension is supply and demand. You know that the United States

has always stressed the importance of multiple outlets for the energy resources of Central Asia. It is the desire of all Central Asians to seek these out. For instance, Kazakhstan is trying to diversify their export routes in an attempt to be more independent of Russian pipelines. Therefore, it is not surprising that Kazakhstan joined the very promising Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project, and they are ready to contribute to its successful implementation. Also, Turkmenistan is ready to establish gas pipelines through the territory of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. However, it is very complicated when the big powers are trying to get more access and the Central Asian states are trying to be more independent and to reap more benefits from their policy. How they can manage their situations depends on the strength of their ruling elites.

Russia does not want to simply guarantee the security of Western bound energy from Central Asia. Central Asians, for their part, do not only want to be primitive energy suppliers to Russia. Turkmenistan has tried to manage their situation in negotiations with Gazprom. They are always talking about how they would like to diversify their energy supplies and some experts spoke about the agreement between China and Turkmenistan. It is a kind of pressure on Gazprom to accept the Turkmen proposals regarding gas prices.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

About the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, I can say that it really is, in my opinion, a club of authoritarian states, and it could be an impediment to democratic reforms. You can find a lot of evidence for my opinion in the text of the agreements between China and Turkmenistan and many others. China

recognizes the natural right of these sovereign states to move to democracy in their own way. They are always trying to put in the agreements terms like “special circumstances.” Special circumstances, translated to normal language, means that if somebody is opposed to you, in special circumstances you can persecute them.

You can see that China accepts the disintegration of the bonds between Central Asian states as a positive development and is mostly focused on bilateral relations. China is trying to use the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a tool to control this situation and to keep Central Asia’s rich countries close to itself politically. As I said before, Russia still lacks a belief in the sovereignty of Central Asia. If they do not believe in our sovereignty and independence, how can we believe that they are able to be positive towards us and our motion toward real independence?

Models of Development

I would like to give two examples of how oil revenues can be used. The example countries are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. You know that they started from the same position and that Uzbekistan is the most populous country in the region. But they selected different models of development. For instance, Kazakhstan, during the past fifteen years, really liberalized the economy and implemented successful reforms in different sectors of social life. And today, the GDP in Kazakhstan is about U.S. \$56 billion, more than \$3,000 per capita. Kazakhstan intends to double its GDP by 2008. Kazakh exports today are roughly U.S. \$56 billion.

If you compare Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan, it is a very different picture.

GDP in Uzbekistan is about \$11 billion and exports about \$5 billion and the GDP per capita is about \$450. Their population is 1.5 times that of Kazakhstan, but agricultural production in Uzbekistan exceeds that of Kazakhstan by only 1.1 times. It means this despotic regime will not bring prosperity to the people. The Kazakh model of development—liberalize the economy first and after that start to move toward openness in the society—may be a good model for Central Asia.

It is very important to be realistic, of course. I know about the different opinions of experts regarding Central Asia. Some experts, and I can join with them, say that it is important to establish the rule of law, get more income for the people, to stabilize the situation and the economy, to recognize property rights, and after that maybe move to a democratic system. Therefore, one of my key proposals is to recognize that Kazakhstan is a possible modernization model for rich Central Asian states, those that can use the revenue from oil for the benefit of the people and for democratic development.

But what about the Kyrgyz model? The Kyrgyz model is very different, and it seems to me that Kyrgyzstan can introduce to the world another model which will be attractive—an example of consensus democracy. This number one anarchist in Central Asia can recognize the rights of other countries, if their own rights will be equally recognized. And therefore, we are moving to democracy with the participation of the population and with the strengthening of civil society. It is very important that we recognize this as a priority in our development.

And finally, I would like to say that it is important to analyze the situation in Central

Asia by understanding the mentality and culture of the people—their historical heritage. Doing that, do not look negatively at the consequences of some events but try to understand that the political events in Kyrgyzstan are a focus of their striving for freedom. Freedom is essential for us. Of course, it is difficult. Of course, it creates a lot of problems. Even today, I can say that the events in Kyrgyzstan can bring us to the point of disintegration of the country, to the division of our Kyrgyzstan into two states—south and north. But strong civil society and this striving for freedom and the participation of ordinary people, this is an opportunity not to show a negative model of development, but to express to the world how Central Asia can create democracy on their own. Thank you very much and please excuse my emotional presentation. Thank you very much.

Anara Tabyshalieva: I will be brief and practical. I would like to thank Bakyt very much for his comprehensive and very interesting presentation. I met Bakyt long ago in Bishkek, thirty years ago. So we are old friends. I met him when he was in Osh, but we haven't been in contact recently.

Kyrgyzstan's Current Situation

The situation is complicated in Kyrgyzstan and I wanted to talk about what will happen and what kind of scenarios we might have. The most important questions people would probably ask are: How long will President Bakiyev remain in power, and can he control the situation in the country? And what are the best scenarios and the pessimistic scenarios?

I would say that it is unlikely for our president to stay until 2010. It is unlikely that he will be able to control the situation in the country. And that scenario may

include an agreement between the President and Kulov and other opposition leaders to form a coalition government to continue economic and political reforms. A pessimistic scenario presumes that a strong presidency like in neighboring countries will prevail. The President might use the army and state-paid protesters and criminal groups to intervene and foment a coup and install a president from Bakiyev's camp.

Another pessimistic scenario is that top officials from the security forces might seize power. Russia could also intervene and if you remember two years ago, they offered to bring troops within four hours. The situation might be more unstable this year and things will be unsettled between regional elites and could be complicated by ethnic and religious disputes, especially in the south. In addition, some conflict between criminal groups could cause a further deterioration of the situation.

As a small footnote, when we talk about Kyrgyzstan and other countries, I noticed a different understanding, different connotations for the same words, especially when we talk about revolution. In our country, part of the former Soviet Union, revolution has a positive connotation and it raises the expectations of the people. People think that something better could happen and that is why they are impatient for reform. Lately people might see revolution in a more negative light and people know that it is not automatic that positive changes will happen after a revolution. So, that is why there are different definitions of the same word.

It strikes me that the nation is actually divided into two big groups. Bakiyev's forces, and Kulov's and other opposition forces. They both disregard the numerous economic reports written by foreign and

local organs. I'm just surprised that they do not read these reports from the ADB, World Bank, and a lot of other advisers who come to Kyrgyzstan. Nobody uses these when they discuss the situation in the country. If we think about why Akayev was successful for such a long time, I think that Akayev, as a scholar, perhaps could understand what the international advisers said to him. And that is why he used their vocabulary. Of course, he did not follow their advice, but he used their vocabulary. So people thought he had a real economic agenda—he had something in his mind.

But if you look at both groups today, opposition leaders and Bakiyev and his advisers, there is a lack of discussion of the common agenda. Despite funds spent by and on international institutions in our country, local decision-makers and international experts communicate too little with each other. It is just a parallel process.

Another thing that concerns me is that both groups, if you look at the president and the opposition camp, lack a fusion of economic and social agendas. They talk about issues regarding power sharing, and often disregard the problematic economic situation and poverty in Kyrgyzstan. It surprises me when I read the news everyday.

Policy Recommendations

I would like to make some recommendations. Of course, I agree with Bakyt, and he is absolutely right when he says that it is a learning process. This transition is important for us, and there will be mistakes. There are lessons that we have learned to modernize Kyrgyzstan. But again, it is still a painful transitional process.

What can we do now in Kyrgyzstan? First of all, we must support negotiations between the two groups: the opposition and the president's team. They should try to negotiate and to find something in common. Second, prevent the intervention of Russia and/or neighboring countries in case of chaos in Kyrgyzstan. So, there should be some rules of the game. And also, it is very important to prepare a team of professionals in conflict management. There should be people who can help both groups to understand and to hear each other.

Also, I think that international financial institutions should use conditionality to encourage political, economic, and social reforms. It is important to continue to support civil society groups, media, the private business sector. Maybe more local politicians should be invited to Washington. Kyrgyzstan could be a showcase for Central Asia and for the former Soviet Union. However, the U.S. has cut aid to Kyrgyzstan and it now receives less aid than it did several years ago and less than Tajikistan does today.

I think what is also very important is for people in Kyrgyzstan to have access to media. It is easy to cut off information and block the Internet, which increasingly plays an important role in Kyrgyzstan. There should also be more useful websites for the youth and other groups. Thank you very much.

India's Role

Frederick Starr: Thank you both very much. I would like to begin if I may by asking Ambassador Beshimov a question. You did not mention India among the surrounding countries that play a role, yet you served there for five years as ambassador.

Beshimov: Yes. First of all, I never met during my term there high level Indian officials who mentioned the role of India as a democratic country and as a country that can promote democracy in Central Asia. Never. They mostly talked about access to energy resources, especially in Kazakhstan, how to get access to uranium, and then after that, how to diversify trade between Central Asia and South Asia. Also, they talked about the situation with Pakistan. But India should play a greater role. The concept of a greater Central Asia will be implemented successfully only if India as a democratic nation promotes democracy in Central Asia. This is a challenge for India if they want to believe that they are really the biggest democracy in the world.

Starr: The floor is now open for questions.

U.S. Policy in Central Asia

Questioner: I was very intrigued by your comment that the Kyrgyz are perhaps the single most important “anarchists” in the region. I’m curious how you see U.S. government reaction to that? Generally, the U.S. government is not thrilled with anarchists around the world. Or, specifically, the U.S. government has had pretty substantial relationships with the dictators in the region for many reasons that you pointed out: Russia and China are interested, access to the important resources, as well as military basing in the region. So I am curious how you would respond to this seeming contradiction between the rhetoric of the United States, which is often in support of the revolutions and the underlying anarchism, and the more realpolitik concerns of the U.S. government.

Beshimov: Thank you very much. To me, the strategy of the United States in Central

Asia is clear. It is to support Central Asians in strengthening their sovereignty and independence and to increase integration. But I can understand why some people see this as unrealistic. It is just fifteen years after the collapse of Soviet Union and it is a short time, historically. The time of integration will come, as of course will the time to promote freedom and democracy in Central Asia. But there are some practical issues, that can be complicated if officials get involved in the wrong way. Therefore I must underline in my presentation that it is important for big powers to account for each step. I would like to give two examples.

First, about the investigation regarding the ill-gotten assets of President Akayev from the U.S. airbase deal. The lawyer hired by the Kyrgyz government, Mr. Lieberman, inquired into this and said that officials from the U.S. Embassy were involved in corrupt activities with the Akayev family, who used their oil supplies to advance their own financial interests. Of course, it is very sad. Second, the discussion in Kyrgyzstan regarding the involvement of Kyrgyzstan in the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) program. The opposition to that was so powerful that the government decided to stay away and not to take part in it.

Practically, it is very important for the government to be transparent, manageable, and for it to fight against corruption. It is important to be free from our huge debts and it was an opportunity to write off part of the debt, which is really very heavy for us. But this is a corrupt government. It is impossible to deal with these problems properly and we may put our country in a more difficult situation. In the eyes of the population, the debt policies of the World Bank and the IMF are connected with the

U.S.

Another example is that when one of the resident representatives of the World Bank left office there, he came back to our country and tried to open a casino with one of Akayev's sons. How can you explain to the people that the World Bank and IMF are implementing good policies if they are doing such things? Thank you.

The Importance of Supporting the Tulip Revolution

Questioner: Given the current political developments in Kyrgyzstan and the overall geopolitical situation in Central Asia, would you consider changing the title of your presentation from "The Last Chance for Democracy" to "The First Chance for Democracy in Central Asia" to support the idea of bringing the youth and the youngest and brightest into places of influence in Kyrgyzstan? Thank you.

Beshimov: Thank you very much for your question. I named it "The Last Chance" because I would like to tell the audience and people who will listen to me how important it is to support the Kyrgyz Revolution. This is the definition of a revolution: it is a revolution in mind, it is a revolution in behavior, and it is a revolution in how people take care of their own country. It is about them. Because during Soviet times, the regime decided how it should use people according to their own plans and they used people in many ways. Today, we have people on their own, voluntarily taking care of their country and their future, which is a good change. It is a real revolution.

I just came from Kazakhstan, and during the official presentation of course they did not support me, but in our personal

meetings they said, "Yes, we would like to see a success story in Kyrgyzstan." It is so important for us because a strong civil society and a free press is a rare phenomenon in Central Asia. And Kazakhs would like to see these too, because Kazakh officials are looking for a very smart power transfer from Nazarbayev to another elite group and to make the country more sustainable. The lessons from Kyrgyzstan are so essential for them. It will be a great loss for them if the Kyrgyz revolution fails. There is a lot of hope in Uzbekistan, in Turkmenistan, in the entirety of Central Asia. I do not want to see it fail. Therefore, this number one anarchist in Central Asia should make a successful motion to freedom.

Regarding us as anarchists, I would like to say that Kyrgyzstan came to life historically as a union of forty tribes. In this union of forty tribes, smaller tribes did not always have to submit to the will of the larger tribes or the majority of the tribes. There were times when larger tribes and the majority of the tribes followed smaller tribes and minority groupings of tribes. This has led to a growing recognition of the rights of minorities. Thank you.

Kyrgyzstan in the Short Term

Questioner: What is your forecast as to how political events will develop in the next year or two?

Beshimov: Thank you. My understanding is that after the revolution, unfortunately, the immature opposition elite selected, it seems, the wrong person for the presidency. And therefore, they are today facing the consequences of that. For us, it is so important to do something in order to avoid corrupting our young people and to stop these bad practices. It seems to me they

will find a way to do it. I'm not comfortable with the current government. It is unprofessional, unfortunately. Once a journalist in my country asked me, "What would you do about this?" I said, "I would make sure that many Kyrgyz nationals graduate from the best universities worldwide and would staff our government with the best professionals." Why not do that? Today I met with a brilliant lady who graduated from the Fletcher School at Tufts University, a top school, and she is not in the Foreign Ministry. Why? Today, the situation in Kyrgyzstan is the last chance for Soviet *nomenklatura* to be involved. It will change and I hope to see that.

Starr: Let me intervene here with a question. Whatever the longevity of Mr. Bakiyev as president, the office of President has itself changed. The staff, power, authority of the presidency in the Kyrgyz Republic is dramatically changing, and any successor is going to face a situation in which you have a parliament full of your Kyrgyz anarchists and very active organizations, groups, and so on. Are you confident that in 2007, 2008—not 2015—the active political citizenry of the Kyrgyz Republic can manage such a formidable task responsibly? This, in other words, is not a question of the president, but about the rest of the government which has become relatively more important.

Beshimov: Not an easy question. They are practicing democracy, not just reading books about democracy. These are lessons and this is practice; it's important for us. A delegation from Germany visited our country and a German lady asked me a question: "Why is there so much instability in your country and how you can resolve this?" and so forth. Why are you looking at Kyrgyzstan like it is today's Germany? Let us compare the Weimar Republic to these

times; maybe we are passing through that period today. We must pay the price for freedom and democracy. We should learn democracy and practice democracy. About the government, if the opposition builds a united effort and comes to the conclusions that are necessary for a democratic nation, of course they will be successful.

It seems to me that many Kyrgyz people who are currently abroad will come and try to restore their own country. I have met with a lot of my young fellow countrymen. They are ready to help change the country.

But other scenarios are possible, too, which Anara mentioned. That is, some kind of disintegration and division of the country into regions, or if Mr. Bakiyev tries to get the support of his followers and so on. But, we have a good civil society and NGOs, and I recognize these as part of the social fabric of our society. They can unite the country; they will not disintegrate the country. And they help to promote professionalism in the government.

Kazakhstan is full of young people in Nazarbayev's government, I met with officials who are 27 to 30 years old, western educated, very bright, and thinking globally. I would like to see more of this in my country. I believe it is possible.

Parliamentary vs. Presidential Systems

Questioner: Thank you for your insightful presentation. I have a question about the parliament. What are your thoughts about that type of system compared to a presidential system? And what do you think of the current parliament?

Beshimov: It is under discussion in our country as to which form of government is best for Kyrgyzstan: presidential,

presidential/parliamentary or parliamentary. I am a former parliamentarian, and think that system is a good match for the mentality and culture of the Kyrgyz people, and if you look at the history of the Kyrgyz people you can see a lot of signs of that. Regarding the presidential form of government, after fifteen years we have realized that it does not serve our interests because each president would like to concentrate more power in their own hands. We had a parliamentary system after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it later switched to a presidential system.

Regarding the current parliament, it was a mistake and it is still a mistake to keep this parliament. It should have been dismissed after the revolution, but it was retained by both Bakiyev and Kulov. Today we are facing the consequences of this mistake. We now have a discussion of a new constitution. This constitution should have elections based on a party system and issues should be addressed by the parties, not based on regionalism, but on ideology. And hopefully it will bring more promising MPs to parliament than we have today.

Nomadic Heritage and Political Culture

Starr: I would like to return to the title of your talk. You wanted to go with this and it was your choice, in terms of the region, and the relevance of the events in the Kyrgyz Republic to the entire region. But then in the course of your talk you withdrew into a kind of cultural fortress. You said, “Well, there are forty tribes and it is the Kyrgyz mentality of anarchism” and so on, which, I think, we we’ll all be quoting. But you really finally came down to say, “This is going to work because it fits our nomadic heritage.”

That sounds like it is the direction of your talk. You and I have spent a lot time

together in Tajikistan. Traditionally, the Tajiks are an urban people. The Uzbeks for hundreds of years have been predominantly non-nomadic. Does this vision that you have really have relevance for the region, or is it something that is relevant for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and Mongolia?

Beshimov: Thank you. Yes, we really need to make that distinction. The situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and maybe in Mongolia is different because of the nomadic heritage; the nomadic way of life really made their political life different. In a settled society like Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan, it is different.

In India, they used to ask me, “Please, would you tell us who are the Kyrgyz?” For instance, when I say Japanese, it is sake and karate; Russians, it is ballet and vodka. What about the Kyrgyz? It was difficult, but I figured out something to say. I said, “Look, when you have two Kyrgyz, you usually have four political parties.” It is like that. It is different from the more settled societies in Central Asia.

Paid Protesters

Questioner: Thank you for your elucidating presentation. I was in Dushanbe when the revolution happened, and they asked me to be deployed to Bishkek to do governance work and to consult with the government and to make assessments and recommendations. In that assessment, I interviewed fifty stakeholders in the government and some at the ministerial level, and some of you in the audience here I talked to in Bishkek. I also spoke with people at the municipal level and grassroots civil society. During my assessment, many voices said to me that there were paid elements in the revolution, that it was not indigenous and not organic,

but that there were paid protesters. This sentiment was echoed by a variety of people.

Beshimov: It is a very good question, thank you. I don't quite know what to say about that. I personally participated in these events, and I have a close relationship with the main opposition leaders. I can say yes, in some ways, it is true that roughly 20% were paid. But on November 8th, I saw about 60,000 people. Who can buy this number of people? Second, when I visited rural areas, there were protesters. No, they were not paid. Some said they marched to Bishkek on their own. But of course, there are some opposition leaders who would pay people. They used money to advance their own interests. But the majority participated voluntarily because they are not happy with the current situation.

Starr: Any concluding comments?

The Kyrgyz Revolution in Central Asia

Tabyshalieva: I forgot to mention that some Tajik people, when talking about the Kyrgyz revolution, compare it with their "revolution." They say that the first color revolution took place in Dushanbe, but Russia intervened to support the communist leader. So they might see our events slightly differently. I think we need to pay more attention to the general situation in Central Asia, not just in Kyrgyzstan. How do people in Central Asia see the situation in Kyrgyzstan? I fully agree with Bakyt Beshimov that the Kyrgyz lessons are very important because what happened in Kyrgyzstan might be useful for future developments in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.

Starr: I want to thank you both very much.

I mean, your last comment, of course, immediately raises the question, what about Xinjiang? The crux of your argument would, I think, cause serious concern in Beijing which, I suppose, at some point has to be taken seriously into account.

Citizenship

I want to thank you both particularly for one thing. Bakyt introduced this notion of a kind of jovial anarchism, and we all understand exactly how you used the term. But I would like to suggest another word which should always accompany it, and that is citizenship. If something interesting, unusual, and important is occurring in your country, it would seem to me it has to do with the emergence of people with a true sense of citizenship—not subjects.

So this is something new—citizenship in an organized state which is active in the world and at home and so forth. It seems to me that wherever you come down on the events since March 24th, a year and half ago, wherever you come down, even supporters of the old regime would have to admit that there is something very active occurring in the realm of citizenship in the Kyrgyz Republic. And I am now sitting with these two wonderful people here, and it seems to me they absolutely exemplify this. And what we heard from Bakyt Beshimov this afternoon is a living example of what citizenship is because he is not in the government; he is not in an organized way in the opposition. He is very much an independent person and he is acting as a citizen. And wherever this all leads, I must say, I take inspiration from that as I always have from Anara, as well. Thank you both.