

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D),B6

CONFIDENTIAL

April 8, 2010

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Kyrgyzstan

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My friend [redacted] with two decades of extensive dealings in Kyrgyzstan, and [redacted] [redacted] has been in close contact with his high-level sources there over the past 72 hours, and sends me the following memo. It is particularly well informed on the new interim leader, Roza Otunbayeva, whom he knows well, the internal politics post-revolution, and how DOD and State are relatively regarded and what that means.

To: Sid Blumenthal

From: [redacted]

Date: April 8, 2010

Subj: Change of Government in Kyrgyzstan

I have worked in the Kyrgyz Republic continuously since 1991 [redacted] [redacted] I became acquainted with each of the three Kyrgyz leaders from about that time, first meeting Askar Akayev in 1990 in Moscow, Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Djalalabad in 1993, and Roza Otunbayeva in Bishkek in 1992. I have had extended dealings with each of them on many different matters, largely inside Kyrgyzstan, although I first dealt extensively with Otunbayeva when she served as Kyrgyz ambassador in the United States.

Assessment of Otunbayeva: The opposition forces selected Otunbayeva for several reasons: (i) among them she is the only figure who commands recognition and respect abroad; (ii) in the eyes of the Kyrgyz people she is closely associated with the Kyrgyz

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Tulip Revolution of 2005, yet she alone among the leaders of that revolution upheld its idealism, openly castigated Bakiyev and others for their corruption and failure to follow through on promises, and personally avoided corruption and graft; and (iii) she lacks a strong domestic power base and therefore is seen as less of a threat to the alternative candidates. Based on these factors, several of the opposition leaders tell me a quick consensus was reached that Otunbayeva should be the provisional leader and the “face to the world” of the new revolution.

Otunbayeva, who is 59, launched her career in the diplomatic service, obtaining the position of foreign minister of the Kyrgyz SSR at a precocious age. She served in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and caught the eye of Eduard Shevardnadze, who appointed her as a vice minister—an unprecedented accomplishment for a Central Asian and for a woman then in her late 30s. Shevardnadze told me in 2002 that he had viewed Otunbayeva as a person of extraordinary skills, well qualified to succeed him as Soviet foreign minister. He noted her ability quickly to grasp complex problems and to propose novel and interesting solutions. He called her a “natural diplomat” with an instinctive tendency to reconcile, but also with a clear grasp of policy objectives and a methodical approach to their accomplishment. My own experience in dealing with Otunbayeva confirms these observations. She has a measure of idealism that often guides her policy orientation, but she is instinctively pragmatic in her approach.

Otunbayeva defies categorization in terms of political philosophy. Her political parties, first Ata-Jurt (“Fatherland”), then the Social Democrats, are often portrayed as “leftists” on the political scale in Kyrgyzstan, but the party orients itself to continental European social democrats and to the British Labour Party (with which Otunbayeva has solid connections, including with Tony Blair). While schooled in basic concepts of Marxism-Leninism, which occasionally appear in conversation (though often as not in a joking way), her politics is fundamentally one of pragmatic engagement. She advocates maintenance of the republic’s Soviet era social net and pays particular attention to health and education issues. She was a vigorous advocate for and supporter of the American University in Bishkek and was repeatedly identified for board membership—she declined one offer saying that her role as an opposition leader would probably complicate the university’s relations with the government. As ambassador, Otunbayeva went to bat aggressively for foreign investors, helped them secure concessions, and advocated for them against government red tape. I am unaware of any instance in which she ever sought personal gain or advancement in connection with these deals, however. She is very unusual among Kyrgyz political figures in her rejection of rent-seeking and her loud denunciation of political figures who use their office for personal gain. Indeed, this aspect of her personality has won her some respect in the public, but general disdain among the political class, who frequently disparage her as “unrealistic.”

Otunbayeva served extended periods in Washington and London as the Kyrgyz ambassador. She has a fluent and subtle command of the English language, and a broadly positive view of the United States and the United Kingdom. Of the three Kyrgyz leaders to date, she is clearly the one with the deepest understanding of American culture and the American political environment and the one with the most instinctively pro-

American leanings.

Otunbayeva believes that for cultural, commercial and security reasons, a stable relationship between Bishkek and Moscow is a matter of primary concern.

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Her Position within the New Government. Opposition leaders with whom I have spoken expect that Bakiyev will resign, that the opposition will dissolve parliament and form a new interim government with Otunbayeva as its leader and that new elections will then soon be called first for president and then for a new parliament. Many of the opposition figures doubt that Otunbayeva can be a successful candidate for president especially given her weak performance in prior elections to parliament. Tekebayev is more broadly expected to emerge as their nominee. However, there is recognition that, Otunbayeva may, if she skillfully manages the transition period, develop the necessary popular basis and emerge as leader. It is stressed that her prospects increase as relations with foreign powers are seen as problematic, since she alone among the opposition figures is viewed as having the stature and skills necessary to cope with difficult foreign affairs problems.

Opposition Relations With Bishkek Embassy. Opposition leaders express a broadly positive view of U.S. ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller.



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One other fact is very important here: Otunbayeva herself is a professional diplomat. She will strongly prefer to address these issues through diplomatic dialogue with other professional diplomats.

All of this suggests to me the necessity for the State Department to assert itself and take the lead in developing relations with the new government.