

Kyrgyz Opposition Sounds Revolutionary Note

Author: [IWPR Central Asia](#)

Emergence of “Revolutionary Committee” marks new stage in the progressive radicalisation of opposition forces.

Opposition parties in Kyrgyzstan have launched a radical new movement to topple President Kurmanbek Bakiev, saying he has betrayed the hopes of those who brought him to power in 2005.

They say they have no alternative but to seek Bakiev’s early removal from power because they have been excluded from decision-making owing to the total domination of parliament by the pro-presidential Ak Jol party.

The new “Revolutionary Committee” was set up in late January under Azimbek Beknazarov, a high-profile opposition leader who heads of the Asaba party, which did not win seats in parliament in the December election.

A representative of the Revolutionary Committee told IWPR that President Bakiev - who came to power after turbulent street protests culminating in the so-called Tulip Revolution of March 2005 - had betrayed the hopes of the nation.

Elected in July that year, Bakiev is not due to step down or seek re-election until 2010.

In a public statement, the Revolutionary Committee accused Bakiev of failing to return the national wealth “stolen” during the rule of his predecessor Askar Akaev, of failing to keep to promises not to allow his relatives to take state positions, and of blocking the adoption of a truly progressive constitution.

The message accused Akaev of striving to create a “family tribal state”.

“The Revolutionary Committee believes that a head of state who does not care about the interests of the people, about the country’s territorial integrity, or about a free economy or public security, cannot stay in office until 2010,” said the statement.

It went on to warn Bakiev “not to repeat the fate of Akaev, but to repent and ask pardon from the people on March 24, 2008, the third anniversary of the March revolution.”

The creation of the new committee undoubtedly reflects disappointment with the fruits of the Tulip Revolution, which channeled popular anger at President Akaev’s rule.

Among the principal stated goals of the 2005 protests were root-and-branch constitutional reform and greater transparency in official decision-making.

But the results have been inconclusive - constitutional wrangling, and failure to deliver promised economic

reforms. Bakiev's former allies quickly formed a new opposition which staged a series of massive protests, although these appeared to run out of steam last spring.

The text of the Kyrgyz constitution has lain at the heart of this confrontation, and the document has been changed three times since Bakiev became president.

The first change, which he approved under pressure from street protests in November 2006, significantly increased the powers of parliament. The following month, however, Bakiev pressured the legislature into giving him back most of the powers he had just ceded.

After the Constitutional Court ruled both these versions invalid, the president came up with yet another constitution, which was rushed through a national referendum in October 2007.

This constitution stipulated that parliament should be elected entirely by proportional representation, and that the majority party would get to nominate the prime minister.

Bakiev immediately called an election, which took place in December and left his Ak Jol party, set up just two months before the ballot, in control of 70 of the 90 seats in parliament.

Eleven seats were awarded to the moderate opposition Social Democratic Party and nine to the Communists, but nine other parties, including the popular Ata Meken and Asaba, did not win a single seat, as they failed to meet a controversial requirement that parties had to win a set number of votes in each of the country's nine voting regions.

The excluded opposition parties have been plotting their response ever since.

In mid-January, groups dissatisfied with the election result declared the formation of a "Public Parliament", comprising 12 political parties and 21 non-governmental organisations. The founders said this alternative parliament would act as a forum for generating new policy ideas.

Some observers of the political scene say the Bakiev administration's monopolisation of political institutions has forced the opposition into adopting more radical positions, of which the Revolutionary Committee is the latest example.

"The narrowing of the channels of legitimate access to power has led to the radicalisation of the opposition," noted political scientist Tamerlan Ibraimov.

"Given the current social and political situation, the readiness to protest in the country is very high."

Miroslav Niazov, a commentator on public affairs, says the opposition has been pushed into a corner. As opposition parties have been left with no tactics other than creating an underground movement, Niazov says the political outlook is grim.

“The government must understand that it has created the conditions not for stability but for destabilisation,” he said.

“If the government itself practices lawlessness, it has no right to demand orderliness from the people. Therefore, anything is possible in Kyrgyzstan, including the emergence of a fresh new opposition.”

Although Beknazarov has vowed that the Revolutionary Committee will use only constitutional methods, it is indicative of the polarised and mistrustful political climate in Kyrgyzstan that the names of most members are to remain concealed for security reasons.

One member of the Revolutionary Committee who has come out into the open, former member of parliament Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, said the committee would only be effective if it kept much of its activities secret.

“The Revolutionary Committee has deliberately chosen to operate semi-covertly,” he said. “This will allow us to act more effectively and will increase the likelihood of achieving our main goal – the early dismissal of the head of state.”

The government says it is unruffled by the opposition’s incendiary language.

Zainiddin Kurmanov, a parliamentary deputy from Ak Jol, insists streets putches are no longer on the cards, as Kyrgyzstan has moved on from the situation that pertained in March 2005. Moreover, there remain serious splits within the opposition.

“This is Beknazarov’s swansong after his party received only two per cent in the elections,” Kurmanov maintained.

He denied that opposition parties were being excluded from the national dialogue.

“Despite all the tension in relations between the government and opposition, attempts are being made to establish consultative cooperation with part of the opposition,” he said.

Valentin Bogatyrev, from the Perspektiva think tank, also doubts that the Revolutionary Committee will be able to unify a mass of opposition parties adhering to a variety of often irreconcilable political positions.

“Beknazarov himself will not be able to unite the opposition, and he represents only one part of it - and not the most promising part,” Bogatyrev said.

However, the Social Democrat parliamentarian and former diplomat Roza Otunbaeva, a key figure in the March 2005 revolution, said the government should not be complacent.

She urged the authorities to listen more carefully to opposition voices if they wanted to stem the drift towards radicalisation, noting with regret what she sees as their growing intolerance of dissent and criticism.

Otunbaeva said the opposition felt increasingly muzzled after protests in Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, were recently limited to three designated sites.

“A number of opposition parties are being intimidated and freedom to demonstrate is being suppressed. All the TV channels and newspapers that are dependent on the government say the same thing, and show Ak Jol officials singing the praises of the government,” she said.

“The government should and must find a common language with the radicals and not push them out of the political space. It must unclench its fist, restore freedom of speech and assembly, free all political prisoners and stop persecuting opposition leaders.”

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