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NO RUSSIANS ARE COMING. RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPERS WILL KEEP THEIR DISTANCE FROM ETHNIC CLASHES IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN

Author: Polina Khimshiashvili, Aleksei Nikolsky [Expert: Nobody wants to get involved in the mess that is the Kyrgyz crisis.]

Russian peacekeepers were ordered to keep their distance from ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan. Material aid from the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is all the interim government may count on. Secretaries of security councils of CSTO member states met yesterday in Moscow to discuss the alarming news from Kyrgyzstan. The consensus was that the efforts of the interim government were insufficient to restore order. The authorities reported 124 killed and 1,600 wounded over three days of ethnic clashes in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of Kyrgyzstan. Interfax quoted the locals as saying that there had been many more victims.

CSTO General Secretary Nikolai Bordyuzha met with President Dmitry Medvedev and plainly said that involvement of peacekeepers in the conflict was out of the question. "Manpower is sufficient, but peacekeepers lack hardware, helicopters, transport means, and even fuel. They might be deployed but not before all of that is provided," said Bordyuzha. Medvedev allowed for the possibility of an urgent meeting of the heads of states.

Speaking at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, Medvedev denied existence of the plans to involve the CSTO and its forces in the Kyrgyz crisis. Roza Otunbayeva, the head of the interim government, meanwhile asked Russia to dispatch peacekeepers to southern Kyrgyzstan. Ex-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev suggested deployment of peacekeepers, too. "Peacekeeping operations on the territory of CSTO member states require a decision of all presidents and a formal request from a member state in trouble. That is, provided that national legislations are no barrier. Anyway, Otunbayeva's appeal could put this mechanism into motion but the catch is, nobody wants to become involved in this mess," said Vladimir Zharikhin of the Institute of CIS Countries. "Deployment of a military contingent is the last resort. Just separation of the warring parties will be impossible, considering that they live intermingled."

Russian political scientist Aleksei Vlasov pointed out that the decision to dispatch peacekeepers required a consensus, meaning that it should be authorized by all seven CSTO presidents. Some experts had entertained the hope that the CSTO would overcome discord and dispatch peacekeepers indeed. They turned out to be wrong. Indeed, what do Armenia or Belarus care about what is happening in distant Kyrgyzstan?

Otunbayeva said that the conflict had been fomented by enemies of the interim government resolved to display weakness of the new regime. According to ex-premier Felix Kulov, the conflict was incited by Bakiyev's supporters. Sergei Masaulov of the Kyrgyz Institute of Strategic Analysis said that Bakiyev's followers and supporters were not the only ones to blame. Masaulov said that some Kyrgyz clans aspiring to political power in the country, some of them criminal clans, could be behind the riots too. The interim government disrupted the parity once established by Bakiyev, so that groups were pulling strings and calling in debts now in the vicious power struggle under way.

According to local experts Zarina Mambetturdiyeva and Leonid Bondarets, the Uzbek minority and the Kyrgyzes peacefully co-existed in southern Kyrgyzstan until recently. The population of Kyrgyzstan stands at 5 million and the Uzbeks account for nearly 700,000 of them all. "In the densely populated south, however, the ratio is approximately equal. All the same, it is Kyrgyzes alone who hold all positions of power," said Bondarets. "There is nothing for the Kyrgyzes and the Uzbeks to fight for because all ethnic groups are equally represented in the business community," said Sergei Ponomarev of Bishkek's Business Club.

Clashes began after a fight between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths in Osh on Friday night. Nearly 60,000 Uzbeks fled to Uzbekistan. Relative stabilization in the Jalal-Abad region was reported by Monday night whereas situation in Osh remained highly volatile. The interim government imposed emergency rule there. Two divisions of Russian paratroops were dispatched to the area in 1990 when the previous outburst of ethnic clashes took place there. Last Saturday, the Russian Defense Minister sent 150 paratroops to bolster defense of the military base in Kant and other military objects.