

Kyrgyzstan Asks NATO for Help

May 10, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyzstan, still shaky after last year's revolution and ethnic riots that killed hundreds, asked NATO on Tuesday to help protect its porous borders and secure arms depots in a region lying next door to Afghanistan.

James Appathurai, the NATO secretary-general's special representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, met Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva during a tour of Central Asia.

"The president stated that the technical standard of border posts was insufficient and appealed to NATO's leadership to provide support in this respect," Otunbayeva's press service said in a statement after the meeting.

It said Appathurai "expressed NATO's readiness to assist in conducting a major overhaul of depots holding rocket and artillery weapons of the Kyrgyz Republic's Defense Ministry, with particular emphasis on the southern region of the country."

It gave no further detail.

Kyrgyzstan hosts both U.S. and Russian military air bases and lies on a major drug trafficking

route out of Afghanistan.

Moscow pledged technical and financial aid worth millions of dollars to Kyrgyzstan in March as part of a three-year program to fight the trafficking of Afghan drugs.

Kyrgyzstan, with an economy largely reliant on production from a single gold mine and remittances from citizens working abroad, is governed by a fragile coalition striving to entrench the first parliamentary democracy in Central Asia.

Last week, the International Monetary Fund said it was preparing a preferential \$100 million loan for the country to help it restore its economy ravaged by last year's revolution and ethnic bloodshed.

In April last year, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was toppled by a violent revolt. In June, Kyrgyzstan's chronically unstable south saw ethnic riots, in which 470 people were killed.

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