

Great Power Rivalry in Central Asia: Russia Sends Paratroopers to its Airbase in Kyrgyzstan

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PRAGUE — Russia has sent some 150 paratroopers to its Kant airbase in the ex-Soviet Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan to ensure the safety of families of Russian military staff, the General Staff chief Nikolay Makarov said.

Protests in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek have left at least 74 people dead and more than 500 injured.

“The president has decided to send two companies of paratroopers there and some 150 people have arrived in Kant,” Makarov, who is with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Prague for the signing of a new arms cut deal, said.

Earlier a source in Russia’s Defense Ministry said the Russian airbase was put on high alert, while the U.S. said its Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan was continuing to function normally.

Russian Air Force spokesman Vladimir Drik said the Russian airbase in Kant, around 20 kilometers (12 miles) outside the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek, is also continuing to function normally.

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