

Protests in Kazakhstan Seem to be an Attempt of Color Revolution

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A strange wave of protests has broken out in Kazakhstan in this first week of 2022, affecting the entire social structure of the country. The public excuse for the demonstrations is popular discontent with the rising price of gas in the country, but the protests have not ceased even with the government lowering prices, revealing that it is likely to be greater interests being disputed. Considering the strategic importance of Kazakhstan, some analysts suspect the involvement of American and Turkish agents interested in creating instability and tensions in Central Asia, mutually affecting Moscow and Beijing.

The first week of 2022 is being very turbulent in Kazakhstan. A strong wave of protests broke out against the government, apparently motivated by the exponential increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas. This type of fuel is commonly used in the country at low prices, as a substitute for gasoline, whose value is higher. On Saturday, the first day of the year, the government approved a law to increase the price of the gas, which possibly prompted a serious social crisis, with the emergence of protests.

The regions with the greatest focus of protests are precisely those where most of the fuel is produced, mainly the city of Janaozen and the province of Aktau. The demonstrations quickly reached Almaty, the country’s largest city, home to around 8% of Kazakhstan’s total population. The situation was completely out of the authorities’ control, with car burnings, depredation, occupation of public buildings, vandalism and violent attacks on police and civilians, resulting in an uncertain number of injured and dead people.

The government, under intense pressure, announced some measures to alleviate the crisis. The price of gas has dropped considerably, reaching the mark of US\$ 0.11 per liter in regions like Mangystau – where Aktau city is located. However, this was not enough to contain the violence of the protesters, who continued to carry out acts of vandalism and disrupt public order. Threatening even more the social and economic structure of the country, the protesters invaded and occupied the Almaty airport, which caused a major

inconvenience for the local population. Part of the government capitulated to the pressure, which resulted in Prime Minister Askar Mamin's resignation. On the other hand, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared a state of emergency and promised a tough response against protesters.

The president asked the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – an alliance of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – to help restore order in the country's cities. The assistance was immediate, with troops, vehicles and equipment being sent in order to help Kazakh security forces regain control over the cities. The clashes have been severe, with many deaths reported. Many protesters are using weapons and confronting agents with guerrilla tactics. CSTO's work has been effective in reducing chaos, but the violence is not expected to end soon.

Faced with this type of situation, it is practically impossible not to suspect the possibility of foreign interference. Obviously, it is possible that the protests started organically, with the population dissatisfied with the prices, but clearly there is more to it than mere popular dissatisfaction. Definitely, it is not common for the people to continue acting with such violence, even after the government partially attends the demands – considering that the price of gas has been reduced. Also, the extreme use of force against police and military personnel does not seem to be an attitude usual of popular collectives. It is very likely that there is something beyond popular dissatisfaction and that foreign groups are interfering in the situation to take advantage of the tensions and provoke a possible color revolution.

The most interested in a situation like this in Kazakhstan are the US and Turkey. Both countries have a very strong interest in gaining influence over the Central Asian post-Soviet space and, for that, they want to undermine Russian and Chinese influence in the region. For this, Kazakhstan seems an extremely strategic point, considering its proximity to Russia and the Xinjiang region of China. Beijing certainly fears that a colorful revolution in Kazakhstan will develop into a wave of rebellions across Central Asia, as that would mean the possibility of a Uighur insurrection. Moscow, in the same sense, fears the destabilization of the entire post-Soviet zone, which comprises a large part of its border territory and strategic environment.

The US is currently looking to increase the number of its military bases in Central Asian countries to fill the US troop deficit in the region after the defeat in Kabul. For its part, Ankara wants to expand across Central Asia as part of its pan-Turkish geopolitics. With this, Kazakhstan becomes a point of common interest for the Americans and Turks to act as destabilizing agents, harming Eurasian integration precisely at the moment of closer ties between Russia and China.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that a summit between NATO and Russia on the Ukrainian issue will soon take place. With this, it is possible that Washington is sending a message to Moscow saying that it is willing to negotiate the situation in Eastern Europe, but that, in return, will intensify activities in Central Asia – which would mean a change of geopolitical focus in the tensions between the West. and Russia.

In fact, there are many possibilities. The strategic importance of Kazakhstan is immense, and it is very likely that some degree of foreign involvement will be revealed soon. The Russian government has already issued a public statement asking that no state interfere in the local crisis, saying that Kazakhstan will solve its problems by its own means. The most

likely situation is that the crisis will soon be appeased and that the plans for a color revolution will fail, as NATO's real objective is only to generate instability in the region, not to provoke large-scale conflicts. Given that there is already a CSTO's intervention, it is unlikely that there is any Western interest in further arming the protesters, creating a possible war.

Despite the possibility of appeasement, there is a clear message coming from these protests: NATO is ready to act strongly in Central Asia. And this will be the biggest challenge to be faced by the Eurasian integration project.

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