

US troops ordered out of Kyrgyzstan after Russia deal

Russia has scored a major foreign policy victory after the United States was told to close its last military base in central Asia

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Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the president of Kyrgyzstan, announced he was ordering the eviction of troops from the Manas Air Base near the capital city Bishkek shortly after receiving a multi-billion dollar bailout from the Russian government.

Frantic Pentagon officials initially attempted to deny there were plans afoot to force the United States out of its last Central Asian outpost before issuing a plea to the Kyrgyz government to change its mind.

"We very much appreciate the support the Kyrgyz have given us in the use of that base and we hope to continue using it," Geoff Morell, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters.

But Mr Bakiyev, speaking after talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow, sounded categorical in his decision.

"Kyrgyzstan will close the US military base in Manas after Washington refused to negotiate better compensation," he said.

An eviction decree was presented to parliament, which will go through the formality of approving it in the next few days.

The collapse of a deal with the Kyrgyz government to continue using Manas, an ex-Soviet base that has been used by US forces since late 2001, is both an embarrassment and a blow to the new administration of President Barack Obama.

Gen David Petraeus, the US commander leading the military campaigns in both Afghanistan and Iraq, visited Bishkek last month with an offer to raise the annual rent the United States pays for Manas from £55 million to £104 million — nearly 7 percent of the Kyrgyz government's annual budget.

According to diplomats, the United States also offered to pay senior Kyrgyz officials substantial "bonuses".

But shortly after Gen Petraeus announced he had received assurances from the Kyrgyz government that Russia had no intention of forcing the United States out of Manas, Mr Medvedev arrived in Bishkek on a gazumping mission.

Although Russia pays just £14 million a year for use of a base next door to Manas, Mr

Medvedev offered a £1.4 billion loan to plug Kyrgyzstan's deficit-plagued budget, as well as £238 million in write offs and grants.. Substantial emoluments were offered to individual officials as well, a western diplomat said.

Russia also appeared to press its case home after Kyrgyzstan's internet infrastructure came under sustained attack in the weeks leading up to the deal.. Several ex-Soviet states have encountered similar problems when coming under pressure from Moscow.

The loss of Manas deals a blow to hopes for an improvement of relations between the Kremlin and the Obama administration. President Obama is reportedly seeking to convene talks to slash Russian and American nuclear stockpiles, a substantial policy shift that will be welcomed in Moscow, which believes that a deal would help restore strategic parity with the United States.

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