The presidential campaign has started in Kyrgyzstan among candidates for the position of head of state, and elections for that are scheduled for January 10. The presidential elections will take place under very difficult economic and epidemiological conditions for this country, and against a backdrop of a plethora of events in 2020 - some of which were purely local in nature, and some had an impact across the entire region.

In particular, it is worth recalling the clashes that occurred along the nation’s borders with Tajikistan, two of which resulted in human casualties; on May 8, one of the sides even opened up mortar fire.

For a whole slew of reasons, Kyrgyzstan wound up in a difficult financial situation in 2020, and Chinese projects were suspended in this country, whose national debt owed to China is now more than $1.7 billion. In addition, the situation with the pandemic has demonstrated how critically Kyrgyzstan depends on foreign assistance, and namely from Russia, China, EU countries, and other foreign players.

After the results of the October 4 parliamentary elections were tallied, the third “October coup” took place. There were many reasons for this, including the repercussions of the pandemic and the financial and economic difficulties that went along with that. On top of that, the attempts to concentrate power in the hands of both the Jeenbekov presidential clan and the Matraimov clan (the Matraimovs are a clan of southern oligarchs that controls the
transportation of goods from China to Kyrgyzstan) led to the fact that other clans reacted sharply to the threat posed to their prosperity, and actively joined the political struggle going on in the country.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the upcoming presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan are attracting the attention of not only the numerous domestic players, but also external ones; this was particularly evidenced by the significant number of candidates that were initially announced for the country’s presidency. In the final count, out of the more than 60 applicants who submitted documents to participate in the elections, which included politicians, businessmen, teachers, artists, and even the unemployed, the country’s Central Commission for Elections and Referenda registered 18 candidates for its highest office. Consequently, chiefly major businessmen and politicians with some kind of track record will be the ones competing for the presidency. Owing to the fact that not all candidates for country’s highest post have presented their programs yet, it is still difficult to say what they are bringing to the race.

Nevertheless, according to observers, many consider the main contenders for victory to be Sadyr Japarov, Major General Kursan Asanov, the former Deputy Interior Minister, and Major General Abdil Segizbaev, the former Chairman of the State Committee for National Security, both of whom enjoy wide popular support, as well as some other heavyweights in the presidential race, such as Adakhan Madumarov and Kanat Isaev.

Sadyr Japarov came into politics after the March 2005 revolution, for several years was an adviser to President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and later was a deputy twice. In 2012, he faced charges under several articles in the Criminal Code for organizing, together with Kamchybek Tashiev (now the head of the State Committee for National Security) and Talant Mamyrov (who is the speaker of the Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan and the current acting President of Kyrgyzstan), a rally on Bishkek’s central square to nationalize the country’s largest gold mine, Kumtor. In 2013, all three were found guilty by the Supreme Court and received a year in prison, but were released in the courtroom due to the sentences’ expired terms. Then, after another criminal charge was filed against him, Japarov was forced to flee the country and returned to his homeland in March 2017. He planned to participate in the presidential elections, but was detained as soon as he crossed the national border; in August that same year, he was convicted and sentenced to 11.5 years in prison. In October this year, during the riots, Japarov was released by his friend and associate Kamchybek Tashiev, and after that in no time Japarov’s career shot to dizzying heights: from prisoner to prime minister and acting president of Kyrgyzstan.

Following the results of the referendum, which will be held simultaneously with the elections, if Kyrgyzstan’s population votes to adopt the new Constitution, then the new head of the republic and that person’s team will start to reinforce their power, and the transition to a presidential form of government will begin there. That is why foreign players, and especially the United States, have energetically joined the contest for the nation’s presidential candidate.

The majority of Kyrgyzstan expresses support for Japarov’s candidacy - and not only in the north, where he is originally from - but also in the country’s troubled south. He has decent support on social media, and in outlying provinces he is virtually seen as the one that can save the country. Over the past few days, Japarov has clearly defined his pro-Russian position.

However, for Washington, which is actively striving to impose its judgment about this country’s future on Kyrgyzstan - and regain the Kant military base that it lost after driving Russia out of there - Japarov’s candidacy is not fitting at all. That is why the US State Department and its local embassy have recently ratcheted up the pressure on Kyrgyzstan. Media outlets and NGOs, which have fostered the United States for many years in both Kyrgyzstan and the region, were actively brought on board by Washington to wage the fight against Japarov.

To undermine the situation in the republic along the line dividing north and south, the US embassy began to twist the arms of Kyrgyz authorities, prompting them to arrest and put on trial the former deputy head of the Kyrgyz customs service, Raimbek Matraimov, who was named as the “main corrupt official” in Kyrgyzstan by opposition journalists. However, Bishkek did not officially prosecute Matraimov, who remains the informal leader of the country’s southern clans, since arresting him would automatically create a rift between the north and south fraught with the risk of civil war. Temporarily in charge of the republic, Japarov forced Matraimov to return practically all the “illegally earned” millions to the state treasury.

However, on December 9, the US Treasury Department added Matraimov to the “Magnitskiy List” as “a foreign person who is a current or former government official involved in corruption.” At the same time, Washington, in its political confrontation with Bishkek, involved a network of US-funded NGOs and media outlets - and started speaking a language that had threats targeted directly at Japarov.
During the Internews Stremlenie awards ceremony, US Ambassador Donald Lu made a statement about the existence of a “criminal empire” in Kyrgyzstan, publicly calling the events taking place in the republic “similar to a Hollywood mafia movie.” Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the actions by US Ambassador Donald Lu, which became public evidence of Washington’s attempts to interfere in the country’s domestic affairs.

Now the United States, under the guise of allegedly fighting corruption and organized crime groups, is actively imposing its “assistance” on Kyrgyzstan during the presidential elections, while at the same time blackmailing the republic’s authorities by saying that it is willing - if there is any refusal to cooperate - to disclose information that compromises a wide range of Kyrgyz politicians.

They will announce the name of Kyrgyzstan’s new president on January 10, 2021. On that same day, the Kyrgyz people will have to decide - in the form of a referendum - what kind of government they want to live under: a presidential or parliamentary one. And the author would like to believe that they will make their own choice - and without any interference in the Kyrgyz Republic’s domestic affairs foisted on them by Washington.

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