



Understanding Recent Turmoil in Kazakhstan: A Conversation with Amb. George Krol

Background

In less than a week, Kazakhstan has experienced a dramatic shift in its political leadership and society. Sparked by protests on the price of gas in the country, the government has cracked down on civilian protesters, cut off internet for much of the country, and called in support from the Russian government to handle opposition. In turn, the government has resigned and former President Nursultan Nazarbayev has stepped down from his position as Chairman of the Security Council. Former U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan **George Krol** explained these dramatic shifts and what may be expected in the near future.

What kind of President will Tokayev be going forward?

- “Listening to him, and listening to his spokesman, and listening to some Kazakh analysts there is a certain hope that there will be efforts undertaken to connect the government more with the people.”
- “Now again, the question will be that President Tokayev has been a part of that structure, as have everyone else in his government, and will they be able to make cardinal changes that will satisfy many of the people of Kazakhstan who have all different kinds of—they’ve been unified in some respect—in their upset with the way the country has been run and governed that hasn’t seemed to benefit them economically, as well as in dealing with the social needs that they have as a society.

What is the value of Kazakhstan’s relationship with Russia?

“... The Russians at least have never left and they are their closest, most strategic and important partner that they have. They understand that the Kazakhstani government, whether it’s Nazarbayev or Tokayev for whatever that is crucial to Kazakhstan to maintain that relationship with Russia. They don’t like to be put in a hard place between Russia and the United States that somehow they have to choose, because at the end of the day I think we know where the choice for existential purposes has to be.”





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What is the impact on China given the recent turmoil in Kazakhstan?

- “I think that the Chinese government certainly would want to see the order, stability, and trust that a government under Tokayev (who actually speaks Mandarin Chinese and has a long experience of having served as a Soviet diplomat there) that he will be in control. Therefore, things will not spin out of control in Kazakhstan that might bring into power a ruling regime that might be more hostile to China and its economic interest there.”
- “I think China is glad to see order in and the order under Tokayev continue.”

Can we expect to see fair Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan?

“That’s possible, we shall see what ideas and if there will be new leaders in the parliament and a new way the parliament operates vis-a-vis the government and the people of Kazakhstan. But it’s possible that might be part of this ‘new Kazakhstan’ that President Tokayev is speaking about.”

Key Takeaways

- 1 Tokayev takes charge and targets the political and economic foundation of his predecessor’s power.
- 2 CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) intervention focused on maintaining order, says Amb. Krol, will demonstrate Russia’s ability and willingness to assist allies and then leave.
- 3 Through domestic reforms, Kazakhstan seeks to reassure international partners and investors that everything is back to business as usual.

Information courtesy of

Amb. George Krol

Former Ambassador to Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan; Adjunct Professor; U.S. Naval War College; Associate, Harvard University’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. To view Amb. Krol’s entire bio, [click here](#).



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To view the entire conversation with Amb. George Krol, [click here](#).



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