

Analyst Eugene Chausovsky discusses the upcoming presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan and its implications for Russian influence and domestic stability.

THE Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, on the same day as announcing a formal bid for his presidency, announced on Aug 15 that the US Manas air force base should be withdrawn from the country once its lease expires in 2014.

Atambayev has been a staunch ally of Russia and will likely further Moscow's interests if he takes the presidency.

However, a stronger presidential system coupled with the country's current fractious politics could put Kyrgyzstan at risk for further social instability and could complicate Moscow's hold over the country.

Atambayev is widely considered to be the front runner in the presidential election race in Kyrgyzstan, where elections are scheduled to take place in October.

Atambayev is known to be very pro-Russian as can be seen by his numerous visits to Moscow during his time as Prime Minister, particularly during times of crisis as well as his support of Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Russian dominated Customs Union.

The timing of Atambayev's statement concerning Manas is also significant given that Russia is currently in talks with Kyrgyzstan to open another military base in the country's southern region of Osh.

While it was expected by many that Kyrgyzstan would allow the lease to expire, Atambayev has now made this his official stance. Therefore, removing the Manas space would solidify Russia's position in the country militarily and put into jeopardy US plans to increase its military presence in the country as well.

This is related to talks about the US building its own additional military facility in the country, this one in the southern province of Batken.

There are also wider implications behind Atambayev's statement on Manas as well as his decision to formally announce his presidency ambitions. With the upcoming presidential elections it is likely that Kyrgyzstan will turn to a stronger presidential system of government as opposed to the parliamentary system that they have put in place currently.

Under a stronger presidency, the country could become more stable, as a strong president could be able to get more things done than the weaker government has seen over the past year.

However, this does not necessarily resolve the country's political divisions, which are split between the North and the South. Because Atambayev is a northerner and doesn't have as much support in the South, any bold moves that he would take under a stronger presidency, were he to win the elections, would be under increased scrutiny.

Therefore, while Atambayev would likely facilitate Russia's strengthening its position in Kyrgyzstan, were he to win the elections, the continuing political tensions between the North and the South ensures that the risk for political instability within Kyrgyzstan remains.