

Kyrgyzstan asks European security body for help

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Kyrgyzstan's interim government, which has struggled to control ethnic violence and even apparently its own police and military, has asked the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to send in an international police force, akin to those deployed in the former Yugoslavia.

This is the fourth plea for international help from the weak and severely destabilized government, which failed to intervene to halt ethnic rioting in the south of the country that killed thousands of people, mostly ethnic Uzbeks, and touched off a refugee crisis.

The O.S.C.E. will consider the request at a council of representatives of its dozens of member states on July 1, Andrew Tesoriere, the group's ambassador in Kyrgyzstan, said in an interview. An advance team arrived here on Thursday, he said.

Even if the intervention were approved, police teams would not arrive until the middle of next month, he said. It was unclear how many international police officers would come in.

Kyrgyzstan twice asked Russia to send peacekeepers but withdrew the request after Russia's president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, declined. It then appealed to the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a grouping of former Soviet states, which also declined to act.

A spokesman for the interim government said Kyrgyz authorities had discussed an outside police presence with the O.S.C.E. but said he could not confirm that a request for a deployment had been made.

The international police force, if approved, would include senior law enforcement officers from Western European and former Soviet countries, Mr. Tesoriere said, and would not perform peacekeeping functions like manning checkpoints separating Uzbek and Kyrgyz neighborhoods. He said it could be modeled on the group's work monitoring and training local police officers in the Balkans.

Ethnic Uzbeks in the south have clamored for international intervention. Many Uzbeks said they were attacked in their neighborhoods not only by civilian mobs, but also by the Kyrgyz military and police officers riding armored personnel carriers and firing automatic weapons.

Members of the Kyrgyz interim government denied that soldiers were involved and blamed the president ousted in April, Kurmanbek S. Bakiyev, for fomenting an ethnic massacre. He has denied the accusations.

Kyrgyz authorities have issued a wide variety of explanations of the exact origins of the violence and on Thursday publicized a new version in a statement by the National Security Service, the successor agency to the K.G.B. in Kyrgyzstan. It said the family of Mr. Bakiyev had colluded with Islamic radicals including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a group with ties to the Afghan Taliban.

The statement said groups of sharpshooters opened "massive precision fire" during the fighting and then "quickly and operationally hid themselves," only to reappear in other areas to shoot at civilians. It said Islamic radicals had gathered in Uzbek neighborhoods and villages.

Earlier, a law enforcement commander in the south had blamed Tajik mercenaries. Kyrgyz authorities have said hundreds of rifles were stolen from police or military arsenals.

Ominously, given the tensions between Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz military and police, the security service statement said ethnic Uzbek community leaders "deserved special note," as they had been discussing autonomy and greater political representation with the interim government before the uprising.

"In realizing their political demands they wound up connected with terrorists and pro-Bakiyev forces," the statement said, though it offered no proof of its assertions.

Already, Kyrgyz police are rounding up prominent Uzbeks. On Wednesday, Jalal Salakhitinov, chairman of the Uzbek National Cultural Center, went into hiding after police searched his home and raided his carpet factory, according to a colleague, Zafar Akbardiyev.

"Why are they investigating us when we were attacked and our houses destroyed and thousands of us died?" Mr. Akbardiyev said. Amnesty International on Thursday reported a study of satellite images shows 1,807 buildings were fully destroyed in the city of Osh, and many others were damaged.

On Thursday, the Committee to Protect Journalists, based in New York, issued a statement saying the police had detained two reporters working in the south of the country, in the city of Jalal-Abad.

"Journalists have told C.P.J. that ethnic Uzbek journalists are being targeted for retaliation on the basis of their ethnicity, and that Kyrgyz authorities are unable to provide adequate protection," the statement said.

While the violence has been confined to the south, there remain concerns that the instability could spread. On Thursday, a small airplane buzzed over Bishkek dropping leaflets warning of "provocateurs" inciting unrest in the capital and urging calm amid different ethnic groups.

The violence has severely destabilized Kyrgyzstan, which is home to an American military base helping supply the NATO force in Afghanistan, as well as a Russian base.

Fonte: New York Times, New York, June 24th 2010, World, online.