



Written by [Christian Gomez](#) on January 10, 2011

## Kyrgyzstan Honors Putin

In a gesture of goodwill to Moscow, the government of Kyrgyzstan decided to name a 14,587-foot mountain, located in the Tian-Shan range in northern Kyrgyzstan, the Putin Mountain in honor of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The announcement was made by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev, “who signed the bill to rename the peak,” according to the Telegraph.



The news of the dedication came on December 17, just 10 days before Prime Minister Atambayev’s first official state visit to Moscow since coming to office.

The Prime Minister was welcomed by his Russian counterpart Prime Minister Putin, with whom he had [met before](#) on September 2, 2010, a month prior to the Kyrgyzstani parliamentary elections in which Atambayev and his Social Democratic Party emerged victorious.

Although during the elections the Kremlin put its resources behind the Ar-Namys or Dignity Party — which had signed an agreement of cooperation with Putin’s United Russia Party, and is led by Felix Kulov, a former general in the KGB, in which Putin also served — Moscow quickly moved to cozy up with the victorious Social Democratic Party, a socialist party that had the initial backing of the U.S. government in the elections.

The recent renaming of the mountain may have something to do with Atambayev’s December 27 visit to Moscow, during which Putin made him a \$200-million loan offer in order to sway Kyrgyzstan away from U.S. influence and back to Moscow.

This is not the first time Russia has attempted to buy Kyrgyzstan’s loyalty. On February 3, 2009, after the Kyrgyzstani parliament voted to close the U.S. airbase in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, the Kremlin agreed to a financial aid package to settle Kyrgyzstan’s \$180-million debt to Russia.

Unfortunately for Moscow, Kyrgyzstan reneged on its closure vote when the United States decided to triple its annual rent payment to keep the base, which the U.S. continues to use for transport and combat operations in Afghanistan.

Although it may seem as if Russia paid to have a mountain named after Putin, such was clearly not Moscow’s intention; rather, it hopes to accomplish its agenda with the assistance of the Atambayev government.

Dedicating a mountain to Putin might be more than just Kyrgyzstan’s way of showing its gratitude to Russia for the \$200-million loan; it may also be a gesture of Kyrgyzstan’s willingness to cozy up to Russia.



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Just as Moscow wants Kyrgyzstan to suspend the lease of its air base to the United States, Kyrgyzstan wants something, too: On December 28, Russia's state-run media RIA Novosti [reported](#) that "Kyrgyzstan is interested in joining the [Customs Union](#)," a reintegrated Soviet free-trade zone between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

During a meeting in Moscow, Atambayev told Sergei Naryshkin, the chief of the Presidential Administration of Russia, "Kyrgyzstan and Russia have a common past, and I think our future will also be shared. We see Kyrgyzstan in the Customs Union and in the common economic space."

Atambayev added, "Russia is our main strategic partner and there is no alternative to that," telling Putin, "Naturally, we see Kyrgyzstan in the customs union, in the common economic space, we see Kyrgyzstan in partnership with Russia."

Although neither Prime Minister Putin nor President Medvedev has yet issued an official invitation to Kyrgyzstan, or replied to Atambayev's statement, the next day Innokenty Adyasov, a member of the expert analysis council on the Russian State Duma's Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) affairs committee, wrote the following in an analysis of the CIS which was printed in [RIA Novosti](#):

The potential new members [of the Customs Union], Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are unlikely to add anything but economic problems and political instability to the situation. Low incomes, skyrocketing unemployment and corruption make these countries very vulnerable to extremism.

It is uncertain if Russia will be willing to allow such an unpredictable and economically troubled state as Kyrgyzstan into its exclusive Union. Russia and its fellow Union states are more likely to avoid a tumultuous European Union-style situation, as in the case with Greece, if they are committed to establishing the Customs Union on a strong economic footing.

If dedicating one of its mountains to Putin is a sign of Kyrgyzstan's intentions, Atambayev may move to suspend the United States' use of the air base with the hopes of joining the Customs Union.

*Photo: Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev holds a bill of new constitutional amendments signed by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev at a news conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, April 10, 2007: AP Images*



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