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**NO DISCUSSION OF OPENING NEW RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN □ RUSSIAN FM**

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The Times of Central Asia (5 February 2019)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says that Bishkek and Moscow have not discussed opening of a second Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan.

Lavrov visited Bishkek on February 4 as part of the preparations for the upcoming state visit by President of Russia Vladimir Putin to Kyrgyzstan, scheduled to be held in the spring of 2019, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

During his visit, Lavrov met with his Kyrgyz counterpart and President Sooronbai Jeenbekov.

At a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Chingiz Aidarbekov in Bishkek on February 4, Lavrov was asked whether Russia was prepared to open a second base in the Central Asian country.

Lavrov said that we did not discuss that subject. We have not received any official initiatives regarding this.

As for Afghanistan, when we speak about Central Asia, we primarily have in mind the threats coming from that country, Lavrov said. These are the threats of terrorism, drug trafficking and overall instability that is being fuelled by the continued infiltration of terrorists from Syria, Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. The terrorists prefer Afghanistans northern regions located in direct proximity to the borders of our Central Asian partners. This certainly means we must give priority attention to security matters, including the operation of the joint Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan. We discussed this in detail today. We also considered ways to strengthen this base as the CSTO stronghold against the threats facing Central Asian countries. We appreciate the attention which President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbai Jeenbekov paid today to the importance of dealing with these issues as soon as possible.

Reports and rumors about the possibility that Russia could open a second military base have been circulating in Kyrgyzstan and Russia for months, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported.

Russia's air base at Kant, in northern Kyrgyzstan, was opened in 2003 under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which includes Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan.

A U.S. air base outside the capital, Bishkek, began hosting U.S. troops in 2001 as part of the campaign in nearby Afghanistan, but Kyrgyzstan shut it in 2014. Russia had pressed Kyrgyzstan

for its closure.

In December 2018, Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov said that Bishkek was not negotiating with Moscow on the possible opening of another Russian military base.

In March, Jeenbekov said that the idea of a second Russian base was discussed before he was elected president in October 2017, but that no decision was made.

Earlier in 2017, then-President Almazbek Atambayev said that Russia could deploy troops in the Batken region on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border instead of increasing the number of troops stationed at Kant.

He said that the issue had been discussed years ago but that no decision was made due to questions about funding.

<https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/20800-no-discussion-of-opening-new-russian-military-base-in-kyrgyzstan-russian-fm>

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