



Tajikistan and U.S. Relations

Pamela Spratlen, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia

Remarks at the Center for Strategic Studies
Dushanbe, Tajikistan
April 2, 2008

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: (In Russian) Thank you very much. Hello. As was just said, I'm Pamela Spratlen. I will speak in English, but I'm very happy to be here with you. We have 30 minutes to talk about Tajikistan today. Who will translate? First I'll speak, then a few questions.

(In English) I'd like to say first of all that I'm very pleased to be here for my second visit to Tajikistan. I was here in May of 2007 for the first time. In that visit, as well as this visit, was an opportunity for me to better understand both the situation in Tajikistan and an opportunity to further develop the relationship between Tajikistan and the United States. In Washington my responsibility is to review, to develop, our policy in concert with the inter-agency community. The countries in my portfolio are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In this visit, the focus was on government meetings. I met with Mr. Davlatov, Mr. Rahmatulloev and Mr. Kasimov in the Foreign Ministry, and this afternoon I will meet with Mr. Nadirov at the Ministry of Defense.

Equally important were my meetings with members of civil society, non-governmental organizations, and also members of the business community. The questions that were of special interest to me in this visit were the questions of development of democratic institutions and civil society, economic development, particularly after the very difficult winter that the country is just now coming out of. Of course questions of security, given that Tajikistan is a frontline state of Afghanistan. And also I had the opportunity to meet with young people, as the United States continues to support exchanges to build better understanding people to people.

The United States has of course been developing its relationship with Tajikistan since we established diplomatic relations in 1991. We continue to be interested in a multi-dimensional relationship with the country that covers all aspects of foreign policy. We continue to be interested in supporting the development of the independence and sovereignty of Tajikistan and other countries of Central Asia. Of special interest in this visit were economic questions in light of the issue of misreporting by the financial section and efforts by the International Monetary Fund to correct that development.

It's a pleasure to be here in Tajikistan once again, now that spring has arrived. I will end my opening statement here and I'll be happy to take your questions.

QUESTION: Recently there has been speculation about NATO's plan to construct a railway to connect Central Asia with Afghanistan. We'd like to know if that's really true and if the United States supports it.

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: All I can say is that of course the issue of Afghanistan and creating a secure, stable and democratic state is a challenge for the entire world. The United States and NATO, along with other partners, are engaged not only in a military strategy but also a reconstruction strategy that will assist the Afghan government to better respond to the needs of the people and securing the country overall.

And of course all of the countries in the region, and particularly Central Asia and especially Tajikistan, have a role to play. We have – the United States maintains an airbase in Kyrgyzstan at Manas, as you know. The United States was recently granted permission to allow its nationals to use the air-bridge at Termez and Afghanistan and of course the Government of Tajikistan has played a very important role in assisting the Operation Enduring Freedom effort and the overall effort in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: (Inaudible – about the use of Termez airbase)

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: Yes, it is our citizens who are permitted to use the air-bridge at Termez. But what I want to underscore is that this effort is an international one and a long term one, and it will continue to require the support of all of our partners, including neighboring countries in the region, including Tajikistan.

AMBASSADOR JACOBSON: (in Russian, correcting interpreter) No, that's not correct. This is a complicated subject. I want to clear up a misunderstanding. You all know there's an airbase, Termez, in Uzbekistan. It's not our airbase, it won't be our airbase. We just recently received permission from the Government of Uzbekistan so that our citizens can use it. It's not airspace, it's the base itself, Termez. Our citizens can use the airbase. That's a kind of progress. When we talk about Tajikistan and the contribution of Tajikistan, we're talking about using airspace. The airbase Termez is in Uzbekistan. I hope that's clear to everyone now.

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: I think what I want to underscore is –

INTERPRETER: They don't understand this air bridge, what is it, an airfield or what?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: This is a military facility that is run by the Government of Germany in Uzbekistan.

QUESTION: (Inaudible – asking to clarify Termez)

AMBASSADOR JACOBSON: (In Russian) It's a military airbase managed now by the Germans. It's not new. No, it's not for planes. It's for citizens to travel to Afghanistan on coalition aircraft.

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: This is an ISAF effort – it's ISAF, the international effort. When Americans are part of the ISAF operation, they're allowed to transit at Termez. That's all. With respect to any other effort that is going on, the question was specifically about the rail transit. About that, I do not have any additional comment and refer you back to NATO. It's a NATO effort and I think NATO is in the best position to discuss it with respect to the provision of supplies, so I refer you back to the NATO authorities for any clarification on that question.

QUESTION: Are there any changes in bilateral relations with Uzbekistan? Just warming relations, now that the U.S. nationals have been allowed to use this base at Termez? Is it a sign of warming up?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: Okay. The only thing I want to say – immediately before my travel to Tajikistan, I was in Uzbekistan, as was noted on the website of our embassy. We have lots of different kinds of visits to the various countries, and that was a working level visit. And it was an opportunity for me in my current role to have an exchange of views with the various members of the Government of Uzbekistan.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, the United States is interested in the development of relations with all countries of Central Asia, and that includes

Uzbekistan. And we are developing our relations with each country as the conditions of our relations with that country permit. And of course we'd like to have the most constructive relations possible with every country, and that includes Uzbekistan of course.

Next question?

QUESTION: BBC. Mentioning about this conflict between Tajikistan and the IMF, you mentioned that the United States is ready to help Tajikistan in settling this issue. In what way?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: The challenge of Tajikistan is to work with the International Monetary Fund directly. This is not a bilateral issue, this is an issue between the Government of Tajikistan and the International Monetary Fund.

Well, what I would say is, the United States is very interested in the resolution of this issue and in the problem, and it was in my interest in this visit to express to the Government of Tajikistan how concerned the United States is about this issue. And our interest in providing political support for the Government of Tajikistan to continue to work with the International Monetary Fund as it works through how the misreporting occurred, and how the government is going to take steps to correct it and move to its program of reform.

QUESTION: The IMF has reported that the external debt of Tajikistan is \$1 billion. The CIA says that the annual budget of Tajikistan is only \$610 million. What political tools do you have to persuade the Government of Tajikistan to build hospitals instead of five-star hotels? Are you concerned that Tajikistan continues to borrow from international financial organizations?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: Well, the first thing I'd like to say is that I'm not familiar with those specific statistics that you mentioned, but I'm certainly aware that the Government of Tajikistan certainly faces enormous challenges as it tries to match the needs of the state and the resources that are available to meet those needs. And of course it is the responsibility of any government to ensure that it first and foremost meets the needs of its country. We discussed the fact that the international community is very concerned and has lost some of its confidence that the government is fully undertaking all of its responsibilities in the area both of its International Monetary Fund commitments and in making sure that it meets the needs of its people.

I think the International Monetary Fund itself was very clear about this when it met with the government, and of course the United States fully supports the efforts the International Monetary Fund is making. This past winter exposed the fact that there are tremendous needs in Tajikistan, and it certainly will require more government resources in order to meet those needs. And we discussed the fact that of course this would be the best choice the government could make, given its responsibilities.

QUESTION: What will you discuss with the Ministry of Defense?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: Well, the Ministry of Defense of course is responsible for the basic security of the country. And the United States for a long time had a program of wide cooperation with them and with elements that are responsible for security cooperation. And I think our discussion this afternoon is likely to focus on border security, which is an enormous challenge, border security with Afghanistan.

QUESTION: The relations between Tajikistan and the United States are mainly due to the fact that Tajikistan borders Afghanistan. If the Democrats come to power, how will that affect the foreign policy here?

ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SPRATLEN: Well, we don't know what will happen in November, so I won't speak to what might happen in the future. But what I will say is that the United States has pursued in global terms a long term policy that has emphasized the same three areas.

As I mentioned in the beginning – I guess I would take exception to your question that our relationship is primarily based on the location of Tajikistan as a frontline state with Afghanistan. That is only one aspect of our relationship with Tajikistan. Of course an important one, but not the only one. For example, the United States just recently released the human rights report for 2007. You can find this report on the embassy's website. This is part of a long term discussion that we've had with the Government of Tajikistan, as we have with other governments about political developments and human rights. So the political reform issues have been an enduring part of our foreign policy with Tajikistan, and I would imagine that will continue.

A second area that's very important, as I mentioned, is the economic dimension. In spite of the fact that the government is working through this issue with the IMF, the United States is generally optimistic about the long term prospects of the economy in Tajikistan. And the symbol of that is the bridge that the United States opened down at the River Pyanj last August. I understand that some 200 trucks a day are now bringing goods to and from on that bridge.

Of course I already mentioned the security dimension, and at the beginning I also noted that the United States had maintained and will continue to maintain a robust program of exchanges.

So I would say that the United States has, continues, and will continue to develop its relationship along several multi-dimensional aspects and will continue to build the relationship along ever more constructive and positive lines – we hope.

So I just want to thank you all for coming this afternoon and I look forward to my third visit next time and seeing you all in Tajikistan. Thanks again.



[BACK TO TOP](#)