



Remarks to the Press in the Kyrgyz Republic

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Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic
October 17, 2008

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm glad to be here, I'm glad to be back in Kyrgyzstan. I'm here at this moment to follow up on a conversation Secretary Rice had with President Bakiyev. She wanted me to come out and talk with him in more detail about the situation in the region, because we value his views and we value our cooperation with the Government of Kyrgyzstan. Conversations today with the President were wide-ranging and covered a lot of depth, so let me try to give you an overview and then we'll talk in more detail about anything you want to.

I think, in the broader region we talked about the situation in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan is a partner in the overall effort that many countries are making to try to end the problems of terrorism and narcotics that are coming from Afghanistan. So we compared notes today with the President about the situation in Afghanistan, and I thanked him and noted once again the important role that Kyrgyzstan plays in hosting the coalition air base at Manas. We also talked a lot about Kyrgyzstan's situation as it relates to the broader region. We talked about the potential for Kyrgyzstan -- potential as a center for education, potential as a producer of energy, and potential in agriculture. At the same time as we focus on some of the problems right now, it's important to try to keep in mind this broader, long-term potential that Kyrgyzstan has as a key center in the region. And we talked about the bilateral relationship, the programs we have in everything from energy to justice.

We were very concerned by the earthquake that occurred here not so long ago, and I was very glad that we were able to mobilize assistance quickly in the form of the Ambassador's disaster declaration that freed up \$50,000 and the quick action by Manas Air Base to provide water and food and supplies to the people affected by the earthquake.

As Secretary Rice asked me to, we also talked more broadly with President Bakiyev about developments in the region, about some of the more recent meetings that have been held here, and particularly the meeting of five presidents here recently. That was very new, a very positive development, and I think it was a very productive meeting. We try to work with all the countries of the region on problems of narcotics or issues of water or issues of energy, but I think seeing the presidents get together and address this directly themselves is a very positive development. I congratulate President Bakiyev in the role he played in doing that.

So, overall it was a very interesting set of meetings I had to follow up on the conversations Secretary Rice has had. Personally, I'm pleased to be back in Bishkek, and I'm pleased to be here with our brand new Ambassador. I'm sure she'll be getting to know you and getting to know the country, and we look forward to working with her and working with you as we move forward. And with that, I'll be glad to take your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, we are also glad to see you again here in Kyrgyzstan. I'm from Radio Azattyk, which is the Kyrgyz-language service of Radio Free Liberty, and my question is about Ganci (Manas) Air Base. Some local and international analysts think the U.S. government is no longer interested in the work of Manas and is promoting a new strategy of government in Central Asia. How would you comment?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know where that information came from. I have to say, every time I come here I hear a lot of unusual stories and theories. But I just keep coming back to the fact that we're very transparent, we're very open, and we're very honest about what we are doing and in what we are saying. The Base is important. It's important to us, but it's important to every country in the region, to the other countries that use it, but also to the other countries that are affected by terrorism coming out of Afghanistan. We're very engaged, and we're going to stay engaged to help build a stable Afghanistan that can be an asset to the people in the region and not a threat. That's the purpose of the Base, that's the value of the Base, and it's a value to all of us, to help us stop this threat of terrorism and the threat of narcotics coming out of Afghanistan right now. But in the long-run for you, it's not just the threat, it's the opportunity of Afghanistan, too. You'll be able to sell energy to the south, you'll be able to sell vegetables to the south, you'll be able to buy and sell products to India and Pakistan through a stable Afghanistan. And that's why we are involved in Afghanistan, and that's why we all still have an interest in the Base.

QUESTION: I'm from Television Company NTS. You said you met with President Bakiyev and discussed energy issues. Which issues did you discuss exactly?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There were a couple of aspects of this. One [was] the agreements that were reached during the meeting of with the presidents, which I think are very interesting and important and should provide you with a certain amount of stability for the winter. The second is that we talked a little about the programs that we have, and we have about 6 million dollars worth of programs here to help deal with food and energy crises that may occur this winter, particularly the energy for hospitals and places like that that need to be especially provided. The third piece is sort of the bigger and long-run piece, which is how to make Kyrgyzstan part of the energy markets for the region, part of the supply of energy to southern Kazakhstan, part of the supply of energy to the south. I think you are in a position over the years to create a market and investment environment to attract hydropower investment and coal investment that will link you up to these routes to export energy for the long run.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, I'm Alexander Tuzov from Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper. What is your opinion about the following issue: Specialists from the World Bank say that 90% of energy in Kyrgyzstan is provided by hydro-electric stations. Do you think the U.S. should support the opening of nuclear power stations to provide energy for many years ahead?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think in the end you have to create a market so the market can decide what the best sources are. We work with the World Bank, we work with private investors, we work with consortia around the world, but in the end, the investors have to decide where the best supply of energy is from for a given country, what the best prices are for the consumers in a country and how to make the investment profitable -- whatever that is, whether its nuclear or coal or hydro or more gas, Kyrgyzstan needs to be able to develop it. But I think in the end, the best job that governments can do is to open up the basis and the opportunity for projects and investment which have a commercial basis.

QUESTION: Olga Zubenko, Reuters. I have the following question: Lately analysts have been saying that President Bakiyev has become more and more pro-Russian. What do you think about this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think we criticize any relationships that you have. We're not here for any competition or any games to play with other countries. Our interest is in the independence of Kyrgyzstan and the welfare of the people of Kyrgyzstan. We expect the government to have good relationships and to develop its relations as much as possible with neighbors like Russia. I guess north, south, east, west, Kyrgyzstan needs to have relations with China, Europe, India, with us far away. The more relations you have, the more choices you have, the more independence you have. That's our interest -- ensuring the independence of Kyrgyzstan. So, we're glad to see Kyrgyzstan take advantage of these opportunities, as long as they contribute to the independence and the prosperity of Kyrgyzstan.

MODERATOR: We have time for one more question, if there are any questions.

QUESTION: Associated Press. Lately, in our press, there was information about an analysis about the efficiency of the activities of the Base which determined that Base

operations are 80% inefficient.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I never heard of that -- another one of those stories that you encounter here, that I don't know why people spread them. We work a lot with the country in different ways. Everybody's a partner in the fight against terrorism. Everybody's a partner in the fight against narcotics. And that includes countries like China and Russia. Different countries are involved in Afghanistan in different ways. Some of the immediate neighbors are providing, selling electricity to Afghanistan to help keep the lights on for the people of Kabul. Other neighbors transport supplies -- some of that comes down through Russia and Central Asia, supplies that are needed by the Afghan government and the Coalition, some of that's by air through Manas, some of that's by air through other countries and other bases, some of that's by road, some of that's by rail. So, all these efforts are important. Everybody's contribution is important, including the contribution that Kyrgyzstan makes.

The efficiency of the Base is that it provides a route for personnel and some supplies. Other people and supplies go through other routes. And I think it's just that we need...we're all in this together. It's a problem for all of us. If we fix it, it's an opportunity for all of us. As the Afghan government stabilizes Afghanistan with the support of foreign countries and neighbors, it presents a new opportunity for people for trade and energy and outlets to the sea. So the Base is an important part of that and will be until we finish the job.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Assistant Secretary.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much. It's good to see you all.

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