



## Press Conference in Tajikistan

**Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State**

Remarks at the U.S. Embassy In Dushanbe  
Dushanbe, Tajikistan  
July 17, 2004

**QUESTION** (Ruzi Nav): Mr. Armitage, today you had a meeting with President Rahmonov. What questions did you touch upon?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** First of all, I came to discuss for President Bush and the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell regional issues, knowing of their great interest in Tajikistan. I also briefed President Rahmonov on my trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan. I expressed appreciation to President Rahmonov for the joint efforts we have against terrorism. Third, we discussed the scourge of drugs, particularly coming from Afghanistan, and finally our bilateral relations and how to put even more energy into that relationship.

**QUESTION** (Reuters): You have been to Afghanistan and you know that it is the main producer of drugs, and that Tajikistan is only a transit country for drugs. Is the United States going to take any active efforts or have anti-drug campaigns in Afghanistan?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Yes, first of all and most importantly President Karzai has expressed a very strong will to combat narcotics. The United States, and Great Britain as well, are taking the lead for the international community to make even greater efforts for the elimination of poppy and the cultivation of alternative crops.

**QUESTION** (Nerui Suhan): You have been in Afghanistan, what is the situation over there? Do you think that the presidential elections will be organized properly?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** Let me say first that I think all friends of democracy can feel very good about the fact that already 7.4 million Afghans are registered to vote and that 40 percent of them are women. The number of people who are registered will obviously go up as we approach the October 9 presidential election. Of course there will be difficulties. But it's quite clear that the people of Afghanistan after 23 years of war and the terrible governance of the Taliban are making a decision that they want to have some control of their fate. And in that decision, they are just like people all over the world.

**QUESTION** (Agence France Press): About the fate of the eight Tajik citizens held in Guantanamo Bay. When are they going to be transferred to Tajikistan?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I don't know the individual cases, but we are trying to release those who do not possess information about terrorism back to their home nations through agreements. We are trying to get those people generally home as quickly as possible.

**QUESTION** (RIA-Novosti): Recently, a public statement was made by the U.S. Embassy expressing the concern of the U.S. Government on some points of the new election law. In this connection, is the United States going to send observers to the parliamentary elections?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** First of all, I actually congratulated the President on the election law because it's clearly a step in the right direction, a step forward, although the U.S. Embassy statement probably noted that it didn't achieve all of the standards of the OSCE. Our opinion is that now we should all concentrate on ensuring that the elections in February are free, fair, democratic and transparent. Regarding whether the United States will participate with international observers, this is a matter that we'll consult with the OSCE on and make a decision. Of course Embassy personnel are here 24/7 [24 hours a day/7 days a week].

**QUESTION** (Agence France Press): Have you any recommendations to the Government of Tajikistan so that these elections will be held most democratically?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** This is something that we talk about constantly through our Embassy personnel and our excellent Ambassador. But clearly at this point in time in the world's history, in almost any national elections that are held under the scrutiny of the international community, an entire nation's reputation can be made positively or harmed negatively by the conduct of elections. And that's well understood in Dushanbe, as it is as in many other countries.

**QUESTION** (Vecherniy Dushanbe): What can you say about the future of bilateral relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:** I think they are going to be quite good. I did discuss with the President the desire of the United States to build a bridge across the river from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. Simultaneously, we and other members of the international community are constructing a road in Afghanistan -- a ring road -- Kabul to Kandahar to Harat and to the north and around. The combination of those two things will give Tajikistan options that are non-existent today in terms of exports and access to markets toward the south. We are quite excited about this. Afghan President Hamid Karzai knows very well of the support which has been given him from Dushanbe and is very grateful for it.

Thank you very much.

(end transcript)

Released on July 20, 2004

