



Press Conference Following Meeting With President Rahmonov of Tajikistan

Richard L. Armitage , Deputy Secretary of State
Presidential Office
Dushanbe, Tajikistan
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DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: First of all, let me express the fact that it was a great honor to meet the President. I started by describing the parts of my trip already completed, particularly the visit to Pakistan and to Afghanistan, because of the importance of those two countries particularly to Tajikistan. We also talked about the regional situation and then the bilateral relationship between Tajikistan and the United States. Of course President Bush and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell have asked me particularly to again express our gratitude to President Rahmonov and to the nation for their assistance for the international efforts in Afghanistan.

QUESTION (ITAR-TASS): How does the United States assess the agreement between Tajikistan and Russia on the establishment of a Russian military base in Tajikistan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think that the recently completed Tajikistan-Russian agreement was a great achievement for Tajikistan. I congratulated the President on it.

QUESTION (BBC): Concerning the elections and the election law, which was signed recently, does the law meet all international standards?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I have not looked at it yet in depth but it seemed to me that it is certainly heading in the right direction. I think now the important thing is to concentrate on the lead-up to February parliamentary elections, and to conduct transparent and democratic elections that will make a great tribute to the nation.

QUESTION (Radio Liberty): You just got back from Afghanistan. How do you evaluate the situation in Afghanistan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think the most encouraging thing I can say is that even in the face of some intimidation and some violence, over 7.4 million people are already registered to vote in the October 9 presidential election, and more than 40 percent of them are women. After 23 years of war, after the terrible governance of the Taliban, the people of Afghanistan clearly want to take control of their fate. This is an excellent thing, and it is very encouraging to the international community and certainly to the United States.

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