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Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman
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TRANSCRIPT:

3:15 p.m. EST

MR. ERELI: The diehard news junkies are the only ones left standing at this late hour.

QUESTION: I resent that.

MR. ERELI: No, it's a compliment. We're all fueled and --

QUESTION: The diehards being a Bruce Willis reference?

(Laughter.)

MR. ERELI: No, it's just a reference to being late in the day on a Friday with a lot of news out there. I don't know if I have really much to add to the -- add to the collective wisdom, but I'll do my best by starting with the questions that our front row might have.

QUESTION: The latest on Kyrgyzstan and your thoughts on constitutional secession or lack of it?

MR. ERELI: Well, the latest on Kyrgyzstan is that we continue to work with our partners in the international community, with the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe in the lead, Russia, Kyrgyzstan's neighbors and others in the UN and elsewhere to help support the Kyrgyz people as they work through this political transition in their history.

What has happened since we last briefed is it appears that President Akayev has fled the country. The Prime Minister has resigned. The opposition leaders worked through the night last night to establish an interim government. Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiyev was named interim prime minister. He is chairing a Coordination Council and has appointed a -- proposed to parliament a new slate of ministers, and including both opposition as well government officials.

Those nominations will be acted on by parliament. The Coordination Council has announced that presidential elections will be held in three months and a parliamentary election three months later. Our ambassador in Bishkek is urging the interim government to work closing with the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. Their special envoy, Mr. Peterle, who will soon be joined by the Secretary General of the OSCE, General Kubis.

So, in summary, I think what I would say is that we will continue to work to support the efforts of the Kyrgyz people as they endeavor to build a stable democracy.

QUESTION: What about recognition?

MR. ERELI: Recognition really isn't the issue here. The issue is helping to support a process that is peaceful, that is consistent with the rule of law and that has the support and the backing of the international community.

QUESTION: Is the takeover consistent with the rule of law? Is it true that the U.S. wants to see regime change?

MR. ERELI: I would say that what we want to see is a process that evolves according to the laws of the country, that is worked through the institutions of the country and that represents the will of the people of that country. That is how we view -- that is the prism through which we will view events.

QUESTION: Yeah. You're looking to the future. But what is your reflection on what has happened so far? Is this fine with the United States?

MR. ERELI: Our reflection is that there was -- that there was an election. That election was challenged, that the institutions of the -- institutions of Kyrgyzstan were called upon and acted in response to those calls.

QUESTION: Well, but actually -- but, I mean, they were -- the institutions were called upon after there were violent protests in which protestors overran government buildings. So do you consider that democracy or is that, you know, a bloodless coup?

MR. ERELI: We consider it events that the people and institutions of Kyrgyzstan are trying to deal with. They are fast-moving, they are unpredictable, and they need to be, I think, handled in a way that is, as I said before, consistent with the laws of Kyrgyzstan, respectful of the institutions of Kyrgyzstan and enfranchising of the people of Kyrgyzstan. That's what we've been working for from the very beginning. That's been the objective of our efforts and the international community. That's how we started on this path and that's how we'll proceed along it.

QUESTION: Adam, President Akayev has said that he was a victim of an illegitimate coup and he's vowing to come back and try to reclaim power. What is the U.S. response to that? Do they support that, wish he would just go away, or what?

MR. ERELI: The U.S., as I said before, believes we'll work to support a peaceful outcome to the political future of Kyrgyzstan, in coordination and cooperation with the international community, consistent with the rule of law and in a way that reflects the will of the Kyrgyz people.

QUESTION: So you can not rule out that President Akayev might come back?

MR. ERELI: I'm not going to make predictions because the future of Kyrgyzstan is in the hands of the Kyrgyz people.

QUESTION: Do you care what happens to Akayev?

MR. ERELI: As I said, what we care is that events and decisions that are to be made and that are to happen, happen peacefully, according to the rule of law, through Kyrgyz institutions and with the help and support of the international community. There are a lot of decisions, there are a lot of steps that the Kyrgyz people have before them as they deal with this evolving situation and there are a lot of factors, there are a lot of elements. I'm not going to prejudge them. I'm not going to tell you what outcome we want to see.

Because frankly, this is a -- as I said before, this is a process that the Kyrgyz people are going to have to work through. It's a process that's going to have to have -- that's going to have to be accepted by them and that, therefore, they will have to determine its outcome. We are there to support them as they do so, consistent with the rule of law, through Kyrgyz institutions and with the support and help of the international community.

QUESTION: So the U.S. does not regard Akayev right now any longer as the head of state there, do you?

MR. ERELI: I have told you what the Kyrgyz institutions themselves have done. I'm not going to provide interpretation for you on those steps.

QUESTION: For U.S. policy, who do we --

MR. ERELI: U.S. --

QUESTION: -- recognize as the head of state there?

MR. ERELI: U.S. policy is to work with the institutions and realities on the ground.

QUESTION: Well, we're not really asking for predictions, I don't think. We're asking for you as judgment as to whether it's in line with U.S. policy that the president of a country be forced out the way he was. And you talk about peaceful change. Was this peaceful change? Or are you looking to the future? You're talking about the future, how you'd like to see things unfold, blah blah blah, all these great Jeffersonian principles. But did the people forcibly remove a president and is that okay with the United States?

MR. ERELI: I can't speak to, really, the motives of the president in leaving the country. It happened. It's a fact. The president is not in the country. We have to deal with that reality. We have to work with the situation to maintain a sense of order, to channel what's happening in a peaceful direction, to work through institutions and to produce an outcome, as I said, that is stable, that is accepted as legitimate and that conforms to international standards. And as these events unfold, that is what has guided and will our actions and our policy.

QUESTION: Adam, is there any attempts to contact Akayev? Has he made any attempts to reach out to you? Is there any contact at all --

MR. ERELI: Not that I'm aware of.

QUESTION: A moment ago, though, you just said that he appears to have fled and then just now you said, it happened, it's a fact the president has left the country. Has the U.S. confirmed that he has, in fact, left the country?

MR. ERELI: We believe he has left the country; his whereabouts as far as I know are still undetermined.

Yes.

QUESTION: Normally, you're a stickler -- sticklers for constitutional successions and you certainly have seem to have made an exception in this case. Why is that?

MR. ERELI: I don't know that I had made an exception. As I said, what's happened -- what the steps that have been taken in Kyrgyzstan have all been through Kyrgyz institutions and, at least, based on Kyrgyz law.

QUESTION: I mean, what happened in the streets is in accordance with --

MR. ERELI: In response to those events.

QUESTION: What happened in the street, compelling the president to leave his post, was in accordances with --

MR. ERELI: Don't get me wrong, Barry. I'm not saying that -- I'm not speaking to the legality of what the opposition people -- of what some people might have done when they stormed government buildings. I'm not speaking to that point. I'm speaking to the way that that situation has been handled.

QUESTION: The way it's been handled?

MR. ERELI: The way they --

QUESTION: By whom?

MR. ERELI: The response to those events have been through Kyrgyz institutions, according to Kyrgyz law.

QUESTION: But the events that inspired the response --

MR. ERELI: I'm not going to speak to those.

QUESTION: -- you have no judgment on?

MR. ERELI: I'm -- that's not --

QUESTION: You're not making a judgment?

MR. ERELI: Right

Yes.

QUESTION: Adam, in keeping with the dealings of realities on the ground ahead, has the U.S. Ambassador or anyone else made direct contact with this Mr. Akayev, the interim leader, directly?

MR. ERELI: I know we've been -- I know that's been our intention. I don't know if they've actually spoken yet. I'll have to check, but I would expect that to be the case.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Adam, by contrast, there has been about roughly two months of trouble in western South America --

MR. ERELI: I'm sorry. Are we done with Kyrgyzstan?

QUESTION: Well, it's a similar question.

MR. ERELI: No, it's not. It's either Kyrgyzstan or not Kyrgyzstan.

QUESTION: I do have one question related to Kyrgyzstan. Any readout on the Secretary's conversation with Foreign Minister Lavrov about Kyrgyzstan?

MR. ERELI: The Secretary and Foreign Minister Lavrov did discuss Kyrgyzstan among other issues.

QUESTION: When was this?

MR. ERELI: This was this morning. And they agreed on the importance of the international community working together to help the Kyrgyz people through this political situation, this political crisis, and I think both agreed on the importance of the rule of law, non-violence and the support of the international community.

QUESTION: Is there anything they disagreed about?

MR. ERELI: Not really.

QUESTION: So it's just one hunky-dunky conversation?

MR. ERELI: Pretty hunky-dunky.

QUESTION: He likes the way things are going and she likes the way things are going and ---

MR. ERELI: I think they saw eye to eye on this issue.

QUESTION: Okay. And they saw eye to eye on the issue. Who initiated the call?

MR. ERELI: I believe it was the Secretary.

QUESTION: Did Foreign Minister Lavrov provide any information about Akayev's whereabouts or share any information from conversations which they (inaudible).

MR. ERELI: Not that I recall.

QUESTION: Adam, earlier this week we were told that there were questions whether or not the extent of alleged electoral fraud in the March 13th elections warranted such a sweeping response. Is that an issue in this now? I mean, nobody's really come out and said definitely that there was massive fraud.

MR. ERELI: Well, I would note that the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan invalidated the election of the new parliament.

QUESTION: Right.

MR. ERELI: So that, I think, is a ruling by Kyrgyz institutions on the validity of those elections.

QUESTION: All right. Okay.

MR. ERELI: Done with Kyrgyzstan?

QUESTION: Yes, we --

MR. ERELI: Okay, off to you.

QUESTION: Adam, by contrast, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, they've had street fighting, they've had what could be termed lawlessness in the last month or two and --

MR. ERELI: Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador?

QUESTION: And not all in the same context, but also Secretary Rice is headed to Santiago, Chile in the near future.

MR. ERELI: Haven't announced any travel yet that I'm aware of.

QUESTION: It's for a Democratic Community of Democracy summit.

MR. ERELI: Haven't announced any travel.

QUESTION: I understand. But is this lawlessness or unrest, do you think, or through your analysis being instituted or instigated by Venezuela or Cuba?

MR. ERELI: I would not characterize it as violence, lawlessness or unrest and I don't see any connection to -- that you described.

I'm sorry. Elise had a question.

QUESTION: Yes. Can you say anything on the intended sale to Pakistan of F-16s?

MR. ERELI: Well, we have spoken to this issue earlier today in a very extensive background briefing in which we spoke really about a broadening and growing strategic relationship with South Asia and where we hope to take our relationship with both India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, for that matter, and how in a, I would say, wide-ranging, far-reaching way, we are looking to improve security and improve prosperity and improve development of the entire region as a whole through an integrated program of engagement with all three countries.

And as part of that -- and those -- that engagement includes security, it includes energy, it includes economy, it includes diplomacy and politics -- and part of that is a decision to begin negotiations with the Pakistani Government and Congress to sell F-16s to Pakistan and to respond favorably to a request for information from India for the possible sale of multi-role combat aircraft.

So those two limited aspects of a much broader strategic engagement were sent up to the Hill today in the form of the Javits report.

QUESTION: Is Afghanistan ready to get F-16s too?

MR. ERELI: That is not on the table at the moment.

QUESTION: Well, do you want to get a little bit into --

MR. ERELI: Well, Afghanistan --

QUESTION: But you brought it in as part of a triangular --

MR. ERELI: Sure, sure, because if you're talking about the future of the region, Afghanistan plays a critical role. We've certainly seen its potential for disruption in the years under the Taliban and what we've also seen is its potential for contributing positively to the democratic development of the region through what's happened since the fall of the Taliban. We've also seen the threat that is posed by the cultivation and sale of poppies. So --

QUESTION: Right.

MR. ERELI: And we've also seen, frankly, what can happen if you neglect Afghanistan and how -- you know, countries like that that are neglected can become sources of instability.

So if you are looking for a more stable, more prosperous future for the region, engagement in Pakistan is a critical component of a broader regional strategy. That is why we are -- I think that is why Afghanistan is a critical part of our strategy for the region. We are working to help President Karzai fight narco-trafficking and it's also why we are focusing on encouraging good relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan which have, frankly, never been better and contribute to all stability.

So it would be wrong, what I'm saying is, it's important to look at the limited question of sale of planes in the broader context of an overall approach to long-term stability and security in the region.

QUESTION: And the sale of planes to two countries that have fought wars against each other, have a hot dispute over Kashmir, among other things, that doesn't give you -- doesn't give the U.S. Government any cause for concern? You don't -- I mean, you don't think they might feel a little more -- what should I say -- a little more plucky --

MR. ERELI: Two points.

QUESTION: -- more inclined to knock each other off? You're comfortable with all of this?

MR. ERELI: Two points. Since the period of tensions, the relations between them have come a long way and the thaw between India and Pakistan -- relations between India and Pakistan have never been better. That's point one.

Point two. Stability comes from a sense of security and to the extent that we can contribute to Pakistan's sense of security and India's sense of security that will contribute to regional stability.

QUESTION: How is this different from Europe contributing to China's sense of stability by selling them far more innocuous weapons -- not even weapons -- helicopters, dual-use things possibly? That you don't like because you feel that fuels -- it adds weapons into a tense region apropos China and Taiwan. You don't see any irony here at least?

MR. ERELI: No.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

MR. ERELI: Yes.

QUESTION: A couple of things. First, is it our -- is it your understanding that the planes that we are negotiating to sell to Pakistan are the ones that have already been built and are in storage now in Tucson, Arizona? Or are we proposing to sell them newly built planes?

MR. ERELI: These are new aircraft.

QUESTION: Have they been built yet?

MR. ERELI: We have not negotiated the terms of the sales. So, no, the answer is no.

QUESTION: Okay. And what would become under this arrangement of the planes that are now in storage from the previous deal with Pakistan?

MR. ERELI: I don't know.

QUESTION: Okay. Would the planes that you're responding favorably to request for information about from India be the same kinds of planes, different planes, or the planes that are in storage?

MR. ERELI: Well, there would be -- India has announced its request for information on what we might be interested in selling it in terms of multi-role combat aircraft. So, it is -- corporations are now free to talk to India about what they have to offer and it will be up to India to decide what it wants and then negotiations, if it does decide it wants something from us, based on its needs would proceed from there.

QUESTION: One last question. To follow up, as much as it pains me to do so on Barry's, why shouldn't -- why shouldn't it be seen as hypocritical? Explain why it shouldn't be seen as hypocritical for the United States to pump weapons, aircraft, military fighters into a tense region, on the one hand, while on the other hand, it's saying, that we disapprove of the injection of military hardware into another tense region?

MR. ERELI: Yeah. Well, couple of reasons. One is, the embargo on China was imposed after the Tiananmen massacre -- after the incidence of Tiananmen in 1989. In response to the suppression of dissent and Chinese actions that had very serious human rights consequences, that's the reason the embargo was imposed in the first place. So if you're going to say, well, let's lift the embargo, you have to ask your question, "Well, what's changed since 1989, with regard to what led to the embargo in the first place?" And the answer is nothing, as far as Tiananmen is concerned.

At the same time, when you have Cross-Straits tensions, where they are today, the idea of adding to -- changing the balance of power does not help those tensions, number one. And number two, I think that's in contrast to what we see in South Asia, where you see a thaw, a lessening of tensions, a steady progression of engagement, of dialogue, of compromise. I mean, look, Musharraf is going to India in the near future. And you have all the trend lines going in a positive direction and you have a process of engagement and a process of dialogue that is producing results. And you have a regional equation that -- in which cooperation and coordination and looking at events in the region differently, are what characterize how they see each other and how we see them.

So that's why I think it's really apples and oranges we're talking about. And you have to look at not just -- you have to look at it not from the prism of selling arms to countries that have traditionally had hostilities but rather working to build relationships and trust and encourage positive movement that has already been there. The fact of the matter is, India and Pakistan have both proved that they -- that engagement works and that they can move in positive directions with the right kind of relationship. They're (inaudible) global war on terror -- Pakistan's (inaudible) global on terror. India has shown it in our next steps and strategic partnership over three years. Afghanistan has shown it with elections.

So this sale needs to be or this issue of F-16s need to be seen in that broader context. And that's very -- it's a very different reality -- I'm not saying -- a very different reality than the China reality, where, you know, the human rights -- Tiananmen -- there hadn't been much of a change there since 1989. And the Cross-Straits tensions really hasn't gone very far. So that's why I would say don't look at it from the same optic.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. ERELI: Sir.

QUESTION: A senior official said a few hours ago that the U.S. goal is to helping to become a major world power. Can you confirm that on the record?

MR. ERELI: Yes. I will confirm that what was said before on the record.

QUESTION: Can you say that rather than quoting me?

MR. ERELI: You know, I will say that India is fast becoming a major world power and our interest is in helping to integrate that world power into the community -- into the -- help integrate that into the existing power structure in the world.

Yes.

QUESTION: How many planes are you planning to sell to Pakistan?

MR. ERELI: Undetermined.

Yes.

QUESTION: There's -- with the regard to the sale, there's talk that the Indians would actually be building that plane eventually, offshore in India. And a day ago, Admiral Ramdas of India just spoke to this issue. He's working much like Senator Lugar, as well as Senator Dodd for disarmament in the region. And when you have these planes, isn't it just another way of taking these weapons and then making this --

MR. ERELI: Well, let's take a step -- let me just -- you've gone too far. As I said before, we are responding to a request for information. We have not concluded a deal to sell anything. But we are now embarked upon the path of possibly selling some aircraft. So that's with respect to this specific issue today.

With respect to our strategic partnership, we have talked about, I think, some local manufacturer of defense articles. Which defense articles, what components, et cetera, et cetera, is again, to be the subject, I think, of discussion, as a principle to something that we are working on but I would not look at it in specific terms yet.

I'm sorry. Let's go on. Yeah.

QUESTION: I just wanted to follow up on something that James had asked. Are you excluding the possibility that deal struck with Pakistan could be to sell the F-16s that have already been built and are in storage?

MR. ERELI: That's -- no. I think that's a separate issue. What we're negotiating with Pakistan on will be new planes. And as for the deals that have already been concluded, I -- that's a separate issue and I don't have information to report to you on that.

QUESTION: Do you have any idea what the maintenance fees on those things are?

(Laughter.)

MR. ERELI: More than I can afford. (Laughter.)

I'm sorry. You had a follow up, Joel.

QUESTION: Yes. Question. It's ultimately up to Congress, as it was enunciated in this morning's briefing. Is Congress all enthused about this dual sale to both countries?

MR. ERELI: I don't want to speak for Congress. I will tell you that we are very mindful of the need to consult and work together in a partnership with Congress and that will certainly be how we proceed.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you. We are a group of Bulgarian media. We understand that last week the United States, Bulgaria and the European Union had a trilateral meeting in Washington to discuss the case of Bulgarian medics in Libya. What are the results of this meeting and what will be the United States contribution to save the Bulgaria medics in Libya?

MR. ERELI: Let me begin by saying that Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Passy had a very good meeting today. They talked about, obviously, our bilateral relationship and they agreed that it is in great shape; that we've really developed a strong and warm partnership and that's certainly evidenced in Bulgaria's very important and valuable role in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in the Balkans and in European institutions as well.

We did discuss the issue of the imprisoned Bulgarian medics in Libya. Secretary Rice affirmed for Foreign Minister Passy the determination of the United States to do everything possible, everything within our power to obtain the release of these prisoners who have been in Libyan prisons for much too long and without cause -- or without justification.

I can tell you that last week senior level officials of the United States, the European Union and Bulgaria met in Washington to discuss the case of these workers and to explore avenues for their release. We will continue with these consultations. We will continue to work together to impress upon Libya our

common desire, our commonly shared belief that the medics should be released, that there were serious flaws in the investigation and in the prosecution of the case and that we would like to see them returned to their country as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Sir, first of all, you said that they explored ways. Did they draw any plan or it's too early for this?

MR. ERELI: I think they agreed on the importance of continuing to work together both as a threesome to engage with Libya on the release so that they agreed that they would continue to consult; they would continue to meet. I think they discussed ways of -- and ideas for achieving their release but I don't have any details to share with you.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(This briefing was concluded at 3:45 p.m.)

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