



## Interview With Pahlavon Turghunov of the BBC Uzbek Service

**R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs**

Washington, DC

August 2, 2005

**QUESTION:** Yes, (inaudible) what about the Uzbekistan decision on the U.S. base?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, first of all the United States has, of course, pursued a relationship since 1991 with Uzbekistan, a friendship with the Uzbek people. We're a country that has always stood on principle and we believe we've been a good friend to Uzbekistan. I cannot say that the decision to close off the air base was a surprise. We did see an indication that this would occur, we knew it would occur. And we have balanced view of our relations with Uzbekistan. On the one hand we clearly have been supportive of efforts to strengthen our relationship on the military side. Of course, access to the base was useful to us, but on the other hand, the United States felt it was very important we speak out clearly on behalf of those who were victims of human right abuses, particularly concerning the Andijon episode. And so we did speak out and therefore we will, of course, abide by this decision on a sovereign basis, but we will continue to believe that reform is necessary in Uzbekistan and the Uzbek people should have a greater measure of liberty in the future.

**QUESTION:** What do you think? What do you know about the motivation for their position?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Ah, I think you will have to ask the Uzbek government for its rationale on why it choose to do this, but as Secretary Rumsfeld said last week - he was in Kyrgyzstan, he was in Tajikistan - the United States has good friends in the region. We do have access to military facilities, and I think one of the points that it's important to note is that the troubles in Afghanistan continue. There are Taliban and al Qaeda attacks on the Afghan forces, on the Coalition forces - on the European forces as well as the American forces. And, therefore, it's still necessary for the United States to take advantage of our friendships in Central Asia, to be able to use the bases in order to provide support and supplies to our forces in Afghanistan.

I know that there have been some statements from Tashkent, other capitals, saying that there's no longer a need for the United States to use these bases in Central Asia because the conflict in Afghanistan has ended. But if you talk to President Karzai, in Kabul, talk to the Afghan people, look at the increased number of attacks against the Afghans and the Coalition over the summer, the conflict in Afghanistan clearly has not ended.

**QUESTION:** Do you see any link between the pressure that the United States had been putting on the Uzbek government to allow international investigation of the killings in May?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Oh, I don't see a link. No, I think it's normal and realistic that in the modern world - the twenty first century - countries have a variety of interests. In the case of Uzbekistan, the United States has an interest in good relations with the government, we have an interest in continued counter-terrorism and military cooperation, but we also have an interest in human rights. We have an interest in the case of Andijon, suggesting that there be an international effort, a cooperative effort to look into the incidents there to determine what happened. That seems, to us, to be logical so we don't draw any linkage. No, we think it's normal that a country should both press for security interests as well as for interests concerning democracy and human rights.

**QUESTION:** So, what's your strategy for Uzbekistan? Will you continue to regard Uzbekistan as an ally, as a strategic partner?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, we will certainly continue to work with Uzbekistan, and we will continue to try to be a helpful partner in the war on terrorism. The war on terrorism is in the interest of the countries of Central Asia, and it's not over yet. There is the Taliban, there is...there are other terrorists groups that haven't been defeated. And so, we will continue with those efforts, but we will also continue to be clear about our interest in human rights and democratic reforms.

**QUESTION:** Yesterday, the State Department Spokesman said whether the Uzbek Government (inaudible) international investigation will be a factor in any decision to provide (inaudible) aid. If it doesn't agree, what else are you going to do besides withhold aid to Uzbekistan?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, we think it's important that the Uzbek government help the international community to determine what happened in Andijon. We owe it - all of us - to the victims there, to the families of the victims and we will continue to assert the point that Uzbekistan should be open to an international investigation.

**QUESTION:** So now with the U.S. a Base is going to be closed in Uzbekistan, can we expect that more criticism from U.S. in terms of human rights and democracy, and support for the positions?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Oh, I think you'll just see the United States continue to assert the principal that human rights and democratic reforms are important and what happened in Andijon must be investigated. We have been asserting that for two months. We will not change now, we will continue to assert that. We made a clear choice, and that was to stand on the side of human rights. We also supported the right of the Uzbeks who are in Kyrgyzstan - the 439 nine Uzbeks who are refugees there, their right to travel to safety in Romania. That was very important so retribution was not exacted upon them. We made these decisions deliberately and, of course, these decisions took into account our regional security considerations as well as our human rights interests. So, I expect the United States will continue to be consistent in what we have been saying and doing, and we hope for a positive response from the Uzbek authorities.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Burns, thank you very much, thank you for your time.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** It's a great pleasure, thank you very much. Bye bye.

Released on August 2, 2005

