



## Briefing on Secretary Rice's Upcoming Trip to Central Asia and Afghanistan

**Josette Sheeran Shiner, Under Secretary for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs**  
**Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs; and Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs**  
Washington, DC  
October 7, 2005

(2:15 p.m. EST)

**MR. ERELI:** Welcome everybody. We're pleased to welcome three officials to brief you today on the record on the Secretary's trip to Central Asia and Afghanistan. We have Under Secretary of State for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs, Josette Sheeran Shiner; Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Daniel Fried; and Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca.

We'll have Assistant Secretary Fried kick it off for the general overview, Assistant Secretary Rocca talk about Afghanistan and Under Secretary Sheeran Shiner talk about the economic dimensions of the trip and then we'll open it up to questions.

So if I could ask -- why don't you all just come on up so we get something for the cameras and kick it off.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Afternoon, everyone. I was in the region last week, Central Asia, and came back. The Secretary -- came back and found the Secretary had firmed up her plans to go to Central Asia, which she is going to do, leaving October 10th. I'll walk through the schedule, but let me start by giving some overall themes.

The reason that she is going to Central Asia; the reason I went to Central Asia is that history there is beginning -- seems to be accelerating in directions of simultaneously both good and, in one country, not so good. There has been this year a major democratic advance in Kyrgyzstan where the newly-elected leadership, elected in the fairest, freest elections that region has seen, is struggling with reforms.

It is moving forward in Kazakhstan, as you will see if you go on this trip, a country with considerable resources and seems to be putting many of its oil and gas resources to good use to develop the country.

Tajikistan has emerged in recent years from a terrible civil war and is now poised to start moving in a reformist direction. The country where the news is less good, I fear, is Uzbekistan where even before the Andijan events, we had had well known difficulties because of the lack of political reform and even some backward movement. The Secretary is not going to Uzbekistan. I did go there, though, my discussions is already old news. There's been quite enough written about it, but the region is accelerating.

Our interests -- American interests in Central Asia are really three-fold. We have military and security interests because of the war on terror and our desire to see that Islamist extremism, if I can use that term, does not succeed or spread. We have economic interests, both energy, but also a broader interest in seeing these countries develop functioning free market economies. And we have political interests, which are really our support for democratic reforms and democratic movements of these countries.

My chief point is that these interests are indivisible. We cannot and will not have a one-dimensional relationship with any of these countries based, for example, purely on security interests. It doesn't work. The President's freedom agenda, which is our guide not just rhetorically but in reality, means that we look to countries and leaders who are moving their country in a reformist direction across the board.

So with that, let me walk you very briefly through the trip. I don't know how many of you are going. In fact, are any of you planning to go on this trip? Most of you are planning to go, well, all right then. You will leave in the morning of October 10th, arriving in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan late that night. This is a ten-hour time difference, so you are very far away. The Manas Air Base is located at the airport so you will be able to see that without much difficulty. There is, I think you'll have some down time because you won't be arriving until -- as I look at the schedule, I realize you don't arrive until the following morning. Well, take that back, so you arrive in the morning of the 11th. That afternoon, you'll be meeting with a constitutional reform group with the President parliamentary speaker. You will be meeting with Prime Minister Kulov -- well, the Secretary will be meeting with Prime Minister Kulov, President Bakiyev. There should be a joint press availability with President Bakiyev. And then an overnight.

The following day, you will go to Kabul. This is now the 12th. You will meet the -- the Secretary will meet with the Embassy staff. There is a planned small business, micro-business event that morning. The Secretary will meet also with ministers involved in anti-narcotics strategy; meetings with President Karzai; and then a flight to Astana.

**QUESTION:** No "pressa"?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Pardon me?

**QUESTION:** No "pressa"?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Press availability with President Karzai, to be sure.

You arrive Astana in the late afternoon or early evening. There will be a meeting with President Nazarbayev of that evening, plus a "pressa" -- is that the term? -- (laughter) -- a pressa. Well, I've got a new jargon.

**QUESTION:** Or a "newsa"? (Laughter.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** A press availability. You'll be overnighting in Astana and if any of you have -- has anyone here been to Astana before? Well, if you -- in fact some of you were there, I believe, in 2001 with Powell and it was minus 30. I can tell you, you will enjoy it more this time, but you will also see evidence of what I was speaking about earlier, which is the development of the country in general and particularly of the city. It has grown; it is a -- the signs of wealth are there and it is not simply empty office buildings and no traffic. There are people. There are cars. And it is quite striking to see how much has been accomplished.

On October the 13th, there are plans for the Secretary in the morning to make a speech, followed by a roundtable with young entrepreneurs in the non-energy sector. And then flying to Dushanbe -- meeting in Dushanbe. We're now on October 13th, early afternoon, meeting with President Rahmonov, meeting with small business people and then flying back to Europe. It's a long way. That is the walk through the trip. And I'd like my colleague to say more about Afghanistan and then Under

Secretary Sheeran Shiner to talk about the economic dimension of the region and there will be questions.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROCCA:** Thank you. Dan's pretty much given you the schedule. The purpose of the Secretary's trip and visit to Afghanistan this time is to congratulate the Afghan people on their successful election and also to restate the long-term commitment of the U.S. to see the job in Afghanistan through to the end. We'll also be talking and working with the Afghans on the counternarcotics strategy. As you saw from the schedule, the Secretary will also be meeting with some of the ministers on this topic. And basically, that's the -- and then also the economic dimension, which I will defer to Josette to talk about. Those are the main thrusts of this visit to Kabul this time.

**UNDER SECRETARY SHINER:** Good afternoon. I think you will see throughout the schedule a strong economic component here. And as Secretary Rice has said throughout this region, but certainly as we seek to promote freedom and democracy throughout the globe, we see demands that a real difference be made in the lives of people and so there's a couple of components here. One is looking at the institutions of economic reform and how they contribute to the building of democracy. And so whether it's rule of law or property rights or contract rights or looking at the opportunity to start a business, we've had some good news in the region. The World Bank's "Doing Business" report, for example, rates Afghanistan as the top reformer this year in shortening the number of procedures it takes to start a business from 28 to 1. This is very critical for people on the ground trying to build a livelihood in these countries. And so you will see throughout the trip a number of events that will highlight different aspects of this.

Each of these events on economic matters are really small roundtables where the Secretary will hear from people -- entrepreneurs, women business -- women trying to start businesses and others -- the ag issues involved in creating alternative crops to -- in the narcotics area, where we can look at how the United States can work in partnership with the people in these countries to help build these opportunities.

So just to touch on a few of these, in Afghanistan we will be meeting with women entrepreneurs. We have a number of programs there through micro-lending, through creating industrial parks where the opportunities can come. But our goal in this meeting is to really hear from these women about the challenges they face and make sure that the programs that we have and the actions we're taking are creating that opportunity for them.

Obviously, in the area of counternarcotics, a key leg of that stool is creating alternative livelihoods, and in building those programs we have a number of programs in the countries to do that.

And then in Kazakhstan we'll be meeting with young entrepreneurs. One of the key policy goals for the United States in Kazakhstan is to help see that the non-oil sector develop so that the benefits of the economic growth there are felt throughout the society. They have a very dynamic entrepreneurial group there and we'll be hearing from them about the programs and policies and reforms needed to push that forward.

And then in Dushanbe we'll be meeting with small business owners. I think in Kyrgyzstan we -- this is a moment, a strong moment for economic reforms to really be pushed forward and throughout the region for the leadership to take a strong stand against corruption, and we'll be meeting with small business owners to really hear about the challenges they face on the ground and to really talk about the kind of programs we have to promote that.

So that's the economic portion.

**MR. ERELI:** Questions?

**QUESTION:** Dan, can you step back for a minute and talk to us about the competition the United States faces in Central Asia from the Russians and the Chinese? Today you had an announcement the Russians are going to be using a military base in Tajikistan. You came back, apparently, with some kind of pledge that we'd be using or they'd be interested in allowing American troops to use.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, I didn't visit Tajikistan at all on this last trip. I visited Kyrgyzstan. We are not -- we do not look at Central Asia as an object in a great game. We do not look at this as a zero sum contest between us, the Russians and Chinese. We have our own interests. Our own interests do overlap significantly with what I believe are Russian interests, that is, we both oppose Islamist extremism and terrorism; we both oppose and are cooperating to help staunch the flow of narcotics across Central Asia through Russia into Western Europe.

Given the history of the countries and the leaderships are by and large all Russian-speaking Soviet -- mostly Soviet elite figures who are obviously national leaders and proud of their respective countries. But given the extent of Russian interests, the very large Russian population -- minority population in the region, particularly Kazakhstan, Russia is going to be a factor. That doesn't bother us. Whether the Russians regard this as a zero sum game is another matter and you should put the question to them.

It is true that the last summer the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created a stir by saying that the operations in Afghanistan were winding to a close, therefore, there was no reason to have foreign military bases. Well, some of the same governments who issued that statement sometimes criticize us because operations in Afghanistan aren't going well enough. Obviously, you can't have it two ways. But we do not look at this as a zero sum game. It is not our issue.

**MR. ERELI:** Saul.

**QUESTION:** It was no surprise that you say the interests are indivisible when you're talking about democracy and the other interests; but, once you've made that strategic decision that you're not going to (inaudible), how does that -- how difficult does that make your diplomacy with these countries? There are countries that while you talk about movement going forward, they tend to be resisting a move towards democracy and they certainly don't get prodded like that by China or Russia.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, I -- so far, it has been true that Russia's democracy agenda doesn't -- in the region -- doesn't seem to be as robust as ours, if I can put it that way. The art of diplomacy is -- and foreign policymaking -- is taking your principles, sticking to them, but applying them in the real world in ways that make sense. That's easy to say and it's very hard to do.

It is clear that a one-dimensional relationship was simply unsustainable in Uzbekistan, for example. We simply could not ignore all the problems on the democracy side. At the same time, you have to be realistic enough to distinguish between what you want in the end and what you see on the ground as possible in any given year and on any given day. That means what we look for is progress. We look for civil society being present and operating without fear. We look for elections getting better. We look for contested elections. There are presidential elections -- presidential elections process underway in Kazakhstan and there are opposition candidates. I met with them. I met with -- in all the countries, I met with the opposition, though in Uzbekistan you might more aptly call them dissidents. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan these people are very outspoken. They don't seem to be -- they don't express a fear of arrest, of the knock on the door.

So you look -- these are countries with civil society. These are countries which have the potential to move much more rapidly in a democratic direction where progress has been made. It's also true that economic development and political development ultimately do go hand in hand, if the economic development is based on the rule of law and development of a middle class whose interest it is to insist on the rule of law and predictability. These are tough processes. So we are very clear about what we want and we are realistic about what we can get, and what we want is the forward movement.

**QUESTION:** Can I ask you a follow-up on the real -- how realistic you are about what you can achieve from sort of, as you say, day to day? We asked here about something that happened in Tajikistan this week --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Right.

**QUESTION:** -- and it was the opposition leader being jailed. Work us through the sort of the calculus there. There's been no statement of any kind condemning that, and yet to all of us it seems a pretty anti-democratic move.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, we have a very clear record of support for democracy and, in fact, the only place in the world where the United States -- the administration is accused of lack of fidelity to democratic principles is in Washington. When I was in the region, it was quite the opposite. It was either thanks for the help and support from one side or, gee, would you people please lay off from the other side, although some of the governments -- well, now, some of the governments also welcome our support and engagement with civil society.

Our record is very clear. I'm quite proud of that record of support for democracy. There are going to be individual problems. I'm not trying to suggest that any of these countries have reached the stage of full democracy, but our -- we do speak out. We do stand for democratic principles and, as I said, our relations with all the countries in this region have to incorporate all of our interests and we won't let ourselves be pulled apart by one-dimensional approaches.

**QUESTION:** Just following up on that a little bit, the Pentagon has been interested in this area for the purpose of bases for some time and the Uzbekistan situation has forced them, I understand, willingly to look elsewhere. To what extent is the presence, the military presence, of the United States in this region a part of the portfolio of Secretary Rice on this trip? Does she engage in discussions about that? Does she participate in the discussions back in Washington about the climate for expanding that presence?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, we do have an interagency process and it functions and the State Department plays. We have an integrated policy toward Central Asia. And we do -- we, State, do work very closely with our DOD colleagues about all of these issues. I can't speak to what the Secretary might or might not say about our military interests. But as I said, our interests include security interests and that's across the board. It's not that State takes one piece of this and Commerce or USTR takes another piece and Defense takes yet a third piece. We all are interested in the same things, though operationally the Defense Department has particular expertise, which we appreciate. We're interested in advancing relations across the board.

**QUESTION:** You just stated that you are very realistic in regard to what you want to get out of that trip. What is that you want to get, if you can speak about each and every country you would go to?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, we want -- in general, we want to see our relations at hand strengthened with these countries on the basis of the three sets of interests that I've described earlier. That is security, economic and support for reform both political and economic. That's what we want. It's been a long time since the Secretary of State has been in the region. I'm not sure when the last time was. I don't know whether Secretary -- I can't remember when -- when Powell went, that was in 2001 in December. But I think he must have gone afterwards.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Right. I'm sorry. My apologies. I should have known that. The -- with respect to the individual countries, Kyrgyzstan has a new government. They had elections. We want to encourage them now to move from simply establishing a democratically elected government to moving ahead on reforms, fighting corruption, stimulating the economy.

In Tajikistan, our interests are similar. They are just emerging from a civil war -- well, some years ago. But we want to see reforms increased. We want -- this is senior officials, senior American officials don't often get to Tajikistan, so this is a good occasion to show them of our interests.

And in Kazakhstan, you have a country which is both large, increasingly wealthy, and as you will see, a going -- very much a going concern and we want to work with Kazakhstan on not only bilateral issues, but regional issues as well. President Nazarbayev has been around awhile. He has made a success of Astana. He has implemented a number of interesting economic reforms so that country is beginning to move ahead. At the same time, the elections on the fourth of December are obviously going to be watched rather closely.

**UNDER SECRETARY SHINER:** Just a couple of things on the trade and economic front. This region makes no sense ultimately economically like most regions in the world, unless they have open borders and work together on both energy supplies, selling goods back and forth and transporting goods through the corridor connecting both Kazakhstan, Afghanistan and the whole region.

One of the things that we've initiated recently with them is a trade and investment framework agreement with the region. There aren't many of those in the world that are regional. And the purpose of that is to discuss with them how to bring down the barriers between the borders, both in customs barriers, rule-of-law barriers, access to each other's countries and look at ways in which some are energy dependent, some are energy suppliers. How we can rationalize and help them rationalize the region. This is absolutely vital. It's intricately linked with the ability for their political reforms to be stabilized and for the region to be stabilized. So we'll work with them on that.

In addition, Kazakhstan is seeking to enter the WTO. Typically when countries enter the WTO it drives reforms through often thousands of laws within the system and they have to rationalize their economy in a way that allows for greater investment and trade, not only in the region and in the world. So we want to talk to them about that process and help really encourage them to move forward in completing that process. But mainly, if we can, ultimately, most regions in the world do 80 percent of their trade with each other. Where you see that not happening is where you often see poverty or a dependence -- overdependence -- on commodities or energy and not on the regional trade. So we'll be working with them to really try to energize that TIFA and put some real programs behind it to start bringing down these barriers.

**MR. ERELI:** (Inaudible) Barbara?

**QUESTION:** Yeah, thanks. Dan, I wanted to ask about the decision not to go to Uzbekistan for the Secretary. Is that wise to try to increase this area's isolation? Wouldn't it be better for her to go and try to see if she might persuade them to get an independent inquiry going into Andijan, perhaps change course?

And also is it true that the Uzbeks signaled to the United States that they wanted to renegotiate the base agreement sometime before Andijan but it was not taken up for some reason?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, I obviously do think it's a wise decision that the Secretary has made not to go and I wonder what your question might have been had she decided to go? Something like, I imagine, "Why are you going to that bloody dictatorship? Aren't you undercutting all your rhetoric about the freedom agenda and acting as rank hypocrites?" Right? (Laughter.) But since --

**QUESTION:** It was only because of fear of my question that she's not going? (Laughter.)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** No. The Secretary made the right, obviously, the right decision. We were very troubled by Andijan and not simply the events themselves but the reaction; but not simply Andijan and the reaction, but a whole series of steps which, frankly, are troubling -- pressure on NGOs, curtailment of exchange programs, a general climate of fear in the country, which I did not find in any other country I went to. These are very troubling.

We want -- now, in answer to your question about Uzbekistan -- we want to have better relations with that country on the basis of the 2002 joint statement, which was concluded when President Karimov came here. If you look at that joint statement, you will find and maybe you would be surprised to find that it lists cooperation from a democratic reforms as the first area of cooperation; not only that but there is explicit language that the United States will help, not only reforms -- political reforms in Uzbekistan, but Uzbek society, meaning NGOs directly. This is very forward-leaning language and I can tell you we had great hopes that on the basis of that language, President Karimov would move his country forward.

We still adhere to that joint statement as a basis for relations. We have not repudiated it. To my knowledge, the Uzbeks have not repudiated it. But we don't think that they have lived up to it. We think we have. I look forward to the day when we will work again with Uzbekistan.

**MR. ERELI:** Still in the back.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) about the base. They kind of signaled that they wanted to renegotiate it but it's not taken up for some reason.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** No, that's not quite true. We were engaged and prepared to be engaged in discussions with the Uzbeks about this. But in the wake of the Andijan events, they gave notice that they want -- that in accordance with the bilateral agreement on the base, they wanted us out and out we will go.

**MR. ERELI:** In the back. Teri.

**QUESTION:** Dan that was going to be my question. But as a follow-up, how are you then working with civil society and the dissident or opposition groups in Uzbekistan, if at all? And couldn't Secretary Rice have gone and given some impetus to them or would that have been impossible, given the relations now between the Uzbek Government and --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, we are working with Uzbek civil society. I suppose the right phrase would be "with difficulty" but we are continuing to; we shall continue to. On balance, I don't, frankly, think it's a very close call. I think that it's important to go to countries and spend our energy going to countries where there is a greater chance in the near term of progress, where this intersection of realism and longer-range objectives meets in a way that appears favorable. These decisions are made on the basis of what you think you can accomplish. This is where we came out. I think it was the right call.

**MR. ERELI:** Sir. Yes.

**QUESTION:** All of the countries on this trip have made a practice of returning Uighurs asylum seekers to China where they face imprisonment, execution. Will the Secretary be bringing this issue up and other human rights issue up in her meetings with government officials?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, it's not a good idea to comment on what the Secretary might or might not raise. I'm reasonably confident that issues of democratic reform, including human rights, will come up. I don't know whether the Uighur issue will come up. I'm not familiar with recent cases but with respect to refugees, of course, we spent a great deal of time working with the UN refugee organization to help the Uzbek refugees find, well, refuge in Romania when they were, I believe, in some danger.

**MR. ERELI:** Dimitry.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Mr. Secretary, if you will have to leave K-2 Air Base, Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, where will you be relocating personnel and equipment from that base? And what Bush Administration is going to do, if any, about the Senate decision to block those \$23 million that you intended to pay Uzbekistan for previous use of the base?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** The decision to --

**QUESTION:** To relocate troops and equipment from K-2.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Well, that's a question you should ask the Department of Defense. It's within their competence. And with respect to payments for the base, my understanding is that the Uzbeks have not accepted this; they want some more money. Well, we will see what happens but we are not -- that's -- I doubt that we will honor the rather arbitrary higher bill which has been presented.

**MR. ERELI:** Time for just a few more. Farah.

**QUESTION:** Has the new sort of strained relationship with Uzbekistan caused a change in the policy of handing back IMU fighters, these Uzbek fighters that were arrested in Pakistan and Afghanistan? Previous to -- previously, those fighters in U.S. custody would be sent back to Tashkent. Are we still doing that? Is there still that kind of cooperation?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** That's a good question and I don't know the answer because I don't know of any particular cases that have come up. When the next case does come up, we will look at that very carefully in light of the changed circumstances, but I don't want to prejudge an outcome.

**MR. ERELI:** Anne.

**QUESTION:** On Afghanistan. In your opening, Secretary Rocca, you talked about counternarcotics and the elections but not about security. In the last several weeks the situation has gotten much worse. How concerned are you about the increase in violence and whether or not it is threatening the progress seen in the elections?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROCCA:** Well, first, I think we would dispute the fact that of a -- the stark picture that you've just painted, I think the violence that was in the lead-up to the election was exactly what we expected. We don't see a particular resurgence of the Taliban, per se. That there is still a security issue to be dealt with, there is no doubt about it and we are continuing to train up the Afghan Army and the Afghan police and we're working on the border areas to get Pakistan and Afghanistan to cooperate even better in preventing insurgents from crossing the border.

And on that I can say that with respect to the elections that just took place, the role of Pakistan was quite important in sending over 80,000 soldiers to the border to help to secure it. I'll just stop it at that.

**QUESTION:** But I mean, there have been quite a number of bombings since the election. I mean, that's not a higher incidence than you thought you --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROCCA:** There's -- no. I mean, we -- obviously, let me start by saying that we don't want to see any violence at all and the ultimate goal in Afghanistan is to work towards stability in a place where all the Afghans can feel secure and can go about their business in a way where they don't have to worry about any kind of insurgent activity.

But that said, first of all, we are continuing to fight the fight against the terrorists. And second of all, in terms of numbers in the lead-up to the election and post-election is, unfortunately, along the lines of what's expected in terms of the current situation. It's a lot better than it was. There's still work to be done.

**MR. ERELI:** Last question for Warren.

**QUESTION:** Two quick questions for Dan. One, is avian flu going to be on the agenda? I realize that there's a meeting here on this very subject, but some of these countries have had cases and is the Secretary going to press the case, especially for transparency and reporting?

And secondly, on Kazakhstan and Nazarbayev, elections are coming up. He's been in power for 15 years, 16 years. Can you give us the Department's assessment of the preparations for the elections and whether it looks like it's going to be free and fair?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** On the first, avian flu is a huge issue in general. It's an issue also in Central Asia but it was not at the top of our list of issues to come up, but the Secretary will be prepared to discuss it.

With respect to the elections, well, I met with the two opposition candidates when I was in Almaty as well as with civil society. They -- the election campaign is beginning. There's registration of candidates. There are -- the issues we will look at will be media access, as well as -- and the general climate during the electoral campaign as well as the ballot counting. Very important, of course, as a practical matter will be the role, access and then finally conclusions of international observers, particularly from the OSCE. The way we look at elections in this part of the world is to have our own observers. But the first statement comes from ODIR, the Office of -- the Democracy Office of the OSCE that runs these missions. They're very good. They know what they're doing and they call elections free and fair, mostly free and fair. Significantly, you know, much improved, maybe a little short of free and fair, not free and fair. There are all kinds of phrases that they use. And their word really does have weight, so we will see.

**QUESTION:** Can I have a quick follow-up to that? In how many of these places will the Secretary meet with the opposition and one other thing, you haven't mentioned the -- I know -- you haven't mentioned the two other stops she has at the end and what her -- what the focus will be in Europe.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** That -- the last two stops are still under discussion, so I've got nothing to say about those. With respect to the opposition in civil society, I believe that in all cases she is --

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) political opposition, not just civil society.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** I'm not -- I can't recall from her schedule, but it is civil society first and foremost that she's going to meet with, rather than the political opposition.

**QUESTION:** So no political opposition in any of the stops?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRIED:** Not quite done yet, but civil society is a focus and, you know, the non-political sphere because as much of these countries futures in post-Communist development, it isn't just the oppositions that make the future, it's the independent institutions of society. No, no -- don't be too cynical because if you have a political opposition, but no civil society, no independent business community, no space for independent activity, you don't have much of a basis for democracy.

**MR. ERELI:** Thank you. That's it.

2005/929

Released on October 7, 2005

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.