



Remarks With Tajik Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Dushanbe, Tajikistan
October 13, 2005

FOREIGN MINISTER NAZAROV: (*Via interpreter.*) We have just concluded a meeting between the delegation of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, President Rahmonov, and the delegation of the United States headed by Secretary of State Rice.

Secretary Rice is visiting Tajikistan for the first time and arrived here to discuss a system of widening relations between Tajikistan and the United States, deepening these relations both on a bilateral and a regional level.

During the session, such topics of international threats were touched upon, including terrorism, extremism, and narcotics trade. The President of Tajikistan said that Tajikistan has been and remains a partner of the United States in the international fight against terrorism, extremism, and the international narcotics business.

And that's why I came to the conclusion that in order to be effective in our antiterrorism cooperation, the sides must devote more attention to the issues of regional security and regional development.

Tajikistan has pointed to the positive changes that have undertaken in Afghanistan and as a result of counterterrorism cooperation there, with the election of the president, the parliament, the adoption of a constitution, and which all give rise to the hope that the situation will be improving.

Still, it was noted that there are pockets of destabilizing factors still extant in Afghanistan. There are pockets of Taliban and al-Qaida fighters who are still attacking the coalition forces. And to combat it, as never before, we need a strong cooperation between the forces of the coalition to finally defeat these negative forces.

The sides also discussed some bilateral issues, especially issues of an economic nature. Tajikistan thanked the United States for helping build a bridge over the River Pyandzh and for many years of aid and support. Nonetheless, we proposed that perhaps it is time to start moving from providing humanitarian aid to projects, which would help Tajikistan develop.

Mutual understanding was reached on all of the above issues.

In conclusion, I would like to ask the Secretary of State, Madame Condoleezza Rice, to also make her statement.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I did have a very good discussion with President Rahmonov and with members of his government about the full range of U.S. relations with Tajikistan. We did talk about our cooperation in the war on terrorism and against narcotics and about the need to fully support Afghanistan so that Afghanistan can develop as a stable and democratic country that would never again be a platform for terrorist attacks.

We talked about the potential in the long run for this area, this region, to be economically strong through regional cooperation and through the contacts that can be made if indeed trade barriers are lowered and if it becomes possible for Central Asia to operate economically as a region.

And the President and I, in our session together earlier, had an opportunity to talk about the course of political events here in Tajikistan and the need for further democratic reform. I noted that Tajikistan does have independent political parties, that one of them is an Islamic party, and that that party participates in the political life, indeed in the parliament and in the government of Tajikistan.

That we, of course, are looking to the elections that will take place in Tajikistan and to have the government assure that those elections are free and fair. And, of course, free and fair elections do not begin on the day of the elections, but rather with the ability of opposition parties and movements to organize, to be able to do so without fear, to have access to the press so that their message can get across to the people.

All in all, we had a very good discussion and I believe that U.S.-Tajik relations can be deepened and we look forward to working with Tajikistan on the many issues of mutual interest.

FOREIGN MINISTER NAZAROV: A question from ITAR-TASS.

QUESTION: (*Via interpreter.*) I have a question, Dr. Rice, about the discussions you've had. Did you talk many specifics about the military-technical cooperation between Tajikistan and the United States? And if you have, what specifically was being discussed? And is there any possibility of U.S. military presence on Tajik soil in any form?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, as we have said, we do not seek a permanent military presence in this region. The United States is not at this time in a position to increase our permanent presence anywhere. In fact, we are tearing down our permanent presence in many places.

What we have with Tajikistan is good military-technical cooperation so that our operations can proceed to support the work that we are doing in the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. That is work that, as the President said, has to be done on behalf of not just the United States and Afghanistan but on behalf of the entire region. Extremism and terrorism are a threat to Tajikistan, just as they are threats to the United States and to Afghanistan. And so our military-technical cooperation is extremely important in support of our struggles -- our joint struggle -- against terrorism.

FOREIGN MINISTER NAZAROV: The thing is that I understand what's behind the question that was asked here. I'd like to tell you that there is nothing new and sensational that came out of these meetings. The only thing that came out of there was what we said in our introductory remarks. We will continue on the path of cooperation that we've started in 2001 after the events and so we will continue to cooperate in our fight against terrorism and other threats, which unfortunately do exist throughout the world.

I know what the press writes about this, but this is not true. I have taken some notes while the meeting between the Secretary and the President was taking place, and she clearly said -- I'm reading from the notes -- there is no military intentions to create any permanent bases in Tajikistan by the United States.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, as you have toured Central Asia, you have talked a lot about democracy in general terms and haven't necessarily highlighted specific cases, any anti-democratic moves that might concern you. But in your talks with leaders, including today, have you raised any specific cases, especially I'm interested to know if in Tajikistan you raised the case of the jailing of the democratic party leader Iskandarov?

And, for the Foreign Minister, when you hope to have free and fair elections, can you tell us how that is possible when a credible leader of the opposition isn't going to be able to be on the campaign trail but is actually going to be inside a jail cell?

SECRETARY RICE: Saul, we have raised these cases on numerous occasions with all of the governments of Central Asia. What I have done today is to express in the clearest possible terms that I can to the leaders that the United States, when it is considering its relations with countries, considers also the domestic circumstances and the road to democracy, as the President made clear in his State of the Union.

With the President I made very clear that free and fair elections meant that opposition could not only mobilize but that legitimate opposition ought to have the ability to run in elections. And so I think that it has been very clear here in Central Asia that we have high standards in our expectations for what can happen here.

Now let's be clear. Central Asia is a region that has not had a democratic path and you have heard me, time and time again, say that the important issue is to take countries where they are and to see them make progress, and that we have high expectations of our partners.

In Kyrgyzstan, there are special circumstances there that led to free and fair elections, elections, I think, that most people believe are freer and fairer than anything that has come close in this region.

In Kazakhstan, they are going to have elections and we expect those elections to be free and fair. And not only do we expect the day of the elections to be free and fair, but we expect the run-up to the elections to be free and fair. And I have made that pledge also to opposition candidates with whom I spoke after my speech there.

Here in Tajikistan, there is a growing multiparty system and that multiparty system needs to be protected. And we did talk today about the need for elections here to be free and fair.

This is a region that is in transition, but we have expectations that we have clearly communicated and will continue to clearly communicate to the leaders about the need for democratic development to continue, for democratic development to meet international standards and for elections -- which are one step along the democratic path -- to be free, fair and inclusive.

FOREIGN MINISTER NAZAROV: I want to answer as well that there's still more than a year left before the elections, the parties are still deciding who their candidates will be. The parties themselves are being formed and developed, so we'll see how that develops. And we hope that there will be candidates contending for various positions.

Speaking about the specific person that was mentioned today, he was not condemned by the courts as a leader of the party. He -- the party still exists and it still has its leadership. The court found him guilty as an official who violated laws, who was engaged in thefts of large sums of federal funds, and a private citizen for crimes. Those people who don't know the actual situation always try to -- tend to say that it is a political matter because of the political connection, but in reality this is not politics; this is just plain law.

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