



Remarks at Eurasian National University

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Astana, Kazakhstan
October 13, 2005

SECRETARY RICE: (*In Russian*) Thank you, Mr. Rector. Thank you for that warm welcome and the warm introduction. This is a really beautiful place. I'm very pleased to join you here at the Eurasian University, a university that is an historic center of learning here in the heart of the new Kazakhstan. This university, like the city of Astana itself, is a source of great pride for Kazakhstanis and the gleaming symbol of progress for all of Central Asia.

It was not 15 years ago that this bustling, modern capital was indeed a quiet and sleepy town called Akmolá, and the land we now know as Kazakhstan was just another part of the Soviet Union. When sovereign states finally emerged from the Soviet Union, they were undemocratic and poor and isolated from the rest of the world. Just think: That was little more than a decade ago. Today in Kazakhstan -- in much of this region, committed leaders and courageous citizens are charting a course for a more hopeful future here in Central Asia.

Every year, more and more people are finding new opportunities to thrive with economies that are privatizing and diversifying, and growing rapidly. Civil society is slowly finding new political space to assemble freely and call for reform. And Afghanistan, no longer an image of war and tyranny, is moving toward a vision of peace and democracy that can inspire an entire region.

To be sure, the road to reform extends before us many decades into the future. And the old demons of extremism and authoritarianism are still very menacing in this region. So today, in Astana, I want to speak to the people of Central Asia: The United States believes that liberty, and dignity, and justice are within reach of everyone in this region. And we are fully committed to partnership in helping you to realize this vision.

We seek peace and security. We seek economic development and prosperity. We seek democratic values and human rights that unite all free nations in trust and in respect. We seek a region in which relations are good between neighbors, between Russia and China and Afghanistan and all others in the region.

In terms of international security, Kazakhstan has been a regional leader since its earliest days of independence. After the end of the Cold War, Kazakhstan renounced its nuclear weapons and freely transferred over half a ton of weapons-grade uranium to secure sites outside the country. Today, as the spread of nuclear weapons takes new forms, Kazakhstan, along with Tajikistan, are expanding their cooperation with the United States through the Proliferation Security Initiative. We hope that Kyrgyzstan will join its neighbors in this important effort to protect people around the globe.

Together with Kazakhstan, and our Central Asian partners, we are also working to counter the illegal drug trade. Tajikistan has distinguished itself in this regard, seizing more illicit narcotics than the rest of the region combined. The surest way to fight the drug trade, though, is to uproot its source, particularly in Afghanistan. And a sustained, comprehensive effort is needed in that country to eradicate poppy, to cultivate lucrative alternatives to poppy farming, and to prosecute those who profit from illegal narcotics.

Finally, we applaud Kazakhstan's steadfast commitment to the continuing war against violent Islamic extremism here in Central Asia. And I want to thank President Nazarbayev and his government for their efforts to promote interfaith dialog and tolerance.

Four years after the liberation of Afghanistan, the enemies of peace and progress remain a very real threat. They are determined to return that long-suffering nation to the dark days of the Taliban. This would, of course, have disastrous consequences for everyone in this region. So until these terrorists are defeated in Afghanistan and throughout Central Asia, the United States needs and values the sustained security cooperation of many regional partners. But let me be clear: We in America do not seek a permanent military presence in Kyrgyzstan or anywhere in Central Asia. We seek access to support military operations against terrorists -- those who wish to sow death and destruction in their lands and ours.

As we strengthen security and fight terrorism, the United States and our friends in Central Asia will be able to deepen our cooperation in pursuit of greater liberty through development and prosperity.

Since its independence, Kazakhstan has also set an example in this region with bold economic reforms that have attracted investment, created jobs, and established a vibrant banking system. The Government of Kazakhstan has also made wise choices to begin diversifying its economy and ensuring that its vast oil wealth can become a source for social mobility, not social stagnation. One needs only to look around here in Astana to see the beginnings of a diverse and independent middle class.

The United States will support Kazakhstan's efforts to thrive economically, as outlined in our bilateral "Houston Initiative." As this nation's economy continues to develop, Kazakhstan should view its role as an engine for growth within Central Asia. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would benefit immensely from Kazakhstani investment and energy to stimulate growth and create jobs. And Afghanistan needs the full partnership of this entire region to overcome the destitution that tyrants, and extremists, and warlords, and civil war have compounded over several decades. A secure and prosperous Afghanistan, which anchors Central Asia and links it to South Asia, is essential to the future of economic success.

The United States is fully committed to helping Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors integrate themselves into the global economy. Central Asia has a long tradition as a host to some of the world's richest trading centers and trading routes. Today, regional economic trade can once again be a powerful engine of economic growth and opportunity. The United States is committed to high-level engagement with Kazakhstan and with its neighbors to stimulate cross-border trade and investment in energy, transportation, agriculture, and other sectors. And the United States is already hard at work with our partners in Afghanistan and Tajikistan in rebuilding the roads and bridges that are essential to revitalized regional and global trade.

To realize their full potential, however, every Central Asian country must do a great deal more to fight corruption, which is simply a tax on the poor. The farmers, and shopkeepers, and school teachers of Central Asia must know that government officials cannot arbitrarily seize their property. They must know that they will be able to withdraw from the bank all of the hard-earned money that they deposit there. And they must know that no unjust obstacles stand in their way of buying a house, or winning a contract or starting a business.

Some believe that these and other economic reforms are all that are needed to guarantee lasting prosperity, but this not the case. Wise statesmen know and history has demonstrated that political and economic freedom must advance together, and complement one another. History also teaches us that true stability and true security are only found in democratic regimes. And no calculation of short-term interest should tempt us to undermine this basic conviction. America will encourage all of our friends in Central Asia to undertake democratic reforms. And as they do, they will solidify a lasting partnership of principle with the United States.

Our goal is not to lecture our friends on how to do things the American way. Rather, we seek to help our Central Asian partners achieve the stability they seek. And our historical experience has taught us that stability requires legitimacy, and true legitimacy requires democracy.

Let me just say that we in America have every reason for humility when we talk about democracy. After all, it was only in my own lifetime that the United States finally guaranteed the democratic rights of all its citizens. We understand that the path to democracy is long, and imperfect, and different for every country. But make no mistake: The principles of democracy are unanimously desired and universally deserved. Here in Central Asia, there is much to do but there are reasons for optimism.

Afghanistan is amazing the world with its rapid progress to democracy. Free elections have empowered a president and a parliament to begin building institutions of governance that are transparent and responsible and legitimate. This will not happen overnight, but it is urgent work that cannot be deferred.

Tajikistan is still recovering from a bitter and bloody civil war, and it has a long way to go. But it is a mark of progress that all major participants in Tajikistan's past fighting are now sharing power in parliament. This includes the only legal Islamic political party in all of Central Asia.

Earlier this year, Kyrgyzstan took a major step toward democracy. Citizens filled the streets, demanding greater justice and fundamental freedoms and democratic rights. This led to a presidential election that reflected the will of the people, and though certainly not perfect, was the freest and fairest in the modern history of Central Asia. And now, the members of the current government must work together to consolidate their revolution by fighting corruption, and increasing accountability, and advancing constitutional reform.

Finally, here in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev has successfully led his country through the early stages of statehood. He has lifted Kazakhstan to a position of leadership in this region, leadership on international security and economic development. And now, with the presidential election in December, Kazakhstan has an unprecedented opportunity to lead Central Asia toward a future of democracy and to elevate U.S.-Kazakhstani relations to a new level.

If Kazakhstan's leaders expand the range of free speech, and free assembly, and free choices in their country, they will unleash the creative energy of their people and secure a future of freedom, prosperity, and stability. In all cases the alternative to this hopeful vision is a descending spiral of repression, and stagnation and extremism. The United States continues to hope that the Government of Uzbekistan will turn back from its current course and make a strategic choice in favor of reform. But we will not wait idly by for that day to come. We will move forward with our partners in Central Asia who seek stability through freedom, regardless of whether Uzbekistan's leaders choose to isolate themselves and their country.

Ladies and Gentlemen: With continued reform, Kazakhstan can become the nexus of Eurasia in the 21st century, the point where all roads cross. For thousands of years, along the ancient Silk Road, the communities of Central Asia facilitated the global exchange of ideas, and trade, and culture. In the process, they made historic contributions to our collected human heritage.

It was here that Muslim scholars penned the scientific treatises that helped to inspire the European Renaissance and wrote religious tracts that formed the basis of a culture of religious tolerance to this very day. The synthesis of faith and reason, reflected in the writings a millennium ago, of al-Farabi, and Avicenna and the authors of the epic "Manas," live today in the hearts and minds of the people of Central Asia, whose tolerant traditions provide a shield against extremism.

Today, Kazakhstan is poised and ready to break a path for a new Silk Road, a great corridor of reform linking the provinces of northern Russia to the ports of South Asia, the republics of Western Europe to the democracies of East Asia. A strong and prosperous and democratic Kazakhstan will once again energize the global transmission of learning, and trade and freedom across the steppes of Central Asia. This nation has a glorious past and it is destined for a hopeful future. Kazakhstan's greatest days lie ahead of it. And the United States wants to be your partner.

Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: *(In Russian.)*

QUESTION: *(In Russian.)*

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, let me explain how we see Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and its position in the State Department. That is right, it will now become a part of the Bureau of South Asian and Central Asian Affairs. Have you been talking to our Ambassador about this issue?

We see this region as having great potential as a region and not -- we don't see the region as simply the states of the former Soviet Union, which is one way that they have often been characterized. This region has, despite the Soviet period and despite the last years of the Russian empire, a distinctive history, a distinctive culture, and perhaps most importantly distinctive trade ties that I just talked about when I talked about the period of the Silk Road and beyond.

Yes, those ties were to Europe but those ties were also to Asia, really the land bridge, if you will, to East Asia. And so what we would like to do is think of the regional development of this area as having links to the growing economies of East Asia, of China, of our alliances in Japan and in Southeast Asia, of having strong internal links between them. One of the things that we're working on is ways to lower trade barriers, to help you lower trade barriers among states of this region. We are going to provide some economic assistance to help with the lowering of those trade barriers.

So it is the way that we see this region, not that it does not have links to Europe. It does have links to Europe, important links to Europe, but that it has also a distinct history, a distinct set of economic relationships, a distinct set of economic ties that could push this region very far forward. And by the way, Afghanistan is a very important part of that.

Let me just say one word about Iraq. We are indeed busy in Iraq but the important thing to remember about U.S. policy is that it is global and the aspects of democracy promotion about which I'm talking reach for us worldwide. But you should understand how we see Central Asia and understanding where it sits in the State Department.

QUESTION: *(In Russian.)*

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, as you know, I was just in Afghanistan and the -- how do we see the development there? The development in Afghanistan politically, economically is moving forward. It is moving forward in a context in which there is a difficult security environment but one that is getting better. They have now had elections for both a president and for a parliament. They are capable now of helping to defend themselves. But the problem for the Afghans is that they continue to fight terrorists who wish to try to do them in. And I want to note that the cooperation in the war on terrorism between Afghans, between Kazakhs and others, is extremely important to the development and the stability of that region.

Again, I do see Afghanistan as a part of this region and I had some discussions this morning with some business entrepreneurs about what could be done to open Afghan markets, to make Afghan development open to these -- to Kazakh investment, and I think this is a direction that we should go. But I assess the political and economic developments in Afghanistan in a relatively positive fashion.

QUESTION: Hi, dear Condoleezza Rice, my name is Anora (ph). I am dean for economic department. My question is what of the last economic achievements have taken place in your (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm sorry, can you hold the microphone away a little bit? I can't -- it's --

QUESTION: What are the economic achievements taken place in your state? Thank you for the question.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. The economic achievements that have taken place in the United States? Well, the United States obviously is the world's leading economy. It's the world's largest economy. It accounts for 25, almost -- more than 20 percent of the world's gross domestic product. And I think one question that we might want to ask is why has that been the case and how are those achievements moving forward.

I come from a part of the country in northern California that is called the Silicon Valley and it is the place where high technology, the internet, computers, medical technology really began and was founded. And the question might be why is this relatively small area of the United States, has it been such an important incubator, such an important place for the development of high technology.

And I think it comes to three things and it speaks to the importance of an institution like this. We are blessed in that region with very strong universities, and so one of the points that I would make to the rector is that universities are extremely important to economic development and economic growth. The computer industry in the United States really started with discoveries that were made in universities, and so it's extremely important to have, Mr. Rector, universities that are helping to stimulate economic growth.

Secondly, the reason that we tend to have good economic achievements in the United States is that we try very hard to keep the government out of the business of the economy. The economy is a private economy. The government tries to play a minimal role. We try to keep the bureaucracy low for people to start small businesses, we try to keep taxation low for people to start small businesses and we try to keep the rules predictable for those who wish to start businesses because small business development is the key to any economic development.

The final point that I would make is that economic growth and economic prosperity come mostly from not the creativity and great thoughts of the government, but from the creativity of people. And because the United States is a very free society, I think it's fair to say that the creativity of people is unleashed; they feel free to pursue their own aspirations and dreams. Many people do not succeed, but many other people do succeed. And I think that's how I would characterize the economic climate in the United States that has made the United States an economic leader.

(Applause.)

QUESTION: Good day, Condoleezza Rice. I have a question. I am here. I wanted to ask you about the social side of Kazakhstan and, for example, education system. How do you think, what is the level of education system? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Well, listening to all of you, I would say that the level of the educational system is very high. The questions are very good. (Applause.) People use different languages. I think the educational level seems very high.

The key to the importance of the educational level, though, is not just in the basic training. The basic training, I think, in Kazakhstan is, as I understand it, very high. I know that there are rural areas of Kazakhstan that still lack education, but here in the cities I have always found the Kazakh people very well educated. And by the way, this is my fourth trip to Kazakhstan and I've been to places like Atyrau and Almaty and in a lot of places in the country and I've always found a highly educated population.

The key, though, to education, I think, in the modern era is that there is basic education and then there is the ability -- there needs to be the ability for people to explore and develop their own talents in a creative way. And there, university education is different from basic education. University education, it's important for people to learn to think rather than just to learn to say what they are reading or to repeat what they are reading. It's important for people to have a kind of creativity that allows them to be able to do things like think up brand new ideas. Again, you've all heard, I'm sure, of Google and Yahoo. Well, these were founded by graduate students at a university who just kind of thought up the idea one day and then got capital for it.

So creativity is a different thing than just learning how to repeat what you have learned, and I really believe that in universities people need to be given the freedom to think and explore.

The other point that I would make is that I would hope that more and more Kazakh students will begin to come to other places to study. The President was telling me last night that he hoped to have as many as 3,000 Kazakh students studying abroad. I think this is a very good thing. I hope some of you will come to the United States to study. Because the exchange of students, the exchange of ideas between students, is also extremely important. You learn about different cultures, you learn about how different people think. It's probably one of the most important things that we can do is get young people to be on exchange programs, and at the State Department we are developing even more exchange programs and I would hope Americans would come here to Kazakhstan as well.

(Applause.)

QUESTION: Good morning, Ms. Rice. I am a student from international law. My question is what perspective of Kazakh-American relations, your views please? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. My perspective on Kazakh-American relations is that we are already good partners in a lot of ways. We are good partners economically. We are -- there is much American investment here in Kazakhstan and people think very highly of many of the economic reforms that have been made here in Kazakhstan. So I think that the economic relationship can grow and get stronger.

We obviously also are very strong together in fighting the war on terrorism. We have had good cooperation. Kazakhstan has some forces in Iraq who are helping to disarm some of the ammunition that has been left around Iraq, and so that and the work that we have done to dismantle old nuclear materials which could have been a danger for terrorism means that we have a strong security relationship as well.

I think our political relationship will get stronger, too, because as Kazakhstan moves on its road to democracy, the United States wants to be a partner. And again, I want to emphasize that it is not the role of the United States to dictate to others or to tell others what is being -- how to get to a democratic path. The United States took its own road, Japan took its own road, the countries of Europe took their own roads, other countries have, too. And that's the way that it should be.

But there are certain basics to democracy that every people in the world, every person in the world deserves: the right to free speech, the right to worship as you please, the right to choose your leaders, the right to be free from the intimidation or the arbitrary power of the state. These are the basics of democracy. And as Kazakhstan moves toward them, the United States will be a friend and a partner. And so I think we have a very bright future ahead for U.S.-Kazakh relations.

(Applause.)

QUESTION: Good morning, dear Condoleezza Rice. My name is Nad (ph). I am the owner of the international (inaudible) of our president. Students of our country will receive a chance to start in the best world's universities. I will study in the U.S.A. and I (inaudible) need to choose the university. Maybe Stanford. (Laughter.) Thank you for the question.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, my. I don't know if I ought to advise you of one university. I'll have lots of letters when I get back to the United States.

I have spent my life as a university professor and I've always found that the United States has many very good universities, many good colleges, small colleges, large research universities, universities that are in rural towns, universities that are in cities. And so you have a lot of variety in the United States, many choices in the United States.

The most important thing is to find a university that fits you, that is best for you, because there are a lot of very good universities, but if you are not comfortable in that university, then you won't succeed.

Now let me tell you how to tell if you are. Some universities specialize in small classes, very small classes. So if you would rather be in classes where you talk a lot among your students, the students and the faculty, then you should ask that question when you're choosing a university. How small are the classes? Some people actually do better in larger settings. It's important to know whether or not you are interested in the sciences in particular or in the humanities in particular or whether you are interested in both.

In other words, when you are choosing a university, don't choose it because of its name. Choose it because you've researched what that university has that you are interested in pursuing. You may like being in a large city in America or you might like being in a small town. But I can assure you of one thing: You're going to have a great experience when you go to university. American universities are wonderful places.

And I want to just say one other thing to you and then I'll close, which is about my own experience in going to university. I went to university very young and I was supposed to be a concert musician. I had studied piano from the age of three years old. I could read music before I could read books. And so everybody -- my parents, my grandparents, all of my friends -- thought that I would be a great concert musician.

And so I went off to school to study the piano, and after two years in college studying piano I thought I'm a good musician but I'm never going to be a great musician. And so I decided that I would try and find something else to study. And by this time I was already two years into college and my parents were getting very nervous that maybe I wouldn't finish college because I couldn't decide what I wanted to do. And luckily for me, I started a course in international politics. That course was taught by a man who was a specialist on the Soviet Union. I decided I loved the study of the Soviet Union. I decided I love the Russian language. I decided I liked Russian history.

Now, I can assure you, I have not a Russian bone in my body. No Russian blood. (Laughter.) So I am not at all certain why I was attracted to the study of Russia and to the study of the Soviet Union. But there is an important lesson in that. When you're looking for what it is you want to do in life, the most important thing is not what other people think you ought to do, not what other people think you ought to study, not what you thought you might have wanted to do. But you have to find what really interests you. We say -- I say -- you have to find your passion. You have to find what it is that you want to do every single day, every waking hour, because when you've found that, then you're going to be much better at doing it.

And so my real advice to you when you go off to school is to explore widely, make available to yourself all of the knowledge that is there and choose something that really makes you happy to study it, not something that somebody else told you you should study.

(Applause.)

QUESTION: *(In Russian.)*

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I do think it will be possible to have free and fair elections. I think that it is critical to have free and fair elections. *(In Russian.)* Yes, I think it will be possible even in transitional circumstances to have free and fair elections. It is critical --

QUESTION: *(In Russian.)*

SECRETARY RICE: *(In Russian.)* I think it will be and it is necessary to have free and fair elections in Kazakhstan. That's the bottom line. That's the first point. I know that there are many conditions that exist that make it difficult to get to free and fair elections and I know that there is much work to do to get to free and fair elections.

I would make the following point: Free and fair elections don't happen on the day of the elections. They happen starting well before in the way that the campaign is run. So it is extremely important that there be the ability of opposition to mobilize, to bring their views together, to run for office without fear of intimidation of any kind.

We all live in a world in which there are security concerns. We all live in a world in which terrorism is a threat. I said when I was in Egypt that fears of extremism, however, cannot be a reason not to have free and fair elections. You have to have democracy because democracy is, in fact, the answer to terrorism and to extremism.

The United States is working closely with Kazakhstan to -- through nongovernmental organizations -- we do this all over the world -- to help in the development of civil society, to help in the development of political parties, to help to develop the foundations, the fundamentals for democratic development. And I believe that the work that has been done in the electoral commission -- a couple of days ago I understand there was a statement from the electoral commission about how an election would be conducted -- that this is very important.

But I do believe and the United States believes that one of the most important -- as I said in my speech, one of the most important things that's coming up for Kazakhstan is free and fair elections. And I believe that the Kazakh people deserve to have them and that when they are held Kazakhstan will be on a path to overcome many of the other difficulties of the environment of the context in which it lives. And it will also be one of the pioneers in this region in the promotion of democracy. And so it is something that we are very much looking forward to, and indeed I think the world is looking forward to free and fair elections in Kazakhstan.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY RICE: *Spasiba.*

MODERATOR: *(In Russian.)*

(Applause.)

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