



## Interview With NTS

**Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs**

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
April 11, 2006

**QUESTION:** Mr. Boucher, Kyrgyzstan has been working on democratic changes after March 24 events. What changes make you, as our strategic partner, feel satisfied and what changes raise certain concerns?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** There are a lot of very positive things here: there is a free press, a strong civil society, there is a definite direction to Kyrgyzstan's democracy. We are good partners in fighting terrorism, which is a threat to all our societies in this region. We are economic partners in many ways. And we think we can expand this partnership working on regional economic integration projects like bringing electricity from here down to Pakistan. But there is a lot of work still to be done, not only on roads and power lines, but also on laws and reforms. They can both benefit the economy and also improve the strength and health of your society.

**QUESTION:** The Kyrgyz Tulip Revolution occurred a year ago. Now, a year after the Revolution, there are voices of disappointment. What do you think the new authorities should do in the near future in order to meet the people's expectations?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Well, I think that the only thing any elected government can do is to fulfill your promises. We recognize how complicated some of these things are: dealing with corruption is not an easy thing, establishing a truly independent judiciary is not an easy thing, writing a whole new constitution is not an easy thing. We will try to help as we can with these efforts. But ultimately, whether they are proceeding fast enough and being fulfilled properly, that's a decision for the Kyrgyz voters.

**QUESTION:** What do you think the future of Kyrgyzstan is from a geopolitical point of view, and what is your opinion regarding the idea proposed by President Nazarbaev regarding the Union of Central Asian Countries?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** We think that regional cooperation here is very important. There are a lot of economic benefits that can come from having smooth transportation lines, smooth trade lines, movement of raw materials and energy back and forth. And ultimately you need to be able to hook up with other areas, Europe, Russia and China already, but also India and Pakistan to the South. So, I think as an economist would say, the more harmonization, the more integration, the better. When and how that might proceed to union, I think I have to leave that to the people and the leaders here.

**QUESTION:** What can you say about a possible review of the terms of the Agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the United States regarding the Ganci airbase. Specifically, regarding the increase of land lease rates. In one of his interviews President Bakiyev quoted a figure of \$270 million. Is this a realistic figure?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Our view on these things is that first of all, the airbase is very important to us and to Kyrgyzstan and to the countries of the region, in order to be able to fight the danger of terrorism that affects all of us. That's why the base is here, that's why we want to stay here, and that's why the Government wants us to stay here. We are also prepared to pay the cost of having the base here. So, we have a discussion going on about what the costs are. That depends a lot on experts' evaluations of prices and land cost and things like that. I am not a real estate expert, so I can't value the property or the services that we receive here. But we will try to come to a fair settlement with the Kyrgyz Government as soon as we can.

**QUESTION:** Is there a possibility that the Ganci airbase will be used in case of a military conflict with Iran?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** First of all, we are not heading for a military conflict with Iran. We've made this very clear. We are on a diplomatic path with Iran. We are working with other governments to try to get Iran to change some of its very dangerous behavior supporting terrorists, building nuclear weapons, and supporting instability and insurgents in Iraq. So, the goal is to deal with these things in a diplomatic manner. The second thing is that we've made it clear that our use of this base here is in order to fight terrorism from Afghanistan until we can make stability there. So this base is to help the people of Afghanistan, not for any other purposes.

**QUESTION:** What results were achieved during today's meeting with President Bakiyev?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I had a chance today to meet with the President, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister. I also met with some members of Civil Society and some students at the American University of Central Asia. So, because this is my first trip in my new job, the first goal was to meet them and hear from them and to learn from them what's going on in this country right now. Second of all, we had a chance to look and talk in a little more detail about some of these things like the base, the constitutional reform process, and judicial independence. So, I think we have a better idea on both ways on how we can move forward in these areas. Third, I think we were able to develop some of these ideas, these ways of regional integration, to help Kyrgyzstan to work better with people in the region and find more economic opportunities. We are having a conference in Istanbul in June to bring electricity officials from this region to try to take these big ideas and turn them into some real economic opportunities. Sometime it's hard to say what happened in one particular meeting. But I think my visit helps us to move forward in all these areas. Thank you.

Released on April 13, 2006



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