



Media Opportunity Following Meeting With President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmonov

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

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let me say a few words to begin. We just had a good meeting with President Rahmonov, and we were able to discuss a large number of issues. Our cooperation is very good, and we are looking for ways to make it better. We want to work with Tajikistan and the people of Tajikistan to help improve their security, to help them to expand their economic opportunities, and to help expand their political choices.

I was pleased to hear the President's interest in projects where we can improve regional integration, and offer new markets for Tajikistan. I was pleased to hear of his commitment to maintaining the sovereignty of Tajikistan by protecting the borders and keeping narcotics out of the country. I was pleased to hear of his commitment to democratic principles, and his willingness to continue working towards meeting international standards in terms of elections and democracy. We will continue to work with the government, the people, and the political parties of Tajikistan in all these matters, and we hope that our contribution can be helpful.

Now let's do a few questions.

QUESTION: What do you think about the level of freedom of political parties in Tajikistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I had a good discussion this morning with representatives of the political parties and civil society. We talked about their organizations and their aspirations, but also about some of the difficulties that they feel exist within the present system. Some of these are issues that do need to be addressed during the process of improving a democracy -- things like having access to the media, so that the people of Tajikistan can hear all the different views of the political parties, or how to ensure that the election commissions can conduct a fair process at all levels of the elections. So, these are issues that we hope are addressed as Tajikistan moves forward. In the end, the issue is: how do you give the people of Tajikistan the right to choose their leadership and the information that they need to make that choice.

QUESTION: What do you think about the Iranian nuclear program, and what are the issues you have discussed about this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We did discuss the question of Iran. I told the President we are pursuing a diplomatic solution to the many problems caused by Iran. Unfortunately, the Iranian government, particularly this new government, has been a source of instability in many ways -- whether it is the interference in the politics of neighboring countries, their support of violence against the attempts to make peace in the Middle East, or the enormous instability that would be caused by Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. We are working with other countries to try to ensure through diplomatic means that Iran stops these kinds of activities, particularly on the nuclear side. We recognize the countries in the region and the neighbors of Iran will have relationships with Iran. We all need to make sure these relationships are appropriate and on a commercial basis, so that Iran does not start causing the kind of trouble in this region that it has caused elsewhere.

QUESTION: Tell us please, did you discuss the Dasti Zhum hydropower project [on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan]? Will it help to reduce the drug flow from Afghanistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We did discuss the power project there. I promised the President I would look into it to see if there is any support or assistance we can give. This is a project that the Afghan government is interested in as well, and they raised it with me when I was there a month or so ago. Tajikistan has a lot of opportunities with hydropower and the export of electricity. The U. S. Government, U. S. agencies, and U. S. companies are here working with your government trying to maximize these opportunities and give you various routes to export your energy. That is a very key piece of Tajikistan's development.

As you noted, it also has an impact on Afghanistan. The problem of narcotics in Afghanistan is a very difficult one. This is one of the highest priorities of the United States, to help Afghanistan beat back the problem. In fact, we are working to have a conference here next week with the Government of Tajikistan on how to improve regional cooperation against narcotics. Part of the solution is to give the people of Afghanistan other opportunities for jobs and development. So, in that regard, yes, providing electricity and income is probably a contribution to helping Afghanistan grow out of drugs. But hydropower projects take a long time to build, and I think we really need to focus on some more immediate efforts that we can all make together. That is what we are doing in Afghanistan. That is what we are doing in the region.

Thank you.

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