



## Joint Press Conference with President Islam Karimov

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**

Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
December 8, 2001

**PRESIDENT KARIMOV:** Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to welcome Secretary Powell to Uzbekistan and through him to convey my great respect to President Bush and to American people. We have just had a very open and candid exchange of views on the issues pertaining to bilateral relations as well as to the situation with the antiterrorist operation. If you think that we focused our attention mainly on the situation in Afghanistan, you will be mistaken. And it should be said that Secretary Powell revealed great knowledge of the situation in Uzbekistan not only with regard to the Afghanistan events but also he showed very deep knowledge on the political situation in this country, the fate of democratic reforms, and the events in the fields of economy and human rights and we have this conflux of questions of mutual interest, the issues which are of interest for both countries and where Uzbekistan can be duly criticized. And I would like to state that as a result of these negotiations we arrived at the complete understanding of the number of issues and most importantly pertaining to the issue of anti-terrorist operations. And I would like to say that I am very optimistic about the future of the operation and expanding cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United States. Thank you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Thank you very much, Mr. President. And thank you for receiving me here today. It was my pleasure to bring to the President the greetings of President Bush and also to extend to him our thanks for all the support we have received from Uzbekistan in pursuing this campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere throughout the world as well. They have been an important member of this coalition against terrorism, and I'm sure they will continue to be so in the future.

I assured the President that our interest in Uzbekistan and in this region go far beyond the current crisis in Afghanistan. In the months ahead, we look forward to deepening and widening our relationship with Uzbekistan on security issues, on economic issues, issues of political democratization and human rights, and we had a very full exchange of views on all of these matters. And Assistant Secretary Jones will return to Uzbekistan next month to continue this dialogue.

We also discussed the humanitarian situation in the region, and in that regard the President confirmed that the Freedom [Friendship] Bridge would open tomorrow after a last technical check on the part of his staff, and this will ease the flow of humanitarian aid into Afghanistan. I thank the President for this decision and this announcement.

I was also pleased to provide the President with a letter from President Bush extending his greetings, thanks for the support we have received, and hoping that he and the President will be able to meet in Washington in the not too distant future at a time to be determined by both sides.

Thank you.

**PRESIDENT KARIMOV:** I would like to add that it is with great satisfaction that I accept the invitation of President Bush, which is expressed in his letter. I look forward to going to Washington in order to discuss the issues of mutual interest not only with President Bush, but also with the American public and with the United States Congress, and all those people who are involved in improving relations between Uzbekistan and the United States.

As far as the bridge is concerned, I would like to tell you that tomorrow the appointed state committee will be at the place in order to give its formal approval for the opening of the bridge and to propose the arrangements as far as the infrastructure of the bridge is concerned, checkpoints, customs points. I would like to join Secretary Powell in his statement that the opening of this bridge is very important from the political, economic, and humanitarian points of view.

**QUESTION:** Good afternoon. Neil King with The Wall Street Journal. Mr. Secretary, for two months the international community has pushed to create a representative government in Afghanistan.

This morning you quoted Thomas Jefferson saying that a government must rely on the consent of the governed. I was curious to know what your critique was of the state of democracy in Uzbekistan and how you raised these concerns with President Karimov.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We had a good candid discussion of the democratization process, and the importance of political democracy. I mentioned to him that I had spoken to kids earlier this morning about the importance of voting. We have areas where we disagree as to how fast progress should be made or could be made and it is something that we will continue to discuss. I discussed it with the president as well as with the foreign minister. The president's emphasis is to bring up a new generation that understands. And the pace at which democratization takes place was the item that was on his mind.

**QUESTION:** The question is for Mr. Powell. Many believe that the current situation presents merely a temporary staging point in Uzbekistan for the United States in its antiterrorist operation. Do you think that the recent intergovernmental talks that were held in Washington are proof that this is not the case? That you're interested in the region and its political and economic situation, and not just in military operations?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I think it is proof that we are interested in a permanent change for the better in our relationship and the president and I spoke about this extensively this morning. That we are looking for a relationship that will endure long after this crisis is over. I applauded Uzbekistan and the president personally for the political courage shown by him, his government and his people to assist us in this campaign. We will respect that courage by continuing to remain engaged with them long after this crisis is over.

**QUESTION:** Andrea Koppel, CNN. President Karimov, what do you say to your critics who say that you are nothing more than a brutal, repressive, authoritarian dictator? And for Secretary Powell, sir, the Uzbek government had been dealing with its own Taliban-like problem. What help has the Uzbek government asked from the United States in dealing with Islamic militants? Thank you.

**PRESIDENT KARIMOV:** I am very surprised to hear the question you posed. And I believe that these questions that are (inaudible) are due to be asked and probably we cannot circumvent these questions. We have to answer them. What can I answer? My answer is that one is to see things rather than hear them one hundred times. I would like to invite you for communication with me on a more permanent basis and believe that I will not disappoint you.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Uzbekistan does have a problem with Islamic fundamentalism and we talked about that as well. I think it is because they had such a problem that caused them to realize that it would be wise to join in the campaign against terrorism. I'm not aware of any specific requests that they have made, there may have been, I just don't have (inaudible).

**PRESIDENT KARIMOV:** I'd like to add something. If you say that Uzbekistan has problems with fundamentalism, that is fair enough, but this problem is not restricted to this country. It can be seen in vast areas: Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Middle East. And we should also talk about European countries that gave sanctuaries to certain extremist organizations that feed this very fundamentalism and nurture it. And if you look at London and some other European capitals, you will see that these extremist organizations feel themselves very comfortable and they are able to raise funds and channel them to hot spots around the world.

When the United States declares that its mission is to disrupt terrorist machines I think that it should not be understood in a limited way. It is not only the military operations in Afghanistan, but also the disrupting the terrorists who aid and abet the fundamentalists and terrorists. And it should be said that the situation with the fundamentalists and the radical extremist organizations was always under control and therefore we never applied to the international community for assistance. And I believe that it is very inappropriate to ask this question in this very way. I would like to tell that we have always been able to deal with this manifestation by our own forces. Therefore, I believe it is absurd to inflame this situation or exaggerate to say that military force should be applied.

In this regard, it should be said that the presence of United States troops in Uzbekistan has nothing to do with this problem and if somebody is tempted to think this way I would like to disappoint you. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Russian Information Agency ITAR-TASS. This is a question for Mr. Powell. You are going to visit Russia as a part of your program of planned visits. And I believe that the international fight against terrorism will be successful and that international efforts to combat terrorism by the United States and the international coalition will eventually succeed, and terrorism if not completely destroyed will be put under control. In Russia certain politicians claim that the cooperation between Russia, the United States and its allies is of a temporary character and is connected with the antiterrorism cooperation. Mr. Powell, can you say that the relations between the United States and Russia will continue to develop progressively? Can you see any extension of this relationship?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The relationship between the United States and Russia has fundamentally changed. Russia right after the events of September 11 in the person of President Putin made a powerful statement supporting our coalition objectives. We appreciated that and it showed the new level of cooperation between the United States and Russia.

Beyond that, though, we are cooperating in many other areas. Just yesterday in Brussels at a meeting of NATO and Russia, we committed ourselves to working with Russia more closely, and we are calling it "NATO at Twenty". Nineteen NATO nations will meet frequently in the future with Russia and the body called "NATO at Twenty". I think this is evidence of Russia integrating itself more fully with the west, more fully with western security and political organizations and by extension with the United States.

I will be in Russia tomorrow night. This will be either my fifteen or sixteen visit with Foreign Minister Ivanov in the last ten months which I think is evidence of the closeness of the relationship and President Bush and President Putin have met several times already. So, yes, the relationship is improving and it is not just as a result of the campaign on terror, but because we have mutual interests beyond terrorism. Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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