



Remarks to the Press in the Kyrgyzstan

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It is good to be here today, nice to see you all. I've had an interesting two days in Bishkek. I've met with government officials, including the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, the President, the Speaker of Parliament. I met the head of the Constitutional Drafting Group. I also had the chance to meet with people in society, business people, civil society people and discuss some issues.



I came to get a feel for what is going on here. I talked to people in the Government about how we can overcome difficulties and move forward with the relationship. I think we will be able to continue a broad and positive relationship as long as we don't allow these difficulties to interfere again. So, I think you will see a lot of cooperation in a lot of areas with the United States and Kyrgyzstan -- security, for example; working against terrorism; economic cooperation, including some of the big projects linking the region with energy, as well as working on economic reform inside Kyrgyzstan; and helping Kyrgyzstan develop a healthy democratic society, a modern society through support for reform, for civil society, health programs, and education. That is where we are. I'd be glad to take your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, I would like to ask the goal of your visit this time. I know this is your second visit to Kyrgyzstan since last year's March events, and it would be interesting to know what is on your mind.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I think it is basically to move forward on issues we want to cooperate on. We have recently faced some difficulties in this relationship, and we want to face those difficulties and make sure they don't happen again. Our goal is to move forward. Mostly what I talked about was how to move forward.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, my question is regarding the airbase. First of all, the airbase in Kyrgyzstan: could you tell us the details regarding the structure of the compensation. The U.S. side is ready to pay the \$150 million. Would this amount be subject to the approval of the U.S. Congress and Senate? And the second question is: would you please tell us about the U.S.-Kazakh Naval Air Base on the Caspian Sea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There is no Kazakh-U.S. Navy base on the Caspian Sea. There is no plan to set up a Kazakh-U.S. Navy Base. We cooperate with Kazakhstan in a lot of areas, including military areas, but we are not setting up a base or any joint base.

We do have a base in Kyrgyzstan, and we recently reached agreement on the continuation of the use of that base. I don't want to try and look at the base solely in terms of one number. I think a base needs to be seen in the context of our overall relationship. The goal of the United States and Kyrgyzstan is to make this region safer by fighting terrorism. The base is a joint effort by the United States and Kyrgyzstan to make this region safer. We have a large assistance program to Kyrgyzstan, we buy a lot of things here, including fuel and supplies. We pay all the landing fees and parking fees and airport fees that any other commercial enterprise would pay. We employ people at the base. So there are a lot of different economic benefits to Kyrgyzstan from the base and the overall relationship. No one number captures all that. Even more important, the base and all our cooperation make the Kyrgyz people safer. And you can't capture that benefit in any number.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, recently Kyrgyz security services expelled U.S. diplomats for inappropriate contacts. Was the PNG of Kyrgyz diplomats a response to this action?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes. We saw some steps taken against our diplomats based on bad information, false accusations, and evil misinterpretations of fact. We promptly had to respond. But I think the point at this moment is to say the Kyrgyz government took some action, we took some action, and there is no need for anyone to do anything more. The thing we really need to do is to make sure that the false information and false stories don't disrupt our relationship. And that is how we will proceed.

QUESTION: The society is currently discussing actively if there is a need to become a member of the [Highly Indebted Poor Countries or HIPC] program. What is your opinion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, first of all, my opinion is that this is a decision for Kyrgyz society and Kyrgyz people and the Kyrgyz government to make. If Kyrgyzstan decides it wants this kind of debt program, we certainly will take a positive view. And we can work with the other parties like the IMF and other creditors to make it achievable. There can be benefits in this kind of program, but it is for you to decide.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, we know that the U.S. administration was concerned with increasing pressure from criminals on the Kyrgyz government. In this regard how would you estimate the attempts, the efforts of the Kyrgyz government on fighting corruption and crime?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think corruption and crime are serious problems here and there's a lot of work that has to be done. I've talked to business people, I've talked to ordinary citizens, even government officials have said the same thing. Corruption steals from the people, it steals from economic growth. It makes it much, much harder for a small business to be started and to operate, much, much harder to get going in the economy. It really takes away from opportunity for the people of the country.

We are trying to help the government deal with it. We're working with the police to improve their professionalism. We're working on economic reforms and training that

decrease the opportunities for corruption. And we're considering programs to help the judiciary and law enforcement officials make significant changes to eliminate corruption there. These can all be helpful programs but in the end it's the determination of the government and of the people of Kyrgyzstan to stop the corruption and stop the crime that's going to matter and we can't bring that from outside. We've heard people say this, we've heard people talk about this but it needs to be demonstrated through the actions of the government and people in society to stop allowing corruption.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, during your last visit you have said that the relations between the United States and Uzbekistan became worse and now this time you are coming from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan. Did you see any changes in Uzbekistan? The second question, recently Kyrgyzstan has extradited four refugees to Uzbekistan, what is your attitude to this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the first question on my visit to Uzbekistan is that I didn't expect to make changes based on my discussions. My visit to Uzbekistan involved very long and serious discussion with officials there. We identified some areas where we could cooperate. We identified some steps each of us can take to start that cooperation again. But the change will come as these steps are taken. So, I can't tell you yet how it is going to turn out.

Oh, the refugees, sorry. On the return of the Uzbek refugees to Uzbekistan, I have to say we are disappointed by this action. Over the last year or so, Kyrgyzstan has lived up to its international obligations with respect to the 430-some people who sought refugee status here. These obligations are very important, and we would have hoped they would have been respected. We are also very concerned about the fate of these individuals. There is no telling, in fact, perhaps, no way of knowing what is going to happen to these people. And, I think that is an explanation of why this is a troubling step.

QUESTION: What do you think about the military conflict between Israel and Lebanon? Do you think it may expand and involve other countries in to this conflict?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the answer to both questions lies in how we describe the conflict. It really involves a conflict with Hezbollah and Israel, where Lebanon is the victim. It is a very disturbing situation where you have an armed group inside a country that can take that country in to war. We've worked hard diplomatically in two big areas. The first is the humanitarian needs of the Lebanese people: arranging bombing halts, arranging safety routes, bringing in supplies for the people of Lebanon who were hurt by the conflict. The second is to try and solve this conflict so the people of Israel and the people of Lebanon are safe.

You have seen the Secretary of State work hard on both these things. I don't have any inside information, but from press reports, it looks like we are very close to having a United Nations resolution that can help stop this violence so that it won't start again. The main point is that we have to stop this situation that this armed group, this violent group Hezbollah that is supported by Iran and Syria, can't start a war again, and can't undermine the state the way it has and so that the country of Lebanon, the government of Lebanon, the armed forces of Lebanon can control their own territory.

QUESTION: Currently Kyrgyzstan, within the framework of regional cooperation, works closely with Russia and China. Isn't it alarming for the United States?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. Our desire is for all the countries of this region to have open cooperation in all directions. We want, fundamentally, for this region to be populated by independent states with healthy democratic societies. And one of the clearest ways of having independence is having a variety of choices and making your own choice. So, whether it is diplomacy, or energy, or markets, or imports, we hope the countries of this region have a variety of sources and a variety of choices. We are not here to play games or to contend for influence with different countries, we are here to provide additional options. So that these countries all have partners and routes, and import markets and export markets north, south, east and west.

QUESTION: You visited Kyrgyzstan after the March 24 events of last year. How do you think the democratic process is developing in Kyrgyzstan? Do you feel changes?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I feel a lot of discussion and debate is going on. Everybody I've talked to, whatever side of society or government they came from, they all wanted to talk about constitutional reform and how it should be handled and how it should be done. These issues of corruption and justice are certainly on everyone's mind as well. So, I think that to the extent there is an open and energetic discussion of these issues, that is progress. But, change will come when they are settled and they are implemented.

QUESTION: What do you think, could the Kyrgyz side somehow be involved in the peaceful recovery of Afghanistan and Iraq?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think so, if that is what Kyrgyzstan decides to do. There are always opportunities to get involved. Certainly involvement of Kyrgyzstan or any other country could help with all these situations that provide help in the war against terror and peace within the region. For example, even as we look at some of these regional projects like supplying power from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan southward to Afghanistan and Pakistan is a contribution to stability in those nations. Opening trading routes to the north and the south also contributes to stability in this region. Fighting terrorism and maintaining the air base here is a contribution to stability in this region. So, I would say that Kyrgyzstan is already contributing to the global war on terror and to stability in Afghanistan. But if people in the government here want to get more directly involved, we would welcome that as well.

QUESTION: My questions are about Ganci Airbase at Manas airport. First, could you elaborate on the documents that were signed recently on the airbase? Second, could you give us some details on the agreement that was signed? Third, do you think the payment of the fee for using the airbase going directly to the state budget would be more beneficial for Kyrgyzstan than paying it to private firms, intermediary firms?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, the agreement that we reached was not really a brand new agreement. It was an extension of an agreement that we had with the slightly new terms in terms of the financing. And the payments we make are the payments for the costs, for the use, and for the land. So, as far as who receives those, it is whoever is responsible for those things. I forgot part of her question before, which is: what is the Congressional involvement now? And this relates to the question of documents. As it is a continuation of the previous understanding, with a change in the terms, we need to notify our Congress. They can disapprove if they want to, but generally it goes ahead once we tell them about it. And indeed we are already moving forward to fulfill our side of the understandings.

QUESTION: (inaudible).

TRANSLATOR: She's insisting on the answer to the question on the breakdown of the \$150 million.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I knew you would be. I really don't want to do that. I just don't think it's an accurate reflection of what this base means to us and Kyrgyzstan or Kyrgyzstan economically. So I have to decline to provide a number. I think that's about it. Thank you very much. It's nice to meet you all.

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