



U.S. Relations With Central Asia

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MR. REEKER: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the State Department. As advertised, we are very pleased to have with us today our Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Ambassador Beth Jones. She has recently been traveling in the region and will give you some brief remarks about her travels, some observations, and then we will open it up for all of your questions. So let me go directly to Ambassador Beth Jones.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Thanks very much. Thanks for joining us today. I spent not quite two weeks in Central Asia. I went to all five of the Central Asians. I was there January 24th to February 1st, and because of the anomalies of air travel there, I also ended up spending several hours in Baku so I was able to meet with President Aliyev in addition to the five Central Asians.

Let me give a little context of what our relationships have been with the Central Asians for the past ten years. All of our embassies -- we've had embassies in each of the five Central Asian capitals for ten years. They are all celebrating their tenth anniversaries. I don't know if any celebrated in January, but all in February, just about.

And throughout those ten years, our effort has been to do very, very focused assistance programs with each of the Central Asians with some specific categories in mind, especially economic reform, especially democratic reform and health reform; as well as on the military side, each of them has joined Partnership for Peace, with the exception of Tajikistan which joined just now. So we have had a mil-mil relationship with each of the Central Asians at various levels for the past almost ten years as well.

So what we have been doing in the past few months, ever since September 11th, is we have been substantially building on the relationships that we have already developed with each of the Central Asians, with NGOs in Central Asia, with other organizations in Central Asia, with the militaries of each of the Central Asians, to do the work that we have been wanting to do and that we do want to do to counter terrorism.

The other element that is important with the Central Asians, which wasn't really much of a factor over the past ten years but is very much a factor now, is, number one, of course they're all very close to Afghanistan physically, but they have all had relationships with Afghanistan going way back, not least in the Soviet military. One of the anecdotal points I think is kind of interesting is virtually all of the Central Asian military -- anybody a lieutenant colonel and above -- served in Afghanistan, so right there you've got a lot of Afghanistan experience.

And I found in all of my discussions huge interest on the part of governments, NGOs, educators, to be involved in Afghanistan now to work with reconstruction, to invite Afghan girls to participate and be students in their universities, to get involved in education and get involved in reconstruction, whatever it may be, because they have so much experience there, and of course some of the languages are the same as in Afghanistan.

But let me focus on some of the work that we're doing now. What do I mean by "expanding the relationship" and what does that all involve? Particularly with Uzbekistan, one of the areas that we have had an extremely difficult time working on is both on the democracy development/human rights issues, as well as the economic reform issues. The president there, President Karimov, has been extremely opposed to convertibility, extremely opposed to Uzbekistan's economic situation being linked in with the West, extremely opposed to the economic reforms that virtually all of the other Central Asians have gotten involved in from the beginning. And he had a particular view. He believed that this was destabilizing and dangerous for Uzbekistan, it was destabilizing and dangerous for the regime, and therefore he was adamantly opposed.

One of the things that we have worked on extremely hard since September 11th, as we were building up our relationships on each of the sectors that I've mentioned, is to make certain to hit that one very, very hard. And we have actually found a receptive audience there, both in President Karimov, but more importantly -- very importantly in President Karimov -- but also in the economic leadership, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mr. Azimov, and the central bankers.

They now believe, starting with the president, that the time is right for Uzbekistan to loosen up on its economic reform. They are talking in terms of allowing convertibility within the next six months. They are talking in terms of exchange rate reform to bring all the different layers of exchange rates back to one exchange rate. And a lot of that discussion is going on between Uzbekistan and the IMF and the World Bank. That's where the heavy-duty work is being done, facilitated to a great extent, to an expert extent, by Nancy Lee, Deputy Assistant Secretary at Treasury, who was with us in that portion of the trip.

On human rights and democracy in each of these countries, each one has developed slightly differently. Each one has its own sort of anomalous situation. But it has not prevented us from really pushing very hard on human rights and democracy issues throughout the past ten years. The difference now, it seems to me, is because each of these countries is so much more interested, it sort of has rejuvenated their interest in a lot of contact with the United States and a lot of work with the United States in each of these sectors, we have a far greater ability to have the kind of tough, detailed conversations that we need to have with government agencies and to work in a more intensified way with NGOs and citizens groups of various kinds on each of these issues.

And I wanted to speak to that particularly because there is a lot of talk about how because we have new military relationships with several of these governments that somehow we're giving a bye to human rights and democracy. In fact, the opposite is the case, and we are finding it easier. Because we have so much more contact, we have an easier time of discussing each of these issues with the governments of the region, particularly Uzbekistan and particularly Kyrgyzstan.

The way that I have been discussing this and the way the Secretary did in December when he was both in Tashkent and in Astana is to say, "Mr. President," or whoever it is we're talking to, "the United States wants to have an expanded security relationship with your country, but we believe security includes not just the military-to-military that we're doing now, but you can not have security in your country without reforms on democracy and human rights and on the economy. You can't expect to have stability in your country without job creation. You have to find a way to remove investment impediments, to do the kinds of economic reforms that allows the citizens of your country to make a living. Because without that, you are simply creating a generation of people who are so disaffected that they become easy targets for extremist organizations."

The same thing we argue goes for democracy and human rights. If the people of this country feel they have no choices, feel they have no voice in determining their parliament, their president, whatever it may be, the governor, those are the people, again, who are going to find a much more congenial home in extremist organizations. If you want to have the kind of security that we're talking about, we have to talk in terms of specific improvements in human rights activities, respect for human rights, and expanding democratic processes in each of these countries.

And the way we do it -- you know, once we do that, sort of a discussion -- is talk in terms of very specific things that could be done in each of the countries. So, for instance, in Uzbekistan we talk in terms of ICRC access to pre-detention centers; to registration of human rights NGOs; to the importance of inviting the UN Rapporteur

for Torture to come and do a study, do a report; to our very straight-up statement about how much the referendum in Uzbekistan that occurred about the time we were there is not a part of the democratic process; it can't possibly be part of the democratic process because it's extending in position a president who was not elected in a free and fair election.

In Kyrgyzstan, with President Akayev, of course Kyrgyzstan was sort of the poster child at the beginning for democracy, for how democratic reform works well in Central Asia. He was Mr. Democracy for the first few years, and he has fallen away from that. So we had a pretty good discussion with him about the importance of Kyrgyzstan restoring its reputation for having good practices in human rights and democracy, but in particular we discussed a couple of the arrests that had been made, specifically the arrest of Mr. Beknazarov that had resulted in hunger strike protests on the part of many of -- I don't know how many -- not many, many, but quite a number, a significant number of Kyrgyz. And it was with extreme regret that I learned of the death of one of the hunger strikers on, I think, February 5th, which demonstrates the fervor of the desire among the Kyrgyz people to get their government to behave in accordance with the human rights principles and democracy principles that it has signed up for in signing up for the OSCE charter, which of course each of these countries is a member of.

In Kazakhstan, the issue there is expanding democracy. I spent some time talking about the importance of the government allowing Democratic Choice, this new group, to function. In the meantime, since I was there, one of the members of the Democratic Choice Party has been renamed to the government. And I spent quite a bit of time with the Foreign Minister talking about the importance of Kazakhstan having the reputation of being stable enough and comfortable enough with its identity and with itself to allow this kind of full discussion in the media, within the elites, among the people with NGOs, so that people had a genuine sense that they were able to determine their future, whether it be through election of local governments or governors, which is sort of under discussion now, the parliament; and that the elections for members of the parliament should be absolutely free and fair, and not back to the old days, when the president said to me, in one conversation, "Yes, we have lots of political parties here. I started them all."

I could talk in greater detail about each of the countries, but let me leave it to you to ask questions and see where you'd like me to focus the discussion.

QUESTION: I'm getting mixed signals on the question of long-term military presence in these countries. I think you knew you were going to get that one.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Right. I should expect it.

QUESTION: And some reports seem to suggest a long-term presence, and others, including your own on your trip, suggest there is no intention of a long-term presence. Could you clarify?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Yes, I'll do my best. The fact is, we are not looking for, we don't want, US bases in Central Asia. We don't want a US base anywhere. But what we do want is access to the bases to which we have access now for as long as we need them, and that is completely impossible for me or for Secretary Rumsfeld or the President of the United States to determine at this particular point.

So that the work that is being done, for example, at Manas Air Base at Bishkek, there is an expansion under way there so that they can handle the humanitarian supplies going into Afghanistan, but most importantly so they can handle all the reconstruction supplies going in, as well as the International Security Assistance Force and all the supplies that they need to have go into Kabul or wherever else the International Security Assistance Force may go.

So, for example, at Manas, yes, there are a lot of Americans there. There are about 300 Americans there now and they're building up to have more Americans there who can handle all of the offloading that needs to be done of these reconstruction materials and reloading onto different planes, or whatever all the logistics are to get all these, particularly reconstruction materials, into Afghanistan.

Now, I can't honestly tell you when that is going to change because it depends on load factors at Kabul Airport on the tarmacs, what's possible at Bagram, how many forklifts they have, where does all this stuff need to go, does it make sense to send it to Kabul if it's going to Mazar-e Sharif. Probably not, but it might make sense to get it to Kandahar, you know, when that airport is up and has runways that can handle the size and the weight of these planes that are going in.

At Dushanbe, the focus there -- and I think there may be 60 US forces there -- I think that's the number -- the focus there is on gas and go. They take the planes coming out of usually Kandahar and refuel them going in and out. So that's mostly a refueling operation there.

And in Uzbekistan, at Karze-Khanabad, that's where sort of the forward CENTCOM area for anything that needs to be done in terms of humanitarian or otherwise in northern Afghanistan. And again, I can't tell you when that's going to go back down again, but it will be determined by what's going on in Afghanistan and what is needed.

What is happening in all of these is that even though the military aspects of what we're doing in Afghanistan are reducing, there is so much work that still needs to be done to get the ISAF in and to get them up that we're finding it difficult to start moving troops out. And one of the anomalies of this ten-year relationship we've had with each of these countries, and we've had a good relationship and a very engaged relationship with them, is that we're the ones that each of these governments want to have to talk to about the French ISAF contribution, the German ISAF contribution, the British ISAF contribution, the Danish, you know, whoever it is that is coming in. They would like us to be in the lead on the discussions with the governments. We're the ones who help negotiate the status of forces agreement for each of them.

So we're finding ourselves very much in the lead, even on the reconstruction and the ISAF, even though we're not in a military sense participating in ISAF, but we're doing a huge amount of support for it.

QUESTION: During your trip, did some of these countries, even though you say that you're not looking to have a permanent military presence, are these countries expressing an interest for you to be there on the long term, especially Uzbekistan? Weren't they looking for some kind of permanent presence?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: It's an interesting discussion that we have with each of them. Each one is a little bit different. In Turkmenistan, very happy to have participated and supported so vigorously the humanitarian effort, mostly by land, but also by air into Afghanistan; very concerned to keep it on the humanitarian level as much as possible; and no interest whatsoever in basing or temporary basing or that kind of thing.

In Uzbekistan, the focus there is we really want to participate in the coalition, we want to help you participate in the coalition, we want to support you. We want you to be engaged with us over the long term, but not looking for a permanent base.

So the trick is to understand what we mean and they mean by engagement, because of course what we mean is engagement in every sector that I've mentioned, particularly especially economic reform, democratic reform and human rights. And, you know, we are very up front about saying it means all of these things; you're not going to have this enhanced mil-mil relationship and the increased exercises and all the kind thing that goes along with that without working with us on these issues as well.

With Dushanbe, President Rahmonov of Tajikistan has been very forthcoming, very eager to have more US participation, more international participation. He doesn't want a US base there either. He would like us to use his bases so we fix them up, but not to stay.

In Kazakhstan, very eager for us to use their bases, partly also because of the fixing up that goes along with that, but also just to be part of the coalition. We're not using any of the Kazakhstani bases at this point, but we have huge overflights. I mean, it's like 10, 12 overflights a day that just sort of goes without any difficulty whatsoever.

And with the Kyrgyz, again, not a base. And one of the reasons, for instance, that you saw in the paper that there is a PX going in is that each of the commanders,

especially at Manas but also at Karze-Khanabad, are very, very eager to make certain that there are no incidents, that all our troops are on the base most of the time. They are very, very few but very small groups that go out into the community just to make certain that we have no difficulties for the short period of time that we expect to be there.

QUESTION: There is an impression, though, that some of these countries are looking for the US to stay there over the long term to counter Russian influence in the region, and even from the statement from the US Working Group, you know, the US kind of saying that. If you could talk about the Russian --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Here's the difference. They want us engaged in the long term, and we will be engaged in the long term, but the difference is to make certain that everybody understands that this does not mean American bases. That's the bottom line. And in terms of the Russians, the Russians have been extremely collegial, shall we say, in terms of the kinds of discussions we have. We have complete agreement on what are our goals vis-à-vis Afghanistan, the importance of assuring that the threats coming out of Afghanistan don't threaten Russia. They have been very concerned about the sort of the ease with which those kinds of threats, whether it's terrorism, narcotics, crime, whatever it is coming out of Afghanistan, flows fairly freely through Central Asia. So they are right with us on working to ensure that border guard programs are beefed up, that counter-narcotics work is beefed up, and all that kind of thing to prevent the threat traffic, shall we say.

QUESTION: You mentioned some very specific human rights benchmarks for Uzbekistan and some of these other countries. What are the consequences for these countries if they don't meet these very specific benchmarks, considering that you've just in the new budget requested a significant boost in aid?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Here is the difficulty I have with consequences. It's a hard question. The consequence is, in my view, the consequence is that we are in their office, in their face, all the time. It seems to me that it makes no sense at all that a consequence of Uzbekistan not cooperating on democracy and human rights is to cut our aid which goes to democracy and human rights groups. No money goes to the Government of Uzbekistan.

And as a student group, fabulous student exchangees that we met with in Turkmenistan who had not only had their year in the United States as exchange students, or exchange teachers in some cases, but they had -- you know, so they came back speaking fabulous English from wherever, wherever, but they were doing -- they had started their own little NGOs, they had started their own newsletters, they were involved in environmental issues, they had groups going to doing volunteer programs in old folks' homes or with physically challenged kids, or whatever it is. And as one of them said to me, "If you really want to make a point about the importance of democracy, you triple this program. You don't cut this program."

QUESTION: Well, if I could just follow up.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Please.

QUESTION: If the Uzbeks, just to go back to that country, are looking for a more engaged relationship with the United States and you're giving them that engagement, what is to stop them from thinking that they are essentially getting a pass on all of these very specific violations that you mentioned in your trip?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Well, they're not going to get a pass on it. I mean, that's the bottom line. But, like I say, I'm not going to cut the democracy programs because they haven't invited the UN Rapporteur on Torture.

QUESTION: What about the ExIm Bank? Or, I'm sorry, I mean, I understand that there's a small business investment program as well.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Yes, well, here's the important thing to me about that. It is important to the people of Uzbekistan that they have the jobs and the ability to sell their wares for hard currency overseas. I mean, why would we want to cut a program that finally allows famous potters to get foreign exchange for the pottery that they sell, or the art they sell, spectacular stuff.

QUESTION: But that's not really the problem, is it? The real problem is the fact that they don't -- they haven't gone to convertibility?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: That's right. But that affects the potters, too.

QUESTION: Exactly. No, that's -- I mean, that's --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Okay. Sorry, yes. Right.

QUESTION: The potters -- isn't that the real point? I mean --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: It's convertibility, but it's also job creation through investment. And by investment, I don't mean necessarily only foreign investment, too.

QUESTION: May I ask about -- since the President's speech a few days after the 11th, I haven't heard a single US -- and maybe this is a function of not having been asked a question about it -- but I haven't heard anyone mention the IMU. Do they still exist in any kind of a reasonable force?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: The IMU does still exist in a reduced form. I'm told by people who know that a lot of the IMU were killed or captured in Kunduz, so it is not the dangerous organization that it was. But it's also clear in discussions that I had with the Kyrgyz, with the Tajiks and with the Uzbeks that they believe and we believe that there are still IMU members in each of the three countries that are a danger.

But that's also why I say one of the greatest ways to fight the IMU is through democracy and human rights programs and economic reform programs. Better to have an agricultural assistance program in the Islamic villages of Tajikistan than to really do anything else. That's the best way to combat the pull of these kinds of organizations.

MR. REEKER: If we could just clarify for the record that the IMU is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. I saw some (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Right, sorry.

QUESTION: Sorry. I mean, one of the fears that the United States had, and probably the Uzbeks as well, but one of the fears that the US was bringing was that the IMU was getting popularity particularly in Uzbekistan because of President Karimov's less than soft hand in dealing with Islamic fundamentalists.

Have all the people that you have been pushing for -- pushing to be let out of prison been let out of prison? Or are these people still festering away in there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: There has been an amnesty in Uzbekistan. There was one several weeks ago of some 2,000, and then there was another one about a week ago of about 800. But I can't tell you person for person who's in, who's out at this point. But there has been the kind of amnesty that we had in mind.

Plus, we have, in my conversations and other conversations with the Uzbeks, pressed home the point that he and his government -- I've said the same thing in Turkmenistan -- must differentiate between what people believe and what they do, that you can't arrest people for being devout Muslims. And the worst thing you can do

is go into a mosque and arrest a bunch of kids for praying, that all you've done is created more IMU adherence, that you can go after them only on the basis of terrorist activities planned or completed.

QUESTION: Do you actually speak to them about the dangers inherent in putting believers, as opposed to terrorists, in prison?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Absolutely.

QUESTION: And do they understand that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: No, I can't honestly say they really understand. Certainly, in Turkmenistan that was not -- I had a hard time with that one. And I kept talking and talking and talking, and I can't honestly tell you that I got through.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) President Karimov?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Well, he says that he understands and accepts that, but we'll see in terms of behavior. One of the things that was very good is that the trial of the, I think four or five police who had beaten to death a prisoner was concluded, I believe, the Friday before last with the conviction of the police.

So, I mean, each of those steps is a good thing. And as I said to the Uzbeks, and I have repeated to the Uzbek Ambassador here, we will always have a list of specific things that need to be improved. When the ICRC goes into the pre-detention centers, they will come out with a list of things that need to be improved, and we will be talking with you about how to get each of those things done. It will be a good thing to invite in -- an extremely good thing, a very necessary thing for Uzbekistan to invite in the UN Rapporteur on Torture. That will be a very good thing. It will give the right impression. But that person will also have a report and we'll be talking with you about how to correct those things as well.

QUESTION: Could you say something more about the cooperation with the Russians in Central Asia? I mean, in Tajikistan you've got the 110th Division, I think it is, still on the border. In Kyrgyz I don't know what the Russian involvement is, but because of the concern that they had with regard to the fear of permanent military presence in Central Asia, it seems to me that there would be some cooperation between the two sides. The French are coming in to the Kyrgyz base, which makes it more of a multinational force. Is there the same kind of cooperation in terms of the Russian military activity in any of these countries?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Let me put it this way. What I want to do is make sure that it's clear that there is not a US-Russian condominium about Central Asia. The Central Asians are each independent states. They make their own decisions. We have a lot of bilateral discussions with them about what we do, what they do, and we come to agreement with them on a bilateral basis.

Our goal with the Russians is to be completely transparent about what we're doing in Central Asia or the Caucasus or wherever it may be. First, we have absolutely nothing to hide. Second, we agree on our goals, as I mentioned earlier, with the Russians. And particularly with -- and, for example, in Tajikistan with -- I think it's the 201st Motorized Division, there is a lot to talk about there in terms of border controls and what can be done to assure that the 201st either gets out of the way of vetted narcotics control units or is no longer part of the problem in terms of narcotics coming through the border. The Russians are right up there in recognizing that that is a problem in itself.

So when we have discussions with the Russians, it is to talk about, as your question implied, specific things we can do with Russian units who are in Tajikistan and specific things we can do with the Russians in UNDCP on counter-narcotics programs, specific things we can do with the Russians on coordination in Afghanistan that may be particularly relevant, things we can do with the Russians to coordinate delivery of the humanitarian supplies across the bridge at Termez, that kind of thing.

So I want to differentiate the way we have these discussions. But our goal with the Russians is to make sure they understand that we are not trying to compete with them in Central Asia, we're not trying to take over Central Asia from them, but we have common interests -- international common interests -- that we will be transparent about as they play out in Central Asia.

QUESTION: To follow up on that, with regard to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, after September 11th, it seems that at least the terrorist side of the Shanghai organization had been kind of sidelined by events and that other things were in action to deal with terrorism there.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Right.

QUESTION: But it seems the organization is still intact, there still is the economic cooperation, and there was this talk about setting up an anti-terrorist center in Bishkek. Is that still on the table or is the US involved in it? Or is that independent, or is that no longer really relevant?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: It is independent. We had a discussion with the Russians in the US-Russia Afghan Working Group on Friday -- they basically briefed us on what the Shanghai Coordination Cooperation Organization is doing. And we said, great, let's make sure to coordinate the program so we're not all trying to do the same thing and we've let something out on the side. Sort of the same kind of thing we try to do with the OSCE and Partnership for Peace, for instance.

But we've told the Russians and each of the governments who belong to the Shanghai group that whatever they can do to improve their regional situation, we're all for it. And in fact that's one of the elements of our policy that we are working hard on this to find ways to enhance and increase regional cooperation, not just each of the countries with Afghanistan, which is sort of at the top of their list, but to improve customs issues between the countries so that vegetables coming out of Kyrgyzstan actually can go out of Kyrgyzstan through Uzbekistan or through Kazakhstan without gargantuan customs, which is the case now. That doesn't help anything.

QUESTION: Can I go back to the question earlier about consequences for inaction on these issues? If you're not inclined to cut the aid because, as you say, it goes to democracy groups, and if the military cooperation is going to increase for our own interests and reasons, then I don't understand what consequences there are for, for instance, Uzbekistan and Karimov if he chooses to ignore your good advice.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: I can't tell you specifically what we might link to what, but suffice -- I mean, the best way I can explain it is that we're going to make sure all of it stays in balance, that there isn't this gigantic mil-mil cooperation that they especially want if we're not getting anywhere on this. And it takes a lot of daily adjustment on our programs and how we pursue them.

But at this point, I mean, the president he agreed to ICRC access for the pre-detention centers, which is something we've been wanting for some time. NGO registration comes next in Uzbekistan. I can't give you, if they don't do this, this is what happens. I can't do that for you.

QUESTION: But you have tried to ask the Pentagon to go slow with the military cooperation because they are lagging on the human rights side?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: We have very detailed conversations, interagency conversations, about how to keep everything in balance. At this point we haven't had to say don't do this because of that. But everybody knows the deal. And what was very, very good is in Uzbekistan we had a very large interagency delegation to pursue all aspects of our assistance programs and sort of talk through what the sort of enhanced relationship is going to be, and especially our Pentagon and JCS colleagues were extremely good about the importance of assuring that democracy and human rights issues stayed on the agenda, right in front of the agenda, because all of these programs were all linked.

QUESTION: Which other countries besides Uzbekistan does the US Government not give direct aid to, to the other government? Turkmenistan, I believe? Is that --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: We don't give direct aid to anybody. We give aid to programs. Our money goes to specific programs through AID, but there's no cash.

QUESTION: No, but some of them are government programs, and in some countries they aren't. Or do I misunderstand?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Right. For instance, let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Ambassador Bill Taylor is here, who can maybe go into it in greater detail but, for instance, let's say we're doing an economic reform program. The money goes to experts to sit down with the head of the Central Bank to write legislation. Now, some of that money will go to local lawyers to help write the legislation that underpins a new Central Bank law, but we aren't giving a check to the government.

QUESTION: I didn't mean that. I meant in some cases we are giving -- we are helping government programs, and in some countries we are not. Is that true in Uzbekistan? You said that we're giving money to democracy programs, but nothing that goes through the Government of Uzbekistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Yes, that's true in -- right.

QUESTION: In Uzbekistan, and which other countries I was interested in?

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Yes, there are only very small programs that we have through government agencies or entities in Uzbekistan. For example, in the Central Bank, that has been -- as Secretary Jones has indicated--the Central Bank and some of the economic reform people have been willing to do good work on oversight. And we've trained a little bit of the Central Banker staff in order to do that. So that's a very small program.

By and large, in Uzbekistan, almost entirely in Turkmenistan, we do very little with the central government. We do do some work with the private sector and nongovernmental organizations and some in the local governments. We're able to identify some reforming local government people to provide some services to their people.

So it's Turkmenistan, virtually nothing; a little bit in Uzbekistan. We have had some good work with the government in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser degree, but still significant, in Tajikistan.

QUESTION: Thank you. That was exactly my question. And did any of this change after Secretary Powell's trip to -- where did he go -- to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan? Did anything change after Secretary Powell was there and talked about democracy and blah, blah, blah, I guess it is, to them? Did you see any difference since his visit, I mean in terms of reforms and follow-through on programs they talked about?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: The biggest difference is that we actually can have a civil conversation about the importance of all these things. I mean, I felt that in talking with Karimov this time, after the Secretary's visit with President Karimov. Well, a couple of things happened since Secretary Powell's visit to Uzbekistan. The two amnesties that I mentioned and then the agreement for ICRC access to pre-detention centers happened while I was there.

QUESTION: So did the election that was neither free nor fair, and so unfree and fair that you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Yes, bad thing.

QUESTION: What is their response to your bringing that up?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Their response is that nobody forced these people to go the polls; obviously it was free.

QUESTION: And your response to that is?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: That the referendum was irrelevant because the initial elections had not been free and fair, which was --

QUESTION: But they already (inaudible) --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Well, President Karimov's answer to that is we have to keep things under control because the people aren't mature enough to understand how to do this right.

QUESTION: And how far can they develop in view of their own view of neutrality?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: With Turkmenistan, right after September 11th, we basically went to the president and said, "We know you are a neutral country, but you can not be neutral on terrorism. There is no such thing as neutrality. You are either with us, with the coalition on terrorism, or you're with the bad guys." And President Niyazov was very clear very quickly, no, we're on the side of the coalition on counter-terrorism, let us help.

QUESTION: And what were you going to do if he said, "No, we're going to be with the bad guys"?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Well, luckily we didn't have to figure that out.

QUESTION: There was no threat, not like we're going to bomb you back into the Stone Age if you don't --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: We didn't use any threats, shall we say. We used the positive aggressive version of those talking points.

In terms of our relationship with President Niyazov, we have had a hard time developing much of a relationship with Turkmenistan. We are working very hard to increase the number of exchanges, especially student exchanges that we do. We work a lot with the UN organizations that have been doing a tremendous amount of work there on humanitarian deliveries to Afghanistan and using that as sort of a foothold to expand a lot of the work that we do with other organizations. It's not widely known that 40 percent of the humanitarian goods that went to Afghanistan throughout since September 11th went through Turkmenistan. And a lot of others went from Pakistan, but of all of the states, 40 percent went through there. And I must say I was extremely impressed with the UN organizations there and how much work they do in Turkmenistan, as well as across the border, so that's a very interesting dynamic that is developing there.

But I was extremely heartened by the local NGO leadership that I met with in terms of their willingness to go after their goals without regard to the difficulties that they encounter. Of course they have difficulties, and we in the OSCE and other Western embassies are constantly in talking about specific things with the Turkmen Government to improve the situation with NGOs. One of the recent successes was getting rid of the exit visa requirement, which was very important to our training programs, student exchanges, the ability of Turkmen to travel, and that requirement went away a couple of months ago, to great effect. But it's not an easy place to work

for these people, but I was extremely impressed with how much -- as I say, despite the difficulties, they all roll up their sleeves and are just ready to go. Especially the kids. They were fabulous.

QUESTION: Still on Turkmenistan, there are reports from various groups from the region that the former Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, Mr. Boris Shikhmuradov, he joined opposition and three ambassadors of Turkmenistan, in Iran, Saudi Arabia and also in Turkey, they resigned. They also joined opposition. And since it happened, the Turkmeni Government now arresting hundreds of relatives of these people, they're demolishing their houses. This is something the human rights groups are giving. Is this something you have taken into account? Are you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: We would take it into account. I have not seen reports of the arrests and the demolition of houses, but it is something that our embassy would be very, very focused on making sure we understand what the deal there is. But again, there and in other places, I did a lot of work with the president -- in two hours and twenty minute discussion -- about the importance of recognizing that stability and security comes from debate, free press, civil society.

QUESTION: On Kazakhstan, if you say this is one of the stable countries in the region which has some potential to be better than -- I mean, others.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: I actually didn't say that, but --

QUESTION: But you mentioned something about the stability. Anyhow, during your discussion with ministers of this country, is issue of Mr. Atajan Kazablavan comes up, because he is -- most every member of the congress supported his position to go back and participate freely in political life. Do you think there is any indication from the Kazakh Government that they will let him come back and participate in political life?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: No.

QUESTION: Have you discussed this issue with the government?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: I discussed the issue in the context of the importance of full discussion, the importance of letting the debate occur, the importance of demonstrating the confidence of the government in allowing full debate by all -- by everybody, whether it be in the TV issues or whether it be among the political elite.

QUESTION: Last one. You also visited Azerbaijan. Could you just elaborate what you discussed with President Aliyev? And he is in Cleveland clinic right now in United States. Do you have any contacts with him since he came to United States?

And also, last one, Azerbaijan proposal to extend his presidency from five years to seven years, also have a referendum from members of ruling party which President Aliyev is chairman. Is this something United States will oppose or support?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Yes, Deputy Secretary Armitage was in touch with President Aliyev in New York before he went to Cleveland. I talked with President Aliyev about the same kinds of issues -- security, stability, you have to allow debate, economic reform, removal of investment impediments and the importance of border security, financial controls, financial bank reform, that kind of thing -- because we haven't been able to do that with Azerbaijan because of the 907 business.

In terms of the referendum, I didn't talk about that specifically with President Aliyev, but we do talk about those kinds of things in all of our discussions, basically along the same lines that I mentioned in terms of Uzbekistan.

QUESTION: On Kyrgyzstan you mentioned that hunger strikers died last week. Apparently, US Embassy staff met with him before that. I wondered if you can characterize the US contacts with these opposition forces. How have they changed since 9/11, since the war in Afghanistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Well, they haven't changed because they were so extensive. They have been so extensive throughout. I mean, the reporting, all the contacts we have had with all aspects of Kyrgyz society has been ongoing. So we --

QUESTION: Are you in talks with Akayev on the military bases?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: No, no. I mean, it just gives us -- frankly, it gives us more to talk about. It gives us details that we can go in and say here's what's going on there.

QUESTION: Could you elaborate on the status of the talks on status of forces agreements with some of those countries?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: I believe all the status of forces agreements are completed with each of the -- the US status of forces agreements. In Dushanbe our Embassy has been extremely helpful to a variety of other countries in helping them develop their status of forces agreements; in Bishkek the same way and Tashkent the same way. I don't know if there are any details that I'm missing.

QUESTION: Do you have just an overall number of aid dollars for Central Asia?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Ambassador Taylor is our numbers guru. I'm sorry, I don't keep it in my head.

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: And I don't have -- I can get you specifics of both fiscal year -- last year up to now and '02 numbers. The conversations that we had in detail on this trip had to do with Uzbekistan, and the Uzbekistan number is generally around 50 million from all spigots, all parts of the US Government. And we've added a hundred million to that for a total of about 150 million this year. So that is the tripling that people have talked about.

It is much smaller -- the base is about -- we have similarly a base program in these other countries as well, and if you're interested I can get you the specifics.

QUESTION: Yes.

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR: Okay.

MR. REEKER: Thanks very much.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY JONES: Okay, thanks everybody.

(The briefing was concluded at 10:50 a.m.)

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