



Press Conference

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Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
June 26, 2007

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: Well let me say, first of all, that it's good to be back in Turkmenistan. I was last here in January -- at a moment of transition in this country, but also at a moment of transition in our bilateral relationship. The former president had just passed away; the country had an acting president. And so it was good to come here to Ashgabat and have a chance to meet President Berdimuhamedov, as President of Turkmenistan, and so many colleagues in the government here. I'm about half-way through my trip but I've had a very good series of meetings here in Ashgabat. I spent about an hour and a quarter with the President discussing all aspects of the U.S.-Turkmen relationship. As I did in January, I spent a lot of time talking to Minister of Foreign Affairs -- to Deputy Chairman Meredov. And I've met with deputy chairmen and ministers in other elements of the government, who each in their own way are responsible for elements of cooperation with the United States: education, health, social and cultural issues, electric power, and some other areas as well.

You know, the United States and Turkmenistan have a lot of history together. We recognized this country's independence almost at the very moment of independence. We've had over fifteen years of diplomatic relations. We've stood since Day One for the sovereignty and independence of this country: for a strong, prosperous, stable, democratic Turkmenistan. But we think this is a particularly unique moment in the relationship. Turkmenistan is a country that has powerful opportunities in front of it. It has powerful opportunities to link more closely to the international economy, to international energy markets, to the international system in a variety of ways, and also to expand its cooperation, its partnership with the United States.

We have a multi ... we have a multi-dimensional approach to our relationship with this country. We want to cooperate in every area simultaneously: on security, on economics and trade, on borders and customs and narcotics and other trans-national issues, on democracy and human rights, on oil and gas and linking this country to energy markets in new ways. On all of these things, we want to expand our cooperation. But we want to do it in a multi-dimensional way, which means moving forward in every basket simultaneously, in every area at the same time. And we've had a lot of American visitors come to Turkmenistan recently to talk about each of these areas of the relationship. But I wanted to come here both to review the progress that we've made but also explore next steps. And I'm very gratified by the meetings I've had with the government: we've been able to do that. I had some ideas; in fact I had a lot of ideas. They've had some ideas. And so I think, step by step, we're moving this relationship forward in a variety of ways. We think we have an opportunity, as the Secretary of State once put it, to "turn a page" in our bilateral relationship. And so, working with our Turkmen colleagues, we want to turn that page and we really want to expand this relationship in new directions. It's been a good visit so far and I'm looking forward to a discussion with you. So, please.

QUESTION: So you said that, from both sides, you know, there were ideas and you were discussing ideas. So first of all if you could, first of all we are very glad to hear that there are ideas from both sides. So if you could just give, provide specific ... details of those ideas and key aspects of their implementation.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: Well I think this is a process. With each visit here, people representing different areas of the relationship put forward some things that we'd like to try to do. For example, one thing we would like to try to do is to expand our cooperation on education. We'd like to bring more Fulbright scholars here. We think there are opportunities to bring more Turkmen students to the United States. And when those students go to the United States, they develop a unique body of experience that --when they return to Turkmenistan -- they use to help enrich their country. I proposed a few ideas for cultural exchange.

I also proposed some ideas in the business area. How to ... things that we can do together to try and attract more international companies here. You know, we think energy is one of these areas where Turkmenistan does have powerful opportunities to link to the international market. And one way to do that is to bring multinational companies, including American companies, with their technology, their expertise, their skills.

And I proposed a lot of other things. And my Turkmen colleagues proposed a lot of other things. And these are in all areas of the relationship: security, democracy and human rights, and other areas as well.

QUESTION: So it's just that there's always, you know, talks. There are lots of visitors who talk about different issues like security and human rights. But unfortunately the talks happen but there are no results. For example, what do you think is the State Department's opinion on human rights issue, human rights situation in Turkmenistan?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: Well, I mean the State Department's view on human rights is very well known. And some of our views are expressed in the reports we write and the statements that we make. You know political development is important not because we expect every country to look like a carbon copy of the United States. We don't. You know, the road to political reform is long and every country finds its own way. But it's well known that we in the United States think it's important that citizens be invested in the political life of their country. And so of course I talk to all of my Turkmen counterparts about subjects in that area as well.

I think you can measure the concrete results in the relationship by looking at the programs that we run here. We're sitting in an American Center, and there are literally thousands of Turkmen who find this center useful in enriching their lives. So there really is a lot going on in this relationship. It's not just talk. Should we give someone else a chance --

QUESTION: Okay so, first of all, we are interested in whether the United States is still supportive of either economic projects of regional character here in Central Asia, in particular connected to Turkmenistan, and why the question is coming from basically, from the transit of energy resources from Turkmenistan and which is related to the Trans-Caspian pipeline so recently. Ambassador Mann also visited Turkmenistan and he talked about the possibility of reanimating the project with Turkmenistan. And so is it worthwhile for the United States to try to reanimate the project and also whether it will help to attract more, to make the investment climate more attractive? And did you also during your visit, talk to the President about this issue and was he openly supportive of it?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: Well I'm not principally responsible for oil and gas, but I do want to say something about it. Let me say two things. First, American energy policy in this part of the world is very, very well known and it's ... it's very long-standing: we want to work with the countries of the region to help develop options to bring their natural resources to the international market. We favor more routes of supply in more directions on the compass because we think that's good for global energy supply and global energy security. We think monopolies tend to disadvantage producers. And so we are trying to work with the countries of the region so they can get market prices for their resources. And this won't surprise you, because this is what American energy policy has been consistently about for more than a decade now. And that's fed and informed our policy on the Trans-Caspian issues that you are raising.

But there is a second issue, which is the development of the resources: it requires technology, it requires skills that we think a lot of multinational companies have. So I'm glad that you mentioned the investment climate because we think it's important for Turkmenistan and other countries of the region to try to attract multinational companies here. And what I've told my counterparts here is that we're committed to working with them to try to create the conditions that will bring more multinational companies here. We think that's a good ... that's a good thing for Turkmenistan, but it's also good thing for the global economy, not just in the energy sector. In July, in Washington we'll be having a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement meeting. This is a meeting of our United States-Central Asian regional trade and investment framework. It includes the United States and all five Central Asian countries, plus Afghanistan who has participated in the past. Turkmenistan will be participating in this meeting. We

see that as a terrific opportunity to discuss regional trade issues, since you mentioned the regional angle. And so we're very much looking forward to that, and we think it's a great opportunity for our partnership with this country.

QUESTION: So what is, how do you ... how would you value the role of Turkmenistan in the regional scale? Have you not, is not the United States surprised about the -- like -- one policy orientation towards energy issues? Maybe it's worth investing into, in helping and supporting the resources development here in Turkmenistan: internal development of raw materials processing so that they would then be able to then transfer?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: You mean extracting? Yeah, I agree. That's one reason why I think it's important to get multinational companies. And, by the way, we've noticed that Turkmenistan is becoming more active in its region. The President has been meeting with the President of Kazakhstan and others. That is clearly a very important development. And the region: I mentioned our TIFA, our Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, because it's another example of regional economic cooperation. And there are other possibilities too. For instance, we're encouraging trade links between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, including Turkmenistan. And so to come back to something I said before, this is a country that has powerful opportunities before it in the international system and international economy, and we want to work closely with Turkmenistan to try to help it realize those opportunities in every sector.

I think we have time for one more and you two guys both got a shot at me today already. I'll ... I'll let you fight it out! (laughter)

QUESTION: So can you please confirm that during yesterday's meeting with the President here, the President openly acknowledged and said that he would support the Trans-Caspian project?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: I told you that we want to have a multi-dimensional relationship and all of your questions are about one subject: oil and gas! (laughter)

QUESTION (different journalist): No, I am asking about human rights.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: I know. So that's good because human rights is, as I said to you, all of these areas are important to us. We want to move forward in every area.

I don't want to characterize my meeting with the President, but the President is on record in public as saying that Turkmenistan sees the possibility for a Trans-Caspian pipeline. And so I think the President's words speak for themselves.

Thanks very much, it's good to see you all.

QUESTION: Last question, maybe. So back in January you said that in four days, you know, you won't ... we won't be expecting a Jefferson democracy in Turkmenistan, by Thursday. Now you are thinking of expecting it by Wednesday, after today's meeting.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: Did I say that? I don't think I did. What I said was.

QUESTION: But you were cited, quoted for saying that. In January you were saying that. In Washington you were telling that --

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FEIGENBAUM: I don't recall being quoted that way in January. But I was quoted saying something very similar to the New York Times last week. Democratic development and human rights are a very important part of American foreign policy in Central Asia, but everywhere in the world. We think it's a question of opportunity: it's opportunity for citizens to have access to education, to religious belief, to participation in political life. We think that when citizens are invested in their system of government, they become productive citizens. But Secretary Rice has spoken to this when she said that our purpose in talking about democracy is not to tell people to do things just like Americans. The world is a very big place and countries find their own roads to democracy, to political development. And that path can sometimes be long. But sometimes it's short. But each country is different. But the point is, we've seen democracy emerge in countries that are very different: Argentina in Latin America, Botswana in Africa, Japan in East Asia, the United States in North America -- countries with very different cultures. So Central Asian countries, too, have unique histories, unique cultures. But every American official has said it many times, so I will say it again: we continue to believe that democratic development is important in this part of the world and every part of the world. And so as I said, it is one dimension -- but an important dimension -- of what we hope will be multi-dimensional relationships with the countries of Central Asia. We want to move forward in every area simultaneously. And that is what we are trying to do: build a track record of success. And I think that we've had a lot of success in our relationship with Turkmenistan and we see a lot of potential opportunity. So it's been a good visit. I had very good meetings. I'm grateful to the Government of Turkmenistan for receiving me, and I hope to come back.

Thanks very much.

Released on July 3, 2007

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