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You Are In: [About Us](#) > [Transcript](#) > Remarks by Assistant Secretary Boucher

### Transcript

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Remarks to the Press by Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A. Boucher

Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
June 2, 2008

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Good afternoon, everyone. It is a real pleasure for me to be back in Uzbekistan. I'm always reminded when I come here of the rich culture, the rich history, the rich traditions of Uzbekistan. And I'm also reminded of the rich tradition of hospitality of the people of Uzbekistan. I want to thank the officials and the people I've met here.

I've had a lot of interesting discussions during the course of my couple of days here. I met with the Hokim of Samarkand to understand the situation outside of the capital. I've had official discussions with the Foreign Minister, Mr. Norov, with the Secretary of National Security, Mr. Ataev, and, of course, with President Karimov. We also had the chance today to go to the Islamic University, meet with some of the teachers, the Rector, and some of the students there. I think we all agree that education, and the education of young people of Uzbekistan, is the greatest promise for the future.

I came to try to understand better the direction that Uzbekistan is taking, to try to understand better the interests of this country -- of the people of this country -- and to try to identify areas where we can work together.

I remain firmly convinced that we have a common interest in stabilizing Afghanistan. And I welcome some of the ideas and proposals that President Karimov put out in that regard.

I think we have very strong interest in seeing Uzbekistan develop as a nation -- especially in such areas as protecting its border from drugs and terrorism, developing its economy, and moving forward in areas of human rights. And we would like to work with Uzbekistan in all of these things.

Our goal is to work with the people here, and with the government, so that the people can participate fully in the active political and economic life of the nation. We take a very practical approach. We want to move forward in all these areas. We want to achieve results -- results that make the people of Uzbekistan more free, more safe, more prosperous, and would help this country achieve the role it should play in the region.

It is no secret that we lost a lot of trust in the relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan in the last few years. But I think both sides would like to rebuild [it]. I think we'll do that by working together, by achieving things together that are in our interest, and in the interest of Uzbekistan, and in the interest of the region. So that's what we tried to identify today; how we can do that. But, I think for both sides, it's going to take time. It is going to take a real effort. For our part, we are committed to doing it. We'll keep at it because we are fundamentally ready. The United States and Uzbekistan share some common interests -- they are worth working on for both our peoples.

So with that statement, I will take your questions.

QUESTION: Thank you for the introduction. I have two questions. I represent the Turkish broadcasting agency Cihan. My first question [is] with regard to Afghanistan. The threat that exists in Afghanistan represents [a] threat to the entire region, the Central Asian region. Do you still believe that the Taliban represents a serious

threat to the Central Asian region today? And my second question is: as you mentioned, that there was a certain loss of trust between U.S. and Uzbekistan over the last several years. Do you think that as a result of your visit, the cooperation between Uzbekistan and the U.S. will improve and reach a new level of cooperation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: What about the threat of the Taliban? I think the Taliban -- in association with Al-Qaeda, in association with some of the radical groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan -- do represent a threat to people of the region. We have seen it. We have seen it in real terms. Unfortunately, we have seen it in bombs; we have seen it in attacks. I think we've all seen that instability in Afghanistan has opened up opportunities for this, these kinds of extremists. But I think that we also know the vast majority of people in Central Asia, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, they want a different kind of life. They want a chance to educate their children. They want a chance to find jobs. They want a chance to live in a participatory government. They want a chance to live with a good government, to participate in a government. And they want more open horizons -- they want to be able to trade, to travel, to study. I think that is fundamentally why the United States is strategically interested in this region, because we think that we can help people to deal with the insurgency, to deal with the extremists, but also to develop the kind of options and opportunities that they want.

Did my visit contribute to rebuilding trust? I hope so. I've come a long way. I've come a long way to understand the situation here, to look at what is going on, and to see how we can contribute to the continuation of progress. What I heard: both sides want to do that. Though, perhaps, it will be a long while before we can render any kinds of judgments.

QUESTION: What is the result of your discussion with the Uzbek authorities on human rights, on the situation with NGOs, the freedom of press? What do you think about possible results? Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let me say, human rights was a major issue in our discussions. It's one of the areas where we really would like to move forward. We want to move forward in all the areas -- security, economics, Afghanistan, regional issues. But human rights is one of the areas where we had a lot of talking to do. And we recognize that progress is being made. We recognize the passage of laws on habeas corpus. We recognize the new discussions with the Red Cross, and the visits to prisons. We recognize the commitment to religious tolerance and moderation. But we also want to be involved with Uzbekistan when it comes to the full implementation of these commitments, and these beginnings.

So, that's a lot of what we discussed today. We hope that will lead to continued progress. We hope we continue to...we can help Uzbekistan move in directions that the leaders here themselves have identified. And it includes making progress on human rights, expanding the roles of non-governmental organizations -- I met with some of the representatives of organizations that work here -- and also expanding the role of the press. So, again, we have tried to look at the direction of the commitments that Uzbekistan has made and see if we can help Uzbekistan achieve results in these areas.

QUESTION: What are your impressions about the meeting with President Karimov? How would you assess this meeting?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've met President Karimov before, with Secretaries of State and also by myself. As before, we had a pretty long discussion that was both theoretical and practical: theoretical about identifying our common interests; practical looking for things we could do together. I think it was a useful discussion. I have to say, I think, for both sides, we find it easier to identify common interests than to identify ways we can work together. But I think he is committed, as I am, to working in pragmatic ways, and also to working on all these different aspects of our relationship, of our regional interest in Afghanistan.

Well, I thought it was a productive meeting. What exactly it will produce, I don't know.

QUESTION: Is there any interaction between the countries in the region to stabilize Afghanistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You mean the interaction between the U.S. and Uzbekistan?

QUESTION: Yes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, indeed. I think after human rights and bilateral relations, Afghanistan was really a major topic. We talked about everything -- from the big issues of how to achieve stability to particular issues of how to get electricity so children can do their homework and people can start businesses. I think there are a lot of areas for good cooperation with Uzbekistan on Afghanistan. President Karimov made some important proposals in Bucharest. I was here, in part, to follow up on that -- how to ensure that supplies come through this route and get to coalition forces and NATO forces in Afghanistan. We are looking for ways to involve the neighbors much more closely in the stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan. And I think in that regard we all have the desire to work closely with the United Nations [Special Representative of the Secretary-General]. So we had good discussions about Afghanistan. I think we have some practical cooperation already. And we have a good base for further cooperation.

QUESTION: In regard to stabilization of Afghanistan, can we expect any changes in terms of military-technical cooperation between the U.S. and Uzbekistan? Was an issue of reestablishment of U.S. bases in Uzbekistan discussed at all?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That really was not an issue. It is not a question of bases. I think there is a question of cooperation to support the overall effort in Afghanistan. We have seen the flow of non-lethal supplies to coalition and NATO forces. We've seen...we appreciate having an increased transit of NATO officers through Termez base. We're not really out here looking for bases. We are looking for partners who will work with us to help save lives in Afghanistan. And that is what we are doing.

Thank you very much. Great to see you.

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