

U.S.-Kyrgyz Partnership

Remarks at Kyrgyz National University

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Well, thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for that warm welcome, and let me particularly thank the Deputy Foreign Minister for his gracious introduction.

It's just a pleasure to be back in Bishkek.

In fact, it's my second trip here in just five months and I couldn't possibly have come at a more interesting or important time.

But since I'm looking out at an audience of students, I have to tell you, first, that I'm particularly excited because I'm back on a university campus. Kyrgyz National is this country's oldest institution, but I know we have students in the audience from campuses across the capital.

Now, some of you may have heard that, before I was a diplomat, I was a scholar, a teacher.

And so I'm comfortable in this setting:
I'm in a lecture hall.

I'm surrounded by students.
I'm home.

I look around and I see faces that remind me of my past as a university teacher. But I also see the faces of those who are going to lead Kyrgyzstan in the future.

I know these are dramatic days here. And off campus, there is a great political debate in the country.

Demonstrators are in the streets.

We've heard a range of political views.

And clearly, people have different ideas about what the future should hold for this country.

But particularly for the students in the audience, I hope, in times like these, that you appreciate just how important your *own* role is going to be in shaping Kyrgyzstan's destiny in the decades to come.

Indeed, that's why I wanted to speak about U.S.-Kyrgyz relations on a university campus.

Each of you, in your own way, is going to be an ambassador for your country.

And I hope each of you, in one way or another, will become involved with the United States.

Some of you may study there.

Some might work with Americans here in Kyrgyzstan.

Some of you may never visit the United States but might nonetheless become advocates for a strong and productive partnership.

And that's just what we have — a strong and productive partnership. And so today, I'm going to talk about two things:

First, I'll talk a bit about what we stand for in this part of the world — how we see the basis for this strong and productive partnership. What does the United States believe about Central Asia, and what does that mean for the Kyrgyz Republic?

Second, I want to talk about what we are doing together. We are proud of that record. And we hope every Kyrgyz—whether leader or citizen—shares our pride, and shares our enthusiasm for the future of U.S.-Kyrgyz relations.

I'll be candid. I know there is controversy here about what the United States stands for.

I read your press.

I listen to what people say.

Some say we care only about an Airbase, claiming we “ignore” other aspects of Kyrgyz development.

Some tell us we should focus more on promoting democracy. In fact, I read an article in a newsmagazine last month that said precisely this.

But, then, others say exactly the reverse. You should focus *less* on democracy, they say. Or more accurately, they argue that American efforts to promote reform only foment “revolutions” and instability. The United States, they say, needs to show “balance” in its policy.

So what should you believe?

What’s true about U.S.-Kyrgyz relations?

What has our partnership accomplished over fifteen years?

And most important, how can we build on that partnership, as Kyrgyzstan strives to strengthen its sovereignty, independence, stability, security, development, and democracy?

I’m going to try answering some of these questions.

And so let me start with American policy.

Why does the United States, a country 7,000 miles away, take an interest in what happens here? Why do we have a compelling national interest in supporting your aspirations?

Well, first, we stand for your independence.

One way or another, for more than two centuries, American foreign policy has sympathized with those that seek to establish their place in the world. That shaped our response to your independence in 1991. And it has shaped our policy toward the Kyrgyz Republic ever since.

You can see that commitment in some of the choices we made during the very first days of Kyrgyz independence.

We immediately recognized your independence in 1991.

We were the first country to open an Embassy here in Bishkek.

We have provided nearly \$1 billion dollars in assistance since 1991 to help strengthen the capacity of your Government and to assist its citizens.

We have provided that assistance in the form of grants, not loans, and thus have added not one *som* to Kyrgyzstan's debt.

And we have worked to facilitate Kyrgyz membership in major international organizations, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Second, we think we can support your independence by helping you attain some additional strategic and economic options.

We respect your relations with your neighbors and with other, longstanding partners. But since our focus is to support your sovereignty, quite logically more options in more directions mean more opportunities and, thus, more independence.

We don't think countries should foreclose their options.

And to prosper, Kyrgyzstan needs more than one option — more than one market, one trading partner, one vital infrastructure link.

From the first days of our relations in 1991, American policy has been clear: We put Central Asians *themselves* at the center of our approach to this part of the world.

And today we reject the notion, once again so fashionable, that Central Asia is merely an arena for outside powers to compete for influence.

Kyrgyzstan is not the object of America's geopolitical struggles with anyone. Nearly everything we do here aims to support your goal of an independent nation whose citizens have the opportunity to realize their destiny.

Now, I know the media often tell you otherwise:

But whatever other countries may be doing, we view Kyrgyzstan—and other strong, sovereign, independent republics—as our partners.

We are a distant nation. We have no imperial ambitions in this part of the world, no legacy of war, conflict, or colonialism in Central Asia.

The focus of our effort is Central Asians themselves.

Third, since Central Asians *themselves* are the focus of our effort, we have every incentive to help you tap economic opportunity in all four directions on the compass: west, east, north, and south.

And that's just what we are trying to do.

We think we can help Kyrgyzstan forge some new connections to the global economy: to trade and investment opportunities, cross-border energy projects, additional deep-water ports, and the enormous possibilities of the global market.

Let me give you an example:

We are working with Kyrgyzstan, but also Tajikistan and the International Financial Institutions, to help create the conditions to export hydroelectric power to South Asia.

The Kyrgyz Republic currently earns about one U.S. cent per kilowatt hour on power sold northward, but just think of the opportunities since Pakistan's generation costs average about 5 cents while India's cost for peaking power may be double even that.

You border one of the world's fastest growing economies to the east — China. And you have resources, such as hydropower, that are badly needed by dynamic economies to the south, including ultimately India.

So we seek to help broaden your options by fostering trade and linking up infrastructure.

Finally, our policy in Central Asia is multi-dimensional.

We have more than one interest and work in more than one area simultaneously: fostering security; facilitating economic change; advancing regional integration and cooperation; and of course promoting democratic reform.

We do not "trade" democracy for bases.

We do not rank one or another area of our cooperation "first," and our cooperation in another area "second" or "third."

Together, Americans and Kyrgyz do more than one, two, or three things.

And since *we* do not have a one-dimensional policy, we also do not have a one-dimensional relationship.

As Secretary Rice has put it, we seek peace and security.

We seek economic development and prosperity.

We seek democratic values and human rights that unite all free nations in trust and respect.

And we seek a region of strong relations between neighbors.

Now, let me try to show you that by describing a few of our successes but also highlighting some challenges, as we see them.

I'll start with security — not because it's most important but because it colors so much of the debate here.

I have to tell you: We are just enormously proud of our cooperation in the security area.

And we have built a track-record of success, working together over fifteen years.

We have worked to enhance the defensive capabilities of the country through NATO's Partnership for Peace and bilateral assistance, including the provision of helicopters, aircraft, and training.

We work jointly to secure your borders.

And we have worked closely to fight the spread of narcotics through Kyrgyzstan's national Drug Control Agency, which was established with U.S. funds.

Kyrgyzstan, too, has been keen to expand cooperation in these areas.

And so we have helped.

Just look at what we've done in Osh, where Americans and Kyrgyz worked closely, through our Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) program, to create a border post with modern facilities, updated equipment, and fully trained staff.

Last October, I walked the uncompleted construction site for this post with our Ambassador and an extraordinary group of Kyrgyz border guards.

The guards were proud of their post, proud of what it meant for Kyrgyz security, and proud of their cooperation with the United States.

And I'm happy to say that, just a few weeks ago, our Ambassador helped to reopen that post at Dostuk.

So these security programs reflect much of what is best in *all* of our bilateral cooperation: We try to assist, to fill needs, to build capacity. But we do so by working jointly with the Kyrgyz government and people.

Your country also has been an indispensable partner in promoting security in Afghanistan. And it rightly sees peace and stability there as essential to its own security.

Now, I know how much public controversy there has been here about our Airbase at Manas. And so I want, first, to assure you that we are working closely with your Government to resolve issues, remove misunderstandings, and ensure that our operations at the Base are as safe as possible for the people of Kyrgyzstan and retain full public and political support here.

We are committed to working together to resolve these issues.

But let's also remember why Manas is so important, not just to the United States but to stability here.

It wasn't so long ago that Taliban rule in Afghanistan was seen as *the* principal threat to security across Central Asia.

Some of you might even remember that in 1999 and 2000, extremist fighters sheltered by the Taliban entered Kyrgyzstan.

And the fight in Afghanistan continues.

The good news is that conditions are improving. And we are working closely with the Afghan government and other partners to bring lasting stability, democracy, and prosperity to that country.

Roads and schools have been built, dangerous landmines cleared, a national army and police force have emerged. A state is being rebuilt out of the ashes of war and conflict.

But Afghanistan's challenges cannot be overcome overnight.

And the United States is determined to help for as long as it takes to overcome them.

And so we are asking others, including Kyrgyzstan, to join Afghanistan and us in that effort.

And I have to tell you that Manas remains crucial to that task.

We are proud that the Kyrgyz people share with us this important interest in regional stability.

In the past year, over 8,000 missions flew out of Manas, moving over 125,000 Coalition troops and nearly 50,000 tons of cargo, and refueling over 5,000 airplanes to support the fight in Afghanistan.

This effort strengthens the Afghan government, and prevents the Taliban from disrupting reconstruction, reconciliation, and Afghan rebirth.

What is more, cross-border narcotics and terrorism remain a threat that this effort also will help to address.

So the Base makes a real and direct contribution to the entire Central Asian region.

But more than that, it is a tangible demonstration of Kyrgyzstan's strength as a partner to the international community.

And so we thank you.

And one way we try to do so is by giving something back to the community.

We believe the Base must also benefit the *people* of Kyrgyzstan.

And so American Base personnel have volunteered their time—and sometimes their own personal money—to build homes, repair schools, provide playgrounds, support an orphanage, and provide other services to the local Kyrgyz community.

We'd like to do more of this.

And the Base also helps through direct economic benefits, including employment for hundreds of Kyrgyz, and the purchase of fuel, supplies, and other products

In short, we are proud of our cooperation on security. And our partners share that pride — from the Kyrgyz border guard standing watch at Dostuk to the Kyrgyz policeman fighting the spread of drugs.

A second area in which we work involves economic development, including regional integration, trade, investment, and creating new business opportunities.

You know, the world is more economically competitive than ever before. And while there is no single model of economic success, economists have learned some things, and three stand out:

First, countries that are economically competitive invest in their people. They educate their youth and their workforce, give them skills, train, and retrain.

Second, countries that are economically competitive allow private enterprise to thrive.

And third, countries that are economically competitive open up. Those that are more open grow faster than those that are closed.

So we are working hard with our Kyrgyz partners to help create opportunities here in education, and also to promote economic reforms that may attract foreign investment.

Take education.

We are working jointly to improve your educational system through new teaching methodologies and the involvement of parents and local communities in schools.

Kyrgyzstan established a scholarship testing program with U.S. assistance. And that, in turn, should help root out corruption in education by ensuring that places at Kyrgyz universities are awarded on merit.

Not far from here stands the American University of Central Asia. And I'm happy to see its President, Ellen Hurwitz, here with us today. It

teaches a pioneering liberal arts curriculum to Central Asian students, including Kyrgyz, some of whom are in the audience today.

Most important, we offer Kyrgyz students opportunities to study in the United States, a life-changing experience that can prepare them to work in the global economy.

After all, nearly *all* of these students come home and seek to build their country.

They've gone to all kinds of schools in the United States.

They've gone to high school through our Future Leaders Exchange, or "FLEX," program.

They've gone to small colleges, land-grant colleges, and research universities through our "UGRAD" program.

They've done professional study or research through our Fulbright program.

Since 1991, over 3,000 Kyrgyz citizens have visited the United States on exchange programs. And they've acquired knowledge and skills that they are putting to work here at home in service to their country.

Our programs to promote reform also aim to boost Kyrgyz competitiveness.

Kyrgyz officials tell us they want more business here. And we are committed to promoting Kyrgyzstan as a market for U.S. companies in many sectors.

In 2005, an American Chamber of Commerce opened here in Bishkek, comprised of some 65 American, Kyrgyz, and international member companies and organizations.

It's *precisely* this sort of business interest that can best promote sustained growth in the Kyrgyz economy.

The United States doesn't have state enterprises that can be instructed to invest in Kyrgyzstan for geopolitical purposes. Nor can we tell our private investors where and how to invest.

Instead, we believe attracting private investment is the key to Kyrgyzstan's future.

Globally, cross-border capital flows have tripled in the past decade, and foreign capital stocks now outnumber global gross domestic product 2 to 1.

But very few of these investment flows are reaching Central Asia.

And so to attract investment, government policies are needed that encourage transparency, predictability, non-discrimination, and a stable macro-economy.

We also encourage entrepreneurship. Since 1995, with U.S. assistance, over 640,000 individual micro-credit loans, totaling about \$248 million, have been disbursed to individual borrowers, allowing thousands of Kyrgyz citizens to start a business, expand a business, and achieve their dreams.

We are funding programs to promote development and reform in agriculture, and to create the small- and medium-sized enterprises that can serve as an engine of job creation and economic growth.

By creating jobs and promoting growth, we want to help Kyrgyz citizens work here in Kyrgyzstan, not abroad, providing stability and reducing the attraction of crime and extremism.

And in addition to education, we have worked with our Kyrgyz partners to help create other social conditions that contribute to growth and competitiveness, such as a healthy workforce.

For instance, we are helping the Kyrgyz health system to meet the threats of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Of course, educated citizens, healthy citizens, entrepreneurial citizens also seek a stake in how they are governed.

And when people have a larger stake in their society, they also assume a greater say in how that society is run.

Ultimately, citizens seek to play an active role in political life.

We've seen that again and again in Kyrgyzstan over the years. And in many ways, Kyrgyzstan has built a record of success:

You have a relatively vibrant and professional media. Just look at today's headlines. And we applaud the decision to make KTR an independent and public entity.

You are improving governance at the local level.
And in 2005, you held a presidential election that was widely judged by the international community to be reasonably free and fair.
The rest of this region and the world are watching closely to see what happens here.

They are watching to see what it means for a society when it tries to institute democratic change.

They are watching to see whether government and opposition can act peacefully, legally, and constitutionally.

And they are watching to see whether democracy—Kyrgyz democracy—means “instability.”

It is our firm belief that sustained stability requires not just security but a stake for citizens in their own governance and development.
And without the institutions to do so freely, they can turn to other, less productive means.

And so as Secretary Rice has said, in our support for democracy “our goal is not to lecture our friends on how to do things the American way.” To the contrary, we seek to help our Central Asian partners achieve the stability they *themselves* seek.

This means good governance.

It means a more institutionalized rule of law.

But no-one can claim that the Kyrgyz people, too, do not seek political liberty. The record speaks for itself.

Kyrgyzstan today boasts thousands of grass-roots organizations, which advocate on behalf of citizens as they seek to improve their lives.

But although much progress has been made, many reforms are not yet complete. And so in this area, too, we have tried to help.

We have set up support centers for non-governmental organizations, established an independent printing press, and trained journalists.

At Kyrgyz request, we have played a role in promoting private ownership of land.

And we have assisted efforts to empower local officials through decentralization of the budget. The two-tier budget just passed by Parliament is a significant step forward in local self-government.

We stand ready to help the Kyrgyz people and their leaders root out corruption, establish a judiciary independent of manipulation, and promote the rule of law.

We hope to see a strengthened role for civil society.

We hope journalists, non-governmental organizations, and non-violent, legal political opposition will be free from pressure and harassment.

Friends, fifteen years ago both of our nations set ambitious goals for ourselves and our relations.

And so I hope you'll agree with me on this:

First, we have come a long way together in just fifteen years. And I hope every Kyrgyz citizen—whether politician, Minister, or citizen—shares our pride in our robust and growing relationship, and shares our enthusiasm for the future of U.S.-Kyrgyz relations.

Second, I hope you'll agree the United States is a true friend to this country.

We are proud to call you our friend, our partner.

And we look forward to continuing our joint efforts to sustain a proud, independent, strong, and prosperous Kyrgyzstan.

Thank you.
