

AMBASSADOR MARIE L. YOUVANOVITCH

THE UNITED STATES and KYRGYZSTAN: STEADFAST ALLIES

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It gives me great pleasure to be here at Bishkek Humanities, one of the biggest and most important universities in Kyrgyzstan. Our Embassy has a close relationship with the university, and we're especially pleased with our great cooperation in the field of library sciences. And the fact that one of our employees, Jyldyz Bekbalayeva, used to be an instructor here.

There's also the friendships we have with the university's leadership. I would like to thank Rector Musayev, Deputy Rector Asanbekov, Dean Mashrapov and Ambassador Abdurazakov for inviting me here today. They've given me a modest topic: U.S. foreign policy in general, U.S. policy in Central Asia, and U.S.-Kyrgyz relations.

Some would need a lifetime to cover these issues. I'll try to cover it in forty minutes, focusing primarily on U.S.-Kyrgyz relations. I'd like to leave lots of time for your questions. Because I'd like this to be a discussion and because I'm interested in knowing what you are thinking about.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FRAMEWORK: REALIST VS IDEALIST

Since this is a university, I'd like to start by providing a framework for how to think about U.S. foreign policy. Right now, there is a debate in the United States whether we should be following a realist foreign policy, that is whether we should pursue our interests with no thought of anything else. Or whether we should follow an idealist policy, that is promoting the values of liberty and human rights around the world.

I think that the U.S. has almost always had a foreign policy that combines the elements of both philosophies. Because the truth is that the United States is a country that has to protect and defend its interests, but it is also an idea.

232 years ago a group of people came together to create "a more perfect union" -- and I am now quoting from the U.S. Constitution -- that held certain "truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Think about it. That is a radical idea today, as it was over two hundred years ago.

And through the centuries, this idea has served as a beacon, not only for the American people, but for many others as well. What we've found, as we seek to create our more perfect union, is that our foreign policy interests very often coincide with our values, because those nations that embrace our

views on democracy, free markets, and the rule of law make better partners, whether it is in the political, economic, or security sphere.

We've also found that our values can sometimes make defending our interests more complicated. Americans are constantly seeking the balance between these two imperatives, our interests and our values.

As students, if you want to understand U.S. foreign policy, you need to understand these important motivations behind American foreign policy.

Let me give you an example: World War II or the Great Patriotic War. The United States was in an isolationist period and did not want to become involved in "foreign entanglements," even if it was to fight fascism. Our interests finally drove us to enter the war when Japan attacked us in 1941. We fought side by side with Soviet, French and British troops to free the world from Fascism.

And after the war was over and the Allies were victorious, we rejected a victor's peace that would engender bitterness among the defeated and restart the cycle of war in Europe. We sought to establish a lasting peace. And the U.S. stayed to help rebuild -- not only the bricks and mortar of ruined countries, but also to help recreate the governing institutions of Germany and Japan, based on democratic institutions and values.

Some would say that we were protecting our interests; others that we were projecting our values. Realist foreign policy? Or idealist foreign policy? As students, practicing critical thinking -- the most important skill you will need to succeed as professional adults -- it is up to you to decide what drove U.S. foreign policy during this period.

Today, the U.S. has interests all over the world. We want to grow our economy, protect our democratic way of life, and secure our borders from foreign threats. But what we have discovered is that our interests don't stop at our borders.

We can be attacked by terrorists based thousands of miles away using U.S. civilian aircraft as weapons, as occurred on September 11, 2001. At the same time we want to trade with the rest of the world, since trade is an engine of growth for all countries. And we seek to advance freedom and fundamental human rights for the benefit of the American people and the international community.

We have seen that global issues, poverty, disease, migration, narco-trafficking, weapons of mass destruction in one part of the world can have a profound effect on another part.

So the U.S. finds that sometimes it doesn't pay to sit on the sidelines and hope that things will get better. It's better to work proactively with other countries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations to find solutions to these problems.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

U.S. policy in Central Asia is based on our understanding of how best to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship with the countries of the region. Our goal is to have stable and prosperous partners in the region. Stability means being secure from the threat of violence, and this means being able to protect and control a country's borders.

However, genuine stability is much more than having effective border guards. Genuine stability, in our view, is best achieved when citizens have a stake in their government. That requires democratic change, so that government serves the needs of the people and not the other way around; and, finally, political stability fosters economic development, accelerates growth, and broadens wealth.

Our strategy for pursuing this goal rests on three integrated pillars: 1) fostering security cooperation; 2) expanding commercial and economic opportunities; and 3) promoting internal political and economic reform. All three pillars are inter-related, and the U.S. is determined to help countries around the world pursue all three pillars in a balanced way.

The United States seeks to establish and maintain mature bilateral relations with each country in Central Asia, based on our foreign policy goals and values, and each country's specific characteristics and dynamics.

U.S.-KYRGYZ RELATIONS

So how are we doing that here in Kyrgyzstan?

We view our relationship as a partnership of sovereign countries. Given our own history, we are supportive of nations who seek self-determination. When the Kyrgyz declared independence, the U.S. recognized that independence, immediately. And I am proud to say we were the very first country to establish an Embassy here.

When Kyrgyzstan faced a serious food crisis in the early 90s, the U.S. provided significant, life-saving food assistance. You are probably too young to remember, but your parents remember. And many of them have told me what that food aid meant to them during those hard years.

Since then we have provided an extensive range of consultative and material assistance to help strengthen the capacity of the government and to assist its citizens. This assistance has been in the form of support for dozens of programs ranging from micro-credit to rehabilitating health care facilities, to support for basic education of Kyrgyz children.

All of this assistance has been in the form of gifts from the American people, not loans, so these programs do not add to Kyrgyz debt.

DEMOCRACY / HUMAN RIGHTS

But some of you may be wondering whether the U.S. does, in fact, respect Kyrgyz sovereignty. After all, there are all sorts of allegations that the U.S. is dictating democracy at the expense of stability to a people and a government that only wants stability.

I'd respectfully disagree with that interpretation. The U.S. is thousands of miles away. We don't have any imperial pretensions.

Consistent with our overall foreign policy, we do, however, have an interest in ensuring that Kyrgyzstan develops into a modern, prosperous, and democratic state that acts responsibly in the international system. A state that cannot control its borders or provide for its people can become a threat -- not just to the U.S., but to the region and to the international order. In the modern world, weak states can pose serious problems -- so we are committed not just in word, but in deed to a strong Kyrgyzstan.

I hear all the time that a strong Kyrgyzstan needs stability, and that democracy undermines stability. We certainly agree that a strong Kyrgyzstan needs stability. We think the best way to create stability is to ensure that citizens have a stake in their own governance and development. Excluding the people from the institutions of power is not a guarantee of stability; in fact, it is possible that they will turn to other, far more destabilizing, means to express themselves.

We not only believe that democracy is the best form of government, we believe that people everywhere really do want to make their own choices. Whether it is which university to go to, what kind of career to prepare for, or who you want to represent you in parliament.

We believe that a country is stronger if the people are informed by a free media about what is really happening, not one controlled by the state that tells you only what the authorities want you to know.

And I've spoken with enough Kyrgyz all over the country to know that this is what you want too.

"Democracy" may be a controversial word in the former Soviet Union. But who does not believe in rule of law which, for me, is another way of expressing the same value? The idea that the law is the highest authority, higher than any individual in the land. That the law provides rights as well as responsibilities. And that the law must be applied equally, to the poorest and richest alike.

On Constitution Day, President Bakiyev gave a strong speech that called for the establishment of a rule of law culture in Kyrgyzstan. We applaud this and stand ready to partner with our Kyrgyz friends in helping develop a democracy that meets Kyrgyzstan's needs.

With the Kyrgyz government, we recently launched the Millennium Challenge Account Threshold Program. This program, which was developed by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, aims to promote the rule of law and combat corruption by reforming the judicial and law enforcement sectors.

Working with the parliament, we have established a legislative program to help strengthen the institution of the parliament. Consistent with the Kyrgyz desire to build up political parties, we have two organizations here that are helping train and develop any political party that requests it. This includes political parties from across the spectrum.

Working in the regions, we have helped to develop a human rights advocacy program. We have set up support centers for non-governmental organizations, established an independent printing press, and trained journalists.

Some of these programs are criticized by officials who do not want to be reminded of their obligation to be held accountable by the public. Non-governmental organizations and a free media are essential to keep government honest; without them democracy is easily subverted by those in power.

Kyrgyzstan has made many gains over the years in this area. There have also been steps backward, such as the conduct of the referendum and the parliamentary elections last year. But we remain hopeful that President Bakiyev's vision of a rule of law culture in Kyrgyzstan will one day become a reality.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

One of the greatest challenges for Kyrgyzstan, especially now when the world economy is in turmoil, is developing the economy and lifting the 40% of the country that live in poverty today to a normal living standard. Here, too, the U.S. has been assisting Kyrgyzstan.

When Secretary Rice was here in 2005, she articulated a vision for a stable, prosperous and democratic Central Asia that is increasingly connected to South Asia. It is clearly in the interest of Kyrgyzstan to build linkages to the south that complement existing ties to the north, east and west. Our goal is to help revive the ancient Silk Route to South Asia and help create new links in the areas of trade, transport, energy and communications.

For example, we are working with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the International Financial Institutions to help create the conditions to export surplus hydroelectric power to South Asia.

Kyrgyzstan has recently renegotiated a higher price of approximately 3.5 cents per kilowatt hour for exports to the north this summer. However, the price for electricity in Pakistan is two to three times that price. The market exists for Kyrgyz electricity exports to South Asia, but the connections are not yet in place.

However, even if Kyrgyzstan continues to sell its surplus electricity to its present customers, the potential of better market prices for Kyrgyz electricity helps generate more revenue for Kyrgyzstan. Choice creates competition, and provides greater opportunities for Kyrgyzstan.

We've also worked with the government to help create the regulatory and tax structure necessary to attract investment. Business needs transparency, predictability, and a level playing field to thrive.

We are funding programs to promote development and reform in agriculture. We have helped develop the agricultural inputs market -- for example, providing fertilizers, high quality seeds, and the training necessary to properly use these products.

And we've encouraged entrepreneurship. Since 1995, 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 live their dreams. I stress that these loans are provided out of seed capital provided for free, and the returns on the loans go towards the continued financing of these micro-credit organizations in Kyrgyzstan.

I love this program, because it helps real individuals in a tangible way. They get a loan, they make something happen. They end up hiring people. The economy grows. In the U.S. small businesses employ more than half the workforce, and employ a 100 times more people than the three biggest U.S. car manufacturers, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. Small business is the engine of the U.S. economy and it can be in Kyrgyzstan as well. Economic prosperity is one of the most important factors for continued stability.

SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

We believe that our security partnership with Kyrgyzstan has greatly contributed to stability not only in Kyrgyzstan, but in the region. Not so long ago, from 1999 to 2000, the Kyrgyz military and security agencies were encamped in Batken fighting terrorists that were sheltered by the Taliban. The effort put Kyrgyz lives at risk, and was extremely expensive for the people of Kyrgyzstan. After the Coalition removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan was able to remove its troops from the south.

Last year, I took a group of Kyrgyz parliamentarians and officials to Afghanistan, so they could see for themselves the Coalition efforts to develop the political and economic structures of Afghanistan; but also to see how serious the war still is; and how important the Manas Air Force Base is to the war effort.

Afghan President Karzai met with our group. He was absolutely riveting when he described the events of the 1990s. How the Taliban became stronger and turned Afghanistan into a fundamentalist state that welcomed terrorists. How he begged the international community, including the U.S., to intervene in Afghanistan. But no one listened. Until 9/11. President Karzai left us in no doubt that if the Coalition fails, Afghanistan would fall.

More seriously for you: he said the next targets would be the countries to the north. And you probably know Afghanistan isn't that far away. At its closest point, Afghanistan is approximately 193 kilometers away.

President Karzai also encouraged your leaders to keep supporting the Manas Coalition Airbase, a critical logistics hub for the entire Coalition effort in Afghanistan. The base has played an integral part in our ongoing fight to combat terrorism and promote stability in Afghanistan.

In the past year, Coalition forces at Manas transported over 118,000 Coalition troops, and nearly 40 million kilograms of cargo, and provided nearly 70 million liters of aerial refueling to support operations in Afghanistan.

This support has improved the security situation of the entire Central Asia region, by helping to prevent the spread of terrorist activities outside of Afghanistan, including in Kyrgyzstan.

We believe that each of you benefits from hosting the base here. But more than that, it is a tangible demonstration of Kyrgyzstan's strength as a partner to the international community.

While the base may be the most high profile example of our security relationship, it is only one aspect of our robust partnership. Our security relationship is designed to support Kyrgyzstan's stability and independence.

We have assisted Kyrgyz security agencies in controlling Kyrgyz borders, training and equipping personnel, and supporting the fight against narco-traffickers.

The U.S. has reconstructed five border ports, two on the Kyrgyz/Uzbek border at Dostuk and Bek-Abad, two at Karamyk and Kyzyl Bel on the border with Tajikistan, and one at Ak-Telek, on the border with Kazakhstan. Over the next year, we will be building another large border port at Chaldybar, on the border with Kazakhstan, and building 12 modular "green" border posts on the borders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

We have trained over 500 military members in the past three years in small unit leadership, technical skills like mountain warfare and English language. We have provided the Kyrgyz Air Force with four AN-2s and four MI-8 helicopters, so that if there is a threat anywhere in Kyrgyzstan, you have the capability to respond rapidly.

Recognizing that threats are not only military we have trained Ministry of Emergency and defense personnel in consequence management, crisis action and emergency medical procedures which can be used in the event of a natural or man-made disaster here in the Kyrgyz Republic.

We have funded the establishment of the Kyrgyz Drug Control Agency, as well as a special inter-agency counter-narcotics group that is designed to patrol the borders in the south.

I should add that we also consider the development and diversification of markets for Kyrgyz hydroelectricity as critical not just for Kyrgyzstan's economic development, but for Kyrgyzstan's energy security and continued independence.

CONCLUSION

When Secretary Rice was here in October 2005, she said that the United States would always be a constant friend to Kyrgyzstan. And I think that's what the record shows. I think we have been a steadfast ally since the very first days of independence, helping Kyrgyzstan develop its economy, its

democracy, and its security. Our relationship has had its difficulties, as every relationship does. But the U.S.-Kyrgyz partnership has thrived, and I believe that it has never been stronger than it is today.

At the beginning of this lecture, I outlined a framework for how to think about U.S. foreign policy. I'd argue that, here in Kyrgyzstan, the U.S. has many long-term interests which coincide with Kyrgyz interests -- the need for stability, security and a government and economic system that work.

Over the past 17 years, we have tried to help Kyrgyzstan develop a system of governance that incorporates our ideals -- open economies, free trade, human rights, democratic good governance, and the rule of law. Not because we want Kyrgyzstan to be a mini-America, but because countries that have these systems have flourished and prospered. We think a Kyrgyzstan that is flourishing and prospering is in our interests, and it is clearly in yours.

I'd also add that since August 31, 1991 when the Kyrgyz people declared independence and the American people saw a kindred spirit in you, we have also genuinely wanted to help the Kyrgyz people form a state and a country that meets their needs; this is part of our values, it is what makes the U.S., the United States of America.

Values? Interests? Or perhaps a combination of the two? As students, I'd encourage you to think about it and decide for yourselves.

In closing, I'd throw out an appeal to each one of you. You are the future of Kyrgyzstan. You will play a role in your country's development and its future relationship with the United States. I hope that you will come to the U.S. to study, work, learn about the United States, and teach us about Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. And I hope that you will return to Kyrgyzstan and be a bridge to the U.S. for your friends and families.

You have the capacity to change the future and forge an even stronger partnership between our two countries. You can achieve change through writing books and articles; you can be a businessperson that creates growth for both economies; you can be a diplomat like me, who tries to foster understanding between two countries. The opportunities are endless; I hope you take advantage of them. Thank you.