

**REMARKS TO THE PRESS  
BY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
WILLIAM BURNS**

**Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
July 12, 2009**



**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming out this morning. I am very grateful, along with a delegation of senior officials from the new administration in Washington, to have the opportunity to visit Bishkek. And I'm grateful for the opportunity to emphasize the commitment of President Obama to strong and broad relations between our two countries. I appreciate the warmth and hospitality of the meeting we had with President Bakiyev last night. We had a very constructive discussion. I also had the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and this morning, an important discussion with a group of civil society leaders.

A new administration in Washington offers a new opportunity to strengthen our relationship and it brings a new approach to partnership between our two countries. We have an opportunity to develop our relations in support of our mutual interests throughout this region and to support prosperity as well as security in this country. I think we're already making practical progress. We welcome President Bakiyev's decision to reach a new agreement with regard to the Transit Center at Manas International Airport. That is certainly an important contribution to our common task in Afghanistan. It complements the contributions of other countries, including Russia, with which the United States reached an important agreement on the transit of military equipment across Russia to Afghanistan during the summit meeting between President Obama and President Medvedev earlier this week.

The new Manas Transit Center is truly part of an international effort in pursuit of our common interest in stability in Afghanistan.



We've also launched new programs of cooperation in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. We've formed a new program for a joint economic development fund between our two countries, which among other things will help Kyrgyz companies compete for contracts. And we've agreed to form a new bilateral commission or high-level policy dialogue and have invited the Foreign Minister to Washington in the near future to begin that process. That new commission between our two countries will provide a practical mechanism for making progress in all the areas that I mentioned, especially in trade and investment. Finally, I wanted to convey our best wishes to the Kyrgyz people in the important elections which will occur later this month. Fair and credible elections are very important for the future of Kyrgyzstan. They're an important priority for the United States. We welcome the fact that a monitoring mission from the OSCE is already here in the country to help ensure the transparency of that process.

So, once again, I'm very grateful for the opportunity for this visit, and I think it's an important step at the beginning of a new American administration toward a stronger partnership between our two countries. And with that, I'd be delighted to respond to your questions.

**QUESTION:** Gulaiym Ashakeeva, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Recently high-level Russian officials visited Bishkek and different sources say that the Collective Security Treaty Organization is planning to set up a military base in Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan. What do you think about a second Russian military base in Kyrgyzstan?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Any such decision is obviously the sovereign right of the government of Kyrgyzstan. Our view is that any step that strengthens the sovereignty and independence and security of Kyrgyzstan is a sensible one. But as I said, any such decision is a sovereign decision of the government here.

**QUESTION:** Hello, Mr. Burns. My name is Ibraim Nurakunuulu of the BBC World Service. My question is, can you ensure that the activities of the Transit Center at Manas International Airport will be transparent to the Kyrgyz government and Kyrgyz community?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** The short answer is "yes." We are committed to transparency in our new agreement. Under the terms of our new agreement, it is the Kyrgyz Government which will have primary responsibility for security. There will also be joint security operations within the Transit Center. We are going to do everything we can to ensure maximum transparency about the goals of the Transit Center, which are very much logistical support for our common efforts in Afghanistan and to help ensure the efficient movement of U.S. and Coalition personnel to and from Afghanistan. So we certainly aim for a very transparent operation at the Transit Center.

**QUESTION:** I'm from the newspaper "Slovo Kyrgyzstan." Please what are the priorities in the partnership between the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan and how do they help Kyrgyzstan strengthen its sovereignty and security.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** As I mentioned before, we take the view that it's important to strengthen our partnership across a range of issues, not only on security, but in promoting prosperity in this country and also strengthening ties between civil societies in Kyrgyzstan and in America. I already mentioned a number of specific steps which we have already taken in this direction: the joint economic development fund between our two countries; a new bilateral commission, which among other things, will help promote greater trade and investment and focus on many sectors of the economy here, including the agricultural sector; as well as steps that we can take together on counter-narcotics, on counter-terrorism, and in dealing with common, regional challenges, like Afghanistan. In the new American administration, we believe that it's very important to widen the scale and the range of areas in which we work together.

**QUESTION:** Alexander Tuzov, "Vecherniy Bishkek." Mr. Burns, what do you think, what role can the Transit Center play in keeping Kyrgyzstan safe from international terrorism? As you know, in 1999 and 2000, Kyrgyzstan suffered from international terrorism.

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** I guess I would offer two comments. First, I think in general terms, the new agreement on the Transit Center is an important contribution to dealing with a shared problem of instability in Afghanistan and violent extremism there. It will certainly help to advance progress towards stability in Afghanistan, to fight against our common enemy of terrorism and violent extremism, and to ensure that that violent extremism and instability doesn't spill over into other parts of the region. My second comment is simply to repeat what I said before, that in addition to the new Transit Center agreement, we are also launching new programs in parallel to strengthen cooperation on counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism, to strengthen the security of Kyrgyzstan's borders, to work together against the flow of narcotics, and to work together against the shared threat of terrorism.

**QUESTION:** National News Agency. You talked about the bilateral commission between Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. At what level would it be formed?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** It will be at the level of senior officials between our two countries, and as I said, one of the purposes of the Foreign Minister's visit to Washington in the coming months is to organize the details of this commission and to begin its work. I really do think that this mechanism offers an opportunity to deal systematically with all of the issues that I mentioned before, because we are committed in the new American administration not just to positive rhetoric about our relationship, but practical results. I think this mechanism is a good way to help produce those kinds of practical results.

**QUESTION:** Peter Leonard, Associated Press. The new Transit Center agreement is in place for only one year. Is there any interest or intention to seek an extension of that one year?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** We are very pleased with the new Transit Center agreement, and we are not looking to get out ahead of ourselves at this point. We believe that the new Transit Center agreement is, as I said before, an important contribution to our common challenge in Afghanistan, and I think, a sign of the mutual commitment of both of our countries to deal effectively with that challenge. So the new agreement is an important step forward, and at this stage, I'd leave it right there.

**QUESTION:** Natalya Lyubeznova, Interfax. Please tell me when the activities of the Transit Center will begin, and will it somehow be related to the transit of cargo from Russia?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** The new Transit Center agreement is about to enter into force. I don't know the precise date for that, but all the formalities have been completed, as far as I understand. And as I said before, the new agreement on the Transit Center here is an important complement to other important steps that have been taken in recent weeks in a common international effort to promote stability in Afghanistan. And as I said before, the agreement on the transit of military equipment that was reached between President Obama and President Medvedev at the summit meeting in Moscow earlier this week was another very important contribution to that common, international effort. So, I think these two important steps complement each other very well.

**QUESTION:** Kyrgyz National Radio. Were there any proposals to keep the military status of the Base in the new Transit Center agreement and were there any other issues raised related to the environment?

**UNDER SECRETARY BURNS:** Well, as I said before, the new Transit Center agreement is aimed at logistical support for our common effort in Afghanistan as well as the movement of personnel. And we also agreed, as a part of the new agreement with the Kyrgyz government, to a joint U.S.-Kyrgyz survey of environmental issues to ensure that nothing in the activities connected with the Transit Center agreement threatens in any way the ecology or the environment. We're going to work together through this joint survey team to ensure that. Thank you very much.

###