

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE,
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ENVIRONMENT

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Chairman Faleomavaega, members of the committee: Thank you for inviting me, I welcome the opportunity today to speak with you on “The Emerging Importance of the U.S.- Central Asia Partnership.”

Why is Central Asia important to the U.S.?

Central Asia lies at a critical strategic crossroads, which is why the United States wants to continue to expand our cooperation with each of the five Central Asian states in a wide range of areas. The Obama Administration has worked closely with the governments and the people of the region to create a broader atmosphere of trust and strengthened relations.

The United States has an important interest in promoting a stable, secure and prosperous Central Asia integrated into the global economy and respecting internationally recognized human rights. Both economic growth and democratic political development in Central Asia are necessary to increase stability and provide more reliable partners for the United States in addressing common yet critical global challenges, from Afghanistan to non-proliferation to counter-narcotics to energy security. Longer term, Central Asia could be the center of a reinvigorated Silk Road that links the economies of Western Europe and Russia, and the oil and gas supplies of Central Asia, with the large and growing economies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, bringing important benefits to Afghanistan.

Shortly after President Obama's inauguration, the administration undertook a full review of our policy toward Central Asia and defined five main priorities, which we actively pursue in our engagement with the region. First, we seek to expand cooperation with Central Asian states to assist Coalition efforts in Afghanistan. Second, we want to increase the development of the region's energy resources and diversification of supply routes. Third, we encourage political liberalization and enhanced respect for fundamental human rights. Fourth, we plan to foster competitive market economies and economic reform. And fifth, we help to increase the capacity of states to govern themselves effectively and serve the needs of their citizens. We assess our progress regularly through the interagency process, and will adjust these priorities as necessary.

While the United States has significant interests in Central Asia, there is no longer any "Great Game" – we are not in competition for influence with any other country, nor do we accept that the five Central Asian countries constitute a "zone of privileged interest" for any country. To the contrary, we want to cooperate more with Russia, China and others to address critical challenges and produce a more durable stability and more reliable partners for everyone. Central Asia has in fact provided an area of common ground to further the "reset" of America's relations with Russia, especially regarding Kyrgyzstan where we have been key partners. Other areas of cooperation include the upcoming OSCE Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, counternarcotics and counterterrorism, and our engagement in Afghanistan and the Northern Distribution Network.

Central Asia's assistance in Afghanistan

Central Asia plays a vital role in our Afghanistan strategy. Just look at a map of the region. Three of the five Central Asian states border Afghanistan. A stable future for Afghanistan depends on the continued assistance of its Central Asian neighbors-- just as a

stable, prosperous future for the Central Asian states depends on bringing peace, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan.

While acknowledging the significant contributions of the Central Asians to Afghan stabilization efforts, we want to facilitate and encourage broader bilateral and regional support to include cooperation on border security, counter-narcotics, trade, and reconstruction.

We appreciate the assistance of all our partners along the Northern Distribution route, from Latvia to Afghanistan, for their cooperation and support of our efforts in Afghanistan. The Northern Distribution Network is an important route for getting supplies into Afghanistan for coalition forces. This year we focused on expanding the capacity of the Northern Distribution Network. We signed an enhanced transit agreement with Kazakhstan, and are also working with Uzbekistan on NDN enhancements. But our relations with Central Asia are by no means limited to cooperation on the NDN or on security issues – we have a broad agenda encompassing everything from counterterrorism and counternarcotics to democracy and human rights.

Annual Bilateral Consultations

In order to pursue these critical priority areas, we developed, in partnership with each of the countries of the region a structured, annual dialogue on all key priorities and on practical steps our countries can take to advance each of our goals. The first of these Annual Bilateral Consultations took place with Uzbekistani Foreign Minister Norov leading a delegation to Washington in December 2009. We launched similar annual consultations with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, and plan to hold an ABC with Kyrgyzstan once a new government is formed. In every country in Central Asia, we are moving from words to actions. After holding several midyear reviews over the summer, we look forward to embarking on the second

round of these ABCs this coming winter. I will now briefly highlight key issues in our relations with each country.

Kyrgyzstan

The situation in the Kyrgyz Republic remains of vital interest to the United States. The end of the Bakiyev regime opened new opportunities for engagement and democratic progress. The events of last April and June could have led the Kyrgyz Republic down the road of instability, but the interim government was able to chart a course that led to historic parliamentary elections on October 10, 2010 that resulted in a multiparty parliamentary system of government – a first for Central Asia. We are encouraging the leaders of the five parties that qualified for seats in Parliament to work together in the public interest to form an inclusive, representative government, which will support a functioning and competitive market economy to provide economic opportunity and progress for the people of the Kyrgyz Republic.

While election observers reported some flaws and irregularities in the voting process, as President Obama noted, the elections "demonstrated important and positive attributes of a genuine democracy." The United States played an active role in facilitating this democratic achievement through our assistance programs and grants to the Kyrgyz government and civil society, and our participation in the election monitoring mission. Other recently announced U.S. assistance to the Kyrgyz Republic includes the signing of a \$20 million Joint Economic Development Fund Agreement and a \$15.8 million program for stabilization in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan. We have also responded to President Otunbayeva's request for food assistance with an additional \$3.2 million of food security assistance through Food for Education and a \$3.2 million grant to the World Food Program.

At the same time, we continue to support the international commission to investigate the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June, headed by Kimmo Kiljunen, a member of the Finnish Parliament and Special Representative on Central Asia for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. We also continue to support an OSCE initiative to improve public security to assist in the urgent task of restoring mutual trust, preventing further conflict and working towards reconciliation in the wake of the tragic events of June 2010.

Kyrgyzstan remains an important partner in our efforts in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the United States and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic have successfully cooperated in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Manas Transit Center represents an important contribution by the Kyrgyz Republic to the efforts of the international coalition to provide security to the Afghan people and work towards a more prosperous and stable Afghanistan. The United States recognizes and greatly appreciates the contribution of the Kyrgyz Republic to that effort. The Manas Transit Center also contributes to the economy of the Kyrgyz Republic by improving employment for, and purchasing local goods from, local communities. We are prepared to discuss the future of Manas with the new government.

While encouraged by the peaceful outcome of the elections, areas of concern remain. We are monitoring the potential for renewed ethnic violence, such as those that erupted in the south in June. Attacks on human rights defenders are likewise troubling. In our interactions with the new government, we will continue to encourage accountability, equal access to justice, and ethnic reconciliation. We will continue to do our utmost to help the people of the Kyrgyz Republic consolidate their democracy, jumpstart their economy, and maintain peace and security.

Kazakhstan and the OSCE Summit

Our relations with Kazakhstan are perhaps our deepest and broadest in Central Asia, with areas of cooperation in fields as diverse as non-proliferation, Afghanistan, and agriculture. Kazakhstan is a regional leader in the fields of energy, education and science and technology. Kazakhstan has also been a strong supporter of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. But the spotlight is currently on Astana for another reason: as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Kazakhstan is about to host the first OSCE Summit in 11 years in Astana on December 1-2, the first ever in Central Asia. We hope that this event will shine a light on positive developments in Central Asia, and the role that the OSCE has played, and can play in the future, in promoting its principles throughout the OSCE region.

We think that Kazakhstan has done a very credible job as OSCE Chairman-in-Office, especially in dealing with the situation in Kyrgyzstan, where the OSCE has been at the forefront of efforts to promote peace, democracy and reconciliation. In offering to host this Summit, Kazakhstan has agreed to follow the example of past summits and allow full access by NGOs and permit NGOs to hold a parallel event on November 28-29. Within this framework, we continue to push Kazakhstan to better its human rights record and to uphold the commitments it made well past its chairmanship and the Summit.

Secretary Clinton plans to lead the U.S. delegation to the OSCE Summit. To be successful, the Astana Summit should produce two documents: a Helsinki Final Act's 35th Anniversary statement reaffirming all prior commitments, and an ambitious, substantive action plan for the future work of the OSCE. Because of the profound impact of instability in Afghanistan on regional security in Central Asia, the OSCE can and must make significant additional contributions to national, regional, and international efforts to ensure Afghanistan is

on the path to long-term security and stability. Therefore, we specifically proposed that the Action Plan include projects that will promote improved border management between Afghanistan and Central Asia, and within Central Asia, to counter illicit trafficking activities and to promote legitimate commercial trade and economic development.

Uzbekistan

As with the other Central Asia countries, the Obama Administration has increased its engagement with Uzbekistan on a full agenda of security, economic and human rights issues. In the regional security field, Uzbekistan has become a key partner for the United States' effort in Afghanistan. Tashkent provides electricity to keep the lights on in Kabul. It has facilitated transit for essential supplies to Coalition forces and constructed an important railroad line inside of Afghanistan. Through this increased engagement, we have seen an improved relationship with Uzbekistan, but many challenges remain.

We continue to encourage the Uzbek authorities to address significant human rights concerns such as ending forced child labor, opening up the media environment, and demonstrating greater tolerance for religious activities. We are also encouraging building an investment-friendly business environment to enhance economic opportunities for American businesses and for the benefit of the Uzbek economy. Last week I traveled to Tashkent to discuss with the Government a number of these matters. In addition to raising human rights concerns in my discussions, I also met with Voice of America stringer Mr. Abdumalik Boboev, whose conviction and fine for libel for his work for Voice of America was recently upheld.

Tajikistan

One of the poorest countries in the world, Tajikistan is a fragile state in a volatile neighborhood. Recent skirmishes between the government and former civil war combatants as

well as security threats such as the August 25 prison break and first suicide car bombing in Tajikistan on September 3, reflect continued tensions in the country. U.S. policy is to support Tajikistan in maintaining stability and creating the conditions for economic and democratic development. We work to strengthen law enforcement and border security, increase food security, strengthen health and education, and build good governance.

Tajikistan is our partner in these efforts and the United States is putting significant resources into our relationship with Tajikistan. As our public reports on human rights, the investment climate, and on religious freedom have made clear, we have concerns about the pace and direction of political developments as well as religious and media freedoms in Tajikistan.

Turkmenistan

In Turkmenistan, we continue to make progress in facilitating Turkmenistan's gradual opening and its efforts to move toward reform and greater respect for human rights. We also appreciate Turkmenistan's humanitarian help to its neighbor Afghanistan, through assistance such as the provision of discounted electricity. Alongside the first Annual Bilateral Consultations that we held in June in Ashgabat, I led the first-ever U.S. business mission to Turkmenistan. This strengthened an important commercial partnership with the nation that holds the world's fourth largest natural gas reserves.

Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael H. Posner accompanied me on the Annual Bilateral Consultations. Together we held a frank dialogue with the Government of Turkmenistan regarding our human rights concerns. We continue to encourage the Turkmen authorities to take concrete steps to fulfill its international obligations on human rights and have offered assistance to Turkmenistan's stated goals of developing a

democracy. We recognize this is a long term goal, but through engagement we feel we can make measurable progress.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, this Administration considers Central Asia to be an important pillar in this vital region. We see a future in which the United States and the countries of Central Asia work together to seek peace, security, economic development and prosperity. We seek democratic values and human rights that unite free nations in trust and in respect. We seek a region in which relations prosper between neighbors, between Russia and China and Afghanistan and all others in the region and of course with the United States.

We recognize that the pace of change is often slow and that our programs should focus on long-term, meaningful results. But through our invigorated policy dialogue and engagement, we aim to strengthen our ties with these important countries and their people and thereby advance U.S. interests in this strategically important region.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.