

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE AND EURASIA
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Chairman Burton, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly with you today on the importance of U.S. engagement and assistance in Central Asia.

As Assistant Secretary of State Blake underscored in his remarks to the subcommittee last month, the United States has an important interest in promoting a stable, secure, and prosperous Central Asia. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union nearly twenty years ago, our primary policy goal in Central Asia has been to ensure that these newly independent countries remain sovereign and independent -- while helping them develop toward becoming stable, market-oriented democracies. The events of September 11, 2001 made clear our common security concerns and led to a significant broadening of the relationships.

Today, the United States pursues a broad range of policy priorities in Central Asia: encouraging cooperation in stabilizing Afghanistan; promoting democracy and human rights; combating narcotics trafficking; promoting a balanced energy policy and support for nonproliferation; and fostering competitive market economies.

Central Asia plays a vital role in our Afghanistan strategy. Three of the five Central Asian states share borders with Afghanistan, and the Northern Distribution Network is an increasingly important route for transporting supplies to Afghanistan. The Central Asian countries themselves are contributing greatly to international efforts in Afghanistan, from supplying much needed electricity to providing humanitarian assistance to supporting educational opportunities for Afghan students. A stable future for Afghanistan depends on the continued assistance of its Central Asian neighbors; and a stable, prosperous future for the Central Asian states will be enhanced through greater peace, stability, and prosperity in their immediate neighbor Afghanistan.

We also believe that developing a more substantive, consistent relationship with the countries of Central Asia in areas of mutual interest will make room for progress on democracy and human rights. In December 2009 we announced our

intention to hold Annual Bilateral Consultations (ABCs) with each country in order to deepen our engagement with Central Asia. Over the last year and a half we've conducted ABCs with all of the Central Asian states except for Kyrgyzstan whose meeting is scheduled for later this year. The ABC discussions offer a structured dialogue covering the full range of bilateral priorities and result in a work plan to address key priorities and outline practical steps to advance U.S. policy goals. While pursuing these goals is often challenging, our engagement -- and assistance -- is yielding important results.

Last week marked the one-year anniversary of the transition to a new government in Kyrgyzstan, and we are grateful that this anniversary passed peacefully. Our assistance and engagement with the government and the people of Kyrgyzstan over the last year has focused on addressing the ethnic tensions which boiled over last June and creating the conditions necessary for the first democratically elected parliament in Central Asia to succeed. A top Administration priority is to work alongside other donors to bolster Kyrgyzstan's stability and solidify democratic reforms.

Mr. Chairman, we continue to view our assistance funding to the region as a critical tool in accomplishing our policy goals. We envision a future in which the United States and the countries of Central Asia work together for peace, security, economic development, democracy, and prosperity. We recognize that the pace of change can be slow and that our assistance should support programs oriented towards long-term, meaningful results. But through our invigorated policy engagement and targeted assistance funding, 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.