

**Ambassador Jacobson's remarks at the  
International Conference on Afghanistan and Regional Security:  
December 11, 2006  
Institute for Oriental Studies and Written Heritage**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on such an important topic. No one in this audience needs convincing that Afghanistan matters greatly, both to global security as well as to regional stability. More than most countries, Tajikistan needs a stable and strong Afghanistan as a safeguard for its own national security. The United States has invested much time and resources in Afghanistan, but Tajikistan also plays a critical role in the reconstruction process.

My remarks today will center on three key points: first, I will say a few words about the current **political and economic situation in Afghanistan**. Second, I'd like to highlight why both **Afghanistan and Tajikistan are important to the United States** and third, I'd like to explain how **U.S. activities in Tajikistan support stability in Afghanistan**.

After more than twenty years of war, we all knew Afghanistan would not be reconstructed in a short time period. Five years since the fall of the Taliban, there has been significant **progress in some areas**. Afghanistan has adopted a constitution and held national and provincial council elections. As Tajikistan knows, it takes time and commitment to build democratic institutions. There is progress in the justice sector. Afghanistan has a working parliament and court system that are developing laws and practices in accordance with international standards.

Girls are going to school and women not only have access to health care unlike five years ago, but also have become government representatives in Parliament. Agriculture is flourishing—not just poppies, but crops ready for export. Afghans are trading with each other, with Tajikistan, Pakistan and other neighbors.

A recent report released by the Joint Commission and Monitoring Board highlights many of these successes in the reconstruction process, including progress in the infrastructure, health, education, and energy sectors, as well as security. Afghanistan has completed 52% of roads scheduled for construction before 2011; the number of health workers in Afghanistan has increased ten-fold in the past year; primary school attendance has increased to 94%; the Parliament has taken important steps towards liberalizing the energy sector; and the international community is working closely with the Afghan government to field an Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and Afghanistan National Police (ANP) that can provide for the country's security needs without external assistance by 2010.

**Considerable challenges remain** in Afghanistan. The U.S. and Afghanistan, together with the UK, are working hard to combat the rise in drug cultivation and trafficking, but it is not easy. Taliban insurgents continue to terrorize certain regions and take away badly-needed reconstruction resources as Afghan National Security Forces and ISAF



fight to protect Afghan citizens. The police training and reform program still needs work before it can declare success. Wide-spread corruption further slows reforms.

However, the United States will continue to work actively with the Afghan government and international partners. Afghanistan is NATO's top priority and the alliance is on the frontlines of the struggle to defeat a resurgent Taliban and support the development of a free, democratic and economically sustainable Afghanistan.

The United States has made a **strong and enduring commitment to Afghanistan**. America will be a friend of the Afghan people for a very, very long time to come.

Which brings me to our second point: why are we engaged in Afghanistan? Quite simply, September 11 and other acts of terror demonstrated to the world what happens when you ignore a country in turmoil and allow extremists to take over. We cannot afford to let any country fall into that despair to the point they harbor terrorists or extremists and threaten the security of its neighbors in the region or the world. Already since the fall of the Taliban, millions of Afghan refugees have returned home from Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia to help rebuild their country – the largest repatriation of refugees in the history of the world. We are engaged and committed because we believe that Afghanistan can become a free and prosperous nation and we want to help.

We are engaged because, as the topic of this conference assumes, **Afghanistan plays a key role in regional security and we support stability in Central Asia**. Drug trafficking and transnational terrorism have threatened Tajikistan and other neighboring countries, and we must combat these global problems.

Your own President Rahmonov has openly pledged his support for Afghan President Karzai and has been a champion for supporting Afghanistan to ensure regional stability. Although the United States does not share a border with Afghanistan like Tajikistan does, we share President Rahmonov's belief that a strong Afghanistan benefits the region and the world.

My third point highlights how **U.S. efforts in Tajikistan support the political and economic reconstruction effort in Afghanistan**. We are working in partnership with a number of Tajik agencies **fighting drugs and terrorism**—such as the Border Guards, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Security, the Drug Control Agency, and the National Guard. Since taking control of its own borders, Tajikistan now leads the region in drug seizures and is cooperating with donors and the Afghan government to further strengthen and monitor activity on both sides of the border. Drug traffickers and terrorists operate globally and countries must work together to confront these shared threats to bring down terrorist and criminal networks.

We are actively working with the countries of the region to create **regional energy markets**, figuring out ways to sell excess Tajik electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. A U.S. company, AES, is working with other international donors to build transmission lines to increase regional energy trade. We support Tajikistan's efforts to develop hydropower resources on the Pyanj River along the border, and are sending a delegation

of Tajik and Afghan water experts to the United States next spring to study trans-boundary water management techniques.

A fundamental facet of U.S. policy in South and Central Asia is **regional economic integration**. We have a senior advisor working on this full time, to see how energy, trade and transit links can boost Tajikistan and Afghanistan's economies. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency has funded a several feasibility studies and sent teams of consultants to look at energy and trade. The United States is building a \$37 million dollar **bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj** because we believe that Tajikistan and Afghanistan should be connected, and trucks and cars should be able to bring goods between and through both countries. This is a clear symbol of our commitment to improving the economic situation not only in Afghanistan, but in all countries in the region.

To summarize, there has been progress in Afghanistan, in governance, education, health and the economy. But we are realists and recognize that much, much more must be done. However, the United States remains committed to working with Afghanistan and its neighbors. Our activities in Tajikistan aim to strengthen both countries and create a region where people can prosper.

My final point is that Tajikistan itself has a very important role to play in the stabilization and development of Afghanistan. Academic conferences such as this one are important, but concrete steps are even more so. Thanks to cultural and linguistic ties, Tajikistan has the ability and resources to take concrete steps and help Afghanistan develop. You could continue to invite Afghans to participate in training or study at your institutions. You could provide internships in your schools, hospitals, businesses and government to young Afghans. You could create a visa regime that would allow Afghans living on the border to more easily access Tajik roads, medical clinics, and markets. You could teach your Afghan counterparts about food processing and agriculture. There is no end to the possibilities of such a partnership, and Tajikistan would also benefit from increased business and trade ties.

No one thought reconstruction in Afghanistan would be easy. We all have an opportunity—and an obligation to help Afghanistan grow and prosper.