

**STATEMENT BY GEORGE KROL
NOMINEE FOR AMBASSADOR TO UZBEKISTAN
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to become U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan. I am grateful for the trust and confidence the President and Secretary Clinton have placed in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work with this Committee and the entire U.S. Congress to advance America's goals and interests in Uzbekistan.

Since recognizing Uzbekistan and establishing diplomatic relations nearly 20 years ago, the United States has supported Uzbekistan's sovereignty and independence and encouraged its development as a prosperous, tolerant, democratic society and internationally responsible state at peace with its neighbors and the world. Those remain our fundamental goals to this day.

Most recently, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia, I came to understand and appreciate the importance of Uzbekistan to U.S. foreign policy interests.

Uzbekistan has provided crucial assistance to its neighbor Afghanistan and to Coalition efforts to stabilize the security situation there. Electricity from Uzbekistan keeps the lights burning in Kabul. Uzbekistan is also an important part of the Northern Distribution Network, a major supply route for Coalition forces. If confirmed, I will encourage Uzbekistan to maintain this support.

Illegal narcotics, trafficking in persons, terrorism and extremism plague Uzbekistan's immediate neighborhood. Over the years, U.S. cooperation with Uzbekistan has grown in addressing these transnational challenges through engagement and vetted training programs. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our partnership with Uzbekistan in these areas.

Uzbekistan has the largest population in Central Asia and also is a major producer of energy and minerals. If confirmed, I will encourage Uzbekistan to take steps to attract U.S. companies to help develop and diversify its economy and to buy American goods and services.

Almost thirty years experience in the Foreign Service has taught me that long-term peace and durable stability are only possible with respect for human rights, the rule of law, transparent and democratic institutions, a vibrant civil society and an open and free media. If confirmed, I will engage the government and people of Uzbekistan fully and forthrightly, to increase not only our bilateral security and economic engagement, but also our engagement on human rights issues such as preventing arbitrary arrests, addressing allegations of torture and mistreatment in prisons, ending forced child labor, and allowing free practice of faiths.

If confirmed, I will encourage the government to make space for civil society in Uzbekistan and for international and domestic nongovernmental organizations to register and function freely. These steps can facilitate Uzbekistan achieving its self-declared goal to become a prosperous, tolerant and stable society in full accord with its international commitments and rich heritage as a crossroads of cultures, education and human values.

The Obama administration has established an atmosphere and a mechanism of constructive dialogue and trust with the government and people of Uzbekistan. In February of this year the second series of comprehensive annual bilateral consultations with Uzbekistan were held in Tashkent. Secretary Clinton visited Tashkent last December to elevate our engagement with Uzbekistan's leadership and civil society. In these consultations the full range of bilateral and multilateral interests including political, security, economic and commercial issues, as well as human rights, are discussed frankly and comprehensively.

An ambitious work plan is being developed to make realistic progress in all these areas. Many of these issues are not easy to resolve and will require great effort. The U.S. and, I believe, Uzbekistan are committed to this process and to achieving results. As Secretary Clinton stressed in Tashkent, we desire to move from words to actions. If confirmed, I look forward to applying my energy, experience, creativity, leadership and insight to the constant, consistent engagement that meaningful action in these areas demands.

I know from my past ambassadorial experience that being an American ambassador is not only a great honor but also a great responsibility. If confirmed, I will endeavor to be a good steward of the American people's trust and property, a caring leader for my embassy colleagues, and a faithful representative of our values and our interests. I will ensure that our mission looks out for the interests of American citizens living and traveling in Uzbekistan.

If confirmed, I will aim not only to develop effective relationships with the leadership and government authorities, but also to get out among the people of Uzbekistan and engage all elements of Uzbek society. To me, public diplomacy is a critical element of our diplomatic engagement. I will encourage all members of the mission team to be ambassadors to the people of Uzbekistan working to increase understanding of the United States, our policies and our values. Fostering greater exchanges and contacts between our peoples and communities, and not just between our governments, will be a major priority.

Finally, I know success depends on my leadership in encouraging and supporting a strong, dedicated mission team and keeping it fully synchronized with Washington, not only with the executive branch, but with the Congress as well. If confirmed, I would look forward to continuing an active dialogue with you as we seek to strengthen our relations with the people of Uzbekistan.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.