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Cheney Tells Nazarbayev: “We Are Proud to Be Your Strategic Partner”

Three agreements signed as part of Vice President’s visit to Astana

U.S. Vice President Richard Cheney, visiting Astana on May 5 and 6, held talks with President Nursultan Nazarbayev on strengthening the far reaching partnership between the two countries and affirmed Washington’s support for Kazakhstan’s drive to bolster its economy and democracy. As part of the visit, three agreements were signed calling for expanded cooperation in eliminating the infrastructure of weapons of mass destruction, fighting proliferation of WMD and promoting the economic development in Kazakhstan.

Speaking alongside President Nazarbayev at a news conference in the Ak Orda presidential residence in Astana, Vice President Cheney said: “Standing in this modern capital city, I am proud to affirm the strong ties between Kazakhstan and the United States. We have great respect, Mr. President, for all that you have accomplished in the last 15 years. And we are proud to be your strategic partner. My country looks forward to continued friendship between us as we work to enhance security to defend the peace and to build a better world.”

Earlier, the two leaders had a private meeting which lasted more than an hour, much longer than the ten minutes originally scheduled, and then led an hour long meeting of the full delegations.



Photo by Sergei Bondarenko

President Nazarbayev welcomes U.S. Vice President Cheney as he visits the Kazakh capital of Astana for a two day visit on May 5.

Opening the full meeting, President Nazarbayev noted the “special significance” of the visit and told the Vice President that it “symbolizes the great dynamics of the bilateral relations established between the two nations from the very first day of our independence.”

At the news conference, President Nazarbayev told Kazakh and U.S. reporters bilateral discussions centered on cooperation in the energy sector, security, and further trade and economic cooperation. The President said the United States is the largest foreign investor in Kazakhstan with 12 billion U.S. dollars in direct investment. The bilateral trade volume reached two billion U.S. dollars, while 374 businesses with U.S. participation work in Kazakhstan today. “We also exchanged views on the geopolitical situation in Central Asia, regional integration processes that take place in the Caspian region and Eurasia,” the President said.

The Kazakh leader provided the news media details on the three agreements signed as part of the visit. One agreement, between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of Kazakhstan, provides for the expansion of U.S. financing of WMD infrastructure elimination projects in Kazakhstan up to a current total of 158 million U.S. dollars. The second agreement, between Kazakhstan’s Customs Committee and the U.S. Department of Energy, calls for greater cooperation in preventing illicit trafficking of nuclear materials through the supply and deployment of special detection equipment. Finally, a memorandum of understanding between the two governments on the Kazakhstan-U.S. Program on Economic Development opens the way for 40 million dollars worth of joint financing of projects in Kazakhstan during the next four years. This agreement takes the so called Houston Initiative on promoting ties between small and medium sized businesses of the two countries one step further. It was launched in 2001. The Kazakh Government will provide 25 percent of financing in the first year, and 50 percent in the final year of the program.

The President also announced the two leaders had agreed “American companies will provide assistance in the modernization of Kazakhstan, as well to our efforts to join the group of the 50 most competitive nations of the world. Implementing breakthrough projects in high technology and export oriented production in Kazakhstan was also discussed in this respect. Opening joint ventures in biotechnology and space exploration, establishment of joint scientific research and educational centers have very bright prospects.”



Reuters Photo

Vice President and Mrs. Cheney enjoy breakfast with the group of U.S.-educated young Kazakh government and business leaders at the Rixos President Hotel in Astana on May 6.

Also speaking at the news conference, the U.S. Vice President said: “I had the opportunity to thank the President for the contributions that Kazakhstan has made to our coalition’s efforts in Iraq and in the global war on terror. We talked about ways to strengthen our bilateral relations, ways we could work together to advance the security and the prosperity of this region of the globe.”

He continued: “We admire this nation’s many contributions to our world, and the United States is proud to count Kazakhstan as a friend. Your nation has abundant resources and an even greater supply of human talent. And

America has tremendous confidence in your future as a successful, independent, sovereign and prosperous nation.”

The Vice President stressed that Kazakhstan, leading the region in terms of economic and political progress, also has “a vital role to play in ensuring prosperity, stability and peace across Central Asia.” Kazakhstan’s economy is twice as large as the economies of the countries of the region combined, while competitive multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections, introduction of local elections, religious freedom and the abundance of private news media point to a flourishing democracy.

Vice President Cheney continued, “All the nations of this region have the right to determine their own destiny, to institute reforms and to work with others to ensure a future of hope across Central Asia. The way forward is clear; continue democratic and economic reforms, the rule of law, fighting corruption, accountability of institutions and sound security policies. These are the keys to progress, and nations that follow such a course will find themselves on a path to greatness. The vision we affirm today is a community of sovereign states that grow in liberty and prosperity, trade and freedom and strive together for a century of peace.”

Responding to questions about Iran’s nuclear program, the U.S. Vice President said “the example provided by Kazakhstan some years ago when they achieved independence of giving up the inventory of nuclear weapons that were deployed in Kazakhstan was an outstanding example that the Iranians might want to consider.”

Before his departure from Astana on May 6, the Vice President also met with leaders of Kazakhstan’s political parties including the opposition, while Mrs. Cheney hosted a tea for a group of U.S.-educated young Kazakh leaders who are currently in senior positions in government and business.

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