

Excerpt of DoD News Briefing with Press Secretary Geoff Morrell from the Pentagon, February 3, 2009

MR. MORRELL: Daphne?

Q To follow up, Russia is reportedly trying to persuade Kyrgyzstan to close an American air base there. How disruptive would that be, in terms of supplying the troops in Afghanistan? And do you have a comment on Russia's attitude?

MR. MORRELL: I have only seen press reports to that effect. I have not heard anything officially from the Russian government, so I would not presume to -- to assume that they are doing as is reported.

All I can tell you at this point is that we have an agreement with the Kyrgyzstan government for us -- and have had it for some time -- for us to operate out of the Manas Air Base there. It is a hugely important air base for us. It provides us with a launching-off point to provide supplies to our forces in Afghanistan. We very much appreciate the support the Kyrgyz have given us in the use of that base, and we hope to continue using it.

We have an agreement, but we remain in talks with them actively on addressing whatever concerns they may have about our continued use. But I think you've -- I think General Petraeus has been to see them, General McNabb has been to see them. We are actively involved in discussions with the Kyrgyz government about the continued use of Manas.

Q Are they actually threatening to shut up that base?

MR. MORRELL: I think you'd have to talk to them. I think we are --

Q What are the talks about, then?

MR. MORRELL: Continued use of the base. I mean, this is a -- this is a -- this is an agreement between two governments, and the terms of that agreement are always subject to negotiation. And that is where we stand at this point. But we are hopeful that we can continue our good relation -- good relationship with the Kyrgyz government and can continue to use Manas in support of our operations in Afghanistan.

Q (Off mike) -- the outcome of this negotiation would be that the U.S. pays a little more money and things go on as usual?

MR. MORRELL: Whether or not we pay more money is certainly a subject of discussion, and -- but that shouldn't be a surprise. In any negotiation, money is often at issue. And hopefully, we'll come to an agreement and can continue the use of the air base. And I don't -- I have seen nothing to -- more directly to your question, I have seen nothing to suggest -- other than press reports -- that the Russians are attempting to undermine our use of that facility.

Q If those reports are true, would we consider that an unfriendly act by Russia?

MR. MORRELL: That's a hypothetical that I'm not prepared to get into. . . .