

**Ambassador Lawrence Butler**  
**Press Conference - January 29, 2003**  
**Embassy Residence**

**Ms. Deby Jones:** Good Evening. Thank you for joining us. I am Deby Jones, the Public Affairs Officer at the American Embassy in Skopje. We have invited you here this evening for a press conference with Ambassador Butler and with the director of United States Agency for International Development, Mr. Dick Goldman. The Ambassador will be happy to take your questions on virtually any topic that you would like to raise with him. He will begin with a few opening comments and then he will open the floor to you for your questions. The press conference will last approximately 30 minutes. We ask you to please identify yourself and your media organization prior to asking your question. After the press conference, the Ambassador and Mrs. Butler have invited us for a cocktail, and we hope that you will join us. We will begin in just a few minutes.

**Ambassador Butler:** Nobody's sitting in the front row? Who wants to sit in the front row?

First let me say, welcome to the Embassy Residence and my home. I don't know if we have ever done anything like this here, but we have a couple of reasons for today's event. I'm so used to seeing many of you on the frozen shores of Lake Debar or in front of the Assembly, and I wanted to give you a warmer and drier place, and hopefully the whiskey will hold out as long as you do. I think you know Eleanor Nagy, who is the Deputy Ambassador, as well as Dick Goldman, who is the USAID Mission Director. I will be calling on them if you have questions regarding the economy or something directly involving the Embassy.

I'm going to have just a few comments to make, and then I want to take your questions. And the floor is open to any question; nothing is out of bounds today.

I've been here for more than a year and I'm glad every day by what I see in Macedonia. You in Macedonia have survived the worst that could be thrown at you over the last two years. The people that inhabit this country are strong, and you've come out of it stronger than when you went into it.

Americans are forward looking. We are looking forward to see what we can do in Macedonia, as it becomes a member of the World Trade Organization, as you take advantage of the European Union Stabilization and Association Agreement, as we work together with you to complete the NATO application. 2003 is a turning point for Macedonia. Macedonia is now a "security exporting" country. Ten young Macedonians are on their way to Afghanistan to help us and that country restore the security and the freedom that you enjoy here in Macedonia. The unit that is going from Macedonia is a mixed unit; they are ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, which any American army officer would tell you, "Yeah, so have you looked into the American army recently? We are as mixed as you are." I have worked closely with your Prime Minister and the President on a recent initiative -- and the President's recent initiative to express support for the United States in the event that we have to take stronger measures to disarm Saddam Hussein. President Bush's response to President Trajkovski was a clear affirmation of his appreciation for Macedonia's

readiness. Last night - actually, this morning around 3 o'clock - President Bush delivered the State of the Union Address. The topics he picked are the same topics I think I would pick if I were to make a similar address in Macedonia: grow the economy and create jobs; strengthen and improve health care; defend peace and security. So going back to the theme on Iraq, and I know you probably have questions on Iraq. I will just quote the President from last night. "We will consult. Let there be no misunderstanding - if Saddam Hussein is not fully disarmed, for the safety of our people, for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him." My message is for you in Macedonia, as you look at your State of the Union, the biggest threat for Macedonia is unemployment and a slow economy, which is why most of our effort in the Embassy and USAID for the next several years is going to be focused on that. The war is over here. There will be no spring offensive. People who threaten the use of force, which includes the idiot who pointed a gun at one of our drivers in Skopje today, will face action by us. And that is the same whether NATO is here or whether the EU is here. They are pathetic failures, whether they are Albanians or ethnic Macedonians. We at the Embassy will exploit your peace to help your business people create jobs.

Let me conclude with just two things. I was outraged when I read on Monday that a judge in Gostivar let two people walk who were clearly involved in the killings of three women. No society can thrive in which the judiciary does not do its job. You cannot tolerate organized crime or trafficking of people. Corrupt officials must face justice. In many ways they are the worst criminals. When they empty out the health fund, they are stealing from your pockets. Civil society means enabling the rights of every person and the possibilities of every life. We have much to work with you to make sure that every person and every population group in Macedonia can contribute to a collective society and state. Without barriers of ethnic origin, language, religion or gender. Macedonia has proved to the world that it is member of the civilized world. You took chances that many other countries were unable to in the last 10 years.

Thank you for your courage and for Macedonia's friendship.

I'll take questions now.

While we are getting a technical problem solved, I really want to congratulate my Norwegian colleague and the government of Norway for their donation of more than a million Euros for heating oil for schools in Macedonia. This is an example of how neighbors help neighbors and the day may come when you can help them - the Norwegians - and I know that the day will come when you are going to be able to help us in other ways. Collective security means you contribute according to your ability.

**Zana Bozinovska - DNEVNIK:** Mr. Ambassador, last week there was some information that turned out to be only allegations, regarding removing Ali Ahmeti from President Bush's Executive Order. Is there any possibility for this to happen soon, can you make a recommendation regarding this issue, and can he now visit the State Department?

**Ambassador Butler:** I think questions about a spring offensive and Ali Ahmeti and the President's list usually come in pairs. The President's Executive Order applies to

persons and groups who threaten the stability of the Balkans. At the time that Mr. Ahmeti and others were added to the list, he clearly met the criteria for inclusion. The list is regularly reviewed to see if the persons and the groups on the list still meet the criteria. Mr. Ahmeti is still on the list. This is the decision that only the President can make. As I said before, he has, since the signing of the Framework Agreement, engaged in a very positive and constructive manner to bring stability back to this part of the world. But I'm unable to predict for you if and when his name will be taken off this list. Because his continued constructive engagement in the Macedonian political structures is a positive contribution, and it will be seen as a positive factor.

**Aleksandra Dukovska-START:** In the event of an attack against Iraq, will U.S. reduce their staff in the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia, how would that affect the Embassy's operation and what can Macedonia expect from the coalition in the fight against Hussein?

**Ambassador Butler:** Two questions. One is, in the event of a conflict in the Gulf, would we reduce the staff in the Embassy and what would the impact be, and the second one is, what can Macedonia contribute?

We have excellent security cooperation with the Macedonian authorities. I would not anticipate that we would reduce staff here in the event of conflict in the Gulf. We have complete confidence that the Government of Macedonia can protect the Embassy and the staff against any possible threat. And regarding what Macedonia can concretely contribute, there are a number of possibilities that is too early at this point to speculate at what those might be.

**Veton Latifi - MTV3:** Ambassador Butler, do you expect that the EU taking over from the NATO mission would affect the situation in Macedonia, particularly the former crisis zone where the situation is more fragile?

**Ambassador Butler:** Well, I disagree with your assessment that the situation in Macedonia is fragile. I'm actually disappointed by the many reports I read in the international press about how fragile and how close Macedonia is to going back to conflict. You're not going to see a difference between NATO and the EU. It's going to be the same troops, the same commanders. But I want to underscore that the US has consistently supported the EU aspirations to create a European security and defense policy. I think this is an excellent opportunity for Europe to begin developing its pillars in the transatlantic alliance. And if anybody thinks that Italian, French or German EU forces are pushovers, they are making a big mistake. The cooperation between NATO, which is still going to be on the ground in Kosovo, and EU forces, is going to be so close you will not see daylight between them.

**Todor Keramitcievski - NATIONAL RADIO:** Mr. Ambassador, you know that one of the priority commitments of Macedonia is its NATO accession. This is closely connected with Macedonian - US relations. According to you, the presence of EU forces in Macedonia will not endanger these relations, but quite the opposite they will be improved. Can you tell us something about the economic aspect of these relations, in addition to the security ones?

**Ambassador Butler:** You're not going to see a difference when the NATO mission, Allied United Harmony, completes its mission and the EU force enters, whenever that happens. We completely support Macedonia's aspirations to join the European Union. We coordinate and cooperate very carefully with the European Union and I would see no implication in the economic sphere. We are not looking at a "divide and conquer" competition for the Macedonian market. It is very hard to tell the difference between a European and an American company these days. And on the positive side, it would give Macedonia more experience in dealing directly with the European Union. It's a very complex organization and it takes time to get used to understanding and to working with them. The more successful Macedonia is, the more experience that Macedonia has in dealing with the European Union, the faster they will be able to complete the process and join the E.U.

**Stole Naumov, Radio station KANAL 77:** Mr. Ambassador - please correct me if I am wrong - the Lions used to protect the U.S. Embassy, as well as some other embassies. The Lions have not been very popular with the international community. What is your position regarding the latest developments on this issue? And the second question - there have been attempts for different interpretation of the Framework Agreement regarding the language issue. (Proportional representation - unintelligible) What position would you assume in case you are invited to act as a mediator on this issue?

**Ambassador Butler:** Every country that has been involved in a military conflict has experience with what happens when the conflict comes to an end. The United States went through this at the end of WWI, WWII and in the Vietnam War. And the right way is to throw a parade and welcome them home. Macedonia is a state -- a country that aspires to NATO membership, it's a strong democracy. It does not have a continuing need for units like the Lions. They were created in the midst of a crisis, and their mission is complete. You are correct in remembering that we have been critical of the actions of some of the Lions over the last couple of years and I think that you as journalists have experienced some of that directly. In Western democracies, security forces take their orders from civilian leadership. And I would fully support the recent decision by the government of Branko Crvenkovski as to the disbandment and the processing of the members of the Lions. It was a very fair and very honest offer. Language issues are the ones that will continue to be discussed and argued for a long time in Macedonia. And my only message is for both sides to be as generous and as open in their discussion about what they seek and to find out what is acceptable. The goal should be that every citizen of Macedonia has the opportunity to communicate with its government as clearly as possible. And we support the efforts of various politicians to find the compromise and a way forward that meets the spirit of the Framework Agreement.

Proportional representation - nobody has got a precise number of just how many ethnic Albanians, or Turks, or Serbs have to be in a particular organization before it gets to the right point - or ethnic Macedonians. I think we'll know it when we see it, but we know what the constraints and the challenges are - resources. The key to really solving this one is getting the economy growing, so that the Macedonian central budget and the local budgets grow enough so that a proper number of persons can be hired. We had an interesting conversation with the IMF early this afternoon on that

very topic. I have a great deal of admiration for your political leaders who are dealing and are very responsible in dealing with this issue. We'll keep encouraging them.

**Linda Karadaku - Voice of America:** Mr. Ambassador, I have two questions for you. First one, you said, pathetic losers. What do you mean? Organized, non-organized groups? Supporters of any parties, Albanians, Macedonians, whatsoever? Do you mean any outside factors? Which of them do you have in mind when you use that term? And the other question has got to do with the Ohrid Agreement. How much has been realized in the last three months? What have we seen from the Ohrid Agreement in the last three months?

**Ambassador Butler:** Let me take the last question first. Successful elections and a peaceful transition of power. I think a year ago many of us could have had a hard time imagining that. Best elections in the Balkans last year. Where the winners and the losers accepted the outcome. The government met on December 26th with the President, with representatives of the government and representatives of the Framework Agreement signatories and agreed on an action plan, which they are still working through in the government, which is a very aggressive timetable, which will now fall into the legislative system. But dramatically the involvement of the international community has actually gotten less direct, because it's less necessary. We're involved, we're paying attention, we are following, very closely, but the government has and the parties have ownership of the process. And there's a lot going on behind the scenes that's not obvious in the front.

Pathetic losers. Could be people who sit up in Vitina and send out faxes; could be some self-style paramilitary commander in Prilep who sends out faxes, but the days where hand grenades and guns were how you advanced your political agenda in Macedonia, are over. And clearly, regarding the people up in Vitina, they have no support. Anybody can send a fax. I remember we were here about a year ago - we had the same conversation a year ago. You can fool me once, but you can't fool me twice. They need to go back to whatever hole they crawled out of. Before we catch them. There's more than one way to catch somebody who's got a gun, who doesn't have permission to have it or sends faxes. In the context of the global war on terrorism, somebody who threatens the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of another state, he's going to find out just who their enemy is.

**Ljubisa Nikolovski - MACEDONIAN TELEVISION:** Mr. Ambassador, what is your opinion on the census results, what do you think the Albanians or the Macedonians expect from these results, and what would their reactions be in case they don't receive what they expect?

**Ambassador Butler:** I suspect that the people in Macedonia are like students who have completed all of their examinations and are waiting for the grades to come back. And there's the fear and the hope. The hope of really good grades and a good university, or the worst fear of failure. We've seen the preliminary results, which is counting how many people are inside the borders of Macedonia. This may mean many, many months before we find out what the ethnic breakdown is for Macedonia. There are a couple of things that you should know. The international community has strong confidence in how the process of the census was carried out. This is thanks to

the active engagement of EUROSTAT and the Council of Europe and the U.S. Bureau of Census. Those same organizations will be engaged with your State Statistical Office during the process of -- while they process each of the census forms. It would be a mistake to try and anticipate the outcome. We don't deal with hypotheticals. When the time comes and the results are announced, then we'll figure out what that means. I'd be curious to find out how many Americans Macedonia has. And my Consul might be interested to know how many.

**Kenan Mimidinowski, TV ZUPA, Debar:** Mr. Ambassador, do you think that the current opposition has no idea what is going on in the sphere of security in the country, or are you convinced that the opposition will have nothing to do with some specific developments in the country. You said that there would be no spring offensive. How strongly do you trust the opposition?

**Ambassador Butler:** I don't have any information that would support what you just asked. We maintain excellent contacts with the head of the two main parties in Macedonia. Ljupco Georgievski and I had lunch today, just a couple of hours ago. And I'm looking forward to seeing Arben Xhaferi as well.

The question you're asking is -- I've expressed myself clearly: we see no substance to speculations as to armed provocations in Macedonia as having any basis for organization. There are going to be people with guns, like the guy who pointed a gun at one of my drivers today, there's going to be someone who fires a rocket at DUI headquarters and there's gonna be those two guys who killed those three women in Dobri Dol. And it is a job for the police to find the perpetrators and put them in jail. And there won't be amnesty for those people.

How about questions on the economy?

Or on Macedonia becoming member of NATO?

**Nazim Rashidi - BBC:** Mr. Ambassador, I'm afraid I'm going to ask something about the security situation again. You said at the beginning that you are going to take measures against those who try to threaten peace in Macedonia. I would like to know what it means - taking measures - does that include a military action against those who would try to -- as I repeat myself -- try to threaten Macedonia? And then, another question, who were those guys and where were those guys who pointed a gun at your drivers today?

**Ambassador Butler:** Somewhere between our Embassy and one of the Embassy's annexes. I think it was unhappiness about how these persons were driving.

We support the government efforts to get unnecessary and illegal weapons out of the hands of people that have it. We've had experience with problems like this in the U.S., we actually have a name for that "road-rage." I've explained in the past precisely what we meant by taking action. We can put people on the President's Executive Order. We can deny them the opportunity to visit the United States. If there's criminal evidence against them, and the Macedonian police doesn't catch them in Macedonia, we might be able to catch them across the border. There's plenty of place to park people up in

Kosovo.

It's not safe to threaten the stability in the Balkans. It might have a bad ending for the person.

**Mende Jovanovski, BITOLSKI VESNIK:** Mr. Ambassador, I expect you to give an honest answer to this question, because you did say that you'd be open. The first question, don't you think that it is too naïve to believe that Macedonia is a security exporting country, when there's no stability in Macedonia and every six months we ask different forces, be it NATO or EU, to protect Macedonia's stability? The second question is, do you think that the conflict in Macedonia was an orchestrated war, or an attack of forces from Kosovo, which is a United Nations protectorate? And my third question- is Ali Ahmeti on President Bush's Executive Order as a human rights fighter, a terrorist, or a person who also sent faxes from Prizren? And my fourth question, what do you think about Mr. Georgievski's statement that, when the former government wanted deal to with corruption and criminal, it was the international community who obstructed this initiative.

**Ambassador Butler:** Americans are forward looking. I never argue with the historians, we'll let the historians write dissertations about the reasons and the grounds for the conflict in 2001. That war is over. I don't want to deal with it. I deal with Dick Goldman from USAID to make companies in Bitola stronger, more effective and more competitive. And that reminded me that I'm going to be in Bitola on March 11th, and we're going to remember what happened in Bitola 60 years ago. That's when the holocaust came to Macedonia. Macedonia avoided another holocaust in 2001. And what Dick and his colleagues are doing is going to make all the difference for you and your kids.

Ahmeti got on the President's Executive Order in 2001 for good reasons. He was associated with arms insurrection, which threatened the stability of the Western Balkans. And he threatened the safety of the 13,000 U.S. soldiers who were in Kosovo. I think that message is pretty clear.

**Dragan Stojanovski TV KISS, Tetovo:** Mr. Ambassador, you said that U.S. gives its full support to our government with regards to the arms issue. The region that I come from is facing a huge problem with this issue – there is a lot of weapons and that is evident lately. What can the State Department recommend to our government in terms of how to deal with this problem? And what's the situation in Kosovo, where there are very high fines for anyone who fires a gun, do you think that this could apply in Macedonia too?

**Ambassador Butler:** There's number ways to deal with illegal weapons. The United Nations Development Program actually has some excellent experience in other countries that have been in and have left a conflict. That can be a combination of incentives and disincentives. Incentives by giving people a reason positively to give up guns. Disincentives, or sticks, which make it clear that being caught with a gun means being punished. At some point 10 or 15 years down the road, an RPG or a rocket is not the safest thing to have in your basement anymore. When your kids walk down and find it, "Hey, what's this? And then you get a new basement! And you've just lost a

child. And why did you have the gun there in the first place.

But I think the government's has a good way for that because it's very hard to disarm weapons from people who have them and don't want you to get them. And if it was very easy, there would be no illegal weapons in Washington D.C., where it is illegal to have a weapon, and we think there is about a million.

Thank you.

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