



Briefing on the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Good afternoon, everybody.

QUESTION: Morning?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Morning? I'm still on some other time in some other place. All right. Well, it's nice to be here with you today. I wanted to talk a little bit at the beginning about the Paris conference. The French are hosting a conference to support Afghanistan, a donors conference, and the First Lady and the Secretary will be going out. And the conference takes place on Thursday. It'll be all day on Thursday.

We're going to join 80 other delegations in Paris. It's a chance for all of us to renew our long-term commitment to Afghanistan. Afghanistan, I think we all know, has made enormous progress since 2001 but still faces major, major challenges. And this is a chance to achieve progress based on the solidarity of the international community that we think is – continues.

You need to look at this conference as sort of a bookend with the Bucharest meeting of NATO – the NATO summit in Bucharest in March. That meeting demonstrated the international community's commitment to and clear vision on the security dimension of operations in Afghanistan. The Paris conference provides an opportunity for complementary commitment and vision on the political and economic side.

I would – as succinctly as I can, I'd say the overarching goal of the conference is to put international money behind an Afghan strategy for developing Afghanistan. The Afghan Government will present its new five-year Afghanistan National Development Strategy. This is, you might say, the implementation steps for the London compact which set out the goals and things that needed to be achieved. They will – Afghans will lay out the progress that's been achieved, but also the priorities among these goals and among these steps on how to continue to make progress.

The conference will also talk and emphasize, I think, a lot the question of aid effectiveness and the importance of Afghan ownership of the development process. Aid effectiveness is a – you might say a double-edged sword. It's a concept that's been talked about a lot and worked on a lot now with the Afghan Government. It means two things. It means, one, using money more effectively by spending it through Afghan Government, through Afghan contractors, through the Afghan trust funds; and two, it means using money more effectively by improving the Afghan capability to manage projects, to audit projects, to control corruption and other things that detract from the effectiveness of aid. So it's a requirement on both sides to look at how we spend money in Afghanistan and to do that more effectively. And at the senior officials meeting that was held last week, this was a major subject of discussion, sort of the deal between the international community and the Afghans about how we can spend more money through the Afghans and they can demonstrate more capabilities to spend the money effectively.

The conference goal in terms of pledging, as I said, is to put international money behind an Afghan strategy. We expect and look to the conference to provide more money than was raised in London. The London conference in 2006 raised 10.6 billion. We now have an Afghan strategy to cover the next five years. We would expect to get a very solid start in terms of pledging at Paris to be able to carry out this program. And I think we'll see that in Paris as well.

So with that, I'd be glad to take questions.

QUESTION: So, Richard, what exactly, other than the First Lady and the Secretary and you and whoever other senior eminent officials who are going, what is the U.S. bringing to this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The United States is bringing a – I think a lot of non-monetary contributions in terms of the emphasis that we put on things like aid effectiveness, in terms of our work in support of the United Nations. This is a major event for Kai Eide, for the new Special Representative of the Secretary General in Afghanistan, and his coordination and organizing role. And we're bringing a very substantial pledge. But I think I'm going to avoid giving you a precise figure right now. We'll let the First Lady and the Secretary do that on Thursday.

QUESTION: Well, is that –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The pledge is two years of U.S. money composed of '08 and '09 funds that have been recently appropriated or are under discussion on the Hill right now.

QUESTION: They've all been requested, though, correct, by the Administration? There is no money that you're going to pledge that has not already been requested?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That has not yet been requested. That's right. And we'll have – we're trying to get not just a, you know, "this is how much we asked for" pledge, but a pledge that reflects the amount that we think Congress is likely to appropriate so that we can really commit to saying this is real money on the table to carry out the five-year strategy.

QUESTION: The last supplemental – or it wasn't technically a supplemental, I guess it was the bridge –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The bridge, yeah.

QUESTION: Bridge thing. Asked for about 700 million, I think, for Afghanistan? Is that correct?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't have the exact breakdown of the different numbers, but it's basically the '08 base, the '09 base, the '08 supplemental and the '08 bridge – or the '09 bridge.

QUESTION: Okay. So if we went back and looked, we could –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You could get in the ballpark, yeah.

QUESTION: Can you address, Richard, the – a little more – in a little more detail the sort of dilemma that you hinted at, that on the one hand, you know, there's been a certain amount of criticism, including I think from the Afghan Government, that they would like more money to be funneled through them and from the international community, that they would like the United States to coordinate better with them so that the reconstruction and security efforts are not all sort of an octopus with its arms flailing in different directions; and on the other hand, what you implicitly alluded to, or in some cases explicitly, that the Afghan Government is somewhat capacity-constrained in terms of its ability to oversee projects, to do so without large-scale corruption? Why, six and a half or so years into the latest U.S. involvement in Afghan affairs, is it that the government's capacity is so constrained? And what, in concrete terms, do you expect to do to help it have a stronger capacity to actually be able to run more of this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let me try to answer your question in less than an hour.

QUESTION: That's your job.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's a big question. The – I kind of look at the situation the other way around, that we are at a point now in Afghanistan where Afghans are increasingly taking the lead. The Afghan military is increasingly taking the lead, including some units that can operate with minimal support from us.

QUESTION: My battery just died. I'm going to get another tape recorder. I'm riveted by your answer, though. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: We don't have to wait.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've never run out anybody's battery before. He can get the transcript.

QUESTION: He has plenty of tape recorders.

QUESTION: Your batteries are still good, though.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: My battery is still going. Okay.

So the Afghan army is increasingly taking the lead. The Afghans are increasingly taking the lead, I would say, at the local and provincial governance level. We have more good governors out there, governors that are eradicating poppy, working on provincial development plans and otherwise sort of taking the lead in galvanizing their provinces and districts and moving them forward with the local people there.

Some of the Afghan ministries are showing themselves quite capable. The Afghan National Solidarity Program has done – is doing something like 35,000 projects in 25,000 villages around the country, mostly small scale – bridges, retaining walls, schools, clinics, things like that. But they have shown themselves capable, and we have over the last few years put more and more money into that program. Other ministries – health, education, a variety of Afghan ministries have shown capability of carrying out projects, certifying them, auditing them. So I think what we have is a situation where we have more elements of the Afghan Government who are capable of taking the lead and taking the lead in a way that we would find reliable.

Second of all, you have more and more Afghan contractors. My own experience, two years ago I went to Panjshir where we built a road up the valley, a very important road. It was good for the people there. But it was built with Turkish contractors, Turkish engineers, Turkish foremen, all the way down. I think that the unskilled labor was Afghan, but just about everything else was Turkish. One of the more interesting moments at the conference, at the senior officials conference last week, was when one of the Turkish representatives said, "We're not getting as many contracts as we used to." Because indeed, there are more and more Afghan contractors that are capable of doing these things. And just a couple months ago, I was in Konar and the road that we financed that was built up the Konar Valley was built with Afghan contractors and Afghan expertise.

And so I think not only on the governance side but on the contracting side we have more and more capable Afghan firms that can do things. We have to adjust to that reality and we have to move in that direction. So putting more money through capable Afghan ministries, putting more money into the trust funds that are administered and spent through the Afghans, particularly money that can then go to the local levels where governors have provincial plans and capabilities, and using more local contractors – these are all things whose time has come, and we need a conscious and concerted effort to do that.

Sorry, one more part of this. I'll keep the answer under a half hour. The other part is what you said, the coordination, that we are strengthening the international coordination. And that's one of the important things about the role of the new Special Representative of the Secretary General. There's always been UN committees to help coordinate who's doing what in energy, who's doing what in roads, who's doing what in education. We want that to be stronger so the Afghans actually have a stronger international partner, a more organized international partner. A year ago, I was at a conference where one of the Afghans was complaining about 62 different project forms they had to fill out for different donors. You know, getting some handle on that is good to make the Afghans more capable. But there's training, anti-corruption measures, fiscal responsibility measures. There's a lot of things that the Afghans are now capable of implementing to improve their capacity; and as they do that beyond the ones that are capable already, I think we'll see foreign donors able to channel more money through them.

Sorry for the long answer.

QUESTION: That's okay. Can I expand on the issue of corruption? There have been some reports about a growing frustration within the Administration about President Karzai's inability to crack down on corruption, and not only that but that he's not, kind of, showing the leadership that you would expect him to be showing at this point.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we should see. It'll be an important point for all of us. Corruption is a very – it's a serious problem in Afghanistan. It's something that needs to be dealt with. The Afghan government knows they need to deal with it. They've tried various measures in the past. There are a number of steps on improving governance, improving government audit capabilities, improving appointments, improving fiscal integrity, you might say, and the financial management of government money, that have already been taken and are being – and more that are being taken. And we'll look to see what the Afghans are able to say on that when they get to Paris. Frankly, that'll be an important point for us all.

QUESTION: Well, I mean, aren't you kind of coordinating with them all along the way? I mean –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes.

QUESTION: -- I mean, could you talk about how they've done up till this point? I mean, presumably, you don't just wait for these conferences to kind of see the kind of measures and plans and strategic plans –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's a – it's been an endemic problem in Afghanistan. It's something that we all know needs to be dealt with. The Afghans have sometimes tried different methods of dealing with it in the past. They haven't worked. We all think that renewed effort is necessary and that concrete steps are necessary. Some of these governance and fiscal steps are important, but they need to be backed also by other steps to really get at the heart of the corruption matter.

QUESTION: Could I just follow up on that, actually, just to ask you more directly about your confidence in President Karzai on the security issue, whether you think he is

the right person who can get the job done?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: President Karzai is the elected president of Afghanistan. He is the man we work with. He's a man we're happy to work with. We work with him. We work with the Parliament, ministers and others. That's the Government of Afghanistan. The whole goal of this process was to allow the Afghans to choose their government. They've done that. We're going to work with that government, no question about it.

QUESTION: Do you have any confidence in his abilities, however?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: He's a -- he's President of the country. We work with him.

QUESTION: So that's not a yes? That's --

QUESTION: It doesn't sound like --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We have confidence in him. We've done an awful lot with him. We constantly do an awful lot with him. There's no question of that. But, you know, we don't -- how can I say? We're not into rating foreign leaders. We don't do it for Gordon Brown, or Angela Merkel and we're not going to do it for Karzai.

QUESTION: It's curious that your region seems to have a lot of presidents that you're -- that are the elected presidents of their country that you're happy to work with, whether you actually want to be working with them or not.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I wouldn't quite say it that way. I'd say that the Afghan election, in contrast to some of the other elections in my region, was clearly a voters' choice. It was clearly a choice of the Afghan people. There's no question that President Karzai is in his office because he was elected by the Afghan people to be their president.

QUESTION: Right, well, that's fair enough, but --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: And remain their president.

QUESTION: But are you -- you're not trying to suggest that you don't have any concerns about his leadership? I mean, I would imagine that you would have concerns about any leader.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I -- you know, he's the guy. He's the man. We work with him.

QUESTION: Yeah, but --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's the only way to play.

QUESTION: But you said that you -- that they needed to do more on corruption.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: So?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There are a lot of things to do in Afghanistan. He's got to do them. We've got to do them.

QUESTION: Right. So what -- you know, Kirit asked about security. Does he need to do anything more on security or is that fine?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There's -- security on the army side is going very well. Security on the police side has lagged behind for a variety of reasons, not all on the Afghan side. And we have stepped up programs with the Afghan Government this year. Starting last year, a program called Focus District -- District Developments that takes police out of a district, puts in national cops, cleans the place up, retrains the old guys, gets rid of some of them, puts them back in with mentors to do a better job. It seems to be showing that it can work. There's a lot more to do with police, too. There's things to do with the, sort of, structure of control, command and control with police. That's a joint -- these are all joint projects -- U.S., Afghan, international, ISAF, European police also. We work with the Afghan government to accomplish these things.

QUESTION: What about (inaudible)?

QUESTION: To follow up on it, there seems to be reports at least of a lack of political will coming from the top of the Afghan Government to go after certain leaders, to go after criminals, this -- broader than the corruption issue, this is a --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There's -- let's -- there's a democracy in Afghanistan. There's a lot of reports. There's a lot of points of view. There's going to be people that say he's great, he's awful, he's doing this, he's not doing that. He's got supporters and detractors. That's democracy for you.

I think our job is to work with the duly elected leaders of Afghanistan. That includes people in Parliament and to make sure that jointly we accomplish our goals.

QUESTION: Richard, in --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Sorry, let's get to another row.

Yes.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary -- Mr. Boucher -- my name is Ayub Kharin(ph) and I work with the Voice of American Afghanistan TV. The First Lady's visit to Afghanistan came at a very important point and just before the conference where she visited one of the poorest provinces, to Bamiyan, and she also saw police training and met the local police. She's representing, or going to the conference. How important do you think her role will be to gather or to pull money for Afghanistan and I think how will she be effective in presenting the Afghanistan case?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we -- we think the First Lady's participation is very important because she's taken a personal interest in Afghanistan. She's been there several times. And one of the reasons that we're very pleased the First Lady is able to go and head the U.S. delegation there is that she's always kept the focus on the Afghan people. And that they -- if the conference is going to do anything, it's not just money and strategies; it's to say to the Afghan people, you know, here's

what we're able to do to improve your lives, here's what we're able to do to deliver better services, deliver economic opportunity, give you the safety and the justice and the economic opportunity that you want. And I think the First Lady's participation helps us focus on that. And the fact that she was just in Afghanistan in Bamiyan, looking at one of the poorer areas, but also looking at the dynamic governor and what she's doing up there, looking at the road that's being built up there, looking at what is being done for the Afghan people there, gives her real credibility to go to the conference and present that.

QUESTION: The First Lady is heading the U.S. delegation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: As what?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let me – I'm – let me double-check that word, okay?

QUESTION: Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah. As head of our delegation. (Laughter.) And she is –

QUESTION: And her position in the government is –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Is First Lady.

QUESTION: -- spouse of the President.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's – I will double-check on the exact protocol appellation for this. She is giving the first statement on behalf of the United States at the conference, and the Secretary will give a statement later in the conference that explains in more detail the sum of the pledge and how it's going to be used.

QUESTION: Was the London – the London pledge, did you say that produced 10.6 billion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: 10.5 billion --

QUESTION: 10.5 --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'm sorry. If I said six, I was wrong.

QUESTION: -- 5 billion, okay. And is it your understanding that President Karzai is going to be coming with a request for a certain amount and that it's 50 billion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The Afghan National Development Strategy is a five-year plan that involves about \$50 billion worth of projects and goals and expenditures. This conference is not intended to raise that whole amount. A portion of that amount is already in the aid pipeline. Another portion will be raised through Afghan funds. Another portion may come down the road. Not all countries – most countries can't pledge five-year money. So it's not a conference to raise – you know, to fill the \$50 billion tank. It's a conference to put on the table a solid amount of money, more than London, to get a solid start on the Afghan -- five years of the Afghan Development Strategy.

QUESTION: And will police training and so forth be part of this package?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's – yes.

QUESTION: Can you give us a little bit more of a range of what this would include?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's – I think for the United States, for example, what we're looking at in the next couple years in Afghanistan is to continue the sort of very basic work that needs to be done to build the nation and the foundations of the nation. That means building up cadre, building up ministries, ministerial reform, governance issues, building up the road system, the electricity system, which are sorely needed by the people of Afghanistan, but also expanding into areas like more focus on agriculture and rural development opportunities that are coming up, more focus on the governors and local administrations, building up governance at the local and provincial level, and then preparations for the elections that'll come up in 2009, 2010. So –

QUESTION: Do you have specific programs that you've already earmarked this money that --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some of the money is identified for specific programs and projects, some is not. A lot of it will be worked in so that it fits the goals and the programs of the strategy.

QUESTION: And this strategy –

QUESTION: How are you doing against drug traffic – drug trafficking, the best gauge of success, the best barometer? You know, because it ties into so many other things like corruption, officials who cover, and the Taliban (inaudible) –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: How we're doing against drug trafficking is very important. It's important because it feeds corruption, it feeds the Taliban.

QUESTION: Right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It undermines the ability to provide local governance to people. But it's not the best barometer of how things are going in Afghanistan. There are successes in drug – against drug trafficking. You can look at the UN reports, the estimates of what's going to happen this year. The basic – what the progress against drug trafficking is is that in many areas in the north and the east of the country, with the assistance of dynamic governors, we've been able to reduce poppy, even increase the number of poppy-free provinces dramatically.

More and more, the drug trafficking is down in the south, where it's at unacceptably high levels –

QUESTION: That's where the Taliban are.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: And it's associated with the insurgency and they feed off each other, okay? The drug programs work in the areas where we have stability and government control. In the south, as we gain more stability and government control, I think the good drug programs will work there, too. But at present, we're

not able to make them work down there effectively. We have to reinforce that effort, we have to concentrate on some of those areas that really need it, and we have to get more control and carry out more effective drug programs.

The overall – you asked – you just said, what's the best indicator of how we're doing?

QUESTION: Right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the quality of local governance is actually the best indicator of how we're doing, where there's a real effort this year to pull out into the – push out into provinces and the districts. If you look at what's happened in Afghanistan, you'd say the first couple of years the Bonn process was building the government up, going from absolutely nothing. When I first went there in January of 2002, the government was 20 people around a table. There was no money in the central bank vault. There were no telephones, no computers, no systems of governance. We built the government up to where it is capable. It's capable of providing schools and healthcare and projects in the small towns and villages of Afghanistan.

Now, we've got to make a bigger effort to build the government out. That's been going on for the last year or so. To build the government out into all the regions of Afghanistan, where it can provide what people need. And to the extent that we provide people in the provinces and the villages with security, with opportunity, with services, that's how you're going to win the war.

QUESTION: One question on numbers, Richard. In terms of calculating the amount that will be pledged in Paris, which you say you expect to exceed the 10.5 at London, am I correct in understanding that in totaling up the Paris pledges, you're going to take all the money that has been promised since London?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The – we've encouraged other countries to look at what they've put on the table since London, because effectively that much of that money is still there, is committed to projects that will help carry out the plan. So, yeah.

QUESTION: So – okay. And then -- but then it means that the number pledged in Paris will actually reflect numbers previously requested, in some cases authorized by parliaments, and presumably, in some cases, actually already spent.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some of it. Yeah.

QUESTION: And can you give us any kind of an estimate of how much you think you're going to get beyond that it's more than the 10.6? Is it 15, is it 20, is it 30?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it'll be substantially more. I mean, from what we heard in terms of the previews from other countries that – there's a lot of willingness. There's – you know, people have talked about donor fatigue, but it's not there. It wasn't in Bucharest. You didn't see it in Bucharest. You saw new pledges and commitments of troops. And I think based on our sounding so far, we're going to see not only a very substantial pledge from the United States, but substantial pledges from many other countries as well.

QUESTION: Fifteen billion? That would be a 50 percent rise?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'm not going to try it at this point.

QUESTION: Richard, do you know how much money the U.S. has given Afghanistan since 2001?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Twenty-six billion.

QUESTION: Twenty-six billion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Of which we have a disbursement now of about 70 percent. I know there was some reporting on that that used bad numbers, but we've disbursed about 70 percent already of the 26 billion.

QUESTION: And the 26 reflects monies appropriated by Congress?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, that's money to date.

QUESTION: Approved by Congress?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Approved by Congress.

QUESTION: Twenty-six billion, got it.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: 2001 to --

QUESTION: Seventy percent was disbursed?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Seventy percent already disbursed, yeah.

QUESTION: Can I ask about --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some projects like roads, you know, you get – you got to get the money out.

QUESTION: 2001?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: 2001.

QUESTION: And London was when?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: London was January, February of 2006.

QUESTION: Just to get --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay.

QUESTION: Do you have any track of how much of that – of the 10.5 billion in London has been delivered, disbursed?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The general number for most donors is about 60 percent, some donors higher like us, some less. But I think by and large, we'd say that most donors have been pretty diligent about making sure their money gets spent.

QUESTION: Is that 26 billion also military assistance?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It includes security training, so we do a lot in the areas of training police and military, yeah.

QUESTION: But not U.S. military op tempo?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Not U.S. military ops, no.

QUESTION: Can I ask a question about Pakistan, actually?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay.

QUESTION: Secretary --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think – let's let those guys ask about Pakistan.

QUESTION: Thank you. Since you have been many times in the area, you have assessed the area as far as the problems in Afghanistan and on the border and in Pakistan and other – you had so many talks with highly and low officials on every issues in the area. President Karzai, of course, is an elected official by Afghanistan. They were hoping and they hoped that they will be living in a free society and a democracy, but now, I think they are losing trust and in – trust in him, because they feel that he had failed – he may not be the one failure, but maybe the officials around him as far as security for the Afghans are concerned, they are saying that Taliban are now coming back and they have hold on many areas in Afghanistan and they are coming from across the border from Pakistan.

What many think tanks are saying now, many officials here – unless you solve the problem of cross-border terrorism, Afghanistan will not be a stable place. And also, now there's a new government in Pakistan. And what do you think we can solve this problem, two neighbors can live in peaceful and – with a peaceful and stable Pakistan and Pakistan (inaudible) regionally?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay, okay, okay, let's – you've got too many misconceptions in your question for me to answer them all.

The first thing you have to understand, I think, is the nature of the battle is changing. Last year in particular, and this – I'd say last year, in particular, 2007, the Taliban set out to take towns and territory. Remember they were talking about spring offensive, they were talking about summer offensive, they were talking about continued operations through the winter. They didn't do it. They couldn't do it. They were stopped. They set out to take towns and territory. They would talk about putting a ring around Kandahar and trying to take Kandahar. They couldn't do it. In fact, they've never – they haven't been able to mass forces successfully or take areas. They've been able to blow into villages, make a couple cell phone calls, take a couple pictures and then get pushed out as soon as the government or the NATO troops show up.

So what's happened is they've turned more and more to the tactics of terror. They've turned more and more to suicide bombings, kidnappings. Unfortunately, that's killed a lot of innocent civilians. And again and again, you know, they've managed to show they can kill themselves and innocent people along with them.

Some of that is fueled by training, recruitment and other things coming across the border. There is still command and control, training centers, and other support that they get from the tribal areas of Pakistan. I think we all recognize, including the Pakistani Government, that for both Pakistan and Afghanistan to be safe, we need to deal with these people on both the Pakistani and the Afghan side of the border. And in some ways it boils down to the same issues on both sides. You're not going to stop the suicide bombings and the terrorist attacks until you get real control at the local level, until (inaudible) of the territory. You need military, you need police, you need governance, you need villagers on your side, tribes on your side.

And that is being done in Afghanistan in certain ways, it's being done by the Government of Pakistan now, especially the new civilian government is looking at how to do that, how to extend security control, governance and economic development into the tribal areas. And we're working with them, we're talking to them, we want to support that. We're supporting a security development plan to develop the proper security forces to do that. We're supporting a sustainable development plan to put economic opportunity into the tribal areas so that we can transform these areas into stable parts of Pakistan and tie them in in a way that stops the terrorists from operating out of there.

QUESTION: Just on the same thing, quickly –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: She has a question.

QUESTION: What is the status of – as you – as far as you know, of the peace talks between the Government of Pakistan and the tribal leaders? There have been some reports that they've been suspended. And if you do know they've been suspended, is that a result of U.S. pressure?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, we see different reports. I would say we haven't seen many reports of anything much happening there in terms of negotiations in recent days or weeks. The politicians have said they want to negotiate with tribes, not with terrorists. And they've tried to make that point that you do need to talk to the tribes to get the tribes on your side, but they do not want to have negotiations with terrorists that result in people getting released and more freedom of movement or action on the side of the militants. So that seems to be the direction policy is heading, but I don't think I can give you a definitive status at this point.

QUESTION: Is it a good sign that you're not seeing much activity?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I would – we're not seeing much of the wrong kind of activity at this moment, but I – it's too early to give a real judgment on it.

Yeah.

QUESTION: I was hoping you might comment on the arrest of thousands of people in Bangladesh that opposition forces say is directed at political parties there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's a matter of concern. We've looked at the situation in Bangladesh and follow it very, very closely. We are concerned about so many people being arrested. Of course, we do understand that there have been arrests over these last months on real charges. We've always maintained, though, that everybody deserves due process and the protections of law. And with so many arrests being carried out, we wonder if they're really being done in accordance with due process and protections of law. So we're watching it closely, talking to people, making our concerns known at this point.

QUESTION: Is this a backslide in –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't –

QUESTION: – the government's attempts to restore democracy?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's sort of happening right now. I think we need to understand a little better before we say more.

QUESTION: Richard, I'm intrigued by the participation of the First Lady in all this. You might have noticed that. And regardless of what she – what her official title will be at this conference, she is going to give the opening speech for the U.S.?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: She's the headliner.

QUESTION: She is, but, you know – and you said that her recent visit there makes her a credible person to do this, she's got an interest in it. But you know, when she spoke in Kabul with President Karzai – I believe it was in Kabul – she was asked if she had raised any of these concerns that you've talked about here, notably corruption, and she said no, that's not – you know, I don't do that, you know, I'm here for other things, which I presume means, you know, the civilian reconstruction, ribbon-cutting of – for U.S. projects or U.S. funded projects.

How does that make her someone – if she did not address any of these concerns, how is she a credible person to lead your delegation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, I mean, I think she's credible because she really has personal involvement with projects and people in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Yeah, but if your headliner, if your star attraction at this is someone who, by her own admission, doesn't raise the tough questions, doesn't --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I – she's not – how can I say? You know, she's not the implementer on the U.S. side. She's not the operator on the U.S. side. She's not the one who directs and strategizes and carries out our programs. That's much more in the bailiwick of the Ambassador and the Secretary of State. So you do have, you know, two people talking on behalf of the United States at this conference. The First Lady is the one, I think, to really give it a focus, to give it humanity and give it a sense of focus on the Afghan people. And the fact that we're all coming to Paris; we're going to talk about development strategies, we're going to talk about pledges, we're going to talk about fiscal responsibility and, you know, integrity of the finance ministry and retraining of employees and audit systems.

But the point of all this is to be able to deliver to the people of Afghanistan what they need, what they expect of their government, and what they expect of the international community. And I think the First Lady is the one who can really make that clear based on her own personal interaction with the Afghans, that the point of all this is to do better by the Afghan people. And the Secretary can explain, because of her background and her responsibilities, in more detail, how our money supports the strategy and is going to carry that out.

QUESTION: Well, but – I mean, how to do better by the Afghans? Isn't quite a lot of that how the Afghans do by themselves?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: A lot of it is.

QUESTION: Well, and --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's why they're going to speak, too.

QUESTION: So you have a – you're setting up a good cop/bad cop situation here, where the First Lady comes in as the benevolent principal or headmistress, and then Secretary Rice is, you know, the vice principal, the unpopular one who cracks the whip and says (laughter), you know, you guys have to get your act together? I don't understand the message that you're trying to send.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't – no, I don't – that's not a proper characterization of this.

QUESTION: Well, you know --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The U.S. message is a big message. It takes two people to deliver the whole thing.

QUESTION: Are you not disappointed, Richard, that six and a half years after – you know, with U.S. backing, the Taliban was overthrown, that you are where you are in Afghanistan? I mean, I know it's endured three decades of warfare. Before that, I know you guys have often used the line, we're talking about construction in many cases, not reconstruction. But we're not one year, two years, five years; we're six and a half years down the line with the expenditure of, you know, 70 percent of \$26 billion of U.S. taxpayers' money and roughly 40,000 American troops, you know. And yet, you are still here talking about coordination of aid, which presumably ought to have been something that should have been apparent and easy to understand as a useful thing back in early '02. Are you not disappointed that this is where you are?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. I think you've got to have some perspective on this. I mean, some of you were with us in January 2002 when we went in there. You know, we went into the bunker that was the U.S. Embassy. We saw, you know, the Afghan cabinet, as I said, all of them around one table. That was the entire Afghan Government.

Over the years, I've been back to Afghanistan on a regular basis. I've seen people build houses. I've been seeing people, you know, selling doors and windows in the market so they could close up their houses, selling furniture in the markets. I've seen more recently the signs for internet cafes and, you know, computer sales. I've seen the shops that were in tents the first times I went there turn into shops that were in containers, and now turning into shops that are in concrete.

This was one of the poorest countries in the world in the '50s and the '60s and the '70s and it went downhill for 20 years. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody how much there is to do.

Remember the ring road was the first big project. That was coordinated with all the donors. But the ring road has actually provided a sense of nationhood. It's not perfect. There's still roadblocks and Taliban interdiction here and there. But it's provided a sense of nationhood and a sense of national commerce and unity. It's working. You know, you just do one thing after another. We built major roads, then we started building provincial roads. We're up into the – you know, building roads up into the valleys and connecting the provinces now. We've done, you know, some electricity work, but we've still got national grids to do, power plant generation, you know, a big power plant near Kabul that's going in this year.

There are just a lot of things that still have to be done. We've got half a dozen ministries, maybe, that are fully capable, others that still have to be reformed, pay and rank reform, training capabilities. It takes a long time to train people. It takes a long time to build power plants. It's just part of the process of doing one thing after another after another. But, you know, we started from zero, maybe less than zero.

QUESTION: So it's not really reconstruction --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, it shouldn't be too much of a surprise.

QUESTION: I mean, it's not really reconstruction, then. I mean, it's really building a state from the bottom up. Is that --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, yeah, we --

QUESTION: -- how you would characterize it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We've been starting from nothing or less than nothing and built an Afghanistan now that's seen as a nation where the government has capabilities to be able to do things around the country, but not yet everywhere in the way we would like. And we have to keep at it. If this place is going to be stable for the long term, it's not going to be building half of it and then walking away. It's going to be by sticking to it, continuing at it, to build a nation that fits together, that has a prosperous economy, and that can govern itself and take care of itself all the way down to the local levels all throughout the country.

QUESTION: Don't you have a problem, though, Richard, if Karzai is seen as weak and ineffective inside his own country, you know, getting into parts of the south where there's very little government at all? Don't you have a problem in trying to build the trust of the Afghan people if their leader is seen as ineffective and that's really the only government that exists?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think -- I mean, first of all, you know, there's going to be a lot of debate and criticism in Afghanistan about the leaders and the president and we're coming into an election season that'll be next year. There is going to be a lot of things said about the quality of leadership. I don't think we want to get into the political debate, frankly. The fact is Afghanistan has a democratically elected president. He's somebody who we've worked very well with. He's somebody we intend to work very well with as we go forward. He's -- he understands the challenges that they've faced: corruption, weak governance, poppy growth, narcotics. There's a lot of challenges that they face and he's willing to deal with them. And we're willing to work with him to deal with them.

I'd say, you know, if you look at the south, there are more and more government capabilities down there. It's less -- you know, Kandahar, at least anecdotally, you know, the markets are back, there's more going on. There still are some bombs going off, but certainly the Taliban have not taken over Kandahar the way they tried to. So in a variety of places in the south, I think you're seeing more and more capability. As we apply military force, we need to bring in the police, we need to bring in the governance, we need to bring in the roads, the electricity and the schools and the hospitals so that people in those areas start getting the benefits of good governance. That's the way the area is going to stabilize. That's the way other parts of Afghanistan have been stabilized. And I would say we know what works; we just -- we need to do more of what works in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Well, why not come out and say you stand behind the president and that you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We stand behind the president and look forward to working with him throughout his term.

QUESTION: And you have confidence in his ability to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: And we have confidence in his abilities. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: That's pretty good, then.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Anything else you want me to say?

QUESTION: That's pretty good.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: But the fundamental issue is it's not for us to judge. It's for the Afghan people to judge through elections. They've made that judgment.

QUESTION: Okay, but what about charges, though, that the U.S. hasn't kind of been tough enough on President Karzai all along? I mean, there's been the same charge with President Musharraf that there was this kind of -- you found someone that you got along with, that you worked with, and this kind of fascination with a leader, but not -- you know, kind of --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We have --

QUESTION: -- tough enough about the partner you need to work with?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's just not true. I mean, I've been in these meetings. We talk very frankly with each other. He talks to us; we talk to him. This whole issue of aid effectiveness, you know, comes out of us saying, you guys have got to be more capable when it comes to spending money and they saying, you've got to give us more of your money so we can spend it directly, you're wasting it. And, you know, we work that over time and discussion and very frank discussions with ministers of finance and others into projects and capabilities and plans that can do both. And we know they've got challenges. We talk very frankly about how to deal with them.

QUESTION: Do you have faith and trust in NATO?

QUESTION: On the question of --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes. Anybody else you want me to have trust in today? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: On the question of peace agreements in Pakistan, Afghan government has always expressed serious concerns. Specifically talking on the last one that was done with the -- with Massoud in Waziristan and the Swat ones, they've been coming out again and again and the Afghan Foreign Minister was quoted that Afghanistan -- Pakistan can not do this without looking at it from an Afghan perspective. And do you think that both countries have serious problems at looking at the war against terrorism as a -- and in the region as a single battlefield? Or you think that everywhere in Afghanistan and across the border in Pakistan, the issue has to be dealt with accordingly looking into the local conditions?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think both sides increasingly understand that we need to deal with it on both sides for either side to feel safe. I mean, it's not going to do the Pakistanis any good if there's terrorist camps and training centers on the Afghan side. They come in both directions. People move back and forth. Militants move back and forth across this border. And we're going to have to deal with the problem on both sides, as I said. And so I do think the more coordination, the better we are. And we've been actually pleased by seeing some of the back and forth, some of the visits. President Karzai and President Musharraf met in December. Since the new government's come in, we've had the foreign ministers meet. I think some of the other senior leaders have been meeting. There's a real desire, I think, to work with each other across that border in a whole variety of ways.

Can we do the last one? And – Charlie?

QUESTION: Yeah. Richard, you gave a few minutes ago a broad brush of the last five years and how far we had to come –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: – to get where we are now. Would you be willing to go a little bit into the future? I mean, is this five year, \$50 billion package the one to get them up and running, or should the American taxpayers be ready to go on to this for 10, 15, 20 years?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We have a very fundamental, strategic interest in the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan: one, to protect the homeland and others from the possibility that terrorism could come out of this region again; but two, just on fundamental stability in a region that's critical to us between the Middle East and East Asia; and three is probably the opportunity that's a historic opportunity, really, a change of the last 200 years of history, of having an open Afghanistan that can act as a conduit and hub for energy, ideas, people, trade, goods from Central Asia and other places down to the Arabian Sea. So we have a very fundamental strategic interest in a long-term, stable Afghanistan. And I'm sure we'll be involved there for a long time.

I think, though, if you talk about the next five years, we need to see that we're involved in different ways. And that's part of it. As the Afghan forces increasingly take the lead, the U.S. forces and international forces should increasingly go to supporting roles and then, you know, support and maintenance roles. As the Afghan ministries increasingly take the lead, then more of the projects that need to be done should be done by a more capable Afghan Government, and less should be done directly by us or through large contractors. So I think what we look to is changing roles as we evolve so that they become more the leaders and we become more the supporters in all these areas.

QUESTION: Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay? Thank you.

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