



## Remarks to the Press: Discussing Afghanistan

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**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Okay, the first thing is, I don't work without coffee. Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. It's a real pleasure for me to be back in Germany. I've seen many of you in my previous trips here. And I think we had a regular program and consultations with Germany and I'm part of that and we have plenty of others who are conducting it, but it's always good to have a chance to compare notes with people, especially with this time on Afghanistan. To some extent we talked about the U.S.-Indian Nuclear Agreement and what's happening with that. But I would say most of the focus of my discussions has been on Afghanistan.

I was invited by the German Government to talk to the worldwide gathering of Ambassadors they are having at this moment, and I got to see some colleagues -- people I've met in (inaudible), in Washington and other parts of the world. But I think there is a obviously serious discussion going on here about Afghanistan about how were are doing and what more we need to do. As we approach the renewal of the mandates by the Parliament, I've been around to answer questions, talk to people, listen to the views of German government officials as well as people in Parliament and some of the Think Tanks. We appreciate Germany's involvement in Afghanistan. And I think we all understand and remember how important it is to us to bring good government to the ungoverned spaces of South Asia. These are places where terrorist attacks have originated from and it's important and it's in all our security interest to bring good and effective government to these areas so that they can't be a source of terrorism. And I think to some extent we are reminded of that by the overnight news about the plot that was uncovered here in Germany, which was an excellent effort we congratulate the German government for.

Afghanistan has a broader strategic importance as well as -- you might call it heart of Asia in some ways. It can be the hub between South Asia and Central Asia, (inaudible) for goods and ideas, people and energy moving back and forth between Central Asia and the Sea. And indeed progress is being made on bringing Afghanistan to this world, and I think it's one of the reasons why we are going to be interested and involved in Afghanistan for a long, long time, even after the war is won and the country is developing.

As far as the work in Afghanistan, we have talked in NATO, at the Riga Summit about a comprehensive approach. What it really boils down to is giving people throughout the country what they expect from their government. They expect safety, so you have to give them police and military forces that can take care of the security. They expect justice, so you need to stand up a court system and policemen and the whole system of justice, so that people can have a fair hearing and get their cases decided. They expect economic opportunity, so we're building roads, we are providing electricity, helping people with news crops, helping people with private sector economic development. And I noted that the Afghan economy, the legal Afghan economy has been growing very, very quickly -- 14% growth this year, which is enormous. A long way to go; it's a very feeble economy, but it's growing and I think that's a good sign. And finally people expect the basics for themselves and their children: health, education. To the extent that the government can bring those things to people, then the government can have support of the population and effective control of the territory, and that's what every government needs to have and that's the goal of the Afghan government.

A lot has been accomplished. The Bonn process has completed itself, there is a democratically elected president and parliament in Afghanistan who govern the country; we built 4000 kilometers of roads already, we the international community, including the Ring Road which serves to unify the country and provide an opportunity for Afghans to trade and interact among themselves. About 6 million children in school, 40% of them are girls, compared to 900,000 five or six years ago. The most wonderful thing you see when you travel in Afghanistan is all the children going to school. And that brings you a lot of hope for the future, whatever the difficulties of the present situation.

Finally I would like to note that 80% of the Afghan people now have access to health care. President Karzai makes the calculation that there are 50,000 babies born every year, who survive -- who survive now because they get this health care from the government. In previous times they didn't have it, they would have died. I think, as we look at what we are trying to do and all the many, many challenges ahead, we need to remember those 50,000 babies who now have a chance to grow up in a peaceful, stable Afghanistan, as long as we keep working to help them do it. So I will stop with that, be glad to take any and all questions you have.

**QUESTION:** So how do you explain those decisions of the Taliban forces under these conditions? If everything has been improved, so what is the reason, why can they get stronger and stronger again?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I think, over the years, as we try to help to the Afghan people try to stand itself up and get going, there have been a lot of areas in the country, particularly in the south, that haven't been effectively governed, where the Government hasn't been present, where in previous years even NATO forces weren't there. And so the Taliban took advantage of the lack of government in these places and was able to regroup and come back. Now, as we provide the forces necessary to push them out and the policemen necessary to maintain security and the development projects necessary to win over the population, we can push them out. And we've seen we've been able to do this -- in some parts of the country, we haven't been able to do it in all parts of the country. So a couple years ago, the major fighting was in the east. We have been able to do a lot of this mission in terms of security and governance and economics in the east. We are still fighting there but a lot less and to some extent the problems have gravitated to the south where the government still does not have effective control.

**QUESTION:** What exactly are your expectations from the German government, from Germany, when it comes to the south? How important is it that the Germans extend their forces to the south, and can you live with it if they don't?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I guess the way I put it is that we are all there on a NATO mission. It is important for the NATO Commanders, for the ISAF Commanders to have flexibility for them to be able to use all the various forces in different places, parts of Afghanistan where they are needed. Different forces bring different capabilities. Everybody is doing an important mission whether you are in the north, south, east or west. There are threats to governing authority that are not just Taliban but drug pushers, war lords; people like that need to be dealt with, where the government needs to assert itself and so forth. Wherever they are, they are performing an important mission. But within that understanding, NATO's mandate is to cover the whole country. And to do that they need to have flexibility from the forces that are there who have the capability, for example when it comes to trainers. More and more the mission is training, and accompanying and supporting the Afghan forces as they start to take the lead more and more in the fighting. And when an Afghan unit is to move to the south it is important for the trainers to be able to move to the south as well. So we would encourage as much flexibility as possible, as much flexibility as is required for the NATO mission.

**QUESTION:** Would you agree to the assessment that six years after the beginning of the NATO mission in Afghanistan the fight against drug production has failed? And could you give us a reason why the drug production has increased within the last year?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** The facts are that drug production is way up in Afghanistan. The overall total hectares planted this year was greater than ever before and the yields were even greater, so the net increase I think was something like 34%. At the same time there are more parts of the country that are poppy free. We went from about six provinces that had almost no poppy to about 13 provinces this year. And if you look at the UN drug report that just came out a week or two ago, you see that poppy production is concentrated in the areas of the insurgency. The insurgency feeds off the drug trade; to some extent they support the drug trade. You know the Taliban gave a lot of their fighters a month off so they can participate in the poppy harvest. We know they tax the drug trade and they profit from it. So it is associated with the areas where the government does not have effective control. So we have a very strong and robust counter drug program. But also as the government asserts

itself, as the government gains more control of those areas, I would hope the poppy production will come down.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Just in view of the terror arrests and the debate that has been going since late yesterday about, you know, terror threats in Germany, does Germany's involvement in Afghanistan expose it to a higher risk of terrorist attack within Germany?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** No. These people have been plotting against us for years whether we had troops in Afghanistan or not. They are plotting against the West. They are fighting against that kind of societies we represent, the values that we proclaim. And I think we need to deal with them wherever they are. And they are in this ungoverned space in Afghanistan, Pakistan, border area especially. I think yesterday's plot is a reminder that we all need to be vigilant; that we both domestically in terms of how our security services operate -- and again it is Germany's credit that they were able to uncover and stop this plot. But we also to remember this threat comes from far away in many cases and that we have to be able to deal with the problems wherever they are. And that means continuing our involvement in places like Afghanistan, because without control of these spaces, without control of these ungoverned places of the planet, we are all going to be subject to this kind of attack in the future.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) Are there concrete plans now to harmonize the police training methods? The EU, the Americans, there are both very different philosophies and could you explain on this?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't think there are different philosophies. When I was in Afghanistan last week, I went to the [Operation] Enduring Freedom Command Center and was meeting with the General there, who is in charge of training. And as we walked out, there was a huge crowd in the courtyard -- and that was the EU trainers, some of the other countries' trainers like the Canadians and others, the Afghan police people and the American trainers -- and they were having a day or two getting together and working specifically on organization, harmonization, how to make this an effective mission so that all our efforts are combined. Police have fallen behind the military in terms of training, how far we've gotten. There are different aspects to this, you need to train some people to a high level so they can be in command, but you also need to train a lot of ordinary policemen. And I have to say, the basic training is very basic. You need to put people through several rounds of training. You need to be able to deploy them. Our inspectors at the State Department looked at the police training mission in Afghanistan last year and as we worked through the years, we worked on these new budgets, we started to integrate a lot of their recommendations. Basically, what they told us is, you're doing a good job training policemen, but you need to create a national police system, you need to create the payroll system, the personnel system, the communication system, the command structure, so that they can operate as a good national police force. So that's one of the areas of emphasis that we've been trying to build over the last year or so.

And in particular, I think the Afghans are working on their Ministry of Interior, to try to improve the quality and the efficiency the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of the police. So I think there is a lot of attention now to not only training policemen, but also building a national police force. And that's a task, you know, that has probably lagged behind, which I think is getting the attention that deserves it at this point.

**QUESTION:** Ambassador Boucher, I've noticed today, before I came in, on our wire we had a story saying according to military -- saying 40 Taliban had been killed in some fighting; and we noticed that for a number of months there have been these kinds of stories in Iraq. Where after the Vietnam War there was a decision not to use body counts as their measure of success. But it seems like we've gone back to that. And some critics say that it is a sign of desperation and a lack of (inaudible) a short-term benchmark to show, you know, everyday we are doing something. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I agree that body counts are not the measure of success and it's certainly not in any way the way we measure our success. But the question gets asked and it gets answered and you all put it in the top of your stories. So I guess that's something that people are focused on, but frankly as we look at the situation, I think you have to understand the insurgency involves a lot of different elements. The primary target has to be the hardcore leadership and command systems of the Taliban -- the people who were essentially kicked out of power and who want to get back into power, who want to do to the Afghan population again what they did before. And they are doing it in areas that they move into; you know, when they are going to a village, sometimes, they just shoot people to set examples. They impose their version of law. They keep girls from going to school. They try to intimidate the local population and the leaders. I don't think Afghanistan wants that again and you have to get out the hardcore. Now, there are people then who are either intimidated because of the drug traders or other reasons who cooperate with them. Those people, perhaps those leaders, those tribal leaders can be run over. And then you have the sort of ordinary fighters. Sometimes they are ideological, and no matter what they are going to try to shoot you and you're going to have to shoot back. But in some cases it's a job and there are reconciliation programs in Afghanistan for those people to leave this, to leave the Taliban and come and support the government and work with the new system.

So I don't think we measure this by how many fighters we kill. We measure this by the government's ability to extend itself, a government's ability to be present, to bring policemen, to bring roads, to bring economic opportunities, health care and education to the people in more and more parts of the country. And that's what we've been doing. So our military operations, for example, have ultimately a development goal. There are operations in northern Helmand this year conducted largely by the British, where we were moving, pushing away a concentration of Taliban that needed to be stopped anyway. But pushing them out of an area so we can get the roads through, so we can resupply, so we can fix the generators at a major hydroelectric plant, which is going to bring electricity to the south of Afghanistan. So a lot of our military goals involve finding concentrations, finding leadership of the Taliban and then pushing them out of the areas, so we can bring in the Government.

**QUESTION:** I want to go back to the issue of the German stance on involvement in Afghanistan and the German government's perspective on military engagement. You clearly said this morning that there is a need for great flexibility in Afghanistan. The debate in Germany seems to be going in the opposite direction. The so-called "new concept" the government, the cabinet, has adopted this week emphasizes, as you know, reconstruction very firmly. The government has a strong need to de-emphasize the military engagement in Afghanistan and emphasize the reconstruction parts of the German engagement there. There is also talk to scaling down German military commitment to OEF as you know. How do you assess that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Our view is that they are all part of the picture. They all have to be done, and one of the factors that makes Germany an important ally is not just the size of its contributions but the fact that it is involved in this mission across the board -- in the military operations, in the training, in the OEF part of it but also in the civil reconstruction, and the increases in the civil reconstruction I think are very important. We work with countries to try to get them to do as much as they can. And you saw huge increases in what we were doing last year and you saw huge increases now in the budgets that we have to do training -- in the budgets that we have for civil reconstruction. So I think we are all doing that.

I don't think it is a matter so much of de-emphasizing the military; I think to some extent the progress on the civilian front and the effort on the civilian front have been undervalued and underreported. It is not -- you know -- building a road is not as exciting as fighting a battle. But the fact is long-term roads can make a bigger difference. Some of you were here when General Eikenberry was here in January along with Ambassador Neumann and will remember General Eikenberry's phrase that he said at one point: "If I could have another battalion or another road I would take the road," because that is the process of extending government and opening up access. So these are all important parts of the mission, and to the extent that talking about the civilian effort and increasing the civilian effort gets more attention to it, I think that is worthwhile.

**QUESTION:** Do you nevertheless see the danger, though, of emphasizing reconstruction may actually on the ground create distance between the German and the U.S. position on flexibility (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I do not think so. I mean, what people do on the ground is what they do on the ground. What we talk about, what we publicize, you know, there is part of the effort, and I hope we give you a fair and complete picture of it all. What is going to matter in the end is how many policemen we can put out, how many Afghan troops we can put out, how many roads we can build, how many government offices we can build and how much we can get at the command and control apparatus, the leadership of the Taliban that are trying to (inaudible) this fight, whether we talk about it or not. As long as we are doing those things, we can have confidence we are making progress.

**QUESTION:** Still the same question, unfortunately. Because when you look at the numbers -- for example the German military efforts cost like 500 million and the civilian part is just 100 million. I don't know what the actual numbers are for the American side. Is there, I mean are there people thinking about reevaluating and taking an amount of the military operation and investing it into the civilian part, because after your analysis that is obviously what will secure the state eventually.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** The civilian part does not work alone. You know you can't bring the generators into the dam unless you have a safe area and safe roads to move them across. So you have to have all three elements and you have to do them in a very integrated fashion. If you're going to use your military to sweep out the Taliban from the district, you have to be able to provide government, provide police. You have to start the aid projects quickly. Doing them in a separate and disjointed fashion doesn't work either. That's why we talked about the Comprehensive Approach in NATO. So, I think, you know military stuff is expensive. It's the only answer I can give you. I'm sure you will see the same thing with our numbers. I actually don't know the exact cost of the military mission in Afghanistan but I am sure it's similar. It's many times the cost of the civilian mission. As expensive as it is to put in roads and generators and things like that, I'm afraid it's more expensive to train police and military people and it's more expensive still to do military operations on our own. So, it's the size of the output that matters.

I realize some of these things are very expensive and require a lot of money. And I have to go to our Congress and ask for money. And they are sometimes skeptical, sometimes not. But we need to do all these things. We need to produce things on the ground -- cleared areas so that the government can come in. We need to produce policemen and army people. We need to produce roads, electricity, irrigation systems, schools, things like that.

**QUESTION:** Coming back to the terrorist attack or plot which was uncovered in Germany. Do you see any specific threat to U.S. institutions right now in Germany and other European countries? Because obviously U.S. institutions were an aim of these terrorist attacks or this plot. And second question is: Do you think there is also a heightened danger of terrorist attacks now because of this decision on the Afghanistan mandates, because that's what we are (inaudible). (Laughter)

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** That's quite a question. First of all, I don't have any information myself or any other details on this plot that was uncovered. I'm really dependent as you are on the news and newspapers. I think, first of all, it's a reminder that there is a threat to all of us. There was a threat to people who worked in the World Trade Center, there is a threat to people who ride on Spanish trains, threat to people who ride the London subway, threat to people who live and work in Germany. Those kinds of plots have been uncovered, some of them succeeded, in a number of places, and it's to Germany's credit that they were able to uncover this one. On the timing of it, I don't know, it's anybody's guess; I mean press reports indicated the police had been watching this for some time. What exactly prompted them to think about doing it now I guess needs to be revealed in subsequent investigations and trial. But I think we have to assume that these plots are going to be ongoing as long as there is a place to hatch them, train for them, plan them, and the ability to get the supplies and operate. We need to be vigilant in all of the fronts and we need to be active constantly and not say it's going to be on this timetable or that timetable.

**QUESTION:** Is there a danger that if there is an increased emphasis on reconstruction that there could become some sort of lopsided development in Afghanistan. So that, let's say, the north gets all this reconstruction effort and then, you know, there it is the south which is simply ignored and that we begin to get kind of, you know, that things will be out of balance rather than trying to get the whole country to sort of move ahead in some sort of a similar pace?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** There is a danger of that, but actually it sort of works in the other direction. I think a couple of things are important. One, it's important to keep the whole country in mind. President Karzai and the government have to govern a whole country. Some of us have [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] in different places. We tend to focus on the location of our PRTs, but really we are involved in the whole country's development and creating a stable Afghanistan throughout the country. I think that's one of the things about Germany, as well. The fact is that they are involved on the local, provincial level with their PRTs but also on the national level with [the International Security Assistance Force] and with their reconstruction efforts. Keeping the whole country in mind and the whole development scheme in mind is important. A lot of assistance goes to the south between, you know, some of the big projects, between the road building -- most of our new road building fronts are for the east and the south.

Helmand Province alone -- a province where much of the insurgency is and where most of the poppy comes from -- if it were a single country, it would be the fifth largest recipient of U.S. assistance in the world. What we see is, poppy is not grown by small farmers -- I mean sometimes it is. But they are not people without alternatives. They are people who can get assistance and who can get access to the regular economy. Poppy is being grown in areas of insurgencies and by large drug lords. And we need to go after it; we need to go after the people who produce and traffic, the networks. We need to go through the plantations themselves and we need to go after the insurgency that helps this exist. And it's not a matter of not having enough aid or assistance in those areas.

But one of the things that President Karzai just announced at the conference that he just held a week ago in Afghanistan was a good performance fund so that the provinces that are poppy-free can get money for development. We don't just stop the poppy in some place and move on to the next and forget about the guy who did a good job last year. There are incentives to provincial governments that are able to whip out the poppy in their province so that they continue to develop and remain poppy free.

**QUESTION:** There is a [lopsided](#) debate here in Germany about Operation Enduring Freedom because actually there one German unit at the moment on OEF in Afghanistan. However, what you hear in the German debate particularly is that Operation Enduring Freedom being the U.S. war against terror is in fact alienating, maybe some of the NATO member states but also alienating part of Afghan public opinion because it is top-heavy and a hard-hitting mission. And even Karzai said himself we have to really count these casualties; it was too many and it had to change. Are you getting this feedback that the terms of the OEF mission has to be changed?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** You know, we talked about Operation Enduring Freedom as well as ISAF quite a bit during my discussions, particularly with people in the Parliament who were asking that question. I guess I find it a little surprising because essentially these are two things that need to be done militarily. You need to be able to move in, secure territory, push the Taliban concentrations out of areas where they have operated or where they have been able to concentrate. But you also need to be able to go after the command and control. You know, as one person said, you can try to stop a suicide bomber but you have to go back and get the cell that trained him and sent him. And that's where you need both sides. You need an ISAF kind of force that can stabilize parts of the country but you also need a counterterrorism operation. Enduring Freedom, let's remember, as I said before, it's mostly a training mission. And then it's deployment of Coalition forces and Afghan forces together in a counterterrorism mission. And then as we move forward more and more of the Afghans want to take the lead and are able to take the lead. We need to be able to work with them all the way through -- from training to deployment to actual combat. And that's what Enduring Freedom helps us do. I think they are both important parts of the mission.

Second of all, they operate under essentially the same ground rules. There are technical directives in both ISAF and Enduring Freedom on the use of air power and on how to avoid civilian casualties. Both NATO and the Operation Enduring Freedom troops sometimes don't engage. They don't go after targets because the Taliban tends to move in to use civilian areas, use farm houses, use people as shields. We try to be very, very careful about civilians and about civilian casualties. It is something President Karzai has raised and it is something that we have talked about ourselves. But there are essentially the same technical directives for both ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom on how to avoid civilian casualties.

One of the things, I think, that is important is not only how we operate and how we use air power -- we have to be very careful about that -- but also the Afghans are better able to operate in many of these circumstances than foreign troops are. So if we can move more and more to bring forward the Afghan forces to get them trained up, equipped and capable -- for us an ongoing process, but as they become more capable and we move to more of a training and support mission for them -- many of these operations will become joint operations. And I think those operations are in the end more effective and result in fewer civilian casualties. So I think we are doing everything possible to avoid civilian casualties and will continue to do everything we can do to avoid civilian casualties.

**QUESTION:** Following up on this, as we have now military personal on the ground in Operation Enduring Freedom, would you be disappointed if the German parliament in November should decide to stop the German involvement in the mission?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** We still haven't filled out the full NATO mission. As I said, commanders need to be able to call in forces from different parts of NATO. Same applies to Enduring Freedom; they have to be able to draw on different capabilities, different forces. Whether they are using these forces at one moment or not, I think it is important to have the commitment to be part of it, because, as I said, it's an essential task. I guess I'd say I'm always disappointed in decreases and I'm always happy at increases. Today is a day when I'm able to be happy at the civilian reconstruction increases, and I hope that will continue in the future. We don't see subtractions from the mission; we see additions to it, and as I said, one of the important aspects of Germany's contribution is that it is involved in all these different areas. That I think is something that makes Germany a very valuable ally in Afghanistan.

**QUESTION:** China is one of the Afghan neighbors but we don't hear a lot about Chinese engagement in Afghanistan. Maybe you could tell us how strong China's involvement in Afghanistan is -- for reconstruction as well?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't have a lot of detailed information on China. They have made contributions; they tried to help in the past. They had people killed and kidnapped in some of their projects in Pakistan and Afghanistan; that makes them somehow wary. I guess I'd just say we'd welcome any contributions that they can make but I don't put too much emphasis on what they are able to do there.

**QUESTION:** Just a very short question. I want to go back to that NATO thing. Because we had the same problem and you will say the same thing in a few months time. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer keeps saying it. The caveats (inaudible) The Dutch are getting very nervous. I really want to sort of press you a little. Germany has 3000 troops up in the relatively quiet part of northern Afghanistan. And after a huge debate they provided -- finally -- Tomadoes to support NATO. Is Germany being a proper NATO ally when it comes to bringing stability to the south? Thank you.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** That's a follow-up to the question on China?

**QUESTION:** No. It's related to it because Angela Merkel has just come back from China.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Oh, I see it. I got the connection now. Angela Merkel just came back from China, so is Germany a good ally in Afghanistan (Laughter).

Germany is a good ally in Afghanistan. We all need to do everything we can to support the NATO mission in Afghanistan; it's still not at full strength. There is still important fighting to do but there is also important work to do on the civilian side, the reconstruction side, the poppy side. So, I think our attitude has been to welcome every contribution. There is no part of the country that is immune from threats to the government. This is a new government; this is a developing country. It has to assert itself; it has to extend itself; it has to extend itself in the north as much as it does in the south. We face different threats in different places. Some places might be warlords, some places criminal groups, some places drug barons, but in the end the government needs to be able to work in all these areas and not be intimidated by the people that would resist it. So, the mission in the north is important. But within the NATO guidelines, within the NATO standards we need to fill out the NATO requirements -- all of us; and we need to give the commanders in the NATO forces the flexibility that they need to use those forces effectively.

**MODERATOR:** Last question.

**QUESTION:** I'm always embarrassed to ask, but where is Osama Bin Laden and is it still important to get him?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's still important to get him because he and Mullah Omar are still part of the command and control apparatus, although maybe not the direct commanders of what is going on now. He is somewhere out there. I don't know if you have ever traveled there. You go from sort of northern Pakistan-Afghanistan border which is like the Alps, only higher, down to Baluchistan, where it looks like the Wild West in the Westens when the gang used to commit a robbery and ride off and hide in the canyons somewhere. It's very difficult territory. It's big; it's forbidding. There are plenty of places to hide. They are up there somewhere. We continue to look for them; we will continue to go after them -- we, the Afghans, the Pakistanis -- and I think eventually we will find them. But I can't say when; I don't know it and I don't know where they are now.

**QUESTION:** Is it still important?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Yes, it's still important. But you know one commander doesn't necessarily change the outcome. You have to sort of get the system of command and control. You have to get the roots and the branches and you have to look for the command structure. If you look at what has happened for example this year: one of the centers of Taliban activity, what we called the Quetta Shura, essentially Afghan Taliban who operated in Pakistan. And out often or twelve members they had, earlier this year three of them were eliminated; one of them arrested by the Pakistanis, too, including Mullah Dadullah, the leader; they were killed in Afghanistan. Those were joint operations with Pakistan; they were part of those operations. Across the board I think we need to look at what can be done. There is pressure from the Pakistani side; there is pressure from the Afghan side. We are going after these commanders -- mid-level commanders who go out in the field, leaders might go back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and also senior figures. But you have to just kind of roll up the whole apparatus in order to be able to eliminate the threat.

Thank you all.

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