



Pakistan/Afghanistan - U.S. Relations

Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We're on the record and I'm on my way to the airport, so we're going to --

QUESTION: Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We'll do this, take three or four questions and try to give short answers.

The Secretary met today with Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi. I would say, overall, it was a very positive meeting. They did talk about the border incident. They discussed and supported the idea of a joint military investigation. That's been agreed between our militaries. They agreed that we are partners in the war on terror; we need to work together. The terrorism coming from Pakistan/Afghanistan border region is a threat to both peoples, Pakistan -- actually Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and elsewhere.

And it's important that we're all in this together, and therefore, we want to look carefully at this incident, investigate, and look especially at how to avoid any such recurrence. The Secretary expressed our regret for the deaths of the Pakistani soldiers in particular, knowing that they too are allies in the war on terror.

We also discussed -- they also discussed how to deal with problems that Pakistan faces more broadly, the overall problems of extremism, including need for development in the border regions, as well as security, the problems that Pakistan is facing in financial matters, in energy and food. And the United States -- we discussed -- they discussed together how the United States can assist in some of those problems.

They agreed it was important to continue our high-level dialogue with the new government. And in that regard, Richard Boucher will go out in early July. And the Foreign Minister will visit the United States at an early, convenient date.

QUESTION: After early July?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Presumably after that visit, but we'll work on dates. He gets -- if he finds dates, they tend to overlap. He gets (inaudible), presumably somewhat after that.

QUESTION: When you said they agreed on a joint military investigation, has that -- our stories have all talked about Gates offering that, but I did not realize that it was now in agreement to do that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It has been -- I think there is an understanding between the militaries that they will conduct and do an investigation. The foreign ministers agreed that that was the right way to go.

QUESTION: You said the Secretary had expressed regret. Do you understand, at this point, enough of what happened that there's -- along with that goes accepting responsibility for it or not?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I think it -- that's why we use a word like "regret" at this stage, because, you know, we're sorry that this happened. This is not something either side wanted. It was something that both sides regret that it happened and we need to find out how and why it happened, what exactly happened, get to the bottom of it jointly and then figure out how to make sure we avoid this in the future. That's the --

QUESTION: He wanted to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: -- tenor of the discussion.

QUESTION: And following on Arshad's question, does the -- does cooperation in either this military investigation or, as you said, further cooperation in the war on terror, is that what he was asking for? He wanted -- he had told some reporters this morning that he wanted to have greater intelligence-sharing and greater involvement from the start.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: They -- we didn't get into too many specifics of that, but that's something we certainly looked at very closely with the Pakistani Government, how we can do more particularly cross-border communications in terms of what's going on. And there was some notice to the Pakistani side that these operations were underway. But I think we all believe that the incident shows there was some need for even better cross-border communication.

But that -- I have to say that's a comment I make and that was not -- they didn't get that detailed into specific solutions. In the meeting with the Secretary (inaudible) -- the Secretary and the Foreign Minister said we need to look into this and figure out how to avoid such incidents in the future.

QUESTION: When you said there was some notice, they were informed that the operation would be happening in where?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Again, we'll let the military account for the details of that. There was some cross-border communication as the engagement started with the militants, (inaudible) people coming across.

QUESTION: Is an investigation already underway? Do you already have people on the ground, or do the Pakistanis? Have they --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think both sides are looking into it. I don't know if it constitutes a formal investigation, but the idea of working them together and working together is something that we want to do.

QUESTION: Do you want to send people to the site?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We'll let the detailed experts figure that stuff out.

QUESTION: And more generally, about your relations with the new Pakistani Government, did you discuss the discussions with the tribes in the border region?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We talked about the overall approach to fighting (inaudible), the need for development in the region, need for security, need to work with the tribes, but also the need to avoid compromises with militants – with the extremists.

QUESTION: And do they agree with that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's generally the approach this government has taken and the civilian government has taken.

QUESTION: And you don't (inaudible) you know, it seemed from Secretary Negroponte's testimony, you really did have or do have misgivings about --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we – the way I would put it is everything we've heard from this government, from the civilians, is that their policy is to negotiate with the tribes and not with terrorists. And that's something we can support and agree with. We have questions about some of the things that are taking place and we'll continue to raise those questions. And we do have misgivings about some of the things that we see going on these days.

QUESTION: Such as?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Such as some of the negotiations.

QUESTION: Such as? Which ones? The ones in Swat?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The ones in Swat and Waziristan.

QUESTION: So are you drawing –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: But again, they didn't get in to those details today.

QUESTION: Did she make that clear, though? The misgivings that you have, particularly about those sensitive issues?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: She made clear that we could support the policy the way they expressed it in terms of working with the tribes and not with (inaudible).

QUESTION: Clearly, you're drawing a distinction between the policy as expressed and what you see being done on the ground, so did she –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some misgivings about what we see on the ground. They didn't get in to any --

QUESTION: And just on the economic stuff, you guys have been hinting very broadly that you're looking to help them on financial matters. They've got tremendous budgetary problems, as you know better than I do. Are you – can you tell us – I can't imagine that you're not. Are you actually talking about the possibility of long-term, you know, whether it's direct budgetary support or greater financial commitments to Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we're looking in the longer term at how we take advantage of the democratic opportunity to offer broader and deeper support to Pakistan generally. But they're also dealing with some immediate problems, and we are taking what steps we can to help them with that. And we're looking at things like food problems and financial problems and seeing what we can do. They're talking to the World Bank about the loans and help and we're involved in that as well.

QUESTION: But are you thinking about – and can you just say yes --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I can't define –

QUESTION: -- thinking about bilateral money for –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I can't – I can't say that at this point.

QUESTION: PL 480 loans for food?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't --

QUESTION: Can we do Afghanistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't have anything (inaudible).

QUESTION: Yeah, Afghanistan.

QUESTION: How much time do you have left, Richard?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Oh, two minutes.

QUESTION: Okay, that – can we do Afghanistan in two minutes? The Secretary's meeting with President Karzai this morning, it – did you, in addition – we heard her saying, you know, we thought this was a good conversation of expression of support and so forth. Did they – what – did they get into any of the, to use your word from a moment ago, misgivings that we heard expressed from some of the other delegates yesterday about –

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: You used the word misgivings --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay.

QUESTION: -- but in reference to Pakistan -- in -- about corruption, about the transparency and so forth, did --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The -- first of all, most of the meeting was (inaudible) Secretary and President Karzai was one of them. So I'm giving this to you third hand, second, whatever.

QUESTION: Hopefully secondhand.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, hopefully secondhand. They -- I mean, first of all, they're both very pleased with the outcome of the conference, both on terms of the strategy and the emphasis, and just the more donors and more donors giving more. Really, a lot of people stepped up to the plate, some for the first time and some who were already there really came through. And I think they're both -- they both noted that. Well, you heard them -- I think you heard them mention some countries. I'm not sure.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: But -- and they also, then -- they followed up on the -- in their discussion, the Secretary's discussion, they followed up on the issues of the conference, including the implementation issues, aid effectiveness, how do we spend more directly, how do we do more effective -- what can the Afghan Government do to curb corruption and help spend money more effectively, including institution-building and other steps that they can take. And that'll be a discussion that continues, I think, with the donors and the Afghan Government, particularly through the UN Special Representative in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: There was quite a lot of discussion yesterday at the conference about the upcoming election in Afghanistan. A number of the delegates mentioned it. Do you think -- did you get a sense that people are looking beyond Karzai or hoping for an alternative to him?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. The sense is that everybody wants there to be a good election. And we're not voters. We're -- we assist and support the Afghan election process. It's the Afghan voters that'll decide who they want to win, not us.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, guys.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay.

MR. MCCORMACK: Richard has to go fly somewhere.

QUESTION: Where are you flying to?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: America. I haven't been there for a long time.

QUESTION: That place? (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: It's a good place. It's a good place to go.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: All right. Thanks. Good to see you guys.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thanks for doing this, we really appreciate it.

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