



U.S.-Pakistan Dialogue

Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs

Remarks to the Press

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure for me to be back in Pakistan. It's a pleasure to see so many familiar, friendly faces again. I always appreciate to [chance to] come here and talk to people and understand the situation on the ground. And I think that's probably the primary benefit of my coming to Pakistan. As you know, I come on a pretty regular basis, so it's always a pleasure to be here, and I'm pleased to be back.

I'm here this time as the result of a discussion that Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Qureshi had in Paris a couple of weeks ago, where we looked at all the things happening in Pakistan, we looked at all the various difficult issues that are being faced by the Pakistani people right now, and we decided we needed a very active dialogue between the United States and Pakistan, almost constant dialogue, to look at how we can deal with those issues, how we can work with all the leaders here to deal with those issues. So they asked me if I would come out sooner, and here I am. Of course I said yes, since my boss was counting on me. I was glad to come.

We have a couple of Congressional delegations that happen to be in Pakistan right now. There's a great deal of Congressional interest, and they have a recess right now for our Fourth of July holiday, so they're out here coincidentally at the same time. And I think as you look at it over the course of the next few months, you'll have economic officials, and U.S. officials, obviously, military and other officials come out, and we're just going to keep up this very regular dialogue with Pakistan across the board as the people of Pakistan try to face some of the very difficult issues that are confronting them right now.

I was able, during the course of these three days, to meet with the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's National Security Advisor, the Senior Advisor for Interior, the Chief of Army Staff. I went down to Lahore yesterday and met with the Chief Minister and the Governor, and Mr. Nawaz Sharif, and business leaders. I came back and had a chance to see the President today, and the Finance Secretary, and I'll meet with the Foreign Minister a little later this afternoon. So I've gotten around and seen a lot of people.

The basic focus, I think, of all these discussions, is to tell people that we want to work with the leaders of Pakistan on the issues that are confronting the Pakistani people right now. And that means the basic issues of safety of the people from extremists, from bombings, and the problems that have harmed Pakistani people for the last year or two; the problems getting food for their families in distant places, the problem of energy and turning on the lights so the kids can do their homework. And that's where our focus is, as we try to look at those problems and see how we can help. As we help Pakistan on all the broader issues, all the broader goals, we realize that there are some very immediate problems that have to be dealt with, and so we're trying to work with them across the board in dealing with those problems that affect the people of Pakistan.

One of my messages is not only that we want to work with you, but that we hope that you, too, will focus on these issues. We have encouraged all to focus on these issues, on issues of safety, issues of food, and issues of energy that mean so much to the people of Pakistan right now. As we do this, we do this in a broader context of U.S. support for Pakistan, and U.S. support for the success of Pakistan as a moderate nation, as a prosperous nation, as a stable democracy. We very much welcomed the democratic opportunity here in Pakistan. I've had a lot of conversations myself with members of Congress, and I know that this appreciation is across the board, from the Administration to the Congress to the civil society and the academic community in the United States, that we do think Pakistan has a real opportunity now, and we need to help Pakistan.

We need to help Pakistan modernize its education system, build its health care system, modernize its government and the way government functions, build up the democratic institutions that can guarantee democracy for the long term, modernize the security apparatus and the military forces so that they can deal with the problems that confront them. The United States is going to continue to be committed to those goals. We're going to help with those goals. I hope we will continue to increase our assistance as we have over the last few years, but really to make sure that we are working for the people of Pakistan, and to confront the immediate problems and to build a stable, modern, and long-term nation that will be a friend of ours, and we can be a friend to it. So that's why I'm here in the immediate context and in the larger context. I'll be glad to take your questions.

QUESTION: Sir, this is Hanif Khalid, with the Daily Jang. How would you evaluate your meeting with Nawaz Sharif, and how would you view his policies and principles?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think I should be commenting on any particular politician. I think that they find a way to express themselves fairly regularly. I do want to say, the basic message that I talked about with Mr. Sharif and others is the same. It's the need to focus on these serious issues, to focus on the problems of the people of Pakistan, and the need to move forward, not get mired in the past. So that's what we're trying to do, and I expressed to him our desire to keep working with him and his party as we work with the other parties of Pakistan to try to move forward on these issues.

QUESTION: My name is Javed Siddiq, I represent Nawa-e-Waqt. Mr. Assistant Secretary, I want your comments on this widely held view in Pakistan that the United States supports the dictators and extends only lip service to democracy. You have been quoted today in the reports that you want Mr. Musharraf to stay on as President of Pakistan and complete his tenure. I want your comment on that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it's just a wrong impression. There is no doubt, and should be no doubt in anybody's mind, worldwide, that the United States supports democracy. We worked very, very hard last year on this transition to democracy. We worked very hard with the leaders of Pakistan at that time. We are working very hard with the leaders of Pakistan now to try to stabilize the democracy, to build the institutions that can help maintain and guarantee democracy over the longer term. We welcome the new government. President Bush has met with Prime Minister Gilani already, and he looks forward to seeing him again soon. I think there should be no question in anyone's mind. Our commitment is to Pakistan as a nation, Pakistan as a democracy, and Pakistanis as people who deserve a chance to live in freedom and safety and prosperity.

QUESTION: Ambassador, Farhan Bokhari with the Financial Times newspaper. This is a two-part question. You, of course, repeated the U.S. Government's view that you are committed to democracy, in this country. But on the whole question of decision-making, dealing with centers of power, compared to eight months ago, when there was only one man in charge of the military and the civilian government, what is your feeling at a very practical level when you deal with the new elected government, the President, the military – is it causing any difficulties? Are you learning any new lessons from this experience? What does it tell you about the new Pakistan of 2008 as opposed to 2007? And maybe, just as an add-on, if you could comment on how much convinced you are now of Pakistan's commitment to fighting terrorism, given that during your stay here, some operation has been launched around Peshawar which has received different kinds of responses from people – some think it's genuine, others are convinced that it's not. Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Democracy is messy. We know that. We've got a democracy. Our democracy is messy sometimes. It's not an easy way to make decisions, but it's, in our mind, the best way to make decisions, because ultimately it provides that solid basis of popular support, that solid basis of national consensus, to move forward on big issues. And so that's why we welcomed it. That's why we said last year that we looked for a transition to democracy, we looked for a civilian government, and we hoped that there would be as broad as possible a consensus among moderate forces to deal with the issues. So there is a coalition composed of

moderate forces. There was an election that brought in, by and large, a moderate result, that reflected the desires of the Pakistani people to move their government in that direction. And so that's what we want to work with. And that's a solid basis, but it's got to be a solid basis for action.

That's where I think part of my visit now is to get people to focus on the actions that need to be taken, that can be taken, to deal with the problems that the people face, the problems of safety, the problems of food, the problems of electricity, and then the long-term problems of modernizing the nation. That's our goal, and that's what we think is the best basis for moving forward, even though, yes, it's complicated. You have to deal with a lot of players, and they have to come together, but they are coming together. I think that's one of the better signs that we have, that there's been some progress in achieving consensus and understanding on how to move forward on terrorism, for example. The statement that was issued last week by the Prime Minister's office, I think, is a step forward. It defines clearly a policy approach that we should be able to support, and that gives a basis for moving forward on one of these very difficult issues.

So I think as the politics comes together, as the people come together, it's a much more solid basis to deal with the problems. I don't underestimate the difficulty of the problems, and that's the answer to the last part of your question. The operation around Peshawar is very welcome. I think all the people up there have had enough of this harassment by these groups, by the threats to Peshawar, to the environs, to industry and trucking and shipping up in that area. People have had enough of that. They want a safe environment. It's good that the Frontier Corps and local authorities are moving to establish that safety for people of the area. But it's a reminder of how much of a problem there is up in that part of the country, because a year or two years ago people were not talking about that danger. And that danger has grown. Now it's being dealt with, but there are other dangers that need to be dealt with as well in the Tribal Areas. So in the end, I think the only thing that makes a difference in people's lives is: do they feel safer, are they going to be safer? The only way to make them safer is to deal with the very dangerous people coming out of these areas, and this has to be continued to make sure that all those dangers are dealt with. Otherwise, people won't be safe.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, this is Naveed Akhmed, with GEO English here. NATO forces, of which U.S. is a leading partner, and probably a leader, often violate Pakistan's airspace and land borders, which not only questions Pakistan government's commitment to fight war on terror, but also creates anti-U.S. feelings in urban areas all across the country, and probably elsewhere where Pakistanis are. How do you comment on these violations? Have you raised this issue or this was discussed with the Pakistani officials you met, starting with the Army Chief to anybody till Presidency? And the second thing I want to just inquire about, the reports of some stolen parts of U.S. nuclear establishment were reported in U.S. newspapers. Don't they raise concern about U.S. nuclear arsenal security? It was recently in U.S. newspapers.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Not the ones I read. I'm sorry. I don't have any doubts about the security of the nuclear establishment in the United States. I just never heard any serious questions raised. Obviously, it's a constant effort to make sure everything's properly accounted for. There were a couple of mistaken shipments recently, I think, but in the end nothing of any danger and nothing that would raise questions about the integrity and the safety of the U.S. nuclear establishment, the nuclear arsenal.

NATO forces in the border – I think we're all very committed to a policy that says that we have to deal with these dangers, and that the best way to deal with these dangers is for Afghanistan and NATO and U.S. forces to deal with problems on the Afghanistan side of the border, and for Pakistan, with whatever support they might want from others in terms of training or equipment, for Pakistan to deal with the problems on the Pakistan side of the border. And to do that, you're going to have to have very effective coordination. We had a very regrettable incident at Mohmand recently. It was very sad to see the loss of life on the part of Pakistani soldiers. It's a reminder of how important that cross-border coordination is, how important it is to all of us to make sure that we work on the problem, that we work on the problem together. That's what we intend to do, and we're doing an investigation now, together, because it is a common problem.

What we've found is if we push on the dangerous militants, the extremists that are coming out of the Pakistani side of the border, we can push them back into Pakistan. If Pakistan pushes on them, they tend to come into Afghanistan. What we need is for both sides to push on them if we're going to deal with the problem. And that has to be done in a coordinated fashion. So our desire is to work with Pakistan so that we and the Afghans take care of the problem on the Afghan side, and the Pakistani army, with whatever support they need, can take care of the problem on the Pakistani side.

QUESTION: Sajjad Malik from Daily Times. My question is: what is your assessment of Al Qaeda potential to carry out an attack something like the magnitude of 9/11, and do you have any plan to eliminate their hideouts from the Tribal Areas or from other places?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Al Qaeda is very, very dangerous and remains a grave threat to the United States, to the western world, but also to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ordinary Pakistanis have suffered from bombings that are Al Qaeda- and Taliban-sponsored. You lost one of your great national leaders, Benazir Bhutto, to a horrible bombing last year. I don't think there is any question that we're not the only targets, and unfortunately you and your people, anybody in Pakistan that's trying to move forward, is a target, as well.

So we're all going to have to deal with this and unfortunately they still maintain a certain ability to operate in the Tribal Areas. They have friends that are Pakistanis and Afghans in the Taliban that help them. And while we can deal with a lot of the problems by helping stabilize the area politically, build it up economically, and give young people different opportunities, some of these people are very hard-core, very dangerous, and we're going to have to fight them. I think that has to be something, as I said before, that's a job for us on the Afghan side of the border, a job for the Pakistani authorities on this side of the border. In the end it really amounts to the same thing on both sides, and that's extending the rule of government on both sides of the border: extending the capabilities of government, the opportunities, the services so that people on both sides can get good governance, can get justice, can get economic opportunity, can get healthcare, education. That's what they want. We're doing that by helping the Afghan government build its capabilities in the provinces, especially in the border areas. We've been able to stabilize large regions of Afghanistan that way, but you need to do that on the Pakistani side, too. And so we're helping not only with the military action which is going to be necessary, but also with economic development and the other actions that are necessary to stabilize these areas.

QUESTION: Hi, Nahal Toosi with the Associated Press. Do you support Pakistan efforts to reach a peace deal with Baitullah Mehsud's representatives?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We support the discussions that were described in the paper that the Prime Minister's office put out last week. They make very clear their intention was to negotiate with tribes, not with militants. We don't support making concessions to the violent leaders like Baitullah Mehsud. We don't support releasing terrorists into the wild so they can strike again. But we do support working with the tribes so that the tribes become responsible for their own security. We do support working with the tribes so they help with stabilization and development in their areas. So in those terms, the way it's discussed, yes, we support that. We have had concerns about what we've seen negotiated and discussed in recent weeks and months, because we're not sure that the discussions really were following that guideline, but I guess for the moment it appears that those discussions are off. But I think our intention is to support the government as it reaches out to the tribes and gets the tribes on their side and gets the tribes to become responsible for stability and security.

QUESTION: This is Fakhar Rehman for NBC. Mr. Secretary, my question is related with, you have had wide-ranging meetings, also you met Pakistani politicians. What is your assessment about the future of this coalition government? How do you see the political stability in Pakistan? And secondly, what kind of prospects do you see with the funds that you have in your pocket for development in Tribal Areas? What can you offer for future Tribal Areas?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't have much money in my pocket today. I didn't come with a lot of funds in my pocket.

The assessment of the coalition and its future? I don't know. I'm trying to read the Pakistani press and learn as much as I can about it. I'm trying to talk to the politicians. But in the end, stability and democracy are not based on one government or one coalition. It's based on having an electoral system. It's based on having institutions that can guarantee the democracy. So that's where our focus is. Our focus is not on a particular party or a particular government. It's on helping Pakistan as a society build the stability into their democracy, build the institutions, the electoral commission, the mechanisms to guarantee public financing, anti-corruption, independence of the judiciary, the other law enforcement mechanisms that can help guarantee fair treatment for all. That's our goal. It's to help those Pakistani institutions so that they can have long-term democracy, because no single government lasts for very long; it's a matter of months or years in most places.

On the question of how we spend money in the Tribal Areas: we are already working in the Tribal Areas on development, on infrastructure, on training programs, on maternal and child health. We've been building schools and roads for quite a few years. We're expanding that now. These programs have been promised to fund at the

rate of about \$150 million a year, \$750 million over five years. They're already under way this year, and they will continue. They will continue, we hope, to bring opportunity to the Tribal Areas, bring an administrative structure to the Tribal Areas, bring schools and education and health care to people who really need it. And that's our goal, that's one of our goals in helping to stabilize this area.

QUESTION: My name is Tariq Mahmood, I'm representing ARY One World Television. There is some news that Pakistan has some secret deal with the United States that they can operate in Pakistani area, getting any information about Al-Qaeda. Is it true?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, I come back to where I started on this question. We have a strong desire, along with Pakistan, to eliminate the Al-Qaeda presence. We want to do that. The main thrust of our effort is to support Pakistani efforts, to support the Pakistani security forces in their ability and their desire to eliminate that threat. We also support the other political and economic developments to try to eliminate that threat. Ultimately, it's going to be Pakistan that's going to extend government to these areas, that's going to stabilize these areas. It's going to help the people of these areas, and it's going to help get rid of the foreign fighters and the dangerous militants that are out there.

QUESTION: This is Shaukat Piracha from AAJ Television. It is a fact in Pakistan, you rightly pointed out, that you worked hard for a transition to democracy, but the perception is that perhaps the United States has not accepted the February 18 election results vis-à-vis the future of President Musharraf and the peace deals by the NWFP government with the tribes. Your comments, please.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know what to say. You say, on the one hand, the facts are that we helped support the transition and that we helped support the democratic election, but there's a perception that it's different. Well, the perception's wrong. And maybe you can write that in the newspaper and tell people that perception's wrong, because we have supported the transition to democracy. We worked very hard until the last days right before the election. A lot of the Americans at the Embassy here, I personally did, a lot of American leaders worked very hard to make sure that everything possible was done to ensure a credible election. And it turned out to be a credible election that does represent what the Pakistani people wanted. We respect those results. We want to work with the new government. But we want to work with all the leaders of Pakistan to move forward. That's our goal, and that's why we're trying to bring the focus back to these fundamental issues, these issues that really need to be dealt with. And whether it's the political parties, the institutions, the army, the presidency, we hope that everybody can focus on these very important issues to try to reach consensus, to try to look at how the nation can move forward and tackle these issues that are so very, very important to the people of Pakistan.

QUESTION: There is another impression that the U.S. is also blocking the restoration of deposed judges and they are also hindering the coalition government to send the President home.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We're not involved in the debate on judges. Our goal is to see an independent judiciary in Pakistan. But how to achieve that goal needs to be decided by the political parties. I know there's a lot of discussion of President Musharraf and his role and his future. Frankly, President Musharraf's not the issue right now. This is not the problem that Pakistan faces right now. The problem the Pakistani people face is that there are dangers of bombings and suicide bombings, there's rising food prices, there's energy difficulties, their electricity is being cut off through load-shedding. So I'm not out here to get involved in political issues. I'm out here to try to help focus on these issues and see what we can do to help.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, Jim Rupert from Bloomberg News. You say that the Bush Administration is determined to promote democracy. Does the Bush Administration regard last year's re-election of President Musharraf as a legitimate and democratic exercise?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: President Musharraf is President of Pakistan. That's the way we deal with him in this new role, in this new circumstance. But we deal with all the leaders of Pakistan. There's no question about that. We work with people within their area of responsibility, and the government has responsibility now to do these things.

QUESTION: Does that mean you don't comment on the legitimacy of that electoral process?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I answered your question. He's the President of Pakistan.

QUESTION: Assistant Secretary, Candace Rondeaux, Washington Post. Recently in Afghanistan there have been some very strong statements out of President Karzai's office about incursions, or at least support of incursions over the Pakistani border into the Tribal Areas. There has also been a lot of talk out of NATO officials discussing the issue of complicity on the part of the ISI and some of the support for the Tribal Areas and activities going on there. I'm wondering if you've had any conversations with your interlocutors here about that issue and what you came away with.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've had a lot of conversations about the need to stop cross-border movement of the militants, suicide bombers, terrorists that operate in the Tribal Areas. We know that suicide bombers get trained there that come in both directions. They come to kill innocent Afghans. They come to kill innocent Pakistanis. I think we understand why Afghans would be upset and concerned about that. We think you have to take that one step farther and that is: how do you deal with it? We can do a lot on the Afghan side in terms of stabilization and stopping people from trying to come across the border. But in the end the Pakistanis have to take action on the Pakistani side to get at these militants who are harming all of us.

I noted again the emerging policy statements that we've seen from the new government, the statement last week from the Prime Minister's office that made clear that they want an end to foreign fighters and cross-border activity, and an end to the training of militants in those areas. I think all those three things go together because you've got foreign fighters training militants who come in both directions, going to Pakistan, going to Afghanistan, so we all should be very concerned about this. We all should need to take action on this. We talked to, we worked with the Pakistani authorities from all the different services to try to deal with these problems. We all need to focus on moving ahead and, as I said, take action until we solve it.

QUESTION: I am Syed Asif Ali from Business Plus TV Channel. Sir, would you like to explain how much important is President Musharraf and his experience for the USA in the war against terror?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You guys keep asking me about President Musharraf. I hope you ask me about Prime Minister Gilani and his experience and his authority. I hope you ask me about Foreign Minister Qureshi and his experience and his authority. I hope you ask me about all the other political leaders and all the people, like Rehman Malik and others who are trying to deal with these problems: the Finance Ministry and those people are trying to deal with the problems of the food crisis and oil crisis. There are a lot of people around here with a lot of experience. We think it's time for the nation to make use of all of them. We think it's time for them to contribute all their experience and all their abilities in dealing with these very serious questions. That is what I am here for, to make sure the United States focuses, to make sure the United States contributes to dealing with these problems of terrorism, of food, of energy, problems that really affect the Pakistani people. We have to try to encourage the people here to put their focus on that, as well.

Thank you very much. It's good to see you all.

