



Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations With the U.S.

Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, Richard A. Boucher
 With Faiz Rehman of ARY TV
 Washington, DC
 October 9, 2008

QUESTION: Richard, thank you very much for your time.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you, it's good to be with you.

QUESTION: I'll ask this question, since the situation in Afghanistan affects Pakistan and the Pakistani people a lot.

There have been some stories regarding Afghanistan, the policy review that the White House is considering, in today's Times. What do you think? Are we going to take a different direction in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we review policy on a pretty regular basis. I can think...I've been here three years almost now, and we've done several major reviews just to look at where we were, what's working, what's not, what we need to do more of, what we need to do less of. I think that's what's going on this year.

One of the elements is: how do you work with local government? How do you help local government work with the people and the tribes? That's an important element. How do you balance the police and the military? We've just decided to upgrade the military size in Afghanistan. How much police do you need to complement that? What's the different roles? So there are issues like that that we look at.

So I wouldn't say a change in direction, but I would say adjustments to the course to make sure that we're doing the best possible job on the political front, on the economic front, and on the military front, along with the Afghan government.

QUESTION: Like talking to the Taliban, on both sides [inaudible] U.S. policy now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's been a longstanding policy, that there needs to be some reconciliation process so that people who want to abandon the violence and accept the government, they have to have a means to do that. And there are different levels of programs in Afghanistan, for lower level people, fighters who just signed up for the money, to come back over; for groups or villages to change to the government side and get the benefits of being part of the government. Or even some of these higher level reconciliation things have been discussed before. So we've been very supportive of that. We've made very clear that President Karzai's redlines, his ideas about how people have to abandon violence and come to the government side have been fairly clear. So we've supported that.

On the Pakistani side we've made clear we do think there's a difference between negotiating with the tribes and talking to the militants. You can give benefits to the tribes and the people who come to support the government structure. But you can't sort of carve out a piece of territory where you're allowed to harbor guns and terrorists, or where you're allowed to keep girls out of school or whip people in markets. You have to have people coming into the ranks of the governed.

QUESTION: On the Pakistani side people feel, especially in Pakistan, that there is more emphasis on the military tactics. Is it true? How much is it true? And do you see any change, like combining with other aspects of the society, like political strategy or economic?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think everybody understands there needs to be an integrated strategy. Economic development, political context and military activity need to go together. Perhaps this year because the militants have expanded and gotten more violent, there's been more fighting, so that's risen in prominence. I think I understand that. But we've also been going forward with the kinds of economic development projects for the tribal areas and the northwest frontier. We've been pushing forward on schools and roads and electricity and vocational training. And we've been pushing forward with our Congress to try to get the economic reconstruction opportunity zones passed, to get trade benefits up there. The Pakistani government's been moving on the political front.

So I think we are moving on all fronts. But you're right, because of the fighting, because the militants have gotten more violent, it means the military side has taken more prominence, but [the different parts of the strategy] are all there still, and they're all being pursued.

QUESTION: There seem some discrepancies between what the U.S. diplomats say in Pakistan and the military strategy, what the Pentagon is doing, like airstrikes, unmanned planes taking reconnaissance surveillance. So is it true that there's a gap, what actually the Vice Foreign Minister has also said, there is a gap between different institutions of the U.S. government? How do you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I frankly wouldn't say there is. We have made clear...first of all, let me say I'm not going to be able to talk about any particular military action, but the United States government as a whole is very supportive of the Pakistani government as a whole. The Pakistani government, the Pakistani leaders have said very, very clearly they need to fight terrorism because terrorism is a threat to their vision of a moderate and democratic Pakistan. It's a threat to their vision of modern Islam. So they want to do this and we want to support them. The entire U.S. government, from whatever part, it is supporting Pakistan's effort to deal with the militancy problem. I think everything we do, one way or the other, is an attempt to support Pakistan's effort.

QUESTION: What exactly is the U.S. government doing politically and economically in these areas?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Economically we've got our ongoing aid programs in education and the economy and building institutions. When Prime Minister Gilani came, we were able to help him with the food crisis he was facing. He got \$100 million for food and agriculture. Pakistan right now is facing this problem with displaced people coming out of Bajaur, and we've managed to get together about \$8 million now that we can help the people coming out of Bajaur so that they...and we understand they're going to be displaced by the fighting, but try to relieve their suffering and make it possible for them to go home. So there are a lot of things we're trying to do for people.

QUESTION: Those people displaced from Bajaur, they also have gone to like bigger cities, for example Karachi or Lahore. Do you have some programs to help those in those big cities as well, or you're talking about neighboring areas?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The way it works is people who end up sort of in camps or in places in neighboring areas. The ones who go to bigger cities find jobs or have family, they kind of get taken care of through that system.

We're also working to help the big cities develop and to provide better education, better economic opportunity for people in the cities. So in some ways they benefit from the broader aid programs. These are more targeted, these \$8 million, more targeted on people displaced. We're also looking at how to take care of the people who ended up being pushed into Afghanistan.

QUESTION: How worried you are about the possible economic meltdown of the Pakistani side?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we understand the difficulties that Pakistan has encountered, the enormous rise in the price of oil, the rise in the price of food. There were structural problems, subsidies, in the Pakistani budget that the Pakistani government has tried to deal with. So it's a difficult economic situation.

Our goal is to help them. They've got to adopt a program, and our people with the Treasury Department, people with the IMF, Asian Development Bank have come to support that. But first and foremost the Pakistani government has to be able to develop the program to reestablish fiscal health.

QUESTION: Pakistanis seem very upset over this Indo-U.S. nuclear deal. They've been asking for the same, if not exactly the same, some kind of deal on similar lines. Any chance of Pakistan getting the same or similar...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This particular deal is unique to India. But I have to say, we've really separated India and Pakistan. We deal with each on its own terms. We do deal with the problems that they might have with each other and the benefits of cooperation. But when we look at Pakistan, we say: what are Pakistan's energy problems, what's Pakistan's energy potential? The potential is coal and hydro and wind and alternate sources. That's where we need to engage more with Pakistan. And that came out of our strategic dialogue that we had with the Pakistani government. We need to engage more on those things.

QUESTION: Does India have the same potential, though? Coal and hydro?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Different potentials. We deal with India on its own basis. I think the important thing to remember is that when a kid turns on the light bulb to do his homework he doesn't really care if it's wind energy or nuclear energy or coal. He wants the light bulb to come on. We're trying to help the kids in Pakistan turn on the lights and do their homework.

QUESTION: Would it hurt if it comes from a more environmentally friendly source like nuclear?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Environmentally friendly wind power and even clean coal and hydro all need to be considered. But we do what's appropriate. Pakistan's real potential is there. That's Pakistan's energy potential. So how do we all get together and help Pakistan develop it?

QUESTION: Let's talk about the Friend of Pakistan Group that's been put together here in New York. What was the need? Why couldn't they go to the conventional means of supporting a struggling economy like Pakistan? Like, for example, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. They used to help Pakistan separately, other than IMF or World Bank. Now they've been like bundled together, all these traditional support of Pakistan.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's not exactly bundled together. I think each country's still going to have its own aid programs, still going to have its own priorities. But you can't have everybody running around doing different things. You've got to have a structure that is really Pakistani-led. Pakistan tells us what are their priorities, what are their commitments, what are their programs? Then we all look at how we can support those programs.

You also have some countries that have money that don't know how to spend it. So I think it's important to sort of have channels so that money can be spent well and in support of what the Pakistani government needs to do.

QUESTION: Any particular programs that have been discussed, especially from the U.S. perspective?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Not yet. We've, in this group, we've identified the major areas but we need to get going on the officials meeting that will happen late this month or early next month and really drill down and start defining more of the programs, the plans, the commitments, and how we support them. That will take place there.

There is a separate discussion going on in the United States about expanding support for Pakistan. You've seen the Biden-Lugar bill. A lot of people think we need to expand our work with education, with economy, with building democratic institutions. So there are areas where we do hope to expand, but that depends on future administration's budgets and congressional support.

QUESTION: What frightens most about the Pakistani society or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: If you look at the big picture of Pakistani society, Pakistan has moved in a democratic and moderate direction: modernized its economy, had a lot of economic (inaudible). But now Pakistan is threatened by this militancy, and these militants who are threatening endangering Pakistan's modernization and endangering Pakistan's growth are also threatening Afghanistan, threatening us in Afghanistan, and Afghans. And they're harboring still the al-Qaida who are threatening us all over the world. So there's some very dangerous, dangerous people in Pakistan and that disturbs us all. That disturbs Pakistanis first and foremost.

QUESTION: Does it bother you that with all the situation going on they still have the nukes?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we understand the situation with the nuclear weapons enough to be comfortable that they're in safe hands. It's something one always has to worry about, but at this moment I'd say we're comfortable that they're safe.

QUESTION: Is the A.Q. Kahn chapter closed as far as America is concerned?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think there's always possibilities, there's always things to learn from A.Q. Kahn about what he did and who he supplied things to. The Pakistani government...there's been a good flow of information over the years to us, to the IAEA and others. But as we explore some of these developments in other countries, there will always be more questions that need to be answered.

QUESTION: Is the request to talk to A.Q. Kahn still on the table?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: What we need is information. One needs to know everything he's done, and I don't think he's come clean yet, so we'll have to see.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for your time.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much. It's good to see you.

###

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.