



Pakistan: Followup on the Strategic Partnership Meeting

Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs

Remarks to the Press
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MODERATOR: Good afternoon, appreciate your coming this afternoon. Today, we have for you Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, who works in our South Central Asian Affairs Bureau.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Forgot my papers. Good afternoon, everybody. It's a pleasure to be here. It's always a pleasure to come back to Pakistan and this is one of my, as you know, very frequent visits. But we had a lot of, I think, very good meetings over the summer, mostly in Washington with the Prime Minister's visit, and then in New York with General Assembly meetings, where our President and our Secretary of State and others got to meet with President Zardari and his delegation, and then in Washington, a very intense and, I think, productive Strategic Partnership meeting.

So I'm out here to follow up on that and some of the other events that we held. I've been talking to my Pakistani counterparts about coming out here for...ever since those events, and I'm sorry we don't announce my visits in advance, but I think you understand that's just not the practice anymore.

We have had very good discussions, I think, during the course of my visit with a lot of different people: with President Zardari -- twice actually, once in a bilateral context and the other in a Friends of Pakistan context -- with the Prime Minister, both...same thing, both bilateral and in a "Friends" context. I'll have some more meetings tonight. I was able to get up to Peshawar yesterday and meet with the Chief Minister and the Governor, and to see our people who are working very hard up there on development and stabilization in the tribal areas and the Northwest Frontier generally.

Obviously, the focus is on two big things: one is on the security situation and the other is the economic situation. I think, first and foremost, I expressed my support, my admiration for the tough actions that the Pakistan Government is taking on both the security and the economic situation. We recognize these are difficult decisions, and the determination that we've seen from the Pakistani Government and the Pakistani people to deal with these challenges has been very impressive.

I come here a month after the terrible bombing at the Marriott hotel that hurt and killed so many people. I also arrived on the anniversary of the Karachi attacks of October 18th of last year. And I think these horrible events remind us of what I've heard expressed throughout the spectrum of Pakistani officials that I've met with (inaudible). These people that are attacking Pakistan, they're attacking Pakistan's leaders, they're attacking Pakistan's people, they're attacking Pakistan's institutions and society, and they're trying to change the way of life that ordinary Pakistanis aspire to: a more modern life, a more open life, a life as part of the world. And we have to fight against that with all the tools possible. But we recognize first and foremost what Pakistanis have said: that they are dealing with an insurgency that's directed at them, and they're determined to deal with it because it's their war.

So our job is to look at how we can support them in that, and that's really what I came for this time...to look at how we can support them better -- what they're doing, what they're planning, and what they're determined to do, and look and make sure that our programs are supporting what the Pakistani Government is doing.

We do that in a whole variety of ways. Some of it's our assistance to the economic reforms or the energy sector, where we have important programs starting up. We have a lot of support for education and health, obviously have a lot of support for modernizing institutions, including modernizing the army. Many of you know we're now...have a small group involved in helping to train the Frontier Corps. We've looked at other areas where we might become involved, all devoted to this basic premise that we have to help the Pakistani Government in its determination to modernize Pakistan and to integrate the tribal areas into the life of the country.

We met earlier today with some of the other countries, the important governments, sort of the Co-Chairs involved in the Friends of Pakistan. Friends of Pakistan...we had our first meeting in New York to launch. Now we're trying to get more organized and plan the next meeting that will come up in Abu Dhabi. I think it was a very productive meeting. We had ambassadors from the key countries: the United States, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, and the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia.

The Ambassador of Saudi Arabia, as you know, has a lot of experience, a lot of understanding, and is very supportive of Pakistan. And the meeting was chaired by the President, President Zardari, and Prime Minister Gilani. And, I think, we welcomed everyone's participation and everyone's contribution, but I think there were a lot of good ideas that came forward about how we can move forward, how we can make this group be a strong support, but a strategic support, for Pakistan, so that Pakistan -- as Pakistan develops and lays out its plans in different areas, we can make sure that the international community is supporting and doing the things that we need to do in support of Pakistan's efforts.

So I think that was very useful and productive. And we'll look, as we go on with this, at the different areas -- whether it's a sort of multi-pronged strategy that's being followed at the border areas, or sectors like economics or education or energy -- where the Pakistan Government has a focus and where we can make sure that we're helping properly.

All of this is about giving ordinary Pakistanis what they can expect from their government and the kind of support they expect from the international community. It's helping people live safely, helping people find economic opportunity, helping people find ways to educate their children, ways to turn on the lights so their kids can do their homework -- just giving people what they expect out of life, and that's a chance to participate in the modern world and to get ahead based on their own efforts. So that continues to be our focus, whether it's individually or bilaterally with the government or through the Friends process...is to see what we can do to give ordinary Pakistanis a better life and a life where it's safe for them and their children.

So with that, I'd be glad to take any questions you might have.

QUESTION: The U.S. intelligence agencies have recently produced a report which asserts that Pakistan is being driven to the edge of a political and economic crisis, and Pakistan needs a lot of financial support at this time. So what the United States can do to drive Pakistan out of this dire situation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, let's talk about the substance of the question, because the premise is actually not true. The U.S. intelligence agencies have not recently produced a report.

QUESTION: This is reported in the media.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Oh, I know, I know, I know. I didn't say you were wrong, but unfortunately, you're basing your question on wrong press reports that, if you can believe it, appeared in the American press. There's no report. There, I think, is always work being done in the intelligence agencies. They may be writing something, but certainly there's nothing that's done. Nothing has come to my desk or any other policymaker's desk on the situation in Pakistan.

But we do keep this under review. And obviously, one of the...there [are] obviously some very difficult challenges in Pakistan. We know how hard it is to deal with the situation of the terrorists who are attacking Pakistanis. We know how hard it is to deal with the economic climate. The international economic climate is a challenge for all of us: the oil prices, the food prices, and the financial crisis. And countries are each trying to deal with this.

And I just come back to saying there seems to be a lot of determination here. We've seen the government make tough decisions to establish fiscal stability as well as to work on the security situation, and we'll try to do whatever we can to help those situations succeed. We have a very substantial assistance program all ready for Pakistan. We have always looked at what we can do more. So when you have specific problems come up, like the food crisis, we came up with about \$110 million when the Prime Minister visited Washington, to help with food and agriculture in the near term. When we saw the people displaced from Bajaur by the fighting there, we've come up with \$8 million to spend through the international organizations to help them, those displaced people, find food and shelter and start to move back to their homes when it's safe.

So as needs arise, we try to fulfill these. And every trip that I come out, I go back with a list of things that I'm going to try to get financing for. But I also think that this just continuous and substantial long-term assistance to help Pakistan modernize its institutions, modernize its economy, modernize its military, that that...that's something we have to continue, as well. So I'm sure we'll continue that and we'll expand it wherever possible.

QUESTION: Today we felt that really United States of America is facing financial crunch because your gracious Ambassador, who was very kind in the past there, she's providing us at least waters is to drink here. (Inaudible) no water, nothing else (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've only got one glass. (Laughter.) There's usually three up here.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) You just talked about the Strategic Partnership and strategic support to Pakistan. And we are listening these words for the last five, six, seven years. But unfortunately, the people of Pakistan, they feel that they are facing a lot of problems -- worst kind of electricity, load-sharing in Pakistan, in the same way that they are also facing the economic crunch. What steps you will take so that the people of Pakistan, the Ambassador of Pakistan, will support the United States of America? At present, the popularity graph of the United States of America is not going up. I think it is going down in Pakistan.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think you know what we do here is not for popularity graphs. We obviously...we'd like the people to like us. But we first and foremost want to make sure that Pakistan is able to deal with its own problems and to make sure that we're offering the right kind of support. And I think if the government here can tackle these problems of security difficulties, of economic hardship, and make the government give the people the kind of lives that they want, and if we can be part of that, that in itself is enough reward for us, if we can make sure that we're helping them achieve a better state for the people of Pakistan.

I do think that the energy problem is very acute right now. We've seen it coming. We also know, however, that Pakistan still has a lot of energy potential, and that's why we're putting...we've got a new \$30 million program to try to help organize and find the opportunities in the energy sector. The government itself is instituting new programs to try to look in the energy sector to develop things like the coal deposits or the hydro deposits or alternate energy. And we're going to try to make sure that we're involved. But I think, also, a very important part of that is opening up the investment opportunities and attracting the private sector investments, so that Pakistan can have for the long term the kind of energy that people need.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) My question is on the war on terror and security situation in tribal areas. So whenever there are top U.S. officials in Islamabad, they assure [us] that that Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity will be respected. Last time when [the] Chairman, Mr. Mullen, was here and then you are talking about, you are appreciating a lot, but [the] on ground situation is different when hundreds of innocent people were killed in tribal areas by the coalition forces attack. And in these attacks, none of [the] important Taliban or al-Qaida leader[s] or operative[s] was killed. So how [do] you view these continuous border violation[s] by security forces and how this can be brought to an end?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the problems in the tribal areas are very acute. We've seen people in the tribal areas go into Afghanistan and shoot at Americans. We've seen people starting to come back sometimes the other way, come back from Afghanistan and shoot at Pakistanis. We've seen them blow up innocent people with bombs. We've seen them attack and kill Pakistani soldiers. I think, you know, if you go back to last July or so, that more than a thousand Pakistanis have been killed by these bombers and these terrorists. That's the problem we all have to deal with.

Every time something happens somewhere, the United States is accused of doing it. Every time something explodes, we're accused of killing innocents. I'm not sure those reports are actually all accurate. Our goal is to work with Pakistan. Our goal is to help Pakistan establish the writ of government in these areas, whether it's training or equipment, whether it's coordination, information. We try to work together with Pakistan. The only way we're going to be able to solve this problem is by extending government on both sides of the border -- extending the Afghan Government on the Afghan side, the Pakistani Government on the Pakistani side -- and dealing with this enemy from both sides so that there are complementary actions on one side of the border and the other.

And that's our goal. And that's what a lot of my discussions were devoted to really...is looking how we can work together against a common enemy that's killing Pakistanis, that's killing Afghans, that's killing NATO and coalition forces as well.

[cross-talk]

QUESTION: Yeah, thank you. My question is that you talked about the security problem, then the economic problem here. What has been the concrete commitment from the Friends of Pakistan in terms of their assessment to bail out this country from the economic crisis? And secondly, do you think the objectives and goals of making attacks inside Pakistan, they are met successfully?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's two questions. I'll pick the one I want to answer. (Laughter.)

The Friends of Pakistan group -- how can I say it? It's a group that's a strategic group. It's a way of combining the Pakistani Government efforts and the Western -- not Western -- and the Friends efforts: government like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, China, the United Kingdom. And you saw, you know, in New York there were at least a dozen countries there and we're always hearing from more who would like to be part of this.

So the goal is not...I mean, it's not to throw money on the table. The goal is to put money where it belongs to support really concrete and positive goals. So it's going to be a systematic process. It's going to be a strategic process that looks at problems, looks at what the Pakistani Government is doing, looks at their approach and what effort that they're making, and then looks at how we need to support and supplement those efforts, so that we really cover some of these problems comprehensively and we don't leave things undone or leave holes.

You know, is that going to produce more money? Yes, it probably will in the long run. But it's not a...it's not a cash advance. There are other steps being taken, you might say, somewhat parallel on the fiscal and monetary problems. Those things are coordinated with treasuries, finance ministries, international institutions. And...but Friends is more devoted to making sure that on the strategic level that we understand Pakistan's plans and that we're putting our programs to support them.

[cross-talk]

QUESTION: Are you in a position to say that President Bush has withdrawn his orders for a ground incursion into Pakistan? And secondly, when these trainers from U.S. will come to train (inaudible) Frontier Corps?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I love this. I get to pick one of those two questions, too.

It's an ongoing program with the Frontier Corps and the cooperation with the army. As you know, for many years we've had programs with the military just as we've had programs in education, health, energy, all kinds of areas. So these are ongoing programs. People come in and out, but we've had people here already working with the Frontier Corps.

Yeah.

QUESTION: I'll try and put semicolons between my two questions; you'll have to treat them as one.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't hear semicolons. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: President Zardari recently told the *Wall Street Journal*...the *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that the President basically said there is an understanding between the United States and Pakistan in terms of what will come across the border, how to fight the war on terror in FATA. Can you describe what that understanding is?

And secondly, despite all of the elements that you talk about in terms of the economy and everything else that the U.S. has done to help Pakistan, as you well know, the United States is extremely unpopular right now among normal Pakistanis. Do you agree with the notion that, as the DCM here put it, there is, perhaps here and in the United States, an overemphasis on the kinetic aspects of the war on terror and rather than the reconstruction zones?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Did he say that? Did Jerry say that?

MODERATOR: I'll get you the transcript.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, okay. Look, I'm wearing a suit. I'm not wearing a uniform. I know how to, you know, do education programs. I know how to get money in Washington for security programs. I don't issue orders. I don't carry out orders. I don't shoot a gun. I don't carry a gun. So I'm not here to talk about military operations or any aspect of military planning. So I hate to disappoint you, but that's not what I'm here to do.

Questions about popularity, I think I answered before. You know, I mean, our goal is to make this a stable and safe place for the citizens of Pakistan. I hope that by doing that people will appreciate American efforts more. I know that we're helping people. I know that we're helping people find jobs. I know we're helping people get education for their children. I know we're helping the Pakistani army improve its capabilities against terrorists. That's what's important to us: the success of Pakistan in this effort.

I would hope that others would appreciate that as well, as we go forward. But first and foremost, we want to help Pakistan win all these fights, whether it's the fight against terrorism or the fight to provide economic opportunity to its citizens.

QUESTION: Sir...my question is regarding the dialogue process with Taliban. There's an increasing support in the international community for engaging the Taliban in this dialogue process. Did you discuss this aspect with the Pakistani leadership during your visit, and what's your official position on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, we did talk about this sort of issue of dialogue or peace talks. And I think the first is: we've always had a position on this. It really has never changed and it hasn't changed, whether it's talking about it in Afghanistan or it's talking about it in Pakistan. And I think you know part of that position has been criticism to some of the previous agreements, which I think many people here share -- that there were agreements in the past that were not effective, agreements that were not enforced, that merely allowed the terrorists to continue their plotting and their plans and, in fact, to rebuild their capabilities.

So I think it's good...I think it's good that Pakistan is taking serious action, serious military action against those terrorists who have tried to rebuild their capabilities and who, once again...who are attacking Pakistanis. That's what August...October 18th reminds us of: the horrible attack on the most respected and renowned Pakistani leader last October, and then another attack last December. You're the target. Your leaders are the target. And I think people understand that. So we're glad to see that they are taking the military action necessary to fight against people whose only goals seems to be to blow up the Pakistani state and society.

But we also understand that you need political solutions as well as military ones. There are people who want to live in peace. There are people who want to give up the violent way. And so there always needs to be a path for militants, you might say, to come in from the cold. And that's been true in Afghanistan. That's been true in Pakistan, as well. When and how that gets done is for Pakistani people, for Afghan people to decide, for those governments, first and foremost, to lead.

But I think what I've heard from those governments has been some fundamental principles that are the same on both sides of the border: that people need to abandon violence; they need to live under the writ of government; and that they can't allow the presence of foreign terrorists, al-Qaida or other terrorists, bomb-makers, training camps on their soil. It's only when those things are achieved that we'll all be safe. Some of that has to happen militarily, but some of that can happen politically or through dialogue, as well. So we've always said, you know, under those circumstances there can be a political process. There has to be a political process.

Frankly, I've seen all these reports of Taliban and meetings in Saudi Arabia and the iftaars and things like that. And at this point, I can't say there's much there there. It seems to me there [are] some people who've talked about "what if" others were to talk, but there's no practical negotiation going on. The people who have engaged in this violence have not shown any sincere or real desire to abandon violence and accept the writ of government. And until they do, I think they need to be pursued. And we have to be realistic about this. There are some of them, whatever they say, you know, whatever they announce about talks, all they're interested in is having more space to rebuild their capabilities, and nobody's going to allow that. So there are some of them who we're just going to have to fight, but there are probably others who may be willing to abandon violence and live under the government.

MODERATOR: We got time for about two more questions. Why don't we go here and then back here?

QUESTION: My question is about the lack of trust between American and Pakistani leadership, as we have seen that because of this lack of trust, [the] former president has to resign and the new government is in power. So at this time, do you think that there is a complete trust between you and Pakistan leadership on this war on terror, particularly in the tribal areas?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't quite see the question the way you see it. I mean, we have had a lot of respect for political developments in Pakistan. As you know, we supported the transition to democracy. We worked very hard to try to see that there was going to be a free election, an election that's credible, that is respected by all Pakistanis. We're glad it turned out that way. We were saying all last year we hoped that an election would produce a moderate government that would form a democratic base to fight terror. That's what we've seen happen. We're glad to see that happen, even with the difficulties that that government faces in going about it.

And frankly, we still continue to believe that all moderate forces need to band together and put national interest above party interest, and show that this nation is determined to deal with the problem of terrorism and extremism. And I think we've seen a lot of determination from Pakistani leaders, from Pakistani political parties. And frankly -- I'll be meeting with Nawaz Sharif later and I'll make that point to his...to him and his party as well. But I don't think there's a lack of trust. I think we're seeing now a lot of determination and we're trying to be as supportive as we can.

MODERATOR: We'll do our last question.

QUESTION: Quick question for you on...you say that the officials you've met with are convinced that this is their war on terror, but the situation on the ground...this is an

unpopular war, that people don't support it. And the drone attacks which you refuse to talk about are only making this more unpopular.

In your meetings during your trip, have you discussed any ways to try to bring the people on board? When taking into consideration the war is unpopular, this current government is untested and relatively unpopular, how do you...how do you bring the people on board to fight a war that can't be fought without the people?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think a lot of our conversations are about how to work with the people in the tribal areas, how to work with the people of Pakistan generally, to make sure that they are part of the solution, that they help tackle these problems. We've heard a lot about lashkars, about the militias being raised in the agencies, showing that there are many people in the tribes who are willing to stand up at great, great peril to their own lives, who are willing to stand up and say: "Enough of this. We don't want the terrorists, we don't want the violence. We want a chance to educate our children. We want a chance for healthcare. We want a chance for economic opportunity."

And you're seeing that happen, and again and again and again when these kind of people have stood up in the tribal areas -- the maliks -- they get assassinated by al-Qaida and these Taliban and these militants who are up there. It's a horrible thing. Every time a real leader stands up to say: "I want a better life for my people," they kill him. And part of what we've seen now, I think, is the fact that the government has shown its determination and that the government is serious about fighting this through to the end, has meant that others are willing to stand up, and willing to stand up and join them. And I think that's a good sign.

It's still dangerous. I mean, we saw just, what, a week ago, a number of these maliks killed. I think we've probably seen a hundred, two hundred of the real leaders of this area killed by the Taliban and al-Qaida over the last six months or so, if I remember correctly.

So it's not easy, but I think you just have to admire their courage and admire their determination, and say we're going to be there with them and we're going to help them. And as I said, everything that we're doing right now is committed to try to work with the Pakistanis to make sure that with all the different capabilities that we have, that we deal with this threat to the Pakistani people.

Thank you.



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