



Interview on GEO TV of Pakistan by Hamid Mir

Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs

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MIR: Ambassador, first of all tell us what was the main objective of your visit to Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This is my first real trip out here on my own and I've been here many times with the Secretaries of State. I was able to come during the President's visit and actually I went down to Karachi, where we very sadly, we had some of our people killed and some Pakistanis killed by a bomber. But it's my first real chance to come here and meet with people, talk to the President, the Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Minister, people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who really do the hard work of moving our relationship forward and businessmen and people in the legislature, and really get a feel for Pakistan, for how the society is developing, for what people want and try to make sure that that the United States is doing the things we promised and doing the things that meet the aspirations of the Pakistani people to have a successful economy, a modern society and a democratic government.

MIR: You met President Musharraf and President Musharraf said many times in the last few days that a nuclear deal between the United States and India can upset the balance of power in this region. So, what is your response?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We've heard this argument before. I think, you know, people have seen it in the U.S. press, there are people in Congress, there are people in sort of the non-proliferation circles, the arms control experts in the United States that have put forward this argument. Our analysis is different. And I understand that President Musharraf has thought about these things very carefully and has done his own analysis. But ours is a bit different. Ours is that you have now, Indians are free to make nuclear material for whatever purpose they want, as we put more and more of their program under safeguards, as more and more of their reactors go under safeguards, it will go from 19% under safeguards now to 65% and as they build more, to 90%. This has the affect of, meaning that fewer and fewer reactors are available for producing military material because all the material under safeguards has to stay in perpetuity, as our arrangement says in the civilian side. So I just, just don't know what India will do in terms of producing material for weapons. This is not an agreement about the military side but I don't understand the argument, I don't think our analysis coincides with those who say that by putting more of their capability under safeguards that somehow contributes to having more nuclear weapons.

MIR: There is an opinion in Pakistan by some people that says that many years ago a Pakistani Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, tried to seek a nuclear reprocessing plant from France and that was for energy purposes and the United States jumped in and the deal was cancelled, and that the United States has a different policy for Pakistan and different policy for India.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I have frankly, haven't heard that story. I don't know what the history is. You know we've made clear that we are not intending to sell enrichment and reprocessing equipment or materials to India. It's just not part of the deal. So you know that's our policy. That is one of the requirements internationally. So enrichment and reprocessing don't come into this.

MIR: What is the level of U.S. engagement in nabbing terrorists within Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This is a task that is being carried out by the Pakistani forces and very sadly they have lost people doing this. We've pointed out many times that no country has caught more Al Qaeda or lost more men doing that than Pakistan. So it's a very strong fight that Pakistan has carried forward. We talked, President Bush and President Musharraf have talked quite a bit about this during their visit. Pakistan is working on all the terrorists, the Taliban, the Al Qaeda, all the violent groups that are trying to upset and destabilize Pakistani society. So that is very important to us. But it is, it's a Pakistani fight. To the extent that we can help them, we will. But Pakistan is very much engaged.

MIR: U.S., U.S. forces are not active in Pakistani territory?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: U.S. forces are active on the Afghan side. And again it's a common enemy and we all need to do what we can, but not on the Pakistani side.

MIR: Recently, U.S. troops have started a new operation in Afghan province, Kunar. So can you tell us that, do you have any clue about Osama Bin Laden and any other big Al Qaeda fish?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know, I don't have any new information on that and certainly I'll leave the military operations to the military people.

MIR: So can you tell us that, why the most wanted person is still at large?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've only come here a few times. I've only flown over those areas of mountains a few times, but it's pretty obvious that it is a difficult area to operate in. It's a difficult area to find somebody in. You know we've had cases in the United States of people going up in the hills and have been able to hide for a few years. So the success of this fight doesn't depend on one person. Certainly we would like to capture Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Omar. I think we are all interested in doing that, but there is a, a violent group, a violent element of Taliban and Al Qaeda people who've been really trying to kill us all, kill Pakistanis, Americans and Afghans, who've been exploding bombs and shooting bullets that kill a lot of people. And we've got to stop them all. Catching the leaders is certainly important, but we've got to stop them all. And not just in military ways. We have to extend government on both sides so that government really has control over these areas and is able to provide for the needs of the people in these areas. We've got to extend economic opportunity and we've been working with Pakistan and Afghanistan on proposals like the Regional Opportunity Zones. So we recognize there is a multi-comprehensive need for working on the military side, the police side, the economic side and the government administration side. And trying to coordinate on both sides is very important. It's a common enemy, it's a common problem and it needs a common solution. And we'll do what we can to work together.

MIR: Do you expect that misunderstandings between Islamabad and Kabul would be clarified in the near future?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think, you know, the level of rhetoric has gone down. That is certainly welcome. There is real cooperation going on in a number of areas and we hope those areas can expand. We see real cooperation trilaterally and militarily. We look forward to economic discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan and discussions on various things that we can be part of on the economic side as well. So I think the more practical cooperation there is between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the better we'll address the problems and the better the relationship will be.

MIR: You also met the Chief Election Commissioner in Islamabad. So what was the objective of your meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the objective of the meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner, and frankly with some of the other politicians and legislatures here, is to really see how this process of democracy is going, to look forward to the elections next year. The Chief Election Commissioner plays a very key role and I think is committed to playing a very key role of ensuring that elections are free and fair under the Pakistani constitution. We are very interested in how that proceeds. I think in an independent election commission that's able to make the right decisions to prepare a free election, that it's harder to commit fraud. Those are very important [inaudible].

MIR: And you think that the Election Commission is independent?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's the independent election commission. It has an independent role under the constitution and I think it has a leadership now that's determined to try to exercise that role. We'll see how it works out, but obviously they're off to a good start and we'll support them as best we can if they need things from us.

MIR: Are you satisfied with the current political system in Pakistan or do you want some more reforms?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's up to the Pakistanis ultimately to decide how their political system is going to operate. Our goal, I think what we would like to see as part of the overall development of Pakistani society is to achieve a more stable society, a more open society, a more democratic society, a more prosperous society.

MIR: Can the next elections be free and fair if the Musharraf government is not willing to allow Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to come back?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I mean, again, that's going to be a relationship, an issue, between the government and the political parties. Certainly it's a question that arises, but at this point I don't know how it'll be addressed. Our goal again is to see full participation in a fair election. Some of these particular issues just have to be worked out here.

MIR: And what is your view on the uniform of President Musharraf?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Again, another particular piece of the big picture. What's important is to see the progress, to see the movement towards democratic leadership, civilian leadership for Pakistan. But exactly how the uniform issue is addressed, I'll leave that to Pakistanis.

MIR: It's internal matter?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think so. President Musharraf has said it is. It's an internal matter but it's also an issue that we recognize is important. But it's also one that we think President Musharraf is trying to address.

MIR: What is the U.S. doing in helping to resolve the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We have encouraged progress across the board in the Composite Dialogue. Many important things have happened. Certainly a reduction in tensions, opening up of trade, bus, train routes, things like that. We would like to see progress in all areas, including Kashmir, and the President made that clear on both sides when he came.

MIR: Ambassador, when they talk about the war against terrorism, many people in Pakistan say that is why the U.S. is ignorant about the situation in Balochistan, where the Baloch nationalists are involved in terrorism. So what is your view about that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think we are ignorant of the situation. We're certainly following it closely. As you know this has been violence that has occurred periodically throughout Pakistan's history. We do think it needs to be solved, both, you know, with whatever military means are necessary but also in terms of the politics and economics of the region. And we are watching closely and encouraging the Government to find solutions.

MIR: Do you believe that the Baloch militants, that they are terrorists?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think that anybody that starts exploding bombs and shooting innocent people is a terrorist, but I don't have any more detailed analysis for you than that.

MIR: Because some people ask the question why the Baloch [inaudible] National Army is not included in the terrorist list of the State Department?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's sort of a formal process that requires a particular examination of evidence over time. That's not been done at this point. Whether it might at some point in the future I don't, really can't say now.

MIR: And are you satisfied with the investigations going against Dr. A.Q. Khan in Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think we've had good cooperation with Pakistan. The international community, the International Atomic Energy Agency has had good cooperation. We just look for that to continue and try to make sure that everything that might be known about this network, every place that they might have supplied equipment, material, designs to, that that is exposed and that that information is used, is given to those who can pursue it elsewhere.

MIR: Recently a large number of people in different parts of the world, they protested against some blasphemous cartoons of the Holy Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. And there is also a proposal in many circles that now is the time to have international legislation. Can the U.S. play any role in this regard for an international legislation to prevent these kind of publications?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't really know what you mean by international legislation.

MIR: By the United Nations.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well there is no international legislative body in that way. The international, U.N. deals with threats to international peace and security. I don't know if anyone would define this quite in that way. There are serious issues here. We all stand for freedom of speech, freedom of expression. The freedom of newspapers in Pakistan is a very important part of Pakistani society. The freedom of newspapers, television, radio, all the media, is a very important part of Pakistani society. So I think we all want to try to respect freedom of speech, but also respect the other people that we're dealing with, respect their beliefs and not try to cause offense, not try to cause offense, period. So these are difficult issues but I am not sure they'd be well served by some attempt to legislate internationally.

MIR: Do you think that the U.S. has an image problem in this part of the world and how can you improve your image?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know I've seen the polls, I've worked on this sort of public relations aspect of things for a long time. I think part of it is we want people to see us as we are. Yes, we've had to use military force in some situations. We've always tried to make lives better and we have made lives better. We've

made the lives better of the people of Kuwait, who are Muslims, we've made the lives better of the people of Bosnia, who are Muslims. We think we've made the lives better of people in Afghanistan who were suffering oppression. We think we've made the lives better of Iraqis, even though there's still a long way to go there. But in addition to that, that's not the only impact the United States has on the world. The U.S. military is very capable. They were very capable in helping the peoples who suffered a national disaster in Southeast Asia, in the tsunami. They've been very capable in helping the people of Pakistan and elsewhere who suffered from the earthquake. That was a devastating thing. It was a horrible tragedy that occurred to people who are friends of ours. And we really want to help. We're here through the relief operation now. We're moving into transition, where we have \$13 million to help people go back to their villages and clean up and rebuild. And then we're already [in the] long-term reconstruction phase to help this whole area really develop again and prosper. And so we're here. We're in Pakistan to try to help the Pakistani people meet their aspirations and needs and we think we're doing that effectively. If people see us doing that effectively, I think people will appreciate what we do for them.

MIR: Thank you very much, Ambassador Boucher.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you.

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