



Interview With Qatrina Hussain, PTV (Pakistan TV)

Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs
Islamabad, Pakistan
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QUESTION: Assalam-o-Alaikum, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our special program tonight. And joining us today, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Mr. Richard Boucher. Mr. Boucher, thank you so much for joining us on Pakistan Television.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much it's a pleasure to be with you today.

QUESTION: And of course you have met with President Musharraf and Foreign Minister Kasuri and we are told that the issue of civil nuclear energy needs for India and the agreement that has been reached with India came up, and Mr. Kasuri mentioned what he called a package approach. Now, what is your take on this package approach that was brought up?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the first thing to say is my meetings with President Musharraf, Foreign Minister Kasuri, Foreign Secretary Khan and others at the ministries and elsewhere, they were very good and they were broad discussions. Because we have, I think after President Bush's visit here, we have a broader and deeper relationship than we've ever had before. And obviously one aspect of that is energy cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistan. And indeed just a week after the President was here, our Energy Secretary came down. There are now some more experts here. There will be further follow-up discussions. So, we are looking at how to meet, how to help Pakistan meet, its future energy needs.

We have been very excited by Pakistan's economic growth – eight percent a year, eight and a half per cent a year – is a very good achievement and we want to help make sure Pakistan has the energy to achieve that. We are working in a lot of areas – in coal, hydro, gas – of other possible energy sources. For us, it's really a question of finding what's the best way to help Pakistan meet its energy needs.

The nuclear arrangement we have with India is unique. It's based on a particular set of circumstances, a particular relationship that we have now there. It's not something that needs to be duplicated elsewhere or that is necessarily the right thing for other places. So, we just, we hope to find ways to meet Pakistan's energy needs and not deal with it as just a mirror or a model of somewhere else, really focus on Pakistan and on what Pakistan needs. I think that's our answer to the people who say that you did this with India and you need to do this here. There are many things we do with Pakistan that we don't do with India.

QUESTION: Right. But of course there are some grave concerns that this agreement could inadvertently lead to an arms race in South Asia because India will be able to divert all its indigenous capability towards military applications, and of course your agreement doesn't cover inspections of military facilities. India has fast breeder reactors and several other nuclear installations already. What kind of safeguards can the U.S. government take to ensure that India's indigenous capability is not wholly diverted towards military applications, creating an arms race in the region?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I think, first we take our obligation under the Non-Proliferation Treaty very seriously. We are bound by that treaty not to help non-nuclear states acquire nuclear weapons in any way. And we certainly went into the agreement with India with that very much in mind, and what we have done in the arrangement with India is to help its civilian sector, and we think not help, in any way, its military sector. We have been dealing, answering a lot of these questions. We realize that some people say, well, you know, you do this and they will have more available for the military side. I just don't see it. I mean, frankly, I just don't see it. Our analysis is that, if you have a certain amount of their capability under safeguards and you expand the amount that's under safeguards, it's only available for civilian use, I don't see how that can add to the military side. It reduces their ability to produce fissile material for weapons. It expands their ability to produce nuclear power for their growing economy, which is something we think they need, and we think it's appropriate to help them in that.

QUESTION: But would there be any effort at any point for inspections of their military facilities, because that's not on the cards right now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This is not a part of our agreement. We knew it wasn't part of their agreement, and I don't think that's actually something that we would have been able to do – that people have said "you should have got more of this," "you should have got more of that." I think we got the deal that we thought we needed to get and thought we could get. And that it's a deal that we feel very comfortable with in terms of helping in the civilian power but not expanding or assisting their ability on the military side.

QUESTION: And of course, let's talk a bit about the Composite Dialogue between Pakistan and India. The United States government has welcomed a lot of the initiatives that have taken place. But, of course, the thorny issue of Kashmir remains the centerpiece, so to speak, of the entire relationship between the two countries. What do you think the two countries should be doing to move forward -- some kind of time frame do you think should be implemented on trying to get to that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the simple answer to what they should be doing is everything possible and everything they can each feel comfortable with. We certainly praise the remarkable progress that India and Pakistan have made in recent years, especially for those of us who were watching some of the tensions just a couple of years ago, two or three years ago. There were very severe tensions in this relationship and people said a risk of renewed war. We're now at a point where there have been bus lines, train lines opened up, communication between Sikh holy sites, opportunities to move forward on every aspect of the Composite Dialogue. You know one part of that is that they have had discussions on strategic restraint that are continuing and going forward. Those are good, too. The issue of Kashmir, that's part of that dialogue. We certainly encourage any kind of progress that can be made. Both sides have been talking about these things. There have been new ideas. There have been meetings with different parties and Kashmiris have met with different parties. So, I think there is a certain amount of bubbling and ferment on this issue and we'd encourage them to really move forward in any way they can. We are not directly involved in the process. We are an interested friend rather than a participant. But we are very interested in talking to both sides about how it is going and what they are doing.

QUESTION: And, of course, a Bilateral Investment Treaty between Pakistan and the United States is in the cards. What is the Bush Administration going to do or what can the Administration do to encourage more investment, more American investment, in Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We've had a lot of very intense discussions on the Bilateral Investment Treaty before the President's visit. We got sort of very close, but not quite there. There are some very technical and legal issues that we could not reach final agreement on. We've made some proposals to the Pakistani side and we're looking forward to hearing back on what the Pakistani side thinks are the next steps of how we can work those into a final arrangement. A bilateral investment agreement would certainly help our investment relations, our trade relations, but we are also helping it in other ways. We are trying to help Pakistan expand a range of exports, the range of products it produces for export. We have programs to help Pakistan improve the competitiveness of some of its industries. We've proposed these Reconstruction Opportunity Zones that will let Pakistan and Afghanistan cooperate in sending exports to the United States, again looking for new products, areas and avenues of economic cooperation. So, the development of the Pakistani economy, as I said, has been very good but we are also looking to see how it can be expanded and what part the United States can play in helping Pakistan expand its economic opportunities for people here.

QUESTION: Do we have a timeframe again on the ROZs? When should they be functional? When do you want them to be functional?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We want to go about this in a very careful, deliberate manner. A lot of times governments get these great economic ideas, but they don't work as well in practice when you get into the real private sector, the real commercial sector. So we are going to try to work this carefully with the parties, to talk to them about products, the range of products, the kind of locations, the kind of rules that they should operate under. We are going to be looking in the United States, studying very carefully sort of the feasibility of the idea and how to make it work. It'll take some months to develop. We'll be having discussions with the different parties and I think those will deepen as time goes forward. We'll have to get some legislation through our Congress. So, it is a little bit unpredictable. So, it will take some months to develop but I think you'll see that we are working on it pretty steadily from now on.

QUESTION: And of course regarding the war against terrorism and extremism, recently Pakistan and Afghanistan have had harsh words and Afghanistan has leveled accusations at Pakistan that Pakistan has been very upset about. And Pakistan has 80,000 troops on this side of the border. Now of course the question comes up from Islamabad -- what is being done on the other side of the border, of course, where American troops are involved, along with other international forces? Where is the onus or the burden of policing that border?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think the burden is on all of us. We have, as you say, we have troops, the Afghans have troops, the Pakistani government has troops in these border areas. And each in our own places and ways, respecting the border and the sovereignty of both nations. We need to cooperate. There is a common enemy of Taliban and Al Qaeda people who are trying to destabilize Pakistan, kill Pakistani soldiers, and there have been, you know, some very sad deaths in those operations. But these are the people that are helping Pakistan achieve more stability. There have been deaths on the Afghan side and U.S. forces on the Afghan side as well. So, it's very important we all deal with this problem together. It's a common enemy, it's a common problem of extending government in these areas, where governments don't have control and making sure that these people can't use the flexibility of the border and the geography of the region to disrupt both nations. And we have been sponsors of trilateral talks between the U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan. We're looking to continue that cooperation, look at other areas where the cooperation could be effective and that's really the only way to deal with a common problem, is to find a common solution.

QUESTION: And regarding that whole region, of course, it has been a very difficult area to police in the past. Now I do understand that there is a conference shortly in Washington for law enforcement officers from South Asian regions to talk about money laundering and trafficking and other issues, but has there been any discussion or any provision for more expertise, more technological expertise, to be applied to that border area for more monitoring?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We are working very seriously with the Afghan government on their whole counter-narcotics program and that's one that involves, you know, education, eradication, interdiction, better use of law enforcement, and alternative livelihoods, rural development and it's a very full-scope program. It's one that this year, I think probably for the first time, is working in all these areas. Pakistan has had much success, frankly, against poppy growing in the past and we need to have the same success against transit and trafficking. We've tried to promote cooperation with us but we certainly cooperate closely on both sides, looking for cooperation between the two sides, and with us as well.

QUESTION: And, of course, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz is currently in New York talking about UN reform. What kind of reforms does the United States government want to see in the United Nations?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: There is a quite considerable agenda before the United Nations and I know everybody can jump right into the Security Council but many of the other aspects are very important to us. We worked on the Human Rights Council, which in the end, we were not able to support the precise result but we will cooperate and work with the Council to try to make this a more effective human rights organization. We have supported democracy in the United Nations and contributed to the Democracy Fund. We've looked at management efficiency in the United Nations for many years now, and a lot of the reforms that we would like to see, and we're working with others on, is to make it a more effective organization so it really does meet the needs of people around the world and, yes, we will address the issues involving the Security Council as well. But there are a lot of different areas of UN reform. We have a very dynamic Ambassador in New York and we are working with a lot of different countries to try to achieve those reforms.

QUESTION: I am going to switch gears here and take it towards Iraq and take advantage of your years as State Department spokesman. Of course the situation in Iraq is becoming more tenuous day by day. The violence continues to escalate. American troops are bogged down. With demands for the Iraqi Prime Minister to step down and issues coming up over there, what is the long-term plan for American troops in Iraq? Are we going to see a withdrawal of American troops anytime soon?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I can't predict exactly when we will see a withdrawal of American troops. It really depends on the circumstances. We don't want to pull out too early. We don't want to stay too long. We want to make sure that we're building the capability of the Iraqi government to deal with the insurgency, with the terrorists who are in Iraq, and to meet the needs of the Iraqi people. I believe the Secretary of State and Foreign Secretary from Britain were just out there encouraging government formation. And we've been through this before. We've been through a lot of times when the Iraqis were making big decisions about their future government and their future society in a political way and they came to impasses and we tried to help. [We're] trying to help again to overcome that and move forward. And they have moved forward in a lot of ways to form a political structure there. They have had tremendously successful elections, they've got a new constitution, and they've got a certain level of political cooperation, maybe need a little help in forming, in getting everything together right now. So, I think our goal is to see progress on the military side, from us, our efforts, as well as the Iraqi efforts. We're building up the Iraqi forces, Iraqi police, trying to help the economy function, the oil sector function, trying to make sure that there is an effective government. And as those things proceed, I'm confident that they will, then eventually you will see U.S. troops starting to pull back and come down.

QUESTION: And of course you are now heading up an expanded bureau of South Asia and Central Asia. What kind of dynamics do you see in this region for Central Asia and South Asia, and of course Pakistan sort of sitting in the overlap, if I can say that, geographically situated between the two countries? Do you see some kind of synergies in this area going forward?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We see a lot of possibilities and potential and that is really a historic change because Afghanistan used to be a barrier between flow from north to south in this region. Afghanistan is now an open place, a place where goods, energy, people, ideas can move through. The energy resources of Central Asia, whether it's the gas fields or the oil generation or the hydro-power, can be brought south to places like Pakistan with growing economies that need the energy. Some of the raw materials of those areas can be moved south to these, India and Pakistan, these expanding economies. Manufactured goods, equipment, consumer goods can move north. The ports that Pakistan has are indeed, are particularly an important part of all this. Now I first heard these ideas discussed by President Musharraf in meetings with Secretary Powell and Secretary Rice. They are not, we didn't think of the ideas. But we are really trying to help make it a reality and so we are working very specifically on road systems and in connecting Afghanistan to its neighbors, on the power system connecting Afghanistan to its neighbors, and really encouraging other countries to think this way too, and look at what they can do concretely to make these visions come about and help the economies of all these places.

QUESTION: And of course we are reading in American newspapers about potential changes in immigration policy for the United States. I understand that is predominantly directed to areas other than South Asia, but what kind of impact would a new immigration policy have on potential immigrants from Pakistan, if any at all?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think largely what is being discussed now is the control of the U.S. border with Mexico from the illegal immigration from Mexico and other countries to the south, as well as the status of many people who are already in the United States illegally without the proper papers and establishing some kind of guest worker program so that we can benefit from their labor and they can benefit from more regular status as guest workers. At the same time, I think it's important to remember that you know the United States is a welcoming country. We realize that we have put in security procedures since September 11 to protect our own society and our own economy that have an impact not only on the people who wish us harm, who we don't want to come to the United States, but have the impact on many, many travelers. We've tried to make those procedures more efficient, to bring down some of the long, you know, there were people who had to wait for months for visas but I think, now the vast, vast majority are done within 30 days, some, many visas, within five days. We've tried to get out the message we want the students to come. We really welcome students in the United States. We think sharing an education is one of the best bonds that we can have with Pakistanis and we hope the students continue to look to the United States. We will help them through this process. It is a little more cumbersome than before but we can make it work smoothly. And we can make sure that the students who want to go to the United States to study, that they have this opportunity because we recognize how important this is to their own lives, to their parents, to their society and to us, as well.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, thank you very much for joining us on PTV World.

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

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