



Pakistan: Remarks to the Press

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'm sorry I'm a little bit late. We had a lot of meetings today. I'm sorry. It has been a lot of time with your leadership: President and Prime Minister, Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister and Foreign Secretary, Foreign Ministry officials.

We had a lot to go over and it took a little longer than we had expected and I apologize.

Let me make a few remarks in the beginning and then I'll take questions, I'll try not to go too long, but I wanted to really take a moment to emphasize that we have a very broad relationship, we have very deep relationship with Pakistan and during the course of my discussions today we have covered really a broad range of topics of interest to us and of interest to our partners and allies in Pakistan.

We covered a broad range of issues. I'd like to talk about the "E"s, the issues of education, energy, elections, earthquake reconstruction, economics, and I'd say the overall path of enlightened moderation, that President Musharraf has set for this nation. Our relationship with Pakistan is based on all these areas. Our practical cooperation is in all these areas as well, so we have, during the course of our discussions today with the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary, National Security Advisor, we have covered all these areas and talked about how we advance together in building a stable, moderate, prosperous Pakistan for the people of this country, but also for the sake of regional and global stability, where Pakistan has a very important role.

We talked about specifics like the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones, where we are in process with preparing legislation for our Congress. We talked about the development plans for the border regions of Pakistan where the United States has promised to make a substantial commitment to support that development plan. We talked about other steps we can take in the border areas. I've heard about those steps the Pakistani government is taking which (inaudible) stability in those areas and we can get rid of the threat of radical extremists, Taliban, Al Qaeda. They threaten Pakistan, they threaten countries in the region, Afghanistan, indeed have tentacles to reach out and threaten the whole world.

We also talked about the relationship with India, given the Foreign Minister's visit this weekend, Foreign Minister Mukherjee, and our hope that these discussions go well and we see the continued improvement of relations between India and Pakistan, which has really been a major positive factor in this region and which is a credit to leaders on both sides. We'll (inaudible) this normalization of relations.

We have a vital strategic relationship with Pakistan. We want to continue to make progress for the sake of the people of Pakistan and for the sake of the people of the region. Pakistan is a key partner for us in all these areas, in the fight against terrorism and in building a better future for all of us, so that effort between the two countries will continue. Our cooperation against terrorism is solid and advancing and I think if we work hard at it we can continue to bring the benefits of that cooperation to the people of the country and to the people of the region. So I'll stop at that and let you ask questions.

QUESTION: I'm Javed Siddique. I represent Nawa-i-Waqt. You have talked about Pakistan's role on terrorism, but we are hearing statements from very top-ranking U.S. Administration officials that there are sanctuaries of safe haven, of terrorists in the tribal areas, and Pakistan is not doing enough to actually weed out these sanctuaries. So, do you agree with these statements?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I think, first of all, we owe it to the people who make statements to read carefully what they actually said. The United States, of course, recognizes that there are enormous efforts here against terrorism, against the Taliban, against Al Qaeda. So I made a point of saying that Pakistan has been a key partner in the fight against Taliban, in the fight against Al Qaeda.

That these groups have been able to use Pakistani territory, some of them continue to have people here and operations here that are a threat to Pakistan, a threat to Afghanistan, a threat to all of us. And we all need to work together to stop them. And what I have been discussing today is, in many cases, how we do work together to stop them, both in terms of the actions that we can take, on both sides of the border, to stop them in the short term and then the actions that we need to take, in terms of cooperation in the longer term, to ensure control of territory on both sides of the border; to ensure that not only the authority of government, but benefits of government are felt on both sides of the territory; and to ensure that in the long term these places are inhospitable; so the people of the region have development, have a stake in the national and world economy, have a stake in the political system, have a stake in a modern future.

Sir.

QUESTION: What do you think about the decision of Pakistan to fence the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and also to mine the Pakistan-Afghanistan border? What do you think about this decision?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, this came up today. This is something that, I think, is still being discussed within Pakistan. The issue to us fits in the context of how does one establish a border regime to prevent bad guys from using it, going across, being able to operate from here, from there, and both sides of the border, which also facilitates genuine transit, trade...

QUESTION: Excuse me, Ambassador. Speak a bit louder.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay. I don't know what all these microphones are, but, anyway, let me...we have talked about this issue in the context of how does one create a situation in the border areas as more stable and how does one create a crossing regime in the border areas that prevents violent extremists, terrorists, from using the ability to cross, for using the territory on one side or the other to organize (inaudible) operations.

I think we had a lot of discussions recently. The Canadian Foreign Minister was just here and we are all interested in helping Pakistan establish government control of the region, as well as the border. I think we have talked about a variety of measures that could be used to do that, but at this point, I think, that's kind of all I have to say, because the matter is still under discussion, consideration here in Pakistan.

QUESTION: A variety of measures such as...?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well it's, you know, the border crossing regimes themselves; there's the information to cross over the border, border crossing cards, documents, and there is joint cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan for border posts, arrangements for crossing. There's the issue of refugees, who remain in Pakistan and need to go back and be able to go back to their homes for settlement.

QUESTION: What about the idea of fencing and mining?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think any specific steps need to be seen in the context of the bigger border picture. Some of those specific steps are still in discussion here in Pakistan.

QUESTION: Mr. Ambassador.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Sir.

QUESTION: You said you also discussed elections in Pakistan. So, did you discuss the various concerns of the opposition parties that the next elections will not be held in fair manner, fair and free manner. And, secondly, anything new on a bilateral treaty?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: On the what?

QUESTION: Bilateral investment treaty.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: On the elections, we discussed in the general sense. We didn't get into the specific elements of what's needed to make a free and fair election. I think you are quite aware that the United States is interested in a free and fair election, that's what the government here in Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf, is committed to. And that's the context that we discussed developments here in, so that's, you know, a development we look forward to. I think we all understand that a free and fair election is a good development for Pakistan.

On the bilateral investment treaty, again, we had some discussions. We think it can be an important element in attracting business and attracting investment, ultimately attracting jobs to Pakistan. And I indicated that we are ready to continue and pursue our discussions and we would look forward to concluding such a treaty. Pakistan is able to deal with some of the issues and we need to deal with them in that context.

QUESTION: Ambassador.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Sir.

QUESTION: You said that you discussed with Pakistani officials, particularly related to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the [Reconstruction Opportunity Zones] and other economic development, economic activities. You mentioned that we also discussed other steps to be taken, so would you like to define these, what the other steps are?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think any of us, when we are dealing with a situation of extremists, threats from extremists like the Taliban, we are dealing specifically with the Taliban, both here and on the Afghan side of the border, understand that this is not solely an economic matter, it's not solely a military matter, it's not solely a political matter. But there is a combination of elements, they can deal with the threat, they can give the population of these areas security, safety, economic development. And so, just as on the Afghan side of the border we are taking military action, we are extending government, we are extending roads, we are extending economic opportunities to people in order to stabilize these areas, so too, on this side of the border, the Pakistani government has taken steps to improve the political arrangement in these areas, to improve the economy of these areas and to take military action, if necessary, against the extremists. And so that's what I'm talking about. You see, it's not just specifically an economic matter; economics alone would not solve the problem, the military action alone will not solve the problem. So I think both, certainly we and the Afghans (inaudible) that's the way Pakistan addresses it as well. And so we have expressed our willingness to assist in a variety of ways.

Sir. We'll go down that way.

QUESTION: Sir, what is the latest position of the U.S. government on the uniform issue and second if there is any possibility of review of the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan, especially in case of moderate Taliban?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: On the uniform, the latest position is the same position as before. It's one of the issues that will be decided in the context of elections, but I don't have any news on that for you today. On the question of so called moderate Taliban, I think you have to look at this as a problem first and foremost for the local population in areas. Certainly the people of Afghanistan remember what the Taliban did to them, the women and girls of Afghanistan remember what the Taliban did to them. The Taliban is going in places and saying poppy is our economy, promoting narcotics trafficking. I don't think people want that. The people want to get the benefits of government. They want to get the opportunity, the safety, the justice that government, good government, can provide. And so that's really the target audience for this kind of steps we are taking. And those are the people who we are trying to win over. And those are the people we are trying to deal with.

There are certainly elements of the Taliban that might want to come across, might want to stop their activities. To help build them a new future, there are programs in Afghanistan for reconciliation and we support those programs, those are Afghan programs the President has already announced and are operating.

But while hoping that people will lay down their arms and join a new future we also have to admit the fact there are some people who are trying to kill us, they are trying to kill Afghans, they are trying to kill Pakistanis, trying to kill American soldiers, trying to kill Pakistani soldiers. Unfortunately they have done that. We recognize that Pakistan has lost people, many people, in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. And I'm afraid that there are many of those people you are just going to have to deal with militarily. But, really the goal is to stabilize areas, extend government authority, extend the benefits of government so that people can have a kind of life that they want to. Those are the people who will remain the target of our efforts on the government and economics.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, let's go down there, in the back.

QUESTION: Well, two questions. Well two plus one.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That makes three.

QUESTION: Tempers have been flying between Afghanistan and Pakistan of late. Have you brought any special word of council or wisdom from Washington on this count? Number two: what is your assessment of the stability around the tribal belt on both sides of the border, in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Is it more stable, less stable, has the situation changed in the last one year either way? And plus one is: what is the U.S. interest in reforming the education sector in Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: So, I get to choose which one of these I have to answer?

(Laughter)

QUESTION: The sequence of it....

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I know that there are a lot of things said in Afghanistan or sometimes in Pakistan, as well, but actually there is also a lot of cooperation. There have been a number of, what we consider, positive and productive meetings in the last several months. The Foreign Minister was just there in

December; the Prime Minister was there a couple of weeks ago. There is a series of discussions, some of which involved the United States, like the trilateral military meetings that were held just yesterday.

And I think if you look at this, say over the past year, you will see what is actually happening is an expansion of cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, an expansion of discussions. Clearly some of the discussions involve serious issues for both sides and extensive discussions. But I think overall we have to say that there is a better channel of communication between Pakistan and Afghanistan now than there have been ever before, at least in recent memory. And so I give a lot of credit to people on both sides who have been conducting those discussions. What I have found in my conversations in Kabul, as well as my conversations here, is that there is a strong desire on both sides to continue those discussions, to resolve the issues and to move forward. And I think that is very good.

As far as stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the border region, that's really what we are dealing with: the border region of both countries. I think overall the trends are positive. Certainly there is a serious threat from, particularly the Taliban, in these areas. There is a threat from narcotics traffickers in these areas, but NATO has been expanding and is active on the Afghan side. The Afghan army, the Afghan police, the Afghan government structures have been expanding and are active on the Afghan side. The economic reconstruction process has been expanding and active on the Afghan side, particularly when it comes to roads, water systems, creating sort of new opportunities through those steps. And I think we have also seen comparable development, different structures but comparable developments on the Pakistan side. And we have further plans on both sides of border.

The United States can support efforts with more reconstruction, more security, more opportunity for people on the Afghan side and we can support Pakistan's efforts to provide more opportunities, more economic opportunity in better governance and more security for people on the Pakistani side. So...I'd note there are positive trends on both sides of the border, even though we are going to face a continuation this year of the serious threats like the ones we saw last year from terrorists and narcotics drug traffickers.

QUESTION: There was question on education sector reforms.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Oh, the education. That's right, that's the question. It is a good question. All of them. All the questions are good questions.

You know, I guess, I've spent my life working in Economics in various countries around the world and I think nothing is more important in the long term, in any country, than education. Nothing is more important to the participation of all its people in the political process than education. Any country, particularly in this age, that wants to achieve a high state of economic progress needs to have an educated population, needs to have a skilled population, needs to have a population that knows how to learn and continue to learn throughout their lives. A lot of the economic studies that I've seen, for example, suggest that the education of women and girls is one of the keys to better health, more entrepreneurship, better economic success, better survival rates for children, plus disease.

So I think we firmly believe that. We not only believe it, but we put our money into it, and put our efforts into it. So the United States has programs to work with the government of Pakistan to provide a modern education to all its citizens, so that they can fully participate in the life of the country, and indeed the global economy. We have programs to do that to help the very youngest children all the way to the very best scientists, and we talked today about some of those programs.

We had a very important education dialogue at the end of November, [and are] looking forward to more education meetings coming up in the next few months. We have good programs, Fulbright programs, the largest Fulbright scholarship program in the entire world, and that's one key to developing the education system and the overall, sort of, knowledge base of the country.

We are developing new programs to deal with scientific exchanges in education so we reviewed a lot of those programs today and we'll continue to emphasize them in the future. It is a very, very, very important part of the future of Pakistan and we want to be involved in helping Pakistan achieve that kind of future.

QUESTION: I just...you are talking about supporting programs that increase stability, especially in the tribal regions. I'm wondering what your impression is of the negotiated settlement with tribal leaders and alleged militants in North Waziristan? So do you think that is a positive development or something that the United States is taking sort of a more hands-off approach to? And then, also, why you are here in the lead up to the elections? Would you be meeting any members of the political opposition?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'll be meeting with a variety of political leaders tonight from all the parties, most of the major parties, that's the way you described it. So, yes.

And I always enjoy those discussions and I know some of these people from the previous visits, and I say they all are lively and all are interesting. They really reflect, I think, pretty vibrant political life in Pakistan. Just the assembly of the people around this table represents the vibrancy of the media in Pakistan.

As far as the agreement in Waziristan, I think...I think the recognition on our part and on the part of the Pakistani government is as long as the cross border movement of the extremists continues we've not succeeded. We have to deal with the threat in Afghanistan and the Pakistani government has to deal with it here, and we have not succeeded yet. No. I think that's clear with this agreement, it hasn't led to any particular change or improvement in the situation at this point.

QUESTION: Has it made it worse?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it's...I don't think that I could draw that kind of conclusion, really, one way or the other. At this point there continues to be a high level of cross-border activity. We just saw the other day, two nights ago, it was reported by a spokesman in Afghanistan. But it is a continuing effort on both sides of the border. I want to make it clear: not just that Pakistan hasn't succeeded yet, but we haven't succeeded yet ourselves. We haven't succeeded in Afghanistan yet, and there is more effort required by all of us. We are going to be in this together, and we have to work it together and that's why I was here and that's why we encourage the exchanges and discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And that's why we participate in tripartite discussions as well, because we all have to continue our efforts until we succeed.

MODERATOR: Two more questions.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay. One, two, down there. OK. Ma'am. I can count. This is two plus one again.

(Laughter)

QUESTION: Enlightened Moderation came up for discussion today. Why? And second, Musharraf would have completed eight years in his Presidency in Pakistan by the end of this year, equivalent to two terms of the U.S. president. Half of the opposition, including Maulana Fazlur Rahman and Benazir Bhutto say they have no objection in Musharraf continuing in power and they want to take part in the elections under his custody, under his supervision, but half of the opposition is not. What do you think? Do you think, Musharraf should continue in power for another five years or more than that even?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think I'm not a Pakistani voter. I vote in the U.S. elections. I cast my vote in the U.S. elections and that's where I cast my vote. This is the only place where I have right to cast my vote.

QUESTION: U.S. opinion?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: U.S. opinion? I don't know. I don't know what U.S. opinion is. You can do the polls. But no, I am not going to take a position with Pakistani politics. What we are interested in is seeing Pakistan succeed as a nation. We are interested in seeing the overall progress of Pakistan, as a nation and society. And I think we recognize that the path that President Musharraf has set this nation on, speaking of enlightened moderation, is one which is designed to give the benefits of a modern system, a modern society and a modern economy to the people of Pakistan. We think that it is a good sign. It is also designed to give them a fair choice in a free election. We think that is important. And so you know that's why we are (inaudible) I think I am not going to throw (inaudible) in one political faction in Pakistan or another, but yes, how did enlightened moderation come up? To that extent we did not really talk about the concept as a concept. We talked about all the elements that are a part: economics, the elections, (inaudible).

QUESTION: You mentioned narcotics in one of your answers. We've had by-line stories by former Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan, Mr. Najamuddin Sheikh is one of them, which have not been denied that Karzai's brother is involved in narcotics smuggling. You had a report from ICG, International Crisis Group, saying that just before elections the Americans were looking the other way, and narcotics were being transported. This was not denied by you. It is a serious problem. Has the U.S. really focused on it and what does it want to do about it in the future? And the question B: what you had spoken about the last time, opportunity zones on the border. What has transpired since the last time you met?

QUESTION: May I be allowed to add just one thing? Chief of command yesterday said that the Afghan economy depends on narcotics and poppy cultivation. Yesterday he said, Chief of Command General Richards.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, I'm afraid, I didn't see that. I saw some other reports before. I'd have to see exactly what he said. But let me give you my opinion on these things. I don't, I don't want people jumping to conclusions. Somebody does not deny something that appears somewhere that is not necessarily true, so...

QUESTION: These are some serious...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. But come on, I mean we cannot go around denying things all the time. Let me tell you what is true.

QUESTION: He's got...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I appreciate that. I'm glad you do, but if I spend my whole life denying things and I never had the chance to tell you what the truth is...so, let me tell you what the truth is and we will deny things later.

First of all, I think we understand the seriousness of the narcotics problem in Afghanistan. It's a very serious problem for the stability of the nation. There is some of the money from narcotics which is making its way into the violent insurgency. That's a threat [for us] to resolve, as well as the people of Afghanistan. We've had a very broad program against narcotics in Afghanistan, that we are pursuing with every possible effort, and every possible vigor. It's a program. It's everything from an information program, to interdiction, to the eradication, to giving people economic opportunity. And what we tried to do this year is to strengthen all those areas. We'll do more education, we'll do more interdiction, we'll do more eradication and we'll provide more economic opportunities to the people of Afghanistan.

It's a program that's based on President Karzai's personal commitment and a commitment of his government to fight this problem. It's a program that's also, I think, takes...takes the experience of other countries that have, including Pakistan, which at one point was a major producer of narcotics and now it has been declared poppy free. And you guys met the problem here by sustained efforts, by strong commitment from the government and by providing the people with economic opportunities. And we intend to do that in Afghanistan.

And so I think, one of the important things to understand is what Pakistan did, what countries like Turkey did, and apply those lessons. And I think we are applying those lessons in Afghanistan and we have that kind of program that needs to be strengthened, it needs to be sustained and that's what we are doing, this year.

As far as developments on the reconstruction opportunity zones, we did in the summer and fall of last year a very thorough economic study of the opportunities there. We think these zones, based on that study, we think these zones can be a success. We've taken the recommendations of the economic study, of that, you know, what's the best way to structure them, where the economic advantages are, how the rules might be written, now we've taken the economic views of that study and now we are turning it into legislation that Congress can deal with. And so we've been working very hard in Washington. We're in the process of preparing legislation that we

put before our Congress to do this, because we think that providing the zones as an economic opportunity for the people of the border areas fits with the development plans for the region that we are trying to support.

QUESTION: Any time frame for this legislation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it will go forward in the next couple of months. We promised that we'd go forward and we will do this early this year. And we will have to work with the Congress for passage. So go forward means, we'll propose it to our Congress. But I think it's really a question: can you bring these areas into the national economy, into the global economy? What sort of economic advantage can we provide for industry to establish itself, or jobs, to establish itself in this region so that people have a different kind of future, than taking up the gun? And that's the plus one.

MODERATOR: Last Question.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you about the comments made by Mr. Negroponte, at the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing. He sort of referred to Pakistan's tribal areas as offering a refuge for terrorist leaders. I wonder did you discuss this at all in your talks here and also, is there any concern that there are elements of the Pakistani establishment who in some sense supporting these kind of elements?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: First, the reporting today about comments that our Director for National Intelligence made yesterday did come up during the course of the meetings and I will say to you what I said to the people who raised it and asked me about that: I think it's important for all of us to read the full text of his remarks. This is a careful analysis that has many elements to it and it is important to keep in mind all of these elements. I was just having a chance myself to look at it. Mr. Negroponte said that some of the successes in Pakistan has been, one of the successes in Pakistan has been among the top four achievements against Al Qaeda last year. He referred to Pakistan repeatedly as key partner in the fight against terrorists. He acknowledged the sacrifices the Pakistani police, the Pakistani officials have made in fighting the War on Terror. And so, the fact that they continue to be radical violent extremists like the Taliban and Al Qaeda types who were able to find places they can operate here or find places they can have refuge here is not in any way a contradiction to saying that there has been a major effort here and a key partnership with us. And all those people in the world, who want to see anti-terrorism (inaudible).

I think that was the second half of your question. Right? Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Well the second half was about some of the establishment who are involved with Taliban.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's right. That's right. You know what I heard today and what I've seen before is a very, very strong commitment from the leaders of Pakistan, I expect to hear frankly from politicians from across different part of the political spectrum (inaudible) to ending the threat of violence, extremism in Pakistan.

Ending the threat in Pakistan emanates to the other areas. This is not the kind of society they want. They make a very strong case and say very clearly that Pakistan does not want violent extremism here or in the neighborhood. And I think their actions speak as loud as their words in that regard.

Pakistan has taken a variety of steps, including military steps where necessary, to demonstrate its resolve against Al Qaeda and against violent extremists, against the Taliban. So what we talked about today was how we can cooperate, how we can coordinate, how we can make sure that these steps are more and more effective. I don't question the commitment or the resolve, but I think we all recognize that we can make our efforts more effective.

QUESTION: So how you make these efforts more effective?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Step up the economic engagement, step up military action, expand the flow of information, develop new tactics, if necessary, deploy forces of police, if necessary. We are doing a lot of those things on the Afghan side and the Pakistani government can (do) the same from the Pakistani side.

Thank you.

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