



Interview With Anwar Iqbal of Dawn TV

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

Washington, DC
May 31, 2007

QUESTION: Thank you very much for this interview.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be with you, and I congratulate Dawn on starting a TV station.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. We need all the good wishes that we can -- and we need a lot of support as well.

So, if you got asked to explain U.S. policies towards Pakistan to ordinary Pakistanis who are not aware of strategic importance of the relationship or other nuances, how would you do that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it's simple. We want you to succeed. We want you to succeed in your personal life, giving your children an education, giving them a safe life, giving them a chance for economic opportunity. We want you to succeed as a country, being stable, moderate, playing a role in the world. Having a democratic system where people can express themselves. We're interested in Pakistan's success as a stable, moderate, democratic nation.

QUESTION: But, you say that, but out of almost \$10 billion that have been given to Pakistan since 9/11. Only \$900 million were for education, health, et cetera, and most of it was for --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think the number's right. I think there's a lot more than that. There's about \$300 million a year that goes into economic support. There's several hundred million that go into earthquake reconstruction, that's still going on. And there are things like anti-narcotics funds that go into building roads in the tribal areas.

We put over \$100 million a year into the education system in Pakistan. This is very important to us. We have the largest Fulbright Scholar program in the world, \$20 million worth. We built schools throughout the country. We support girls' education, repairing girls' schools. We're really interested in Pakistan sort of reaching that moderate center, reaching that economic opportunity as well. And frankly yes, our aid is important. The trade that we have with Pakistan, the support we've given to economic reform and you have a fast-growing economy, because of your own efforts and our help.

QUESTION: Do you think this economy is sustainable or is it just because of the assistance Pakistan is getting after 9/11?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, I think it's definitely sustainable. I think the numbers will show that the big growth in the Pakistani economy is investment, and exports, and new opportunities created by the private sector.

QUESTION: Are there threats that this political instability can derail the economy?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, it's hard to say. I think people who do business in Pakistan, who have done business in Pakistan, they've seen a lot of things come and go. They've seen a lot of, -- there has been violence on the streets of Karachi before. There have been changes of government. So, I think realistically speaking, people in Pakistan know how to do business, know how to create economic growth despite some very difficult circumstances.

QUESTION: You spoke of a democratic Pakistan, and one of the things that is said in Pakistan about your policies is that the United States prefers to work with military rulers.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think that's true. I haven't been in this long enough to say if at some time in the past it might have been true. What I can tell you right now, we want to see a democratic Pakistan. We want to see a fair and free election this year. That's why I tell people Pakistan's headed in the right direction. They've got economic growth, they've got progress towards elections, they've got progress confronting the extremists and making it inhospitable for al-Qaeda, Uzbeks, and people like that. That's the right direction. Part of that direction is democratic elections this year.

QUESTION: What sort of democracy? Like a democracy headed by a military ruler or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Headed by whoever the Pakistani people decide they want for their ruler.

QUESTION: In an election?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: In an election. Certainly, we've worked well with President Musharraf. I'm not apologizing for that. He's taken the country in this more moderate direction. He's also taken the country towards an election later this year. So, we think that's the right direction. But in the long run Pakistan is going to be headed by the people who are chosen by the people of Pakistan.

QUESTION: I think you have been asked this question umpteen times, but I'm also going to come at this. Do you want President Musharraf to take off his uniform before this election, after this election?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I have answered it umpteen times. I'll give you the same answer that I've had the pleasure to give to others. That's certainly one of the questions that comes up during the course of the election process that we're all familiar with the provisions of the Pakistan constitution. President Musharraf has said he's going to deal with the matter in the context of the election process, and in the context of the constitution. We'll see how he deals with it. But I think he's pledged to resolving that issue, among many others, as Pakistan heads to elections.

QUESTION: And when you say you support fair and free elections, does it mean allowing Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to come back?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Individuals have different issues with the Pakistan legal system that they're going to have to address, with the Pakistan authorities and the legal system. So I don't think for us it's about individuals. For us it's about having competition, political parties, it's having a system that counts the votes so that people's choices are respected.

QUESTION: What do you think this judiciary process is leading to what? Do you see Pakistan again leading towards problems?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think it's been a difficult situation for the government. It's been a difficult situation for the country. It does, perhaps, reflect in part the fact that it's a political year and a lot of this gets seen through a political lens by the different players.

Our view is that it needs to be handled smoothly and cleanly as a judicial matter. The Justices need to decide; they need to make a decision that everyone respects. So we're looking for that to happen. We are watching things closely. We certainly don't want violence to get out of hand or this to become a big trouble for everybody, but it does need to be resolved in that judicial context and we hope that can happen quickly.

QUESTION: A little more about Afghanistan, cross-border movement of the Taliban. I've seen Afghan authorities and some U.S. officials are also complaining that it is happening. Do you think it is intentional that the Pakistanis are allowing them to cross over, or is it something they cannot control?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think there are a lot of signs that the Taliban consider Pakistan inhospitable. It's not a safe place for them any more. It's not safe certainly for some of the foreign fighters, and it's not safe for the Taliban, the senior leadership of the Taliban. And, you've had -- to some extent that's why some of them crossed over into Afghanistan. And, you've had I think some serious efforts made on both sides of the border. The senior leadership, Mullah Dadullah Lang is no longer with us. Mullah Osmani is no longer with us. Sheikh Obaidullah is reported to have been picked up on the Pakistani side, so a lot of mid-level commanders, too.

So, I think frankly the Taliban are under pressure from both sides. They're under pressure on the Afghan side from NATO and the Afghan Government, and they're under pressure from the Pakistan side by the Pakistan Government.

QUESTION: So the Pakistani government is doing what you think it should be doing?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think they're doing a lot. We're all going to be at this for a while. There are always other things we need to do. We can step up our efforts on both sides of the border. We need to coordinate better. But there's a lot going on; and I think if you listen to what the Taliban are saying, they're saying it's no longer comfortable for them in Pakistan.

QUESTION: You recall that there were border clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan and then it did stop. Did America play a role in stopping it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We do. We play a role in the Tripartite Military Meetings. And in fact, the American officer and some of our soldiers who were shot were there, because they had to call a meeting; they went to a meeting for the purpose of solving some of these border clashes that occurred. This is a terrible thing for our people who were killed, for the Pakistani and Afghans who were shot at, some of whom were hurt in these clashes. This is a terrible waste of effort, energy, and resources. We have a common problem in that area, and we have to deal with it together. The United States is committed to working with both sides and helping us guard that whole region better so the people of that region can live safely. We have enormous development plans. We need to be able to get on with the development plans.

QUESTION: Do you see the relations improving?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think in a lot of times things are working well. There was just a meeting of the G8 between the Foreign Ministers and a statement that was issued that was very positive. There's real cooperation on refugees, real cooperation sometimes across the border, real cooperation on military issues sometimes. There can be a lot more.

QUESTION: No interview is complete without talking about U.S.-- sorry, Pakistan and India relations. The United States has had very close relations with Pakistan for years, and now it also has very good relations with India. So --but still, because of India's position on this you're reluctant to play a direct role in promoting their relations. So how do you go about it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, Frankly, both sides have told us they don't want us directly involved. We recognize, they've been doing quite well without us. I give a lot of credit to the statesmen on both sides, on the Pakistani side and the Indian side, for moving this forward, for seeing -- looking for ways of dealing with tough, tough issues like terrorism, looking at ways of dealing with nuclear balance, nuclear stability issues, and looking at ways to solve the Kashmir problem. And, frankly, we've been encouraged by what we've seen, and we've been, in our own way, trying to help them just by encouraging them, by saying this is really important to us and to the whole world. We like what's happening, we encourage you to keep moving and look for ways to bring this to some kind of closure.

QUESTION: Some people say that they are close with resolving the Kashmir issue. Have you heard anything like that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I've heard a lot of people say they're close, but when you ask people what does that mean, some people say that means two months, other people say it means five years. So, it doesn't really count until you get there, until you really do it. So, we're hoping to encourage that as best we can.

QUESTION: In new recent dealing with Pakistanis did you feel any signs of bitterness over India-U.S. nuclear deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think what people in Pakistan want to know is that we're helping Pakistan with Pakistan's goals and Pakistan's problems. There is a desire to deal with Pakistan's energy problems. There is an energy deficit in Pakistan, a fast-growing economy. They need energy. We're working a lot of different energy projects with Pakistan, working both private sector investment, bringing -- but also things like bringing electricity down from Central Asia. There are a lot of possibilities there. New energy sources, --

QUESTION: But not nuclear energy.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: But not nuclear. But that's appropriate to what we think are Pakistan's circumstances.

QUESTION: What if say another country like China offers a similar deal to Pakistan? What would be the U.S. reaction?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I think there's an International Nuclear Suppliers Group. Everybody operates according to a certain set of rules and understandings. We wouldn't want anybody to break those rules or understandings.

QUESTION: Do you see the United States breaking that rule by offering this deal to India?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We've made very clear it's a unique deal, and we've made very clear we're not going to do anything without the approval of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Thank you very much.

[↑](#) Assistant Secretary Boucher is referring to foreign militants.

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