



Briefing on Pakistan

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It's good to be back and I want to thank Sean and Tom and Gonzo for lending me their podium for a few minutes and getting a chance to talk to my old friends.

I wanted to, I think, talk a little bit about Pakistan today because we've been getting a lot of questions about the situation in Pakistan and you've seen from Fran Townsend's briefing at the White House that Pakistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan do figure in the National Intelligence Estimate key judgments that are being put out today. So I thought it was a useful moment to come down and we can talk about Pakistan or my part of the world in any way you want. But let me give you a few thoughts at the beginning as we try to take the time to explain what we're seeing and what we and the Pakistani Government are doing about it.

The first thing I would say is Pakistani Government is dealing decisively with the problems that have been brewing for some time. Without reviewing decades of history, I think, let me say that al-Qaida has been able to exploit an opportunity last year after the Waziristan agreement. By violating the terms of that agreement, they were able to operate, meet, plan, recruit, obtain financing in more comfort in the tribal areas than previously.

In addition to that you've had the situation at the Red Mosque where Red Mosque occupied by militants, you've seen all the guns and the weapons that were recovered after the army went in. Again, this was the product of decades, but it became acute over the last eight months or so. So again, the government action on the Red Mosque itself was a decisive move against extremism. I think it shows that the Government of Pakistan is prepared to move, to act against dangerous militancy that has come to infect various areas in parts of Pakistani society. This action on the Red Mosque comes amidst more government pressure on the extremists in the tribal areas. So over the last six to nine months in particular you've seen arrests of Taliban, fighting between the tribal elders and the Uzbeks, movement of troops back into the tribal areas, the blocking of border crossings, and in recent weeks warnings by President Musharraf and Governor Orakzai that the time had come to expel the foreign elements and to prevent the Talibanization, as they call it, of the settled areas of Pakistan.

The extremists have reacted to this. You've seen the bombings, especially the horrible bombings over the last weekend that killed some 70 people, and our sympathies go out to the soldiers and the others who were killed in these bombings. The reaction -- I think the retaliation has been not only for the mosque and the action the government took there, but also for this government pressure on the foreign elements in the tribal areas generally.

So what's the way forward? What can we all do about it? I think first and foremost we have to remember that some military action is necessary and will probably have to be taken, that there are elements in these areas that are extremely violent and are out to kill government people, out to kill government leaders, and will not settle for a peaceful way forward.

Second of all, and corollary to that, is we need to support Pakistani efforts and we need to help them upgrade their military, particularly the Frontier corps, which is the corps that forms the bulk of the forces, the 85,000 or so military forces that they have in the tribal and border region of Pakistan. And so we are developing programs and seeking funding to try to help upgrade their capabilities.

A month or so ago, I was down in the border, in the Balochistan border out of Quetta, and I was talking with their forces there, with a colonel there and they have a whole series of border posts. He's got enough night vision equipment, enough body armor for some of his soldiers, a very small number of his soldiers. And so he has to apportion it according to where he thinks the most difficult areas might be. So you get that kind of situation. You see that overall they need help with equipment, with upgrading with the training, with organization. Pakistanis, I think, are determined to do that and we need to help them with that.

The third thing is more general for the tribal areas and that's to develop these areas. Through history -- the history of the British period and then onward, these have been, sort of, ungoverned or indirectly governed spaces, where the governments still relied on the tribal elders to be the agents -- the powers that be in those areas -- and government agents worked with the tribes to try to maintain law and order. They haven't had direct government control at any period.

So these places have never really been part of the national order of the national economy even, and I think at least on that side we can help them make these spaces part of the national economy. And they have now a tribal areas sustainable development plan that involves funding of about \$100 million a year from the Pakistani Government. We have promised \$150 million a year for the next five years to try to bring development to these areas and help them integrate into the national economy.

The plan is a good one. It's been very thoroughly worked out. It involves, first, the building of institutions in the area who can carry out projects and represent a way forward. It involves a lot of training, education, vocational training, some of the infrastructure that's necessary to develop industry, and creating more education and more opportunity for the people who live there so that they can find jobs and be part of the economy, as opposed to revert to more traditional employment, you might say, that people have taken up in this area, including guns and smuggling.

The fourth element, I think, of dealing with the current situation -- dealing with extremism in Pakistan -- is to support the democratic transition that is underway in Pakistan this year. And the process is moving forward. There's a lot of politics in the air right now in Pakistan, but we're very much supportive of movement towards a free and open election where the Pakistani people be given a choice and be able to make the choice of their leadership in the future. And that will help, we think, stabilize a moderate center and provide a basis for the whole society to fight extremism. Because we think in all this situation, as you look at these different elements, what's clear is that the vast majority of the Pakistani people are looking for more modern and more moderate to more prosperous course, based on openness, based on democracy, to be an Islamic nation, but a modern, moderate Islamic nation and that's a course that we very much support. They have cast their lot in that direction and there's no going back. It's a tough choice. It could be a difficult period. But we're going to be with them all the way.

So with that, I'd be glad to take a question from the senior wire service correspondent.

QUESTION: Is that me?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) Richard, one, is Musharraf capable of taking these decisive actions without the -- without serious and significant support from the United States? And is it your feeling or is it your concern that he may have acted too little, too late in dealing with a problem that I think with the Waziristan agreement that you all had foreseen and warned about at the time?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think on the first part of the question -- is he capable of doing this without the United States -- the answer is yes, but it's not a question that's really going to arise because he's going to have our support. I think he has made very clear, if you look back, you know, over the last few years, that he is trying to move the whole society in this more modern, moderate direction and that dealing with extremism has been on his agenda and he's tried in various ways to do that.

One of the reasons for the Waziristan agreement was it was a whole series of new tactics or new steps that were adopted last year by President Musharraf and the Government to deal politically, economically and militarily with the problem of extremism in the tribal areas. A sustainable development plan comes out of that, some of the military steps last year come out of that.

The Waziristan agreement was an attempt politically to get agreement where the tribes would deal with the extremism, would -- you know, there are the three basic conditions: no cross-border, no al-Qaida and no Talibanization of settled areas. When it -- after it was signed in September it became clear by November, December, it wasn't working out that way. And so it was not -- it was an attempt to deal with the problem, but not successfully. And then as you look at what happened in sort of December-January period, then you started to get more cooperation between the governments and the tribes to actually make it more effective and it was the fighting between the tribes and the Uzbeks to get rid of those foreign elements. There were a significant number of arrests of senior Taliban figures, particularly the Quetta shura figures. So I think they've been trying to deal with it over time. I would say, though, that dealing -- clearing out the mosque and the extremism there was a bold move, a decisive move. It may have been a long time coming after a lot of provocation, but that I think reflects certain concern about the women and children inside. But now having dealt with the mosque, it's pretty much, you know, crossing a line and there's no going back.

Janine. Janine, yeah.

QUESTION: That's Farah.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Sorry, next door to each other.

QUESTION: Janine can ask a question if you want.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You can both ask a question.

QUESTION: It's my understanding that a lot of the moderate tribal leadership has already fled Waziristan and most of these tribal areas and that basically, you already have the Talibanization of those areas; you don't have the kind of moderate leadership that you would need in order to build these institutions. You know, maybe you had it in 2001, 2002, but that -- those guys are killed or they're gone. And so I'm wondering, what is your assessment of whether or not the moderate forces, the moderate tribal leaders are still -- you know, there's still a tribal structure there to work with.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think there is still a tribal structure to work with. It's not something that's happened over the last year. I mean, if you look back over the last three decades, what's happened is -- you know, well, let's look back even farther.

If you go back to the British period, the tribal leaders really did have control of that area, but especially as the anti-Soviet period began, different people started to get a lot of money from outside and the mosque grew up in a new way and the madrassas grew up in a new way and the mullahs became more important. And then there were the people the army worked with and the people -- and so there were a lot of other different forces in society. And the Malaks, the tribal elders no longer had the control they used to.

And so working with them to control that area has become much more difficult over the last few decades than it was, based in theory, on the governing arrangements that exist there. So yes, the power of the tribal elders has been attenuated. In dealing with the Uzbek situation earlier this year, I think you began to see a certain reassertion by those elements of their ability to operate. Now there are lots of qualifications on that because they were in league with some of the other bad guys too to do that, but still, you know, trying to come back and assert themselves.

What has to happen over the longer term is there needs to be responsible authority in that area and how exactly that will evolve, I don't know. The first step, we think, is obviously for the government authority in the form of their military forces and Frontier Corps to be assertive where necessary. The second step is to develop the economy so that the stake people have there in the national economy can be increased.

QUESTION: Just to follow up.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: I mean, you're -- you talked about the Uzbek situation as a sign that they were going to -- that there was someone asserting -- you know, the willingness to fight these outsiders. But you know, as you alluded to, many people believe that the Uzbeks -- that that was just two parts of al-Qaida fighting each other and that you're going to come out at the end with somebody who's incredibly -- you know, strong, two mafia families fighting each other and then the strongest wins and they're going to be --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think it's --

QUESTION: -- bigger and badder than everybody else.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think that's -- I don't think that's right. I think it may be -- it has elements of both, of one side going against the other -- you know, one group of bad guys turning on another group of bad guys -- but it also has elements of a government and the local leaders turning on the bad guys. So it's never purely one or the other in those areas.

I think you have to look, though, and understand the government's most important concern right now, and probably has been from the beginning, is the Talibanization of settled areas and the groups of Taliban supporters in the tribal areas who've been moving into settled areas and, you know, attacking video shops and barber shops and trying to impose their will in settled areas has really been a concern overall throughout Pakistani society and so they're trying to prevent that. They're trying to prevent the cross-border activity and they're trying to get rid of the extremists in those areas that feed this, and that's what you see in President Musharraf's speech in Peshawar for example.

Yeah, down here, yeah.

QUESTION: Why work with Musharraf, rather not let democratic leadership emerging work with them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, first of all, because he's the President of Pakistan and he's the leader of Pakistan. He's been leading Pakistan in this direction for a number of years and we work well with him. He's shown the determination and the authority and the ability to deal with some of these very difficult situations. He's also shown the determination to bring about the democratic transition that he understands, that we understand, is important to the long-term success of Pakistan as a moderate, modern Muslim nation. So we have no problems working with him. That's the direction that we support. That's the direction he's going in and he's the guy in charge and we work with him.

QUESTION: But do you think if they had an elected government, it'll be -- it will have a different policy towards these issues?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think if you look at people across the political spectrum in Pakistan, there's been a fairly solid support for moving against the extremists. I think it was noteworthy that Benazir Bhutto, for example, expressed her support for the action of the Red Mosque; as her party actually also supported the government when it came to expanding women's rights and reducing -- removing some of the ordinances last fall. So there is sort of a logical, moderate center to Pakistani politics that we hope can help -- can emerge through a democratic election.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, the facts are that it's not a Pakistan Government that has abandoned Waziristan agreement, but the local Taliban, and there are conflicting signals coming from different government leaders like Chief Minister of NWFP and the (inaudible) NWFP and also the Information (inaudible) minister. All three have said that we are trying to resuscitate somehow this agreement. So where do you go from there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know. I don't know where they go from there. The -- you're right. The declaration, the agreement was over -- done and over, was a Taliban shura, based on what I saw in the press. And where exactly the tribal leaders stand, where some of the more moderate tribal leaders stand who were in that area is not clear. The government, I think, would like to see it work.

For our concern, it's not so much the agreement. It's the facts of what happens, however those three fundamental conditions are met, whether it's through an agreement or through a position of government will or whatever. They remain the key; no Talibanization, no cross-border activity, no al-Qaida plotting and planning from the tribal areas. And we're going to help the Government of Pakistan achieve that through whatever -- all these different means that might be necessary.

If they decide that an agreement like that can work and can be effective, they might want to try it again, but in the end, it's the -- you know, it's the behavior of people in that area that really matters if those three conditions are met; however they're met we would all be better off.

Yeah, Jonathan.

QUESTION: I want to talk about the idea that you can use military force or military force is going to have to be used in some way. It was the -- General Musharraf's employment of heavy artillery and helicopter gunships over a two-year, three-year period that alienated a lot of the tribes because of the civilian casualties that they caused and built up support in that area for both the Pakistani and the Afghan Taliban.

And it was American cross-border attacks like the Predator attack on Damadola that also killed civilians, that fueled anti-American sentiment in that area and has increased anti-American sentiment in areas like Tonk and that -- the areas just outside of the settled areas.

Why do you think -- well, let me put it this way. What has to be done this time to avoid that kind of result and blowback? Does he have to use less military force and more police and intelligence-type operations? What -- there are enormous dangers of using military force again in that area.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, but nonetheless, some elements have to be dealt with militarily.

QUESTION: Understood --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I mean, there are people trying to kill people, there are people trying to set off bombs, there are groups trying to organize attacks in other parts of Pakistan and other parts of the region and other parts of the world.

QUESTION: But does it have to be --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Some of these groups are going to have to be dealt with, you know, with weapons.

QUESTION: But does it have to be done differently this time?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Obviously, everything needs to be learned from previous experience to do better. This is not something that happened in one year or two years or -- it's happened over decades. And to say it was this attack that caused the radicalization or it was that effort, that tactic that caused the tribes to move into the settled areas or the Taliban to move into settled areas, I don't think is true.

But in any case, I think they recognize that they have tried to adopt different tactics, different measures, and the measures being used this year are different from last year and those are different from the year before. So I do think you see a lot more sophisticated use of force, taking into account some of the problems that have happened in the past. And that's why we do believe it's important to go through the transformation of the Frontier Corps so that they can become a different kind of force that's able to deal with the severe problems, but also stabilize the area.

QUESTION: Does it mean that --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you expect a major military offensive and will you support it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That'll be for the Pakistani Government to decide how to go about it militarily.

QUESTION: And will you support it if it is done?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: As I said, that'll be for the Pakistani Government to decide how to go about it, and we'll obviously work with them in terms of all the steps, political ones, economic ones, and military ones that are necessary to bring stability to these areas.

QUESTION: There have been, recently, a number of attacks by extremists on a number of government installations, departments, and also troops. Do you think the tribal leaders in this context, in this setting have the standing in order to convince the militants to lay down arms? And do you expect them to continue to play a meaningful and a positive role to resolve the situation with the rising militancy?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I guess, you know, the answer -- that's sort of the same question we were discussing before. I can't say that the tribal elders, tribal leaders in and of themselves have the ability to impose order on this situation. They haven't been able to do so, so far. You know, one can question if they wanted to, but whatever happened, they themselves have not been this whole solution to the problem, so far. So one would hope they would be part of the solution. One would hope that the tribal leaders in this area would look for development, would look for stability, would look for opportunity for their people and therefore would look to expel the foreigners, stop the Talibanization and stop the cross-border activity.

Anyone down here?

QUESTION: Now, when you said that some military action is needed and that some elements have to be tackled militarily, what kind of threshold is there in terms of the military action that can be taken and the death tolls that would be acceptable and people caught in sort of crossfire of that -- civilian casualties?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think that's a question one asks oneself. One makes every attempt in any of these situations to keep civilian casualties at a minimum and look at the way they went through the mosque. You know, there were indeed, you know, civilian casualties or people inside the mosque that were killed -- some of them apparently trying to, you know, brandishing weapons and trying to kill the soldiers who came in.

But they -- the reason this operation in the mosque took a long time was apparently because they went through so carefully, trying to avoid civilian casualties. The reason that it had been allowed to try to see if it could work itself out over eight months, along with all the negotiation that happened, was because they were trying to avoid civilian casualties. So I think, you know, in the military -- everybody's military, always makes efforts, maximum efforts to avoid civilian casualties. And one doesn't start off thinking, well, you know, X number is okay. You have to make every possible effort to avoid civilian casualties.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. have a position on Musharraf's bid to keep himself in power for another five years? And also his continued refusal to let the two leaders, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto return to Pakistan? And how can there be a fair, free and transparent election, something that -- a mantra that you keep repeating -- with Musharraf in power and an election commission which simply does not enjoy the trust of the people? And of course, the upsurge --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay. You want a question or a speech?

QUESTION: -- witness on the streets, because of the sacking of the chief justice? How can you ignore those elements? You seem to confine yourself to the situation in the tribal areas. Pakistan is more than tribal areas.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Okay, now that you asked a question --

QUESTION: End of speech.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: End of speech. Thank you. (Laughter.) We came -- we're talking about tribal areas today because that's what's in the news today. I'm happy to talk about other aspects of Pakistan, as I indicated when I came out. There is -- it is a political year in Pakistan and there's a lot of politics going on. So you have, you know, the opposition rallies, the rallies in support of justice. So the people, I think, in a way, it's heartening to see that there are so many people who believe a space has been open for independent justice in Pakistan. It's heartening to see the civil-growth of civil society for the last few years, that there are people out there, you know, defending causes and supporting things. It's heartening to see the enormous expansion of the media in the last few years where, you know, eight years ago, there was one TV station, now there are 42 -- so all these factors contributing to the political atmosphere in Pakistan this year.

I think we do want to see a successful transition to credible elections, elections that give the Pakistani people a fair choice and a real choice in their leadership and that is a transition the government and the society have to make this year and we see it as contributing to the overall stability and to the overall fight against extremism. President Musharraf has pledged to do that. We have tried to support that process in every possible way.

You mention the Election Commission. I've met with the Election Commission during my visits to Pakistan. The embassy works with them regularly. We have about \$13 million that's going to support the work of the Election Commission. They, in and of themselves, don't guarantee a completely open and fair election, but they are certainly able to contribute to that. There are a lot of other factors. The parties have recently been talking about having an all-party meeting or getting together to agree on a code of conduct and the ground rules for an election. We've made very clear we think that would be a good thing because that can make it fair and more credible. So we are trying to support all these different things.

As far as individual leaders of individual parties, you know, each of their circumstance is different and I'm afraid they have to deal with different circumstances as they contemplate a return to join the election. They have judicial proceedings and other things against them. But we have certainly worked with all the parties and encouraged all the parties to participate in the election, so that the people of Pakistan have a real choice as they go through the transition that everyone wants to see to a democratically elected civilian government.

Yeah, let's see. Nick? All right.

QUESTION: I'm wanting to go back to the money. You mentioned the 150 million, which I assume has already been budgeted, but you didn't give us a number for the military aid that you're seeking. What are the -- what's the range of that and when do you hope to get it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The 150 million is year-by-year in the budget. We got the necessary transfer from the supplemental funding this year to complement. So we've ascertained 150 million for this year and we have the mechanism for doing that in the future years. As far as --

QUESTION: So it comes to 750 over five years?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Over five years, yeah. The Pakistani Government has pledged, I think, about 100 million a year for ten years, and the overall plan looks at \$2 billion over that period. So there'll be a shortfall that, we hope, maybe some other countries will help contribute to. But that's our commitment at this point, and together it adds up to really getting the thing started in the right way.

On the military side -- now this is going back, particularly for the tribal areas because there's other money that's for Pakistan's development as a whole that you're aware of that's been going on for some time -- on the military side, the transformation of the Frontier Corps, the Pakistani Government has estimated it'll take something like 300 -- \$350 million to do what they need to do. They have already started themselves, in terms of training and equipping the Frontier Corps. Frankly, we looked at what we might get in this year's supplemental budget and weren't able to secure the funds, so we'll have some money out of regular funding this year and then we're looking at how we built that over the course of say, two or three years.

QUESTION: What's the 300?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: But that's not -- I wouldn't say that's pinned down yet.

QUESTION: Right. In that number, you just decided this is a one time -- not over several years or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That's the transformation of the Frontier Corps for one time over several years that we're looking and trying to come up with the money for.

QUESTION: And if I could just follow-up on the tribal areas. You had, sort of, talked about a couple of steps that need to happen, in terms of institution building and such. Are you envisioning some sort of, I guess, elections, in terms of who is going to lead the areas? You talked about the tribal leaders --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, that gets back to the, sort of, unusual governing arrangements that exist in this part of the country. And they know they don't have the same election system --

QUESTION: Right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: -- as elsewhere in the country. So that's something politically that will have to evolve. I think what we're looking at first and foremost is try to build -- and this is part of the plan, which, if you look at the plan, if you read the plan, you'll see the first and foremost thing is to build the development institutions of the areas and especially the tribal areas' secretariat, but the tribal areas' development authority that would have a lot of the work to do in terms of overseeing the funds and the projects and making the whole plan fit together. And so really, as you look at the whole development plan, the first element is to develop the people who can carry out the whole plan.

We have experience working up there. I mean, we build schools, we run health programs up there, we have helped build roads, we have both, you know, anti-narcotics efforts up there that do things, and aid efforts up there; you know, and scholarships for teachers, micro credit programs, a whole list of things. And we do make sure, you know, that these things are properly funded, staffed and maintained.

When I was up in (inaudible) earlier this year, you know, we went to visit a school and the first thing you see are, you know, are the kids in school? Do they have books? Are the teachers there? What's the record? We're building 65 schools -- I guess, a little bit more than half have been built so far, you know. Are we making sure that in every single case it's not just rebuilding a school but the teachers, the books -- the students are able to get there and to study? And yes, that is something that we pay a lot of attention to and it does work.

Okay, Janine's turn now.

QUESTION: Can you -- I have a clarification question. The 750 million over five years is -- the U.S. contribution -- is that tied to this deal with the tribal leaders that has collapsed?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Oh no.

QUESTION: It's just separate from that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No, no, this is a development plan for the overall border area and tribal area of Pakistan.

QUESTION: So that goes ahead whether or not --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That has nothing to do with the deal.

QUESTION: Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We're not part of the deal. We never endorsed the deal, we never put money behind it and we never looked at it as a key element. You know, if it works, in terms of getting rid of the foreign elements and the cross-border and the Talibanization, then great. But, you know, it didn't work last fall and other steps have been necessary, but, I think, as we look at the overall picture, you have this sort of long term -- which is, develop the area, bring it more into the nation. You have the medium term, which is transform the Frontier Corps into a more capable force and try to start opening up channels to the rest of the country; work better with the tribal elders; these things being done by the Pakistani Government. Then you have the short term, which is, deal with the violent elements that are there now and keep them from perpetrating this violence into Pakistan or other parts of Pakistan or into Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) this -- where is this plan, by the way?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The tribal area --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: -- development plan? I think it's on the web, but I'm not sure.

QUESTION: Is it? Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We'll find you a reference.

QUESTION: So it's --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah.

QUESTION: But if you -- so you're looking at a total of, when you combine that with the military aid for the north -- for the Frontier Corps, you're looking at about one -- just over a billion dollars, if you get the money for --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The problem we've -- yeah, that's -- the problem is we've identified the money stream for the economic development side. We have told them we want to help with the Frontier Corps, but I haven't -- we haven't identified the money yet, so I hate to add real money, but we have hopes.

QUESTION: Right, right, right, but you're hoping to come up -- you're hoping that the U.S. can come up with this 300 to 350 itself? It's not one of these things where you're --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It's a -- what we've told them is, "We'll try to help you with that."

QUESTION: But it's all going to be U.S. money that you're hoping to get?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah, but this is only part -- I mean --

QUESTION: No, I understand. I understand.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You have to understand, both on the economic side and the military side, the Pakistani Government is, frankly, not waiting. They're going ahead with their own funding, with their own training, with their own equipping. And they are moving forward in these areas and we've said, "We will try to help you in the following ways."

Okay, where were we? Let's go down -- sorry.

QUESTION: How much of the violence actually in the tribal areas is feeding the violence in Afghanistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think that there's a complicated relationship between the two. There is certainly violence that originates in Afghanistan and there's violence that originates in Pakistan. The ability of Taliban to go across the border, the ability of people to get trained and recruited in Pakistan in these safe haven areas or just in parts of Pakistan that weren't firmly under government control, that has been feeding the violence in Afghanistan. It's not the only source of violence in Afghanistan. What we've said to both sides is, "We need to work with each of you to deal with the problems on each side of the border." We're working with the Afghans to deal with the problems on the Afghan side and working with the Pakistanis to deal with the problems on the Pakistani side. And we've seen a certain amount of success. I mean, let's face it. Three of the major Taliban leaders were either killed or arrested this year and all with some help from Pakistan. Mullah Obaidullah was picked up in Pakistan, Mullah Osmani was killed in Afghanistan, Mullah Dadullah Lang killed in Afghanistan, along with other mid-level and other commanders of the Taliban.

Just in recent weeks, you've seen other further press reports saying that some of the senior Taliban people, people close to Mullah Omar, had been picked up. So I think it's important to remember there's been a lot going on over the last six months, even a year; that the Taliban is under pressure from all sides, from the Afghan side and the Pakistan side, and that it's no longer safe for them and easy for them to operate everywhere.

They still use this ability to cross the border. They use the ability to find -- exploit the situation in the tribal areas to recoup, regroup, to get supplies, get recruits. But it's no longer as easy for them as it used to be.

QUESTION: Can we then say that over the last six months, attacks (inaudible) from Pakistan have been lesser?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I couldn't -- I don't have the data to draw that kind of conclusion. I think you've seen other Taliban figures taken off the battlefield because of the joint efforts of the U.S., the Afghans and the Pakistanis. And the Taliban is under pressure from all sides and that has to continue.

Let's do one or two more if that's okay.

QUESTION: We (inaudible) from the area they're talking about (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes. Sir.

QUESTION: Yes, sir, I'm from that very region and does Pakistan (inaudible) --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: He knows more about it than I do, so ask him afterwards.

QUESTION: Pakistan (inaudible) has a history of funds embezzlement, so what mechanism you have created for the transfer of the funds that it should be used by proper hands and that people should not be attracted by these guys who are giving money for suicide attacks, so --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yeah. Well, we're not just going to dump money out of airplanes. That's where the whole plan, the whole strategy of building the authorities, building the mechanisms, building the expertise in that region to handle the money well to complete -- to do the projects, complete the projects, check on the projects, all that is very important to us.

And as I said, even though -- you know, we don't wander around freely in the tribal areas, we've been able to do things. We've been able to build schools, support health clinics, support micro credit programs. You have, you know, contractors who know how to get the work done. You have people who know how to check on -- make sure it is done. You have people who can work with the government to make sure that they do their part of staffing and providing books and teachers. So you build a network of people who are capable of doing things and capable of making sure things get done and that's in view of the expansion of resources, that network of people, those local development institutions -- the first and foremost thing you're going to expand as we start working more there.

QUESTION: Can I ask you the last question?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Can he ask me the last question?

QUESTION: I'll let (inaudible) after him. (Laughter.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Whatever you say.

QUESTION: I'm sure you have seen the statements of President Musharraf that he has said that anybody who wants to back up elections may go ahead, but I am here and he has said categorically that he will not allow the leaders of main political parties exiled to come back. And you still believe that he's the leader who's committed for a democratic transition in Pakistan?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: He has made every indication, every statement, every commitment that anybody's ever asked him in terms of proceeding with a democratic election. He has not made commitments on leaders and a few other things. But frankly, the essential thing of moving through a democratic transition with an election this year is something he's made every commitment to over and over again and that's something that we want to see happen because it's something that we support as much as, you know, as well as everything else going on in Pakistan. So that part of the transition is an essential part of creating a long-term, stable, moderate, democratic society that can successfully fight extremism.

STAFF: Your last question.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Bonus question.

QUESTION: We talk a lot about the Taliban and al-Qaida, but the one thing that no one ever mentions is what ever happened to Sheikh Omar and Osama bin Laden. Do we know any more today than we did a year ago about where they are or what they're doing? And I ask this seriously, not to just be sloughed off.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know where they are or what they're doing. I have not met anybody who does, despite all the charges and statements and supposed information. Do we as a whole in the U.S. Government? I'm not sure I can speak for the entire U.S. Government on this, but I'm not aware that we have a good picture of their exact whereabouts.

QUESTION: So the answer is no, we don't know any more than we did a year ago.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Know any more than we did a year ago? That's an analyst question. I can't answer it. But we don't know where they are. If we did, we'd get them.

Okay. Thank you very much.

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