



## On-The-Record Briefing on U.S.-Pakistan Relations

**Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs**

Via Teleconference Call  
Washington, DC  
December 21, 2007

**MR. GALLEGOS:** Good afternoon, you all. Thanks for joining us. We have Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, who will be discussing U.S. aid to Pakistan and the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations. For your information, this is on the record, however not for broadcast.

Richard, do you want to go ahead?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Hi, everybody. I'm glad to be with you. So I don't forget, let me wish everyone a happy holiday. Let me just say I wanted to do this and talk to you all just to clarify some issues that were in press reports today about the congressional appropriations. I think...on Pakistan. And I think the first thing I want to say is we're comfortable with what they've asked for, the requirements they've made for us to report on certain issues and a final tranche of our financing money. We're confident that we'll be able to report to Congress on developments in areas that they have identified. In fact, those are the same issues that we're following very closely: the fight against terrorism that Pakistan is engaged in, issues of democracy that Pakistan is engaged in. And we'll report -- you know, we report in all kinds of ways, in public statements and written reports to the Congress.

In terms of the use of the money that we've used for foreign military financing, this is very much part of the counter-terrorism effort. For the last couple years, it has been solely for counter-terrorism efforts, broadly defined. It goes to TOW missiles. It goes to tactical radios that their forces can use to plan military operations. And it goes to support the program for P-3C aircraft that help them do maritime patrols.

Pakistan is currently, for the second time, in command of the Combined Task Force 150 that patrols the seas off Pakistan and the Arabian Gulf to prevent terrorist activities on the high seas. And the P-3 program is a complement to that, so they can work better with us and others in protecting their neighborhood from threats of terrorism on the high seas. So, in a variety of different ways, our military programs serve to support their capability.

So that's where we are. The requirements of the Congress, I think, are ones we're comfortable with and we look forward to reporting to the Congress and having a dialogue with them.

One question that will probably come up, let me answer now: This does not affect the F-16 program. The F-16 program is a Pakistani purchase, their money, they're buying them. And our foreign military finance, our military assistance goes for different purposes and is not involved at this point in the F-16 sales. So they will be able to continue that and we will be able to continue our efforts (inaudible) so they can do the fight against terrorism that they are in. I will stop with that and take questions.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you very much. If you would like to ask a question, please press \*1 on your touchtone phone. Please un-mute your phone and record your name clearly when prompted. Your name is required to introduce your question. To withdraw your question, press \*2. Once again, if you would like to ask a question, please press \*1.

One moment, please, for our first question.

Elise with CNN, your line is open for your question.

**QUESTION:** Hi, Richard. Welcome back and thank you for doing this.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the broader issue of policy towards Pakistan right now. I know the administration has come out, been pleased about the lifting of the state of emergency. But do you think this has been done in enough time to create the kind of conditions for a free and fair election? Thanks.

**MR. BOUCHER:** Thank you. We are very much focused on the election and we are very actively working with Pakistan, with Pakistani civil society, Pakistani government, Pakistani leaders to try to keep moving towards an election that's as transparent and fair and free as possible.

Even at this moment, which is two, three weeks away from the actual voting date, we do think there are steps that can still be taken and will be taken to try to ensure a fair election. Lifting of the emergency was a big step, removing a heavy burden that had been placed on the election period. Glad that was lifted. Restoration of most if not quite all of the press is a very important part of the election and we hope that that process completes itself, that all the press are allowed (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** But, I mean, just --

**MR. BOUCHER:** We're continuing to be very focused on the steps that can still be taken to have a good election.

**QUESTION:** But, I mean, just to follow up, I mean, couldn't you talk about some of those steps? And, obviously like no one has the long kind of campaign period that we have in the United States. But, I mean, is one month of, like, no state of emergency with some of -- with people still in jail, you know, even though there's been some lifting of the restrictions of the media, obviously the media doesn't have unimpeded access and does face some restrictions. And is one month enough time to create -- to meet the high standards of free and fair elections that you and the rest of the international community accept as free and fair?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Well, I think what we would say is that the election could be better without these constraints, could have been better without having the state of emergency. But, on the other hand, I think it's incumbent upon all of us now -- Pakistanis, Americans and international observers -- to think, what can we do to make this election as good as possible so that it ends up being a fair representation of what the Pakistani people want. That's what we're focused on.

We are sending out a lot of observers. We're continuing to push for more openness in the media, we're continuing to work very hard on issues that the political parties have raised about potential government interference. We've had an active dialogue. Our ambassador talks to people in the government all the way up to President Musharraf about these issues. And we hope to see continued steps to ensure fair elections.

**QUESTION:** Thanks.

**OPERATOR:** Our next question comes from Andre. Sir, your line is open. Please state your institution.

Sir, your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hello? Is it for me?

**OPERATOR:** Yes, sir. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Okay, I'm not Andre. I'm Anwar.

Hi, Richard, it's Anwar from Dawn Newspaper of Pakistan. Two things. Number one, did you say, the line wasn't very clear, that the Secretary of State will issue the report of the certificate that is needed for getting the money that has been withheld? And is it only the \$50 million that has been withheld and there is no restriction on \$250 million?

And also what the Congress is saying about the judiciary, saying that it...that the judiciary should be restored? And so is there a difference between Congress and the government on this issue?

**MR. BOUCHER:** I don't think there is a difference between the government and Congress on these issues. First, on the question of what money is involved here, what's clear from the intent of the Congress is that we spend all of the foreign military finance money to help Pakistan in the fight against terrorists. And that's already the case, that will continue to be the case. That's not a problem.

Second of all, we're allowed to spend \$250 million of it right away without any further reporting. And third of all, there's 50 million that we will spend after we make this report. It's not...I want to avoid the word "certification." It's not a certification. We know that's a neuralgic issue in Pakistan and, frankly, it's a report. That's okay with us. We'll report to the Congress. We expect to see an election, hope it is as open and transparent and fair as can be.

We do think that independent media, independent judiciary are important for Pakistan. And we look...and we'll be glad to report on how those issues are handled after the election.

**OPERATOR:** Eric Schmitt with the New York Times, your line is open for your question.

**QUESTION:** Hi, Richard. I just wanted to check. Is this the first time the Hill has laid this language out, specifically citing the monies, the 300 million, 250 and plus the 50, be spent specifically on counter-terrorism and law enforcement activities?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Yes, I think this is the first time that I'm familiar with. I'd have to check, there are so many different pieces of legislation that affect Pakistan and coup waivers and things like that that we've had to do. But I think this is the first time that we've seen legislation that Congress said "spend it on counter-terrorism."

But as I said, you know, for the last two years at least, that's been the nature of our program. So we're happy to continue in that manner and continue to support their efforts in fighting terror.

**QUESTION:** What does that say though about the mood on the Hill right now in terms of the effectiveness of the Pak's counter-terrorism program on the ground, the operations on the ground, that is?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Well, I think what it says, at least what we got in our consultations on the hill is that they were taken aback by the emergency. It led a lot of people to think carefully about exactly what we're doing in Pakistan and what our goals are. Everybody recognized two primary goals: one is fighting terror and the other is a smooth transition to democracy.

So what they wanted to do, I think was not so much question how the Paks were doing in those areas, but to make sure that our assistance was really focused on that.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**OPERATOR:** Paul Eckert (phonetic), you may ask your question, and please state your affiliation.

**QUESTION:** Paul Eckert of Reuters. Hi, Richard. And I first want to say I'm very happy that you're back in recovered health after that scare.

The conditions laid out in the omnibus bill are broadly separated into two areas. One undoing the emergency rule and constitutional and, you know, civil society issues. They seem more generally measurable when Secretary Rice would have to report to congress.

But the efforts against al Qaeda and the efforts against the Taliban on the other side, how are you going to sort of quantify those, given the mixed nature of the battle over there quite often and Pakistan's progress and occasionally reported lack of progress? That would be part one.

Part two, do you have any sense that during the emergency rule, significant ground was lost against the various militants while Pakistan was distracted with its civil disturbances?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Well, I think to some extent it's the contrary. During the period of emergency rule they carried out a major counter-terrorism operation in the Swat Valley, killed a lot of militants up there, they got rid of the mullah that was broadcasting pro-Taliban messages on the FM radio station. The radio station is down and I guess he's on the run. So they did carry out a major counter-terrorism operation, even during the state of emergency.

But I think our view has been and continues to be that the democratic transition and the fight against extremism and terrorism are really very closely linked in Pakistan. And that to establish a very solid basis for Pakistan as a moderate nation and society, modernized, and to move in a moderate direction you need both. You need the soldiers and the security forces who can fight terrorism directly. But, you also need to move society into a democratic (inaudible). That's why we do want to support both. I think in that way, the congressional focus reflects this.

**OPERATOR:** Farah Stockman with the Boston Globe, your line is open for your question.

**QUESTION:** Hi, Richard. Thanks for having us on this call.

I was wondering what this pot of money, what it's relationship is to the 300 million that you guys were trying to get for the Frontier Corps this summer, and at the time there seemed to be some issue because the Frontier Corps was not an army, so there was some issue with getting foreign military sales money for them. Has that been resolved?

**MR. BOUCHER:** I'll tell you, the one thing I've learned in this job is all the different accounts that we have and all the different places we have money and how you can use different pieces of it. Let me try to break this one down as simply as I can.

The Pakistani request for help in transforming the Frontier Corps into a capable security force in the border areas is one that we are very supportive of and sympathetic to. And they estimated... they are doing things already in terms of training and transfers of equipment and the like. I visited some of those people out on the border areas and talked to commanders at border posts who say, "well, I've got a couple night vision goggles and I've got to sort of move them around between the troops depending on where the action is." So we really do want them to be better trained and better equipped.

So what we were able to do this year was identify some military funds and anti-narcotics funds, since they are out on the border, that we were able to use for that transfer. That was 2007.

In 2008, now we have authorization from Congress to use 1206 money, which is a different account, to support Frontier Corps. That's the one where we had to identify their command structure and make sure everybody understood what their military role was. And then we're talking about how we can support the third tranche in the 2009 budget. So that support for the transformation of the Frontier Corps will be above, in addition to, the normal foreign military financing program that we're talking about with this.

**QUESTION:** Thanks.

**MR. BOUCHER:** Can I say one more thing on that? My staff wants to make sure I'm absolutely clear. The legislation that we just got authorizes us to tap the 1206 fund, it doesn't actually give us money. So we will have to weigh it against all the different priorities.

**OPERATOR:** Ken Fireman with Bloomberg News, your line is open for your question.

**QUESTION:** Yes, hi. Thank you.

The administration is launching a review of its -- of its Afghan policy. To what extent will Pakistan and specifically its counter-terrorism activities in the frontier areas figure in that Afghanistan review? And a related question, what are you hoping will come out of the meeting between Presidents Karzai and Musharraf that's coming up next week?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Let me try to say, in terms of reviews of policy, what we're looking at with other agencies is to make sure that our current programs and current funding and current efforts fully support the strategies that we've decided...actually, we had a big strategic review last year. I would say where we're at this year is more of an implementation review, are we really achieving those goals of extending the Afghan government, of pushing the Taliban out and bringing in the government to provide services to people.

Whenever we look at Afghanistan, it's really the whole Afghanistan-Pakistan border area and equation, it's that comes up consistently. And so we have meetings on Pakistan, we have meetings on Afghanistan, we have meetings on both together. But I think we're always looking at that relationship. And frankly, we welcome the progress that has been made. The jirgas last fall were very important. I think we're very glad to see the process of dialogue continued. President Karzai's visit was just announced to Pakistan, another important step in that regard. And we hope that this contributes to moving forward jointly against terrorism and also moving forward jointly in terms of how to develop the border areas, to give those people industry and opportunity.

So we have our own contributions, whether it's funding or going for Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in those areas. But we're very supportive of what they can do together and hope they can make progress. What's clear from things like the Pakistani operation in Swat or some of the things they've done in the other parts of the border, down around Quetta or Waziristan, is that the Taliban and al Qaeda are now fighting on two fronts. They've got to worry about their Afghanistan side and they've got...they're no longer comfortable on their Pakistani side. I think that's a very important development. We can all do more on those issues. We can make life very uncomfortable.

**QUESTION:** Do you expect that President Karzai will ask Musharraf to do something specific in the border areas at this meeting?

**MR. BOUCHER:** I think they will both talk about what we can do to have a better control at the border, have better pressure on the militants, so they can't move back and forth, so they can't threaten both Afghans and Pakistanis. As far as what his specific agenda might be at that moment, I think (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Okay, thank you.

**OPERATOR:** Our next question comes from Joe McCullen (phonetic) with Kuwait News Agency. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Yes, hi, I have two questions. First, do you have concerns about the secret detention center that was released yesterday, I think?

And my second question is, in this critical moment in Pakistan, do you see any contradiction between the fight against al Qaeda and Taliban and the challenges for democracy?

Thank you.

**MR. BOUCHER:** As far as the detentions in Pakistan, I think that's an issue that is being addressed in the Pakistani judicial system, in the political system and I think we all understand that countries fighting terror, we all face the issue of how to best organize and provide the judicial underpinnings to the efforts that we have to make through our justice systems and fight terror. So, I'm going to have to leave that one to the Pakistanis to work out. It is an issue for them that they are dealing with both through the judicial system and in the political system.

The other half of the question was terror and democracy? I tried to answer that before. I think we really don't see any contradiction. In fact, they are mutually supportive. The more you can move against the extremists, the more you can establish security and governance for the people of any society, where they can participate in their government and they can find opportunity and democracy. And the more you have a solid and stable democracy, the more parties and groups and society members come together to support a modern, moderate, stable Pakistan, the stronger the society will be in fighting terror. I think we see both the fight and the transition to democracy as components of building the kind of nation the Pakistanis want and the kind of nation (inaudible).

**OPERATOR:** Karen DeYoung with the Washington Post, your line is open for your question.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. I hope this hasn't -- I know this has been addressed in part, but the line keeps cutting in and out, so I apologize if I'm asking you to repeat yourself.

You talked about the administration being very focused on specific individual steps that could be taken that would ensure free and fair elections over the next three weeks. Could you expand a little bit on specifically what those steps are that you think can be taken?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Thanks. I'd be glad to. And I want to point out at the beginning, you all know me well enough to know I'm never hesitant to repeat myself.

When we look at the election in a couple weeks, lifting the state of emergency was an important development. Participation of all the political parties in the election

(inaudible) was an important development. Restoration of much of the media was an important development.

Now, granted the emergency did harm to the prospects for the elections, but it didn't (inaudible) completely. And I think we have to do everything we can to see what more can be done.

Our focus is on a couple things. The first is on good and transparent counting. That means an open counting process so that votes can be counted (inaudible), ballot boxes aren't stuffed and results aren't falsified. So that's transparency at the polling stations, counting centers, that's deploying observers, which we are deploying, Europeans, 1,000 Pakistani observers that we trained, so there's that. The transparency of the process at the poll. Second of all, is, I think, the open media environment. And that's why we've always emphasized restoring all the media. There's still one major TV station off the air, I think some entertainment programming may be back. But we'll continue to encourage open media.

The third, I think, issue that we've heard of concern from a lot of the political parties is noninterference by people in the government. We've also heard from people in government to say that they've been instructed not to interfere. (Inaudible) something else (inaudible) active dialogue.

And then finally, I would say the election commission itself. We've done a lot over the last year or two. I think upwards of \$13-, \$15 million that we've given to the election commission -- it's not the strongest body in terms of election commissions around the world -- some things like transparent ballot boxes. There are still, I think, things that can be done for the election commission in the longer terms, in terms of its appointments, recruitment and activities so that to conduct the election and complaints there may be afterwards are (inaudible).

I think I've got time for one more -- next question.

**OPERATOR:** Our next question comes from Stephanie Griffith -- Griffith, I apologize. Please state your affiliation, ma'am.

**QUESTION:** I'm with the Agence France-Presse, AFP.

I'm still trying to get a sense of the size of the rift between the administration and Congress in their views on the way forward with Pakistan. Can you -- can you talk about, you know, if as you say there's a meeting of the minds in terms of what the objectives are, why they felt the need to pass legislation in the appropriations bill, and what the actual practical impact would be if that were to go forward? How does that hamper administration counter-terrorism or democracy efforts?

**MR. BOUCHER:** The size of the rift is somewhere between miniscule and very small, depending on the member that we're talking to. We did talk to folks on the Hill, we consulted with appropriations members. We understand what they're interested in, and they are the same things we're interested in: the fight against terror and the transition to democracy and they've identified some of the key elements.

Any administration prefers not to have to write reports and not to have to deal with legislation. And again, we all recognize the important role that they play in giving us our money. So I'm happy to talk to congress and they're happy to give us our money, so we're doing pretty well together, these days.

**QUESTION:** And you would say that they also would say that the size of the rift is very small?

**MR. BOUCHER:** I think so, depending on the member you talk to.

**QUESTION:** And can you remind us also when this certification is likely to happen by the Secretary?

**MR. BOUCHER:** The..looking at this now, I don't remember exactly.

**QUESTION:** Is it a question of weeks?

**MR. BOUCHER:** Oh, it's a question of when we get around to the 50 million at the end. No, I can't, really. I don't know what the disbursement and the obligation pattern is going to be for those funds. I mean, I'd point out we're still at this point obligating in the next few weeks 2007 money. So it may be a bit down the road. But I'm sure we'll want to be reporting to the Congress either in this manner or throughout the year.

**QUESTION:** Okay, thank you.

**MR. BOUCHER:** It's not a certification.

Okay?

**MR. GALLIEOS:** All right, Richard. I appreciate that and I appreciate everyone's participation.

**MR. BOUCHER:** Well, once again, happy holidays, happy New Years to everybody.

**QUESTION:** Best regards.

**MR. BOUCHER:** Bye-bye.

**OPERATOR:** That does conclude today's conference. Thank you all for joining. You may disconnect your lines at this time.

2007/1153

