



Remarks With Afghanistan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta After Their Meeting

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State
Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Afghanistan Foreign Minister
Loy Henderson Conference Room
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MR. WOOD: Okay. Welcome, everyone, to a press conference in connection with the third meeting of the [U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership](#). I'm first going to introduce the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte. And the Deputy Secretary will give some brief remarks, and then we'll turn it over to the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta. So -- and after their statements and before you begin your questions, if you could just state your name and the news organization you work with, we would greatly appreciate it. So I'll turn it over to the Deputy Secretary.

Mr. Secretary.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Thank you very much, Robert. Good morning. It's a pleasure to be joined here by Foreign Minister Spanta and the other members of the Afghanistan delegation for our meeting of this year's United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership. We're joined here at the podium by Minister of Defense General Abdul Rahim Wardak, Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher of the Department of State, the National Security Advisor Mr. Zalmay Rasul, and the chief of the fifth political department of the MFA -- no, excuse me -- Director Jelani Popal of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Mitch Shivers from the Department of Defense, and as well as other members of the delegation who are in the audience.

On behalf of the United States Government, we're honored to be hosting the third round of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Dialogue. Today's meeting underscores our commitment to the objectives of enhancing the long-term security, democracy and prosperity of Afghanistan -- the objectives that President Bush and President Karzai laid out when they created the Strategic Partnership in May of 2005.

Through senior level dialogue, such as these, we will seek to improve bilateral cooperation to address near and long-term challenges. Together, I would say that there has been -- we have made significant progress over the last seven years in Afghanistan. The Taliban and the al-Qaida have been dealt numerous significant setbacks and many of their top leaders have been captured or killed.

National presidential and parliamentary elections were held. Road and school construction and countless other development projects have been completed and millions more Afghans have access to healthcare today than they did only a few years ago. The Independent Election Commission is making preparations for next year's planned presidential and provincial council elections, which will further solidify democracy in Afghanistan.

Afghan National Security forces are more professional and capable than ever before. And they are increasingly assuming the leading role in defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and protecting the lives of Afghan citizens.

We welcome the recent decision of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board to expand the size of the Afghan National Army from 65,000 to 134,000 by the year 2014. We look forward to working with our NATO and other international partners to help make this important decision a reality. These are only a few of the many positive developments taking place each day in Afghanistan. But of course, many significant challenges remain. The Strategic Partnership plays a crucial role in helping us chart our way forward to confront them together. Working groups have been formed to address important issues related to governance, development, security and counternarcotics. And each group will report recommendations in these areas later today.

And finally on behalf of the United States, I would like to, once again, express our regret over the loss of any innocent civilian lives incurred during security operations. In response to concerns expressed by the Government of Afghanistan, we are conducting a senior level review and assessment of the Shindand operation that took place on August 22nd. United States forces take every precaution to avoid harming any Afghan civilian during military operations. Yet, we and our Afghan counterparts recognize the need to establish a mutually agreed upon mechanism to minimize civilian casualties and to maintain the strong support of the Afghan people in fighting terrorism. The United States reiterates that it takes every precaution to avoid harming any Afghan civilian during military operations. We draw a sharp contrast to the Taliban and al-Qaida and their deliberate campaigns of intimidation and terror on the Afghan populace. We especially condemn, along with the United Nations Secretary General, the recent murder of two United Nations doctors and multiple Afghan civilians during the United Nations humanitarian efforts to vaccinate Afghan children in southern Afghanistan.

It is an honor for me to be able to host this strategic partnership meeting today. And I thank my esteemed colleagues for coming and representing their governments so well. And I would like now to turn the podium over to my colleague, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Dr. Spanta.

FOREIGN MINISTER SPANTA: Thank you very much, Deputy Secretary Negroponte, the friends, the colleagues. It is an honor for me and Afghan delegation to be here. We thank you for your generous hospitality.

The journey that we began together seven years ago is a difficult journey. From one side, we have a lot of achievements. We have the right and responsibility to be proud together about our achievements. And now in Afghanistan more than 6 million Afghan children can go back to school, 38 percent of them are female students, compared to the seven years ago under Taliban that no girls was allowed to go to school, (inaudible) education as a basic human rights. Politically, 28 percent of the member of Afghan parliament are female today, and the Afghan women have the right to join the political and civilian life of Afghanistan. As you can recognize in our delegation, we have deputy minister and also ladies and leadership of the political process in Afghanistan.

Today, Afghanistan -- we have in Afghanistan more than 300 newspapers and periodical and the absolute majority of these newspaper are free and independent and they criticize our government daily, and that is good for us as democrat. Sometimes maybe too much. The health service, six years ago, some kind of health service -- (inaudible) health service was possible for only, I think, 9 percent of Afghan population -- and today, it's for more than 85 percent -- roads building, an elected president, elected parliament, civil society -- despite all of difficulties that we have -- human rights. We arrived all this achievement thanks to your generous support and cooperation with us, an historical desire of Afghan citizens to have a better life in freedom.

Two years ago, our President signed the Strategic Partnership Declaration and that is the begin of new equality of our bilateral relation. The Afghans are thankful and happy to have you with us in difficult episode of our history with us in our joint journey for democracy. Our young democracy need U.S. support (inaudible) your long-term commitment.

The discussion today on four topic -- governance, security, prosperity, counternarcotic -- is the base of our comprehensive strategy to bring Afghanistan, as Islamic nation, to the family of civil democracy of this world. My president and our government, we are committed to work, to increase close cooperation with you, closely from day to day. We will use this opportunity with you together to look for the ways -- how we can make the things better. And this is also the prerequisite of cooperation among friends, to discuss with each other, to have sometimes, different position, to create, to shape a common strategy. And this strategy will be to build a strong government in Afghanistan on the base of the rule of law and the base of human rights, especially regarding to our historical situation in Afghanistan woman rights. And we are fully committed to this end.

We need, our friends, your cooperation and your support. Allow me to thank you, your daughter and son, that they sacrificed their life for our freedom, together with our sons and daughters and (inaudible) in Afghanistan. The common enemy of the international terrorist network, al-Qaida, fundamentalist and extremist Islamic groups, they are a serious threat for coexistence of our world, a serious threats -- for our common values, such as democracy and freedom.

We are happy to be here. And I wish us together, and you, a very constructive discussion to find out our more commonality. Thank you very much.

(In Dari via translator) Thank you very much. I would like to express my appreciation to the media. And today, we are with the American press. We are here and we would like to have a discussion and dialogue in governance, prosperity, and also counter-narcotics. We would like to have very fruitful discussions, and this will be the third meeting that we have this strategic partnership between the two countries. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. WOOD: Okay, so we're ready to take some -- excuse me. Okay. We're going to open the floor to some questions. So, please, the ministers will answer from here.

QUESTION: Barry Schweid, Associated Press. For Secretary Negroponte: Can you tell us the facts, as you know it, at this point -- as you know them at this point about the firing on NATO helicopters by Pakistan forces while the helicopters were in eastern Afghanistan? Were they American helicopters, for one thing? And is that a way for an ally to behave if it's true?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: All right. I would respond to you as follows, which is I've seen one initial press report from an unidentified spokesperson, so the first thing that I would like to do is check up on whether NATO has even made the statement to which you refer. I do not know any of the facts surrounding this situation, if, indeed, such a situation even exists.

But certainly, one of the issues that we have already discussed this morning and we will continue to discuss in the future is the importance of promoting greater collaboration between the governments of the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in our -- towards our common objective of dealing with militant extremism in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We share that commitment in common. It is an issue that is under active discussion between us, and it certainly has been a discussion between Presidents Bush and President Zardari of Pakistan when they just met in New York, and I am confident that it'll be a topic of discussion when President Bush receives President Karzai here at the White House tomorrow.

QUESTION: Susan Cornwell from Reuters. I have a question for Foreign Minister Spanta. Have you seen any sign of improvement in Pakistani efforts to control their border and prevent infiltration of extremists into your country? And can you confirm Turkish newspaper reports that Ankara is going to host a meeting of your government and the Pakistani Government in the near future? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SPANTA: President Karzai received an invitation from Ankara for an -- for the second trilateral meeting among President Karzai, President Gul and President Zardari. In principle, we accepted this invitation. We have to look for a date which is acceptable for three parties. As you know, the first meeting hosted by President of Turkey -- one and a half years ago, and we will continue this trilateral institution as a possibility to continue the discussion between the two countries.

We don't (inaudible) determination and will of new-elected civilian government in Pakistan to address the menace of terrorism. We will extend our cooperation and exchange -- view exchange with the new government in Pakistan. We have to give them more time and a chance for -- to be in charge of their security and military issues, and the new spirit amongst and between us is very positive on the base of cooperation against common enemy and -- common enemy terrorism.

MR. WOOD: Any other questions? Going once. Going twice. Okay. Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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