



Remarks With President Hamid Karzai of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan

Secretary Colin L. Powell
 Presidential Palace
 Kabul, Afghanistan
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PRESIDENT KARZAI: Ladies and Gentleman, I am very happy to be standing today together with a good friend of mine personally, and a very, very nice person socially, and a statesman in the international community; Secretary Powell. We met in Kabul two years ago. Lots of water has flowed under the bridge since then--lots of good water. And the country of Afghanistan, with the help of the United States, has seen many, many good days -- reconstruction, institution building and a degree of prosperity in comparison with the past two years. For which we are grateful to the United States, to Secretary Powell and to the rest of the international community. We discussed today in our meetings, issues that concern the two countries and the region as a whole: Afghanistan's fight against terror, the U.S. fight against terrorism, and our joint struggle against terrorism, and what we have achieved, the question of elections in Afghanistan, the Berlin conference. In short, we discussed all questions that relate to the future of Afghanistan and to the relations between Afghanistan and the United States of America, and the continued fight against terrorism and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I thank you once again for visiting us and for all the

help that the United States has given to Afghanistan.

Thank you once again, Mr. Secretary and welcome to Afghanistan. Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much, Mr. President, my good friend. We have been through much together over the past years and I do remember my previous visit two years ago when there were just a couple of telephones working, money was being moved around by the wheelbarrows, and there was very little construction going on, very little activity, there was very little activity on the streets. We had our work cut out for us, as partners and as members of a team that were committed to rebuilding Afghanistan and putting into place a democracy that the international community can be proud of but, more importantly, the Afghan people can be proud of. Much has happened over the past two years. I want to congratulate you, Mr. President, first, for all the leadership that you have brought to this task. Without you I do not know where we would have been. Congratulations on that, sir.

We have been through a donor's conference in Japan and now we are looking forward to a donor's conference in Berlin at the end of the month. And, I am confident that at that conference the international community will once again show its support for the people of Afghanistan, and they will do it with a spirit of generosity and they are interested to hear about your political plans for the country as we move forward with respect to elections. I am very pleased to be here shortly after the completion of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, where the people of Afghanistan came together and endorsed a constitution that is unique for this part of the world, and certainly unique for Afghanistan. I am also pleased to have visited a registration center earlier this morning at a school where Afghan women have come forward to register so that they can vote in the upcoming elections.

Mr. President, we are united in the campaign against terrorism, we are united in the cause of peace and freedom in this part of the world. The question that has been raised in the course of my visit this morning is, "Will the United States be here for the long term?" The answer is yes. We are committed to this. The American people are committed, Congress is committed, and above all President Bush is as committed as he has been since the very first day we started and you can be sure of that. The United States will be making another substantial pledge at the Berlin conference and we look forward to seeing you there. You will be leading the conference and they are looking forward to working with you and your authorities in building up of the Afghan National Army, the building up of your police force, the building up of your political institutions. And doing everything possible so that the Afghan people know the international community stands firmly with them and that the United States of America stands firmly with the Afghan people as they move forward.

There are still challenges ahead, there are still remnants of the Taliban, who would try to destabilize your efforts and try to turn the clock back. That will not happen. We also are going to do everything we can to bring the country together. The road that you and I have spoken so much about over the years now has been completed from Kabul to Kandahar and we look forward to the next season when we can continue work on the road.

So, Mr. President, I think we have seen a lot over the last two years but not as much as we are going to see over the next two years. It is a great pleasure for me to be back and I look forward to continuing our conversation over lunch and to being with you in Berlin.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much. We have time for very few questions--that means two questions.

SECRETARY POWELL: Can I?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes. Yes.

SECRETARY POWELL: Why don't you call on someone?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Gentleman in white shirt.

QUESTION: You talked, Mr. Secretary, about the remnants of the Taliban. I was wondering if both of you could talk to us about the current actions along the border, and specifically do you think the fighting in south Waziristan yesterday might be forcing people into Afghanistan? And also, if you could talk to us about the status of hot pursuit of both sides of the border and how, maybe, things can be more effective if there is hot pursuit? And what you think is different this time, with this offensive, than what we've seen in the past?

SECRETARY POWELL: As you know, our forces, our U.S. forces, have been focused on the region down along the Pakistan border and we have been doing everything we can to encourage Pakistani leaders, especially President Musharraf of course, to be more active along the border areas and the tribal areas. The action in Pakistan yesterday that you made reference to, suggests that the Pakistanis have picked up the pace and we hope they will continue to do that. We regret the loss of Pakistani life in this effort but it shows, I think, good intentions on the part of Pakistan not to allow these tribal areas to be used as a haven for the Taliban, where they can cause trouble in Afghanistan. And I am sure this will be the subject of conversation with President Musharraf tomorrow.

I am pleased that the U.S. forces will be increasing the pace of operations along the border. With respect to the border, it is a border between two sovereign nations and we have to respect that it is an international border. And I am sure that nothing would be done along that border that is not done in coordination with both sovereigns -- the sovereignty of Afghanistan and the sovereignty of Pakistan. If Taliban elements are forced from Pakistan back into Afghanistan as a result of actions on the Pakistan side of the border, I am sure that our military forces here, working with Afghan forces, will deal with those elements.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: I don't have much to add to what Secretary Powell said. I will say in general terms that the fight against terrorism will continue full speed. In

Afghanistan, if they cross over or if they are hiding in the mountains here and in Pakistan, we are glad and happy for what Pakistan is now doing on their part, in their territory to chase terrorists and to arrest them. From this forum I would like to give them a categorical reassurance that Afghanistan will stay firmly with the Government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism and that we are willing to extend every cooperation.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. I want to ask about the upcoming elections. How confident are you that you really can have these elections by June, since parties have barely started being formed, candidates have not yet come forward. Do you think it is possible you might have the presidential vote in June and perhaps parliamentary voting later? Thank you.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much. We are focusing intensely on the upcoming elections in Afghanistan. For us, elections are an ideal situation. Elections will take Afghanistan one-step further towards a higher legitimacy, towards the establishment of a more legitimate authority in Afghanistan through the direct vote of the Afghan people. So for us, it's something – it's an imperative – that has to take place within the time frame that Bonn has given to us and within the time frame that the expectation of the Afghan people is of us. Now, that time frame is the summer of 2004. The United Nations is busy registering voters, giving them cards. The registration process has so far given 1.4 million people cards, of which 28% are women, and the rest of them men.

Now we have not yet reached the countryside of Afghanistan or even we have not gone beyond the major cities of Afghanistan. We still have to register almost eight million voters. The United Nations is working on a massive plan to begin, to be implemented in the month of May. And they hope that by the end of May, they will be able to register in a massive exercise, which I have described already the modalities of to you. By the end of May we should be able to register eight million people. If that is done on time by the United Nations, the Afghan Government is keen to have elections in June, July or in August, depending on the preparations for elections.

Whether we can have the presidential and parliamentary elections at the same time, the Constitution asked us to try to have it at the same time. The Afghan people would be happy if we could have elections at the same time. It would be good for us, also, in terms of the expenses that we put into the elections to have both elections at the same time. Whether technically it is possible for us and for the international community to have it at the same time is something I cannot talk about now.

But, yes, the intention is to have the elections on time – presidential and parliamentary. Whether together, or with the difference in time, is something that we have to decide. At this point, it looks like we should be aiming for elections in mid-summer of 2004.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you.

2004/275

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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