



Press Conference with Foreign Minister Abdullah of Afghanistan

Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Presidential Palace
Kabul, Afghanistan
July 16, 2004

4:00 p.m.

Opening Statements

FOREIGN MINISTER ABDULLAH: It is a great honor and pleasure for me to welcome my friend, Deputy Secretary Armitage, here in Kabul. Just a few minutes ago, Mr. Armitage talked to President Karzai and I had the pleasure of meeting Deputy Secretary Armitage in Panjshir in my country home and we had good discussions. Before anything else, I would like to thank Deputy Secretary Armitage for visiting us at this important time and I would like to thank on behalf of the people of Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan for the whole support which we have received from the people of the United States and for the full commitment of the supporting the political process, the re-construction of Afghanistan, and the process of stabilization of this country. With the support of the United States of American and the international community, Afghanistan has been able to move from one spot to another point. Where not only it is the hope of its own people but for the whole region, for a stable region, for a prosperous region, for a region which will be at peace within itself, economically integrated, and being able to contribute to global peace with stability of economic development. During discussions wide ranges of issues of bilateral interest were discussed, including the regional aspect and again Deputy Secretary Armitage assured us of the continued commitment and support of the United States for the people of Afghanistan. In long term prospects we all appreciated the positive developments in the country and discussed how to deal with the challenges Afghanistan is faced with, together.

Secretary Armitage: Thank you very much Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah. I am delighted to have the honor to be back in Afghanistan. President Bush and Secretary Powell had asked me to make this journey for several reasons. First of all to take a look at the electoral process as we move toward the October 9th presidential elections and for this morning I called upon the JEMB and I must say the spirit, the enthusiasm of those who are involved in registering Afghan citizens to vote in this elections was infectious and overwhelming. The fact that given today we are at about 7.3 or 7.4 million Afghans who have register to vote, 40% of them women, is a demonstration of the commitment to the future, the commitment to run their own future, of the Afghan people. I must say I can't think of anything that would give more energy and enthusiasm to the American people or to the international community.

Second of all, I was asked to come and visit the regional states to make the point, very graphically, that in our view - the view of the United States - stability in Afghanistan means regional stability. Therefore, I engaged in a serious of talks in both India and Pakistan before arriving here in Kabul.

Lastly, in the United States we are involved, of course, in our election season, but regarding our elections season Afghanistan is not an issue. The people of the United States are going to stand with the people of Afghanistan to the successful conclusion of this endeavor. I wanted to be able to reassure our friends in the government here in Afghanistan of that fact. If I may, on a personal basis, let me thank you Dr. Abdullah for both your friendship and you hospitality today. If I were you sir I think it would be very rare that I would return to Kabul from such a lovely home.

QUESTION:In-audible -- the question was about the abuse of prisoners in American custody and the three Americans in Afghan custody.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: The government of the United States and the people of the United States have been horrified by the abuse and allegations of abuse, which have taken place in some prisons in both Iraq and in Afghanistan. This is why the investigation into these matters is taken so seriously. This is why the President, Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State have all indicated that those who are implicated in such actions will be punished. This is corrosive to the soul of the United States.

To the question of the interpreters I am unfamiliar with it and am sorry I can't answer it.

Since I have been traveling I have been made aware of the arrest of three Americans who have been free-lancing, who have been doing things in Afghanistan which is against the law of Afghanistan and as far as I am concerned if not against the law of the United States, certainly against the law of good common sense. The investigation into the activities and just whom they were involved with, as far as I know continues, but you might want to direct that question to my distinguished colleague as well.

Foreign Minister: Yes as far as the investigation of individuals the investigation continues. To the best of our knowledge, up to now, we are of the opinion that those individuals were not acting, or apart of any official institutions of the United States Government. So they were individuals acting on their own behalf and the investigation continues.

QUESTION:In Dari.

Secretary Armitage: If they have been seen to have broken laws in Afghanistan, and this will be a discussion we have with the government of Afghanistan, as far as I know, we have consular access to them, to make sure they are being treated appropriately in the interim. I think the augment disposition of them is something we will have to talk about. I think we would be interested to knowing if they broke laws of the United States in these endeavors. As I my distinguished colleague said they were not working for organizations of the U.S. government, as far as we have been able to determine.

QUESTION:Will the U.S. government provide additional troops to provide security for the elections process? There recently have been a lot of incidents.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: The United States, we feel at present, has sufficient troops here -- along with all of our coalition partners - to ensure stability. And I would note that we've additionally had the provision of up to 14 Provincial Reconstruction Teams and three others are due from our NATO colleagues. We're getting a pretty good footprint around the country and I would note also that the graduates from the training for the Afghan National Army are very much involved in providing security for Afghanistan. And as far as I understand, they are doing a terrific job and are welcomed very much by the population.

QUESTION:In regards to your mention of a U.S. recommitment to peace and prosperity in Afghanistan, are you implying that the security will come to an end with successful and elections and with the coming of the new government? Because, the impression is that if none of these high value targets have been caught, these people can afford to hold their breath and wait. (Inaudible) So, how long will you stay?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: In my opening comments, I deliberately used the phrase "seeing this through to a successful conclusion" and a successful conclusion is not simply a very well ran and transparent presidential election or, for that matter, a very well ran and transparent parliamentary election next April or so. A successful conclusion, as far as we are concerned, will be when the people of Afghanistan can live free of fear, permanently with their lights on across this country, permanently with their access to health care and education for both sexes -- permanently. And that does not mean we have to have a certain number of troops and, for that matter, that U.S troops have to there at all because, simultaneously, the Afghan National Army and police forces are training to be able to provide that security for

Afghanistan. No American official will make an estimation of how long that will take. It will be a subject of discussions between the government of Afghanistan and the United States and be very much a function of how we view the security situation mutually.

Foreign Minister Abdullah: Yes we believe that with the elections of presidential and parliamentary (inaudible) in Afghanistan the environment will become more stable -- that's obvious. But if those terrorist elements are holding their breaths until the international community disengages, I think they will be dead away -- if they hold their breath that long. (Laughter)

QUESTION:In Dari.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you. We've had continued discussions with our allies in Pakistan about both their borders and, for that matter, stability as a whole in Pakistan. I noted in Pakistan our sorrow at the fact that some 75 or so Pakistani soldiers have lost their lives recently in the war against terror, particularly in Waziristan, and many others who have been wounded. And, I noted, our appreciation of these activities.

There is a question of Taliban activity, it is not one which we feel is sponsored by the (Pakistani) government. That question is if these Taliban elements are able to freely cross into Afghanistan and to conduct destabilizing activities, this is clearly not in Afghanistan's interest but it is not in Pakistan's interest either. Previously, I said that stability in Afghanistan equals stability in the region -- and I mean that, I don't see how Pakistan can have this stable and prosperous future that President Musharraf wishes for his nation unless that same stability and prosperity exists here in Afghanistan.

QUESTION:In Dari.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: (Inaudible exchange between Deputy Secretary Armitage and Foreign Minister Abdullah).

If it is involving strictly Afghanistan, there will not be. The question of our approach, assistance -- including security assistance and military assistance to Afghanistan -- is not a subject of divisive debate in our country. The people of the United States, in both political parties, stand squarely with the people of Afghanistan. On a question more broadly on the global war on terrorism, I could not speak for what other possible changes might occur, if any. But I would note, that regarding Afghanistan, there wouldn't be any.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman: One more question -- no questions? OK.

Released on July 16, 2004

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.