



Remarks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Presidential Palace
Kabul, Afghanistan
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PRESIDENT KARZAI: (In Pashto.) Welcome, Dr. Rice, to Afghanistan.

INTERPRETER: Madame Secretary and Mr. Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you all and welcome Ms. Rice, a very talented woman who is working in the United States Department of State --

PRESIDENT KARZAI: No, I didn't say that. (Laughter.) I will say it myself. (Laughter.)



Ladies and gentlemen, we in Afghanistan are honored to have a lady from the United States who's been on top of the academic circles in that country, who has served in extremely important positions in the United States, as the National Security Advisor and today as the Secretary of State for the United States, a lady that knows the world very well, that has analyzed -- has been analyzing the world very well in the past as an academic and also as a high government official of the United States.

Today her visit to Afghanistan as the Secretary of State brings back the closeness of relationship between the two countries and we, in having her today in Afghanistan, are proud to have in her position our country the support of the United States for the political process in Afghanistan, for the reconstruction in Afghanistan and we are sure that Dr. Rice will see to it that Afghanistan remains very much in perspective in the United States and that the U.S. support to Afghanistan for the coming development of the country, for the staying relationship between us, will be strengthened.

Today we discussed among ourselves the progress that Afghanistan has made with the help of the United States and particularly with help from Dr. Rice because she was there from the first day of the liberation of Afghanistan till today on a daily basis following the progress of Afghanistan. We are thankful to her for all her support and dedication to our country and we are sure that she will see to it that Afghanistan is even better in the coming days and months and years.

Welcome, Madame, again.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. President. This is my first opportunity to come to Afghanistan and it is a great honor and, in fact, it is really thrilling to be here. The progress that Afghanistan has made is there for everyone to see in the world. I want to thank President Karzai for his extraordinary leadership of this country through difficult times and now to times that seem to point to a much brighter future for the Afghan people.

I want to thank the members of the Afghan Government, including my host, Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah, for their constant attention to U.S.-Afghan relations.

I want to say to the Afghan people that their story here of coming out of years of civil war and turmoil and difficulty and going to vote and to demonstrate their commitment to the democratic enterprise has indeed been an inspiration to people all over the world. I talk to Americans, ordinary Americans, who know the Afghan story. They know what the Afghan people have sacrificed and how they've struggled and they know now that they are committed to democracy. And we will stand by the Afghan people as they go through the next phase of their democratic development, the parliamentary elections that will take place this fall. We look forward to continuing to help in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

And a little earlier I had a chance to be with some of our military forces and those of the coalition, and of course we are great allies now in the war on terror. This country was once a source of terrorism; it is now a steadfast fighter against terrorism. There could be no better story than the story of Afghanistan in the last several years and there can be no better story than the story of American and Afghan friendship.

It is a story of cooperation and friendship that will continue. We have a long-term commitment to this country. We learned the hard way what it meant to not have a long-term commitment when, after the Soviet Union left, I think it is well understood that we did not remain committed. And I said to the President earlier that in many ways September 11th was a joint tragedy of the Afghan and the American people out of that period. And so we look forward now to a better future for the Afghan people, a democratic future for the Afghan people, and to many, many years of Afghan-American friendship.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Yes.

QUESTION: The visit today has obviously emphasized democracy as it's emerging, but problems remain, particularly on two fronts, on the violence and on the narcotics side. Today there was a blast in Kandahar, one of the largest for several months, indicating that violence does go on. And I wonder how you talked about that and how you intend to counter the insurgency.

And on the drug front, the State Department itself said that Afghanistan is on the verge of becoming a narcotic state; there have been some improvements this year but no signs really that there's going to be a reversal of the trend. So is it now time to have a more aggressive policy toward drug eradication to beat the narcotics trade?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: On the question of the violence in Afghanistan, I believe if you look at the trend, compare us with last year and compare last year with the year before. Afghanistan is at present right now, very fortunately, among the least violent states in this part of the world. So violence, in comparison to what Afghanistan has gone through, in comparison to the fight that we've put up against terrorism, is much, much less, and we are very happy about that.

Of course, we would want violence to end completely in Afghanistan, indeed anywhere else in the world. Nobody wants to have bomb blasts anywhere in the world. Afghanistan -- you will see that a year from today we will have a much better security environment.

It all comes with the increasing capacity of the Afghan state in policing and in intelligence gathering and in delivering better services to the country. We have had magnificent progress and that progress is because of the help that the international community gave us, in particular the United States, for which I would thank again Secretary Rice for what the United States has done for Afghanistan, for what she herself has done for Afghanistan.

On drugs, sir, I have said this story so many times. The Afghan people were, out of desperation, forced to cut their pomegranate orchards and vineyards in order to grow poppies in order to benefit immediately because nobody was sure of the day that was coming tomorrow. Now that Afghanistan is establishing itself as a more secure

country, with democracy, with institutions coming, with economic progress being felt better with each day passing, we saw this year that the people in many parts of the country refrained from growing poppies themselves and the government fight and the international community's fight against this has intensified.

This year we will have much less crops than we had last year. Of course, it's an economic matter. Afghanistan and the international community have to join hands in order to provide the Afghan people with alternative livelihood and the presence of alternative livelihood and the secure and democratic and stable environment in the country will make the fight against drugs much easier. I don't say -- nobody says, nor will the international community say -- that we will be ending drugs in Afghanistan this year or even next year. But we have begun a journey and that journey has begun with a very positive note and we will see in a few years time that Afghanistan will be free of drugs. It's a long-term fight and requires a long-term strategy.

SECRETARY RICE: And let me just pick up exactly there. We do know that it's a long-term fight because in other places it has been a long-term fight and it does require a long-term strategy and it requires the commitment of the government and I believe we have the strong commitment of President Karzai's government to this scourge against the Afghan people and against the international community.

I would just note that he has spoken out publicly about the need to confront the drug problem --

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes.

SECRETARY RICE: -- in educating Afghans about their responsibilities as citizens of a democratic society not to engage in the growing of poppy.

We also have put together a strategy that has been worked on cooperatively with the Afghan Government on eradication, on law enforcement and alternative livelihood. And taken together with public education and with efforts at law enforcement, I'm quite certain that over time this will succeed. The United States has increased considerably its resources for the counternarcotics fight. The British Government has doubled its resources for the counternarcotics fight. And while it is a long-term problem, it is also not just the responsibility of the Afghan people to deal with this but those who are suffering as well from this, and we are working with Afghanistan's neighbors and with other members of the international community to try and deal with what is a very serious problem but one to which there is great commitment to fight it.

QUESTION: Yes, Secretary Rice, I believe you just said the elections will be in the fall.

SECRETARY RICE: That's right. Is that correct?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Yes.

QUESTION: And President Karzai, when the parliamentary elections were first delayed last fall, I believe he said they were going to be in the spring. What does this delay say about the state of democracy here? Are you concerned at all about this, Dr. Rice, and how assured are we that they won't be delayed once again?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I hope that I've not broken a story, but I was just told by the electoral commission that you've agreed on a date and it's September, which I believe, John, is in the fall.

But the Afghan people have demonstrated their commitment to democracy here. The parliamentary elections, as I understand it, are being arranged. I just had a meeting with members of the electoral commission. They are excited. They are working hard. The parties there were excited about the opportunities to get out and advertise these elections.

This is a large and complicated country. It takes a while to do these things. But I'm quite confident that these elections will be yet another example of the Afghan people's commitment to democracy, and being with the electoral commission only reinforced my sense of that.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: On parliament, sir, we are very eagerly waiting for the parliament to come. With that will be the completion of the Afghan state structure and the democratic institutions that Afghanistan needs so badly. The delay in elections is because it was impossible to have it in May, as we wanted it, as the government had asked for it. I cannot enumerate the issues there, from refugee participation to the census to the forms of election to the district boundaries to so many other questions that the election commission has to find technical solutions for. It's a technical matter.

The commission came to us and said that them and the UN body that's working with them together are finding it impossible to have elections in May. They proposed September and we respect whatever decision the election commission makes. Remember, ladies and gentlemen, that Afghanistan is now a country building institutions and the election commission is an independent body.

We, for the sake of democracy and for the sake of institution building in Afghanistan and progress towards a formidably democratic future, have to abide by the decisions of independent institutions. And the election commission is one of the most important institutions, in our view, with regard to the building of democracy in Afghanistan, therefore we would agree to whatever decision the election commission makes in this regard and we know the difficulties and recognize them.

On preparations, we have already appointed a chairman for the parliament's secretariat and some staff have already been trained for them by France, and in a few days time the chairman and the staff will visit France again for more training and they are going to employ about a hundred people, men and women, to work as the secretariat parliament. So the preparations are going on, and as they have told us, the commission's chairman, elections will be held in September. And we very much hope that that wish of ours will become truth in September. The Afghan people are waiting very eagerly to send their members to the parliament. Don't worry about that. That will happen.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Please, that's the Afghan press.

SECRETARY RICE: Where is the Afghan press?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: I think they're Afghan press. (In Pashto.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (In Pashto.)

PRESIDENT KARZAI: (In Pashto.)

QUESTION: Actually, there are two questions, Ma'am, both for you. Recently we heard that the Republican Party in the United States of America has deducted \$517 million from -- it just goes to the military side. I would like to --

SECRETARY RICE: Reconstruction.

QUESTION: Reconstruction. That's one part. And the second question is that when you visited Pakistan recently, what was your message to the Pakistanis and having them secure the borders? This is one part. And how much they are committed to just secure the border, the borders in the Pakistani area?

QUESTION: And (inaudible).

QUESTION: And (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. First of all, let me take the question about Pakistan. I was just in Pakistan and I had meetings with President Musharraf and with the Prime Minister. I found the spirit very good toward Afghanistan, that indeed everyone cited the tremendous improvement in Afghan-Pakistani relations and a desire to see even a further improvement in those relations.

I also believe that the Pakistani Government played an important role in securing the borders for the elections that took place for the presidential elections. I remember well that President Karzai -- that President Bush and President Musharraf met at the time of the United Nations General Assembly last September and talked about the need for Pakistan to play that role, and they did. So I found the attitude and spirit very constructive and looking forward to continued good relations with its Afghan neighbors.

As to the -- I assume you're talking about the budget supplemental that is being considered. We are in our budget process in Washington. It is a complex process. Even for those of us who live in Washington it's a complex process. The Administration has made very clear that the requirements and the needs for funding for Afghan reconstruction, for training of police, for counternarcotics support, that these are very high priorities of the Administration. And we will work with the Congress as they continue through the process, which is not yet over -- this is a process that has a couple of other phases yet to go -- to try and assure appropriate and much-needed funding so that we can support the government and the people of Afghanistan.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Good. One question from the ladies from the Afghan press. Any ladies in the Afghan press? (In Pashto.) (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (In Pashto.)

PRESIDENT KARZAI: (In Pashto.) The question is on a report by Senlis which supported dealing on drugs. They have proposed that Afghanistan's poppy crops should be purchased by drug manufacturing companies to turn it into medicines and things like that; in other words, legitimize it.

The question is to me. (In Pashto.)

I think that's enough. Would you like to take another question?

SECRETARY RICE: No, I think we should go. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Whatever you want. (Inaudible) (Laughter.)

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