



## Why South Asia Matters

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Remarks to the Asia Society  
New York, New York  
February 3, 2004

Thank you for your warm welcome, Nick. I am very glad to be in New York with you all here today. The changes that we have seen in South Asia over the past three years – and the past three weeks – have been enormous. They deserve our serious attention. I am grateful for the invitation today to share our thoughts with you on U.S. policy toward South Asia and where it is headed.

At the outset I want to thank you and your colleagues here and at the Council on Foreign Relations for your thoughtful Task Force reports published last summer: "New Priorities in South Asia: U.S. Policy toward India, Pakistan and Afghanistan" and the less optimistic "Afghanistan: Are We Losing the Peace?" My colleagues and I at the State Department are grateful for your insights and we studied your recommendations carefully. We were glad to see that you endorsed what we are trying to achieve; I hope that you will agree that what has taken place in the intervening months is consistent with your recommendations.

### The Administration's Policy

At the beginning of this New Year, Secretary Powell summarized where we are and where we are going in U.S. foreign policy for an op-ed published in the [New York Times](#). He wrote:

"...President Bush's vision is clear and right: America's formidable power must continue to be deployed on behalf of principles that are simultaneously American, but that are also beyond and greater than ourselves."

Our foreign policy is firmly founded on the President's belief in expanding freedom -- for individuals as well as nations -- on promoting economic prosperity and on never, never giving up in the search for peace.

Nowhere is this more the case than in South Asia, where democracy has both taken root and sometimes proven elusive. It is a region of remarkable social, economic and technological transformations, yet it is the only place in the world where there has been a recent danger that two nuclear-armed countries could go to war. It is also the front line of our Global War on Terrorism.

The war on terrorism remains our principal foreign policy priority. As President Bush has repeatedly reminded us, this will be a long and difficult struggle from which we will not shrink. In our region, we are building a network of partnerships – based on national interests and shared values – to achieve our goals of spreading freedom and democracy, development and human dignity. Meeting these goals in South Asia is not incidental to U.S. foreign policy, it is essential for the free and prosperous world we all hope to see.

### The Global War on Terrorism – Afghanistan

The successes of the Afghan people over the past two years in rebuilding their country and their society have been impressive. With their latest major step, the conclusion of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, Afghanistan now has a democratic constitution – drafted in a widely accepted and transparent process by representatives drawn from every region of Afghanistan.

We are fully aware that constitutional democracy cannot take hold in Afghanistan unless there is also security – and the security situation in Afghanistan remains difficult. That is why the bulk of our resources are now being devoted to the security sector, including the establishment of a National Army (ANA) and the training of a new police force. There are now nearly 6000 trained Afghan soldiers with another 2000 currently in training; our goal is to reach 10000 Afghan soldiers by the time of elections this summer. Our police training programs are also in high gear. We are building seven new regional training centers for national, border and highway police. These new centers put the country's police force on track to reach its goal of fielding 20,000 police officers by the summer.

We are also building a network of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) throughout the country that will help provide for local security and coordinate development and reconstruction while easing the transition to civilian rule. The PRTs, are currently established in eight locations around the country – and four more should be in place by the end of this month. At this time, five PRTs are being run by the United States and the U.K., Germany and New Zealand are each running one. Under active discussion now in Brussels is the possibility of NATO command for PRTs – a new role for our expanded Alliance operating for the first time outside of Europe.

To further enhance domestic peace in Afghanistan, we have been working closely with the government of Japan and the United Nations to disarm and demobilize militia combatants, who have known only generations of warfare. After weapons are handed over, demobilized militia combatants are able to sign up for agriculture assistance, job placement or vocational training or they can join the Afghan National Army.

The resurgence of Taliban activities in southern and eastern Afghanistan is a serious problem. It represents a threat not only to Afghanistan's stability but also to that of Pakistan across the border. Because combating Taliban activities is a common interest that the US shares with Pakistani and Afghan leaders, we established in June 2003 a Tripartite Commission that meets roughly once a month to improve coordination between our three governments. The Commission has been very successful in easing tension, building a sense of common purpose and in coordinating counter-terrorism efforts.

We know that it is hard to make political progress in Afghanistan without security, but the reverse is also true. We have found that the steady progress toward constitutional government is fundamentally changing the incentive structures and strategies of Afghanistan's aspiring leaders. Free and open political debate and the opportunity to participate in democratic politics reinforce the growing support among Afghans for participatory government, just as it does among people everywhere. At the same time it discredits those who would return Afghanistan to the warlordism and anarchy of the past. Participants in the recent Constitutional Loya Jirga are now strong advocates of the political process that will result in a freely elected government in the months ahead.

Our investments in rebuilding the infrastructure and economy of Afghanistan are beginning to pay dividends as the Afghan people are given a stake in a more hopeful, more peaceful future. Rebuilding the ruins of two decades of conflict, Afghanistan's leaders have effectively pursued forward-looking economic policies, introducing a stable new currency in 2002, passing a strong banking investment law in 2003 and adopting a realistic national development strategy. These actions, as well as trade agreements with its neighbors, have allowed private sector interest in the country, particularly from the Afghan Diaspora. Within Afghanistan, increased security and political stability have spurred Afghans to return to their homes, their fields and their businesses – and Afghanistan's markets are once again thriving. Unofficial IMF/World Bank estimates put annual economic growth at an impressive 30%.

We must – and will – build on this progress. We have already provided over \$2 billion in assistance to Afghanistan and we will provide about \$2 billion more during this year.

We are committed to improving the status of Afghan women and we have integrated this goal into all U.S. government programming in the country. The U.S. has implemented projects to enhance women's political participation, role in civil society, economic opportunities, education and access to health care. Nearly four million Afghan children are enrolled in school today, including more than one million girls – far more than ever before in Afghanistan's history. With U.S. support and the encouragement of President Karzai, women achieved important gains at Afghanistan's Constitutional Loya Jirga, where they made up about 20% of the delegates and played an important role in the Jirga's leadership. The new constitution affords all "citizens of Afghanistan – men and women – equal rights and duties before the law" and reserves 25% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament for women.

In sum, today, I want to underscore two very important points about Afghanistan: First, we are winning the peace in Afghanistan – more to the point the Afghan people are winning the peace. Second, we all know there is still a long way to go -- but we are committed to finishing what we have started.

### **Pakistan**

The United States has had a long and, at times, complicated relationship with Pakistan -- a country that faces many political and economic challenges. Since September 11, 2001 Pakistan has been a key ally in the Global War on Terrorism capturing more than 550 al-Qaeda operatives and Taliban remnants, including al-Qaeda operational commander Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and September 11<sup>th</sup> plotter Ramzi bin al-Shibh. Many Pakistani lives have also been lost fighting terrorism.

In addition to continuing our cooperation with the Government of Pakistan to stop al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists, we also want to help improve the lives of the Pakistani people. We are committed to helping Pakistan improve education, expand economic opportunities and restore a fully functioning democracy.

Pakistan's cooperation in the Global War on Terror has had costs for the government of Pakistan and for the country's social fabric. This year, President Bush will be asking Congress to fund the first year \$600 million of a five-year \$3 billion assistance initiative for Pakistan, designed to continue and help expand that country's counter terror cooperation, bolster economic growth and expand social sector programs, including education, health, grassroots development and democracy. We are committed to continuing to broaden and deepen our relationship with Pakistan, and we are committed for the long-term

### **Pakistan and India**

The threat to regional stability resulting from differences between Pakistan and India over control of Kashmir, and other issues, is also a focus of American diplomacy in South Asia.

As recently as the summer of 2002, war between India and Pakistan seemed possible. The international community worked hard to help our friends move back from the brink of a conflict that could have devastated and destabilized the region for years. The US has been working very hard to turn our parallel improvement of relations with India and Pakistan into what Secretary Powell has called a "triangle of conflict resolution". "We do not impose ourselves as a mediator," instead, we "try to use the trust we have established with both sides to urge them towards conciliation by peaceful means.

The dramatic offer by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee to begin a process of reconciliation with Pakistan in April 2003 was an event that shook up established pessimism about the potential for improvements in the India-Pakistan relationship. The December ceasefire across the Line of Control and on the Siachen glacier gave rise to further hopes. But the agreement last month by the leaders to resume a wide-ranging dialogue with the objective of peacefully resolving all bilateral issues, including Kashmir, has won worldwide acclaim.

The United States strongly supports these positive steps by India and Pakistan. The leaders of both countries and their governments deserve enormous credit for the statesmanship they are demonstrating. We are optimistic that both sides want to keep up the momentum generated by these recent hopeful events. The first round of talks between India and Pakistan are scheduled to begin in Islamabad February 16-18. The world will be paying very close attention to their progress and wishing them success.

### **India – A New Strategic Relationship**

From the very first days of the Bush Administration, we have been embarked on a course to fundamentally transform the U.S. relationship with India, recognizing the changes that have taken place in the world's largest democracy over the past decade. India is clearly destined to be one of the world's largest economies. Yet, while we are India's largest trading partners, our bilateral trade remains far below what it could be – improving that situation is one of our primary objectives.

Our political relationship is rapidly maturing and probably better than it has ever been since 1947. We are having regular meetings with the Indians at the highest levels of government. At their summit in Washington in November 2001, President Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee articulated their vision of the relationship our two countries should enjoy. The Prime Minister called it "a natural partnership."

The two leaders recently announced the next steps in implementing their shared vision. We are calling it, appropriately, the "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP)." India and the United States have agreed to expand cooperation in three specific areas: civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programs and high technology trade. In addition, we have agreed to expand our dialogue on strategic stability, including missile defense.

The proposed cooperation will be transparent and threaten no other country. It will progress through a series of reciprocal steps building on each other and will include: 1) an expanded dialogue on nuclear regulatory and safety issues and missile defense; 2) an exploration of ways to enhance cooperation in peaceful uses of space technology; and 3) steps to create the appropriate environment for successful high technology commerce.

This momentous agreement is only one milestone on the road to achieving a true partnership with India. We all know that India can play a larger role in the world, and the United States would like to work closely with India as it does so. India has contributed to Afghanistan reconstruction and has pledged to do so in Iraq as well. Our two militaries have developed a closer partnership that includes joint exercises in locations such as Alaska, Agra and the high elevations of the Indian Himalayas.

Whether we are combating the common scourge of terrorism, the common pain of HIV/AIDS or the common tragedy of human trafficking, India and the United States are finding many more reasons to work together than at any previous time in our histories.

### **Bangladesh**

A valued partner in the Global War on Terrorism as well as a moderate voice in regional and international fora, democratic Bangladesh is the fourth most populous Muslim country in the world. In recent years Bangladesh has made marked progress in the economic arena and in some key areas of development. In the last 30 years, Bangladesh has succeeded in becoming agriculturally self-sustaining; in dramatically reducing its birth rate; in improving literacy rates; in delivering basic social services to its people; and in empowering women through employment and education.

Yet deep and bitter political rivalries between the two leading political parties and one of the highest corruption rates in the world threaten to undermine democratic stability and impede economic growth. Bangladesh's opposition parties should join the current parliamentary session; they should refrain from using disruptive street agitation and strikes – activities that only further deepen the suffering of Bangladeshis who are left without a representative voice in the country's highest decision-making

body.

The United States cannot help put Bangladesh on the path to sustainable development without that country's leadership taking serious action. We look forward to government action on the establishment of a long overdue anti-corruption commission; to the separation of the lower judiciary from executive control; to strengthened basic education; and to efforts that create an environment that will promote foreign investment. Democratic, economic and legal reforms are needed quickly. Immediate action is in Bangladesh's interest and in the interest of the entire region.

### **Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, after almost two decades of ethnic conflict costing well over 60,000 lives, a ceasefire was put in place in December 2001. Curfews and restrictions on travel were relaxed, military checkpoints reduced, and a sense of normalcy returned to people's daily lives. Although formal negotiations between the government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were suspended by the LTTE in April 2003, the LTTE put forward a proposal for an interim administration in the predominantly Tamil areas of the north and east of the country last October. We hoped that presentation of this proposal could lead to a resumption of formal negotiations between the government and the LTTE. But in early November, a government crisis erupted between Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and President Kumaratunga. The continuing standoff between the Prime Minister and President is now preventing the government from resuming formal peace talks with the LTTE.

Despite the suspension of formal negotiations, however, the ceasefire continues to hold. Importantly, the peace process, in terms of increased interaction among the ethnic communities, increased trade and economic opportunity, continues. There is no appetite among the Sri Lankan people for a return to war. The United States government joins the Sri Lankan people in urging their leaders to continue the path to peace and a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict.

We are prepared to do our part. Several U.S. agencies sent assessment teams to Sri Lanka to explore avenues of increased U.S. engagement and assistance intended to reinforce the peace process as the parties move forward. Along with Japan, Norway, and the European Union we co-chaired an international donors conference in Tokyo in June, 2003 where a massive \$4.5 billion in humanitarian, reconstruction, and development assistance were pledged to Sri Lanka over the next three years. Deputy Secretary Armitage has invited the co-chair countries to Washington on February 17 to discuss ways to support and reinvigorate the peace process.

The United States will continue to urge a settlement that has as its goal a nation that is whole, at peace, and respectful of the rights of all its citizens.

### **Nepal**

The United States has had a close relationship with Nepal for over 50 years. During this period, Nepal has evolved from a closed, monarchy-dominated society into an emerging democracy with growing economic opportunity. We have contributed more than \$1 billion to improve the lives of the Nepalese people. Unfortunately, the Maoist insurgency that has left more than 8,700 people dead since 1996 threatens to destroy so much of this progress.

The Maoist insurgents, in their attempt to overthrow the government and replace it with an autocratic communist state, have destroyed schools and infrastructure, tortured and killed civilians, looted food from humanitarian aid projects, forcibly conscripted children, and assassinated government officials. In August, 2003 the Maoists unilaterally withdrew from a seven-month ceasefire previously negotiated with the government and immediately engaged once more in terrorist actions against the people and government of Nepal. In October, the U.S. designated the Maoists as terrorists under an executive order, subjecting them to financial sanctions.

During my visit to Kathmandu two months ago, I strongly urged the King and the Nepalese political parties to work together to face the threat to Nepal. The preservation of Nepal's system of constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy is crucial to meeting the Maoist challenge.

The Maoists are the perpetrators of this conflict. They are conducting a war against the people of Nepal without respect for human rights. Yet in its response, the Government of Nepal's security forces must be above reproach. Without a focus on maintaining human rights, the Government could lose the support of the very people it seeks to save from the Maoist insurgents.

The United States policy in Nepal is very clear. Along with India, the UK, and others in the international community, we stand with the Government of Nepal in its continuing struggle against the brutal Maoist insurgency. But there can be no successful military solution to this conflict. The government must unify under multi-party democracy, maintain a spotless human rights record, and reach a political solution with the Maoists for the benefit of all Nepalis.

### **Summary**

I have shared with you today some of the principal foreign policy challenges associated with nation-states in South Asia – including bilateral as well as regional and international security concerns.

So why does South Asia matter for Americans? Let us review:

- South Asia is a region of both enormous danger and dazzling opportunity. It is a region struggling against international terrorism, regional nuclear confrontation and proliferation, social instability and humanitarian crises; and yet
- It is a region that is home to nearly a fifth of the world's people, a huge and growing market whose industrious citizens are keen to build better futures for themselves and their families.

As Secretary Powell wrote in the [New York Times](#):

"We fight terrorism because we must, but we seek a better world because we can...This is why we commit ourselves to democracy, development, global public health, and human rights, as well as to the prerequisite of a solid structure for global peace."

The interests of the United States and the challenges faced by the people of South Asia have fully converged. This region is now, and will long remain, at the forefront of America's foreign policy concerns.

Thank You.

Released on February 5, 2004

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