



Press Availability

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary
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Deputy Secretary Armitage: Good afternoon. I can't tell you what a thrill it is for me to be back in Delhi. This is my fifth visit under the Bush Administration. I just noted to the Prime Minister that I was the first Bush Administration official to come after Mr. Bush's election and I am the first official to be able to visit the new government. So, I consider these two signal honors. I met today early in the morning with the leader of the opposition Mr. Advani and through the day with Mr. Dixit, the National Security Advisor, with the Foreign Secretary, with the Foreign Minister Mr. Natwar Singh and finally with the Prime Minister. I also met with the Defense Minister for about half an hour. I was particularly eager to thank Foreign Minister Singh for his attendance at the Ronald Reagan memorial in Washington at which time he had an opportunity to speak with Secretary Powell at some length. We covered the normal issues that you would expect me to cover. I briefed on Iraq. We talked about Afghanistan, certainly Pakistan and Kashmir. We also talked about regional issues and particularly with the Prime Minister this afternoon we focused a bit on the economics of the India-U.S. relationship. So I will stop there and try to answer any questions that you may have.

Question: Sir, would you say that the issue of troops for Iraq is closed as far as Washington is concerned or is it not closed even after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's statement in Parliament?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I made no request at all of the Government of India for troops for Iraq. The Government of India had indicated there are ways in which they might want to be helpful. We have had some real experience in the not too distant past with Afghanistan electoral processes. Things of that nature, there may be some training opportunities here in India for Iraqis but I made no request for troops.

Question: You made a reference to Kashmir so what is your assessment of the situation in Kashmir now?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, clearly people are still dying. This is an unacceptable situation and I'll, of course, have these discussions with our friends and colleagues in Pakistan. I know that the Government of India has indicated and issued a statement that they are willing to talk to all of the Kashmiri parties in an effort to bring about a better situation. I would say that from what I have heard here in India the process which is ongoing between Pakistan and India, the composite dialogue, is one that seems to find great favor here. I'm sure I'll hear the same thing on the Pakistani side. I think as we continue forward, you'll find more and more confidence being developed on both sides. I note the announcement of the upcoming meeting of the foreign ministers (who) will meet during the SARRC meeting and the foreign secretaries and rather the working groups, that six or eight groups will meet following that, so I think it is the more positive place certainly then it was two years ago or even one year ago.

Question: Saurabh Shukla from Hindustan Times, I would like to ask you if there is a proposal that has been voted by actually recently between India and G8 that Britain has also supported that. Do you think the U.S. actually supports that? The proposal to expand G8 and get India into that?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I noticed today when one of my interlocutors said, "What's with this G8 expansion?" and I asked him "What's up with that?" Because it may have been discussed informally. I know of no formal proposal for such a thing and I think it, India is certainly a country which has taken its place on the world stage and is to be much, I think, admired for many of the stances she has taken. But the question of the expansion of G-8 is not one that, as far as I know, has ever been discussed in a major way.

Question: But, will you support it whenever it comes?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I would want to hear what the expansion is too - is it a G-8 to G-10? Or G-8 to G-20? I think I can't answer the question in the absence of knowing exactly what the proposal is.

Question: I am Shukla from NDTV. When the new government came to power here there were initially some statements that gave rise to the belief that there may be a re-evaluation on the relationship with America. After your trip here what do you think has changed in the relationship?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I must say that I found several interesting phenomenon and the first is there seems to be no difference between the opposition and the power ... the government in power about the desirability of enhanced U.S.-India relations. I also found the foreign policy itself didn't seem to be a major area of disagreement between the opposition and the UPA. The Congress Party is well known to us, I myself have been working with the Congress Party since ... for years and years, back in the time of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. We have absolute confidence that the U.S.-India relationship is going to grow in all its aspects and I, for my government, committed ourselves to that endeavor. And I received very good comments in return.

Question: Parsa from National Review. Is the Bush Administration satisfied with the progress on the battle against the Taliban and Al Qaeda on the Pak-Afghanistan border in Waziristan?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I think I'll answer your question in sort of two ways. We are certainly satisfied that the battle against Al Qaeda is one in which our Pakistani friends have engaged full force. You would know, as I do, that the activities in ... [Not audible] and Waziristan have been quite muscular. On the whole question of the Taliban - it's a little more complicated because of the historic relationship between Pakistan and the Talibs and I myself will be trying to encourage the Pakistanis to be a little more muscular on that end as well.

Question: Indrani Bagchi from India Today. Is there ... there seems to have been a slowdown on progress on the quartet issues. Did you have discussions on this? And what are the next steps on that?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: On the quartet? No, we didn't discuss this. We were primarily discussing Iraq and the regional issues - Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Sri Lanka and of course Afghanistan and Pakistan. No, there hasn't been a slowing of the quartet. You saw a statement issued about a week ago on the quartet. Some of my colleagues, as I left the airport at Andrews to come to Jordan and then further to Delhi, was Mr. Hadley of the National Security Council and some of his colleagues were leaving Andrews to go to Israel to continue those discussions. The quartet, and certainly the United States and the rest of us all, agree that the Gaza withdrawal plan of Prime Minister Sharon offers us an opportunity.

Question: I am sorry, I should have clarified. This is the quartet as in the high technology discussions.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Ah.

Question: The NSSP...

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Ah, the NSSP. I'm sorry, when I hear quartet, I go to the Middle East. Now we felt that we were making progress on the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership, that the new government seems committed to it - we certainly are. My colleague, Mr. Juster, an Under Secretary of Commerce, was out here not too long ago and we're pretty enthusiastic about the opportunities that exist for enhancements for both sides. It's a win-win situation from our point of view. We did discuss it at some length.

Question: Mr. Armitage, I am Amit Baruah from "The Hindu" newspaper. I saw earlier in the day you said something about Mr. Fernandes being searched -- you spoke to him and you offered your regrets. I just wanted to know that -- obviously in the post-9/11 situation airport security is an obvious area of concern to the United States, but when a senior minister like our Defense Minister travels to the U.S., what can you do to make sure that these kinds of things don't happen again?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, first of all it's not quite correct -- I did call my friend George Fernandes this morning; tried to call him first thing in the morning and I got to him around 10 o'clock I think, to not, not to express my regrets but my sincere apologies. But let's get the facts right, he was not strip-searched. He said so on television today at noon. He'd removed his shoes and I find this something worthy of an apology.

Question: I just said body search.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I just want to be clear because there was a lot of misinformation about this. Yes, I think there are things that we can and should do and it starts with us knowing ahead of time when people are going to travel. And when that happens, generally we are able to make arrangements so that people are treated appropriately. We don't like the situation in which we find ourselves, and need to protect our borders in such a, let me use the word, intrusive way. And we long for a day when things will be better, but I think that day is a ways off. So, we have to educate our own people who are involved in the customs and immigration and the transportation and safety agency work. We also have to depend on friends, in this case Indian friends, to give us a heads up when people are traveling so that we can make the proper arrangements.

Question: Did Mr. Fernandes tell you that he had accepted your apology?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I'm trying to think of what he said. Mr. Fernandes said, thank you very much. So, ...

Question: I ask that because he has gone on record as saying something like he will never visit the United States.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Well, I hope that wouldn't be the case, and I know he felt that my apology was sincere. And he has been a great friend of mine, a great friend of the United States, and he has certainly been an Indian patriot. And so, if that statement was made, I hope over time I will be able to convince him to change his mind.

Question: I am Ajay from PTI. Is the U.S. convinced that Pakistan has dismantled its infrastructure, its terrorist infrastructure, and is doing enough to stop infiltration?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I'm not sure I understood the entire question, I'm sorry.

Question: Is the U.S. convinced that Pakistan has dismantled terrorist infrastructure on its soil and is doing enough to stop infiltration? Because there is a concern, renewed concern in India about regaining (sic) of this infiltration.

Deputy Secretary Armitage: Clearly all the infrastructure that supports cross-border activities has not been dismantled, and this is well known, I think, here, and generally. Some have been dismantled, as you know. The level of infiltration it appears -- any level of infiltration is too much from our point of view -- there is infiltration and I think you can get various opinions here in Delhi about whether it is up or down. I think it is probably down a little bit. But that is not the point, the point is not to have it at all and to have a Pakistan and an India who live side by side in peace and prosperity.

Question: Sir, I am Aruni Kant Sinha from the Television Today network, that's Aaj Tak and Headlines Today. Sir, my first question is pertaining to a seemingly isolated United States vis-a-vis the incidents that have occurred in the past week or so. After Philippines has decided to draw its troops out and now we hear that Egypt ... the Egyptian who has been taken hostage is on 72-hours notice. The terrorists have issued a 72-hours notice for his life. The idea is, my question is as U.S. finds itself increasingly isolated: 1) Are you looking for new allies who could help you in Iraq and, if not, how do you intend going about handling the entire situation all by yourself? Sir, there is a second question to my.... it is about Pakistan. Now, the last time Secretary Powell had come down, he had gone over to Pakistan and, of course as a pat on the back, had given them the status of a major non-NATO ally. Do you intend doing any such thing to find to, in fact, cajole Pakistan into sending troops to Iraq?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: First of all, I don't accept the premise of the first question, that we're isolated. You would note I am sure, to be fair, that the Australian Government made a decision to send some more troops in. That King Abdullah of Jordan has offered Jordanian troops in the last several days. And you have the better of me, as I have been in meetings all day long, but I believe the decision of the Philippine Government, as I last saw it, was to leave their troops there till 20th August, which was the time they were originally scheduled to go out. Further note that in the region, whether it is the near neighbors or those a bit farther away, have accepted this new government with alacrity, as have the people of Iraq. If polls in Iraq are to be believed, over 70 percent welcome this very good government that they have and the sovereign government. So I don't accept the premise that we're being isolated. What is happening is Iraqis now are not fight ... ah, the insurgents, are not fighting Americans, they are fighting Iraqis. This is a new development and they are fighting against the development of their nation. They are not fighting outside invaders or any more occupiers. This fact is getting through quite well in Iraq and I think, over time, we will see betterment of the situation. Now to the other question on Pakistan. I think you put it, would I give Pakistan a pat on the back? Where it's deserved, I certainly will. For activities in Waziristan, for much of the activity in the global war against terrorism. If your point was, is there going to be another major announcement while I am in Islamabad or in Pindi - I certainly don't anticipate one today. Can never tell what'll happen over night, but I don't anticipate one.

Press Attache: One last question.

Question: Akhilesh Suman from Sahara newspaper. Did you have any knowledge about George Fernandes incident earlier, and was there any protest lodged from Government of India earlier about this incident?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: I had no knowledge. And I would accept whatever former Ambassador Lalit Mansingh says. But I had no knowledge of it. It was the first I heard when I got off the airplane here. And I was horrified.

Question: Was there any protest lodged by the Government of India?

Deputy Secretary Armitage: If there had been a protest, then I think I would have heard about it. But I am unaware of a protest. Thank you all very much and good afternoon.

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