



## Press Roundtable on Pakistan

**Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs**

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**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's good to talk to you guys. We thought it was maybe a good time to get together again because there's so much happening with the U.S. and Pakistan.

**QUESTION:** Something is always happening.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Something is always happening. I was going to say, even though we had quite an eventful week two weeks ago in New York when President Zardari was there -- we had lots of meetings -- it seems to me that events keep moving along, both good ones and bad ones. So let me say a few words at the beginning and then just take questions for a while.

The summary that I would give you of our meetings with Pakistani leaders who came to New York was: we expressed our very strong support for civilian democratic government in Pakistan and our strong desire to work with this government as they take on some of these enormous challenges. We were struck by their determination to address all the difficult issues that the country faces: extremism, but also some economic and development issues of great importance throughout the country.

We are continuing, obviously, our broad support for Pakistan, to help modernize Pakistan, whether modernizing education or the economy or institutions for the military. We're also, as events arise, looking to make sure that we provide the kind of assistance that's necessary with particular events. So you saw in the summertime, Prime Minister Gillani came here. We addressed with him the food question, food and agriculture assistance, going forward.

Right now there's a serious problem of [displaced] people because of the fighting in Bajaur. In the last week or two we've gotten together a total of \$8 million...to help the government help those people who have been displaced by the fighting. Recognize that fighting's necessary, but obviously the people who are displaced and who are harmed by it need to be taken care of so we're making our contribution of a little more than \$8 million to try to help those people. And we know some of these people have been pushed over into the Afghan side, so we'll also look at how to take care of them on the Afghan side of the border as well.

The last thing I'd note that I think is very important is the Friends of Pakistan meeting we had in New York, which was an international group formed with a dozen countries, but we found there are many more who want to participate. There are, I think, a lot of people with good solid programs already, and people that are looking to start programs.

I think the basic structure of this is going to be to focus on those big categories the chairmen pushed out, but to really hear from the Pakistani government what is their program, what is their commitment, what is their plan for each of these areas, then look at how we make sure that our support and our aid programs, our commitment matches their commitment in terms of going to the right areas and doing the right thing. So if they have plans to build schools and find teachers, maybe we can help make sure their teachers are properly trained, to make sure that their commitments and our support match up. That's where I think one of the most useful parts of Friends of Pakistan comes in. Obviously there are people who will participate in this that are looking at how to assist Pakistan, and that's most welcome.

We've started to work behind the scenes with the other governments involved on follow-up meetings. We were planning on doing a follow-up meeting late this month or early next month in Abu Dhabi, so we've been talking to the Pakistani government obviously in the lead, and the Government in Abu Dhabi about how and when that meeting should take place. It's not scheduled yet, but everybody wants to do it in that timeframe that we announced.

**QUESTION:** By the end of this month?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** We said end of the month. It may be early November, but that's around the time. Towards the end of the month or early next month.

We're following up on that. We're going to make this work. We're going to make it work concretely and positively for the people of Pakistan. As was said at the meeting itself by several people, it's a friend of a democratic Pakistan and a friend of the Pakistani people. The goal is to help the government institute programs that help build institutions of democracy in Pakistan and also help the government serve the needs of the people who are faced with all kinds of difficulties right now.

That's enough from me. I'm happy to take questions on these things or whatever.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) dollars. Would that be part of the discussions in Abu Dhabi? Is (inaudible) also, like (inaudible) program or (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's not a defined program yet. You're going to have each country bring to the table what it can bring to the table. We've got a big assistance program -- it's in the area of \$800 million. There are proposals in the United States to take this up much higher, particularly on the civilian side. Each country's going to bring to the table what it's got, but the sum total will be fairly significant and the goal is to make all these pieces work properly together.

So it's not the place to try to raise new funds or get a new cash transfer or something like that. Those remarks have more to do with the fiscal aspect of things, and the Pakistani budget and foreign exchange accounts -- Pakistan's taking a lot of debt to sort of stabilize them, and I think it's in that context that we talked about getting some deposits or available funds.

**QUESTION:** You're assisting them in doing so?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** We're talking to them along with the IMF mostly about what kind of steps they can take to reestablish their...to establish fiscal health.

**QUESTION:** What have you proposed?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** That's not something really we're leading. That's something the Treasury Department and the IMF and the Asian Development Bank are working.

**QUESTION:** What are the \$800 million, that's your commitment?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** That's our ongoing assistance program. That's our assistance program this year, and there are proposals to raise it in the future.

**QUESTION:** So we can say that the next meeting they will come up with a framework (inaudible) to materialize what kind of assistance --

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's not a number. It's a plan to match the Pakistani plan with foreign support. That's fundamentally what we can do in this group. There will be money available because there are a lot of donors there, but the goal is not to come up with a number. The goal is to come up with a program that matches Pakistani commitments, Pakistani plans with foreign support.

**QUESTION:** Medium-term? Long-term?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I think short, medium, long, whatever we can figure out. We're still early days with this.

**QUESTION:** Yesterday was a briefing by the chief of the, the new ISI chief and (inaudible).

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Wasn't it a closed briefing?

**QUESTION:** I know. When you brief about 400 people...(inaudible) separate areas, not private but separate areas. (Inaudible) beyond Pakistan's control. Pakistan exercises no control there, and there have been independent reports (inaudible) saying that (inaudible) or any Pakistani (inaudible) between (inaudible) and (inaudible) which has (inaudible). How (inaudible) on the basis of information which you possess that (inaudible) control?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** You're doing an interpretation of remarks reportedly made that neither you nor I heard, so let's wipe that out completely and say there is no way I can comment on something that somebody supposedly said in some meeting that none of us were at.

What is the situation in the Northwest Frontier, and particularly the settled areas, and how concerned are we about it? We're quite concerned about the situation in the settled areas in the Northwest Frontier. If you look back a year or two at this there was a lot of trouble in certain tribal areas and there were forays, you might say, into some of the other parts of the settled areas. Then you compare that to the situation now where the militants are doing more and more things in the settled areas. We've seen fighting in the Swat Valley where the government has taken them on. They've been up there actually for quite a while.

So I think you'd have to say there's been an expansion of militant influence into the settled areas in a way that's disturbing. Now there have been a number of military operations already this year. There is, I think, a government effort, and we've had a lot of talks with government up there through our folks in Peshawar who talk to people like (inaudible) about the situation.

I think one of our goals is to help them build development in those areas. So we've got the Tribal Areas Development Fund and other development money that goes up there to try to help the government develop those areas with roads and schools and bridges and electricity and hospitals for people all over those areas, try to help them build institutions of that region. I'm not sure how much money we eventually got, but we looked at the police, for example, what can one do to help the police in that area take more control?

I think there's a strong desire on the part of the government and the government in the Northwest Frontier and the governors in the Northwest Frontier to establish more stability and control. But we recognize that that's more difficult over the past year or two, and it's going to take a concerted effort, an organized effort, to get rid of that militant...those militant incursions.

**QUESTION:** You said that part of U.S. efforts is to help Pakistan (inaudible) development to those areas. (Inaudible) situation there (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's ongoing already. Since the beginning of the year we've been signing contracts, undertaking projects. That's \$150 million a year for the tribal areas; we also have regular aid programs in the settled areas up in the Northwest Frontier. So it's an ongoing process of really trying to help the tribal areas develop, but also some of the other areas up in the Northwest Frontier.

**QUESTION:** Do you (inaudible) assistance (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** You need a measure financially (inaudible) the second year, or you can measure it in terms of contracts on the ground, which is calendar year 2008, which is when a lot of it got up and running in a big way.

**QUESTION:** You talk about (inaudible) and building there. What about (inaudible) problem that is (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's very important. There's a lot of different remarks that people make and they're often taken out of context. I think we all think there needs to be an integrated military/political/economic plan to address the problems that they're having. You need to involve the people in the process. You need to give them the benefits of development, and you need to fight the hard-core militants who are not allowing the people to develop.

We have always made a point that we're willing to help the Frontier Corps develop and modernize itself. We're willing to help the army learn to do better in terms of addressing these issues. We've helped with equipment. We're in talks with our Congress about how to improve the capability of the F-16s that are being used up there. So there is a military aspect to it, but I never want to talk about the purely military aspect of this because it's always linked to a need to provide people with a role in their governance and to provide people (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Which means government is moving in all these dimensions? Political, economic...

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I think so. Generally, yes. Some places, when there's heavy fighting going on you can't build bridges. So there's always kind of a tradeoff, but they're always trying to move forward on all fronts.

**QUESTION:** How would you define (inaudible) in Afghanistan?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I wouldn't compare it to that. I would say over the last year or two in Pakistan its gotten worse.

**QUESTION:** Is it alarming?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's a very challenging situation. I'm not given to exaggeration. I'd just say it's a difficult and challenging situation.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) on how (inaudible)? Do the Pakistani people understand the degree that (inaudible) U.S. (inaudible)? And when you (inaudible). How would you talk to the Pakistani people? What would you tell them to correct this perception if Pakistan and America (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** First, let me say I can't really talk about any particular military action or a course of military action. But there are fundamental

things to remember. It's Pakistan's war, not just a U.S. war. I think the elected leadership of Pakistan has made it very clear that the militants, the extremists, particularly in the tribal areas but in other parts of Pakistan, too -- this is a challenge to the vision that they have for Pakistan's future. It's a challenge, a threat, to the vision that Pakistanis have for their own future. They were elected because people shared a vision of a modern, a moderate, and Islamic Pakistan. Pakistan is a country of people who believe in Islam. But their vision of Islam, their vision of modern society, their vision of democracy is being attacked by these militants. The people who bombed the Marriott were trying to kill the vision that all these new leaders have of a modern Pakistan.

I think first and foremost we understand they want to proceed because they think it's essential to their goals, the goals that the people had who elected them, to achieve a more stable, more modern Pakistan.

The United States shares that goal. We're happy to support it. That's primarily where we are. We're in support of a goal that the Pakistani government and Pakistani people share.

We also know there are some very dangerous people holed up in the tribal areas. It's got a long history to it. I think we all understand that. But particularly when you have al-Qaida people up there who are threatening the whole world, when you have people who are up there who are training and sending forces across into Afghanistan, it's important that we all look at the bigger picture and that we end the use of this area for terrorism, we end the use of this area for terrorism against Pakistan, for terrorism against Afghanistan, and against the whole world.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** The tribal areas in particular.

**QUESTION:** And (inaudible) areas as well?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't know if I can quite go that far. I don't know I can identify all the locations of the al-Qaida people. They're probably more in the tribal areas than elsewhere. I don't know if any of them have moved out into other areas.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) meetings of Afghan leaders and Taliban in Saudi Arabia?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** First, I wouldn't hang too much on this. It appears that it's been in iftaar. That was pretty much what happened.

But President Karzai has always made clear that he wants to have a process of reconciliation. There needs to be a way for Afghans who want to join in the new constitution, who want to support Afghanistan -- there needs to be a way for them to come in and join. We've always supported that. We've always made very clear that with certain provisos: you're not going to take in al-Qaida, you're not going to take in people who have war crimes on their heads, you're not going to take in people who defy the constitution. You can't imagine giving the Taliban a piece of Afghanistan and saying you can keep girls out of school and you can beat people in markets for not having long enough beards.

So the fundamental has to be accepting the constitution, but there has to be a way for people to come in. So, I think this is something that the Afghans have in their hands, the Afghan president is exploring. If he has the Saudis supporting it, that's probably a good idea. But we've always known there has to be some kind of process like this and it's an Afghan process first and foremost, and we support it.

**QUESTION:** Would you like to (inaudible) if any Afghans (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** There's been a lot of negotiation up in the tribal areas and we've always supported the view that we've heard from Pakistan, from Pakistanis of different parties and Pakistanis in the tribal areas: that's the view that you negotiate with the tribes, not with the Taliban; you negotiate with the tribes, not the militants, not the extremists. I think we all recognize under whatever reconciliation proposals you've got, there may be some people who are willing to accept the benefits of joining with the government and there are going to be other people who are going to fight against it. So you have to welcome in those who accept the benefits of joining the government and you have to fight the people who are going to continue to try to kill you.

**QUESTION:** Essentially the tribesmen joining the (inaudible) in flushing out (inaudible) terrorists? How do you see that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I think that's the way it should be. There have been some signs of that. I think those are good. Fundamentals to any counter-insurgency are fundamental to the situation in the tribal areas. There are a lot of people up there who just want to live decent, normal lives. I haven't been out as much as maybe some of you have, but the people I've met from the tribal areas, whether they were NGOs or in official positions or tribal leaders, they all say: we want jobs, we want health care, we want education, we want roads, we want development. And they have a right to that as much as anyone in any other part of Pakistan or anywhere else in the world. And so, many of them are actually willing to stand up at great danger to get those things for their own people. We've seen too many leaders of the tribal areas when they have stood up and want a different course, they've been assassinated -- hundreds of maliks. And yet there are still people who are brave enough and strong enough and who believe enough that they're willing to stand up. So I admire them and I welcome them and I think the government of Pakistan is pursuing the right course in terms of (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** The Saudi move, (inaudible) before (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't know we knew about the specifics of that, and we haven't really talked with the Saudis that much about it at this point. We've talked to a few. But we've always had a clear understanding with the Afghan government and with President Karzai about reconciliation and we've always had clear support for reconciliation that brings people into the fold of the new constitution and the new government.

**QUESTION:** About the (inaudible), can you say that you have a better understanding with this government on those issues?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I didn't say anything about (inaudible). No. It's not a question I can answer on military actions.

**QUESTION:** You have (inaudible) as well. That (inaudible) appear to be more willing to cooperate with you on...

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't want to characterize it. Let me put it this way: they've made very clear what their views are on some of these things that have happened. I'll leave it at that.

**QUESTION:** Judging from the current (inaudible), do you think, how long will it take to bring things under control?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't know. And I don't know if they know. We'll see if they try to estimate that when they talk to Parliament. Talking to Parliament is a good thing. There does need to be strong national consensus because these are serious events and serious actions. I think you remember, before the elections we always said we think a democratic base for action against the militants is a better way, a stronger way to fight extremism. And so we've welcomed that, we've welcomed them talking to Parliament and including Parliament in this process. But as far as, kind of, the military estimates, you need political and economic ones of how long this might take. A lot of that does depend on the actions of people themselves in the area. If the leaders in the area and the tribes in the area decide that they want the benefits of governance, then it could happen more quickly. If they have to fight their way through and eliminate the militants first, that becomes a longer and

more difficult proposition.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) seen in the U.S. media also the (inaudible) Pakistan is the most dangerous place on earth. And then there are predictions that it's about to fall apart, (inaudible). What is your take on that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** There are a lot of very dangerous things happening in Pakistan, perhaps more dangerous things happening in Pakistan than anywhere else on earth. That doesn't make Pakistan as a nation dangerous. Pakistan as a nation, as a government, as a society, I see as generally moving in a positive direction, generally getting organized for long (inaudible), and trying to carry out moderate democratic government.

Now they say deadly enemy, several deadly enemies (inaudible), and it's a very difficult task. I see that Pakistan's, sort of, getting itself organized. I see the government and the army cooperating. I see a broad consensus in Pakistan that they need to take on the militants. But it's a very challenging task because there are a lot of dangers, dangerous people, dangerous activities going on in Pakistan.

**QUESTION:** There has always been (inaudible) in the media and there are elements within the Pakistani establishment, especially the defense and the intelligence establishments which have not really believed, in the fight against al-Qaida and the Taliban, believed it is Pakistan's fight. In fact they are sympathetic and supportive of the (inaudible) forces. Is that (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't know. It's a question that would have to be asked in Pakistan and answered in Pakistan. We don't know the history, the history of Pakistan's involvement with the anti-Soviet jihad, the groups that they funded -- with our money sometimes -- during the '80s. And then the history of the '90s and Pakistan's working with them, supporting the Taliban. And the decisions in 2001 and 2002 to break with that.

So I think we understand this has been an evolving process. Where it stands right now I think is more of a (inaudible). What I do know is there's a very clear commitment from the Pakistani government that appears to be supported by the military as well, to take on the militancy because the militancy is a threat to their vision, their shared vision of Pakistan as a moderate, democratic nation, a modern democratic nation.

I do think when they say this is Pakistan's fight they're truly committed in that way. I think that is shared by a broad section not only of the political (inaudible), but people throughout society including people in the military.

**QUESTION:** Something (inaudible) after the Vietnam War and this seems to (inaudible). Do you see us going the same way as (inaudible)?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** I don't think anything similar happened, and I hope nobody feels the same way (inaudible) Cambodia (inaudible). No, I think you have to examine Pakistan on its own terms. It's a very complicated place, but it's a place where a lot of people are firmly committed to modernization, modern economy, a modern education system, modern army, firmly committed to democracy. And that offers a lot of hope. That certainly offers a lot of people we can work with.

**QUESTION:** One question about India. In view of the recent (inaudible) Indo-Soviet Nuclear Cooperation Treaty, what kind of reaction did it receive from Pakistan? Negative?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Indo?

**QUESTION:** U.S.-India.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** You've seen what they said in public. They have a position that's well known. (Inaudible) from them privately as (inaudible). I think the key to this is to understand that we are absolutely committed to working with Pakistan on Pakistan's energy needs. And indeed during the strategic partnership meeting we had with the Foreign Minister and others who were here, we talked about Pakistan's energy needs. We talked about how to improve the cooperation. And Pakistan's energy problems are also balanced by Pakistan's energy potential. Pakistan's energy potential -- a lot of that is in coal, particularly clean coal; a lot of it's in hydro power, in some of the mountainous areas of the country; a lot of it's in alternate energy wind farms and other things down by the Macram coast.

So in the end we're going to help Pakistan, work with Pakistan on Pakistan's energy potential which has a uniquely Pakistani character. That's where we really need to reinforce our efforts. And we heard very strongly from the Pakistan side they want us to do more. We told them we agreed. We'd try to step up our cooperation.

**QUESTION:** But no nuclear cooperation?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** It's just not on the table.

**QUESTION:** This is only India specifically.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** The agreement we have with India is unique to India, not a model for anything else. But as I said, the goal is to help Pakistan with its energy needs.

When a kid turns on the light bulb to do his homework he doesn't really care if the light comes from coal, hydro, nuclear or whatever. He cares that the light bulb goes on. We want to help turn the lights on for kids to do their homework.

**QUESTION:** There is (inaudible) very serious energy crisis.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Absolutely. I think there's a developing program by the government to address those energy needs. But yeah, there's a lot to do, and unfortunately a lot of the energy investments take time so it's hard to immediately satisfy the needs for energy that are appearing now.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER:** Thank you very much. It's good to see you all.

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