



United States Relations with South Asia

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As Prepared

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to come here today to talk about the United States relationship with South Asia.

Mr. Chairman, it has become very clear that the most vital interests of the United States are affected by events in South Asia. It is imperative that our country be actively and effectively engaged with this region. Since it came into office, this Administration has devoted great resources and energy to advancing our relations with this very important part of the world. As a result, we have the close cooperation of all the countries in the region in the war against terrorism, and were able to play a helpful role last spring and summer to defuse a dangerous crisis between India and Pakistan that could have led to a catastrophic conflict. There has been development in all of our relationships with South Asian states, which I look forward to discussing with this committee.

The continuing success of our alliance against terror and other initiatives in South Asia depends on productive and effective long-term relationships with each of the countries in the region, combined with economic growth, stability and the strengthening of democratic institutions. South Asia faces great challenges. But these challenges also provide opportunities to bring positive change. My testimony today will highlight our relations with the individual countries of the region. While I realize that this Subcommittee does not have jurisdiction over Afghanistan, I want to assure you that the continuing political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan is one of the key U.S. foreign policy goals being managed by the South Asia Bureau.

India:

I would like to start with India, where we are continuing to transform our relationship. Soon after taking office, President Bush outlined his vision of a transformed and deepened US-India partnership, one that reflects India's emergence as a major regional power and the shared values that unite the world's two largest democratic countries. The scope of that relationship has widened and broadened significantly over the past two years. The United States and India have overlapping vital national interests -- promoting peace and stability in South Asia, combating international terrorism, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We seek a vital and comprehensive partnership with India that removes as many Cold War and other barriers between us as possible. Over the past year we have stepped up consultations on strategic and regional issues, and greatly fortified cooperation in science and technology, defense exchanges, intelligence dialog, and law enforcement. We are also working collaboratively with India to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. India is committed to preventing onward proliferation and we are encouraging and supporting India's efforts to upgrade its export-control system to meet international non-proliferation standards. We will deepen all these initiatives and extend engagement on key global development issues, including climate change, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and trafficking in persons.

India is already one of the world's important economies, but there is much room for further growth through accelerated rapid economic reform. The United States will continue to urge such reforms, particularly the fiscal consolidation necessary to address the government's domestic debt overhang and the continued liberalization of their trading system. A strong and rapidly expanding economy is essential to eradicate India's staggering poverty, which finds more than 300 million of its citizens living on less than a dollar a day. And a robust Indian economy is in the best interests of both our nations as it will provide greater opportunities for business and deepen our commercial ties.

Pakistan

Mr. Chairman, U.S. relations with Pakistan have broadened significantly in the past 18 months. Starting with our solid partnership in the war on terror and our cooperation in Operation Enduring Freedom, we have expanded the relationship and have reestablished a USAID program, providing assistance in the areas of education and health, we have expanded our cooperation in law enforcement and we have begun restoring our military ties. In the coming years we will strengthen our programs of bilateral cooperation in order to deal successfully with issues of key interest to both our nations, including counter terrorism, Pakistan's relations with its neighbors, regional stability, strengthening Pakistan's democracy, helping to promote its economic development and improving life for the people of Pakistan to help this nation continue moving in a positive direction.

United States and Pakistan cooperation in the war on terror takes place on several fronts, including coordination of intelligence and law enforcement agencies in hunting Al-Qaida and other terrorists within Pakistan, coordination with military and law enforcement agencies along the border with Afghanistan and efforts to strengthen Pakistan's law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities and institutions. Since the fall of 2001, Pakistan has apprehended close to 500 suspected al-Qaida operatives and affiliates. It has committed its own security forces --some of whom have lost their lives--to pursue al-Qaida in its border areas. Equally importantly, we are encouraging Pakistan to build positive, mutually constructive relations with neighboring Afghanistan and support its efforts to establish a stable and secure government.

To promote both regional and global stability, we also seek to reinforce Pakistan's commitment to non-proliferation and to improve its system of export controls. Pakistan clearly recognizes the seriousness of any proliferation activity, and President Musharraf has personally assured Secretary Powell that his country is not engaged in such activity.

Pakistan's commitment to democracy and human rights is central to its efforts to build a stable, positive future for its people. National elections in October, although flawed, restored civilian government, including a Prime Minister and a National Assembly, after a three-year hiatus. We want to see strong Pakistani democratic institutions and practices, including a National Assembly that plays a vigorous and positive role in governance and an independent judiciary that promotes the rule of law. These institutions are required if Pakistan is to develop into a stable, moderate Islamic state.

Pakistan's progress toward political moderation and economic modernization will require sustained growth. We are also providing debt relief and budgetary support. We are devoting significant resources to assist Pakistan's economic development, particularly in the area of education, so that Pakistanis develop the skills they will need to build a modern state that can compete successfully in the global economy.

India-Pakistan Relations, Kashmir

One of the greatest challenges to advancing our goals of moderation, stability and development in South Asia is the continuing tension between India and Pakistan, primarily over Kashmir. Last Spring, US diplomacy at the highest levels, along with that of the international community, helped prevent an India-Pakistan war after terrorist attacks led to an Indian, and then Pakistani, mobilization along the border and the Line of Control in Kashmir. Last Fall's Kashmir state elections gave new hope for progress in addressing issues that contribute to that long-standing dispute. But violence inside Kashmir continues and is aimed at exacerbating tensions and undermining reconciliation. An end to this conflict requires continued de-escalatory efforts, increased communication within Kashmir and a peace process between India and Pakistan.

Ending infiltration into Kashmir remains a key goal.

The Kashmir state government under Mufti Mohammed Sayeed has announced a "Common Minimum Program" of reforms and conciliatory steps to address Kashmiri grievances and lessen conflict in the state. We would like to see the state government move forward on this initiative and for the central government in Delhi to support its efforts. In this regard, India's appointment of Mr. Vohra as an interlocutor with Kashmiri groups is a welcome development. Last summer's election made it clear that the people of Kashmir want to pursue the path of peace. In the broader context, we will continue to urge dialogue and restraint between India and Pakistan. Continued U.S. attention and creative diplomacy will be essential to help move these two nations away from confrontation and towards dialogue and resolution.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a moderate, democratic Islamic nation, is the eighth most populous country in the world. It is the top contributor of manpower to UN peacekeeping missions, and is an active player in regional and international organizations. It is a voice of moderation among developing countries, in the Islamic world and in South Asia. The country has made impressive strides in economic development, dramatically reducing its birth rate, improving literacy, delivering more social services and empowering women through education and employment. Major challenges remain. Deep and bitter rivalries between the two main political parties as well as continued corruption threaten political stability and impede economic reform and growth. Serious law and order problems need to be addressed. It is in the interest of the United States to keep Bangladesh firmly in the moderate, democratic camp and to help its economy prosper.

We are working to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions – Parliament, local government, civil society, the police, and the judiciary – to make their operations more accountable, effective, and transparent. But the future course of democracy in Bangladesh will depend on the political parties working together to solve the problems facing the nation. We are also advocating greater respect for human rights and are working with Bangladesh to end trafficking in persons. Bangladesh is a valued South Asian partner in the war on terrorism, and we have worked to enhance its capabilities to deter terrorists and to stop the illicit financial flows that support them. Our goals in Bangladesh can be achieved over the long term if Bangladesh's economy grows and living standards improve. Progress has been made, but additional structural reforms are needed to diversify Bangladesh's exports and strengthen its infrastructure. A decision to allow the export of gas by pipeline to India could attract the foreign investment that Bangladesh needs to help propel the economy forward.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the peace process moderated by Norway and strongly supported by the United States has continued since a ceasefire was agreed to more than a year ago. Actual negotiations between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam began last September and the sixth session of these talks will wind up tomorrow in Japan. We praise the commitment of both sides to sustaining the ceasefire, moving forward with the peace process, and working toward a final settlement. They have made significant progress toward a political solution that protects the dignity and security of all Sri Lankans and preserves that country's unity. But the talks are bound to be complex, time consuming and difficult. All political parties need to cooperate, put aside their differences and work together in pursuit of a settlement. Our support for the peace process has included strengthening our bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka and increasing our assistance, particularly for reconstruction and humanitarian needs. The international community has also shown strong political support for the peace process, as well as willingness to assist with reconstruction and reconciliation.

Nepal

Mr. Chairman, Nepal's democracy, stability and its economic and social development are now threatened by a ruthless Maoist insurgency. The Maoist leadership has made it clear that its ultimate goal is to establish an absolutist communist régime. Such a development could contribute significantly to instability in the region.

Fortunately, a Maoist military victory is increasingly unlikely, something the Maoists themselves conceded by agreeing in January of this year to re-enter political negotiations with the Government. We would support a meaningful dialogue leading to peace. Unfortunately, the government's ability to mobilize effective resistance to the Maoists and develop a strong position for a peace process is complicated by ongoing rivalries within and between the mainstream political parties. The King and the parties need to cooperate more closely to maximize chances for a successful outcome. Our support for a settlement has led us to increase our development assistance to \$38 million requested in the President's FY '04 budget -- an all-time high -- and to restructure our programs better to address the economic causes of the insurgency. We are also providing security assistance to the government. Once a political settlement has been reached, the United States should be in the forefront of donors prepared to help Nepal conduct national elections, strengthen administrative and democratic institutions, protect basic human rights and provide better health services and rural livelihoods.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I will close by once again pointing out that the United States has significantly changed and deepened its relationships in South Asia. We are making progress in the war on terrorism. We have contributed to the lessening of tensions and supported the resolution of conflict throughout the region. We have been champions of strengthened democratic institutions, development and economic reform that will lead to a better quality of life for all South Asians. But there is a great deal still to do. A more secure, democratic, stable and prosperous South Asia is very much in our interest and I look forward to working together with the Congress as we continue to pursue those very important goals.

I would be happy to answer any questions from you and other members of the committee.

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