



Interview by Pakistan Television

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Residence of the U.S. Ambassador
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Q: Asalam alaikum Khawateen-o-hazrat. We have a special guest today, and that is the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Richard Armitage. Mr. Armitage, thank you so much for being with us on Pakistan Television.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you very much for having me.

Q: You come to Pakistan at an interesting time. How would you describe the current situation between Pakistan and India, this new "rapprochement," so to speak? What level of importance are you giving that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: The United States Government gives it quite a high level of importance. I think the gesture of the phone call by Prime Minister Jamali, and the statement at Srinagar by Prime Minister Vajpayee have set a new tone, and, hopefully, the leaders on both sides will be able to take advantage of that new tone, move forward and discuss all of the issues.

Q: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has suggested a number of confidence-building measures, like sporting events and people-to-people contact, and other issues like that. But for Pakistan the core issue, of course, remains Kashmir. Do you see any position where these positions can be reconciled, and how can this issue be solved?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I don't dispute at all your statement that for Pakistan, Kashmir is the core issue. Of course, India has core issues as well, and their core issue may not be exactly Kashmir. From their point of view it has to do with what they would say was unrelenting hostility from Pakistan directed towards India. So I think that's why I put the focus on all aspects of this relationship have to be discussed. And I think if the atmosphere is improved on both sides on a lot of other issues, then clearly Kashmir would be able to be discussed rationally and reasonably.

Q: OK, and one of the things that we've seen, of course, is that within the Indian ruling party, the Bharata Janata Party, there are hardliners that really don't want to see any level of talks. How do you bring people like that around?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it's not a job for the United States to bring them around. What's going to bring them around is the hopes and aspirations of the people of India, the hopes and aspirations of the people of Kashmir - and, by the way, the hopes and aspirations of the people of Pakistan. Every body politic, whether it's here in Islamabad or whether it's in Delhi, has hardliners, conservatives, liberals, etc... This is not a new phenomenon or one unique to India.

Q: India's concern, of course, has been what they call cross-border terrorism, and Pakistan says that they have stopped that, or reduced it to a large extent. Now, one of the proposals that Pakistan had presented was that neutral observers, international observers, be placed on the Line of Control to verify Pakistan's claim. And India is not accepting that. Is there any other mechanism that could be used, do you think, to try and put at rest this controversy?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: President Musharraf today was very clear: that nothing is happening across the Line of Control. He gave absolute assurance, further, that there were no camps in Azad Kashmir. There are any number of mechanisms, as you correctly point out, but I think the most effective mechanism is the degree of confidence that Indians and Pakistanis -- that the state of their relations is such that they can believe each other. That's the most effective mechanism.

Q: President Musharraf, of course, has called for a no-war pact and a nuclear-free South Asia. Is that a vision worth pursuing?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, I think ultimately the United States, in every part of the globe, we'd like to have nuclear-free visions and possibilities, but I think something like that is quite a bit down the way, in terms of confidence-building measures. There are more immediate issues.

Q: And of course, now let's move to Afghanistan, another issues that has been, of course, very important. It's been more than a year now since the Taliban have been ousted from Kabul. But President Hamid Kharzai says that he has not received the full amount of reconstruction aid that was promised to his government. Is the world community losing interest in Afghanistan again?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I can't speak for the whole world community, but one of the reasons that President Bush has asked me to go to Kabul tomorrow is to make a dramatic display that the United States hasn't lost interest. We put about nine hundred million dollars into Afghanistan last year. We're very intent on building a ring road from Kabul to Kandahar. In fact, we're buying almost all the gravel that Pakistan can manufacture for this road. So we want to show politically that we haven't given up our vision for an Afghanistan which has a very bright future.

Q: But critics say that President Kharzai's government doesn't extend beyond Kabul. Is there any chance that we're going to see some kind of unified Afghanistan in the future?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I'd say it's a complex and difficult problem, and I think that there is a degree of truth in the questions that the critics raise about how far and wide the central government's writ extends. I think, as a general matter, wherever you go in Afghanistan you see that Hamid Kharzai does represent to most people a certain level of security, and that's a good base on which to move forward. And I think he's intent on moving forward.

Q: How long do you think it would take for this to happen, where Afghanistan would be in a position to stand on its own, and the U.S. would withdraw its troops at some point?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, I haven't a clue. I think we're quite a ways away from that. I think every day is better than the day before, but I wouldn't want to venture any guess. Anything I said would be wrong one way or the other.

Q: And, of course, when you think Pakistan-Afghanistan - the whole region - then, of course, the war against terrorism, which has been a prime factor in U.S. policy. But, recently, with the war in Iraq, there has been some feeling in the region that perhaps American interest in the region has waned, and Iraq and the Middle East is more important.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I don't know why one would say that. Our Assistant Secretary for South Asia has been here, I think, ten or eleven times in the last twelve months. I've been here four times, Secretary Powell three times. President Musharraf is coming to Washington to visit President Bush in June. And there's not a diminution of our interest. In fact, if anything, we're very, very intent on not going through another separation with Pakistan, as we had for ten years. We want a relationship that is deep, enduring and long-lasting.

Q: And, of course, the war against terrorism. I guess one question that one would ask is: When would this war be really over? Is it going to take the arrest of, let's say, somebody like Osama Bin Laden for the U.S. to declare that the war is now over, the war against terrorism has been won?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Our president has said that the global war against terrorism is going to last for a long time, because there are many people intent on harming innocent civilians for political (ends). And he's not going to be stopped. Osama Bin Laden is one element in that, and the capture or death of Osama Bin Laden is a good thing, but it's just another milestone in a long battle - a long battle which, I might say, that Pakistan has very high stakes in the outcome. And the activities of the government and the law enforcement people of Pakistan have been absolutely fantastic.

Q: And, of course, talking about that, there have been several Al-Qaeda people arrested from Pakistan, one of whom was recently involved - or accused of being involved in the bombing of the USS Cole. Now, these kinds of arrests, what kind of dent is that putting in Al-Qaeda's activities, and are these major intelligence gains here?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, our intelligence officials tell us that they certainly are, and I think that one of the many reasons that we've had a somewhat lessening this year in the amount of terrorism is because through joint efforts - Pakistan, the United States and many other countries - we've been able to put a real crimp in their plans. We've been able to really strangle a lot of their funding, and this is a good thing, and, God willing, it will continue.

Q: A couple of quick questions on Iraq. And, of course, a major issue is that the war in Iraq has left a lot of damage, and the task of reconstruction is now there. How long will it take for an installation of an Iraqi government?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I'm sorry, I don't accept your initial premise. There was a lot of damage done in Iraq prior to the first bullet ever being shot, because of the deliberate policy of Saddam Hussein to punish people, particularly in the South. And you have the phenomenon now of people in Basra and Um Qasar actually receiving water and electricity at a higher level than they did before the war. So I think the cost of reconstruction in terms of dollars, if I may, will not be as enormous as people think. I think that the international community will be required to stay in Iraq until security and stability are absolutely assured. And the day that is assured, we're leaving, but not before.

Q: And the coalition has, of course, arrested several leading members of the Baath Party and Iraqi scientists, but is there any further movement on discovery of weapons of mass destruction?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, there's been a much-publicized biological mobile van which has been discovered. It was exactly what Secretary Powell testified to the UN Security Council on five February. I think it's a very good step in the right direction, and there's very little question in anybody's mind that we're going to get to the bottom of weapons of mass destruction.

Q: And last question, coming back to Pakistan. You have had meetings with Prime Minister Jumali and President Musharaf today. Could you give us a brief idea of what those meetings were about and what you discussed?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we discussed - I could give you the general topics. First of all the bilateral U.S. relation. Second of all, Iraq, Afghanistan, of course, India. And we talked about Pakistan's chairmanship of the U.N. Security Council this month, where we'll be moving forward with a new U.N. Security Council resolution. So we had a pretty full agenda.

Q: Mr. Armitage, thank you very much for joining us on Pakistan Television.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you for having me.

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