



Interview by ARY Islamabad Bureau Chief Talat Hussein

Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

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11:45am

QUESTION: Well, thank you very much for joining us.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thanks for having me.

QUESTION: Let's start with a statement that you made in India regarding infiltration, which has not come down to a point to the satisfaction of the U.S. What's your take on that; what is happening on the Line of Control?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, the point I made in India was that the infrastructure, the camps, still have not been entirely dismantled. Regarding the violence, there is indeed cross Line of Control violence. There also is, what I mentioned this morning, indigenous violence and violations of human rights. The point is less to depend on numbers of incidents and more to trying to eliminate all the violence, so that Pakistan and India can sit down and have a meaningful dialogue on this question.

QUESTION: So, people are still crossing the Line of Control from Pakistan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: There are some. There are also other people who are in, let's say, in Kashmir, indigenous, causing difficulties. There is plenty of blame to spread around.

QUESTION: You also said that the U.S. will lean more on Pakistan to dismantle its infrastructure. What does "leaning" mean?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It means, we feel that, as long as there is infrastructure, the camps, as it were, then there is a possibility of difficulties and trouble. We'd like to get a situation of such confidence, between Pakistan and India that such camps were no longer necessary. We think that Pakistan is a great country, and a great future, we think. And we want to be a part of that great future. And we think it would be helpful if the camps were dismantled.

QUESTION: There is a feeling in Pakistan that unless India were to scale down the violence perpetrated by the forces, and unless it changes its policy towards the Kashmiri leadership, most of them are in jail, there is no point in going to the point of bringing the infiltration down to point zero. What's your take on that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: You know, I think violence from whatever source always runs the risk of escalation. So, the U.S. Government would have no choice but to oppose violence. Because it could bring about some unknown consequences. As I said, there is plenty of blame to spread around. And this, the history of the question of Jammu and Kashmir is well known and longstanding since the time of partition in 1947. I think it is just about time to sit down and have meaningful dialogue. And we are encouraged by the meetings which have taken place between the foreign ministers, the foreign secretaries and now the recently announced working group meetings. This is an encouraging time.

QUESTION: Moving to Afghanistan. Mr. Karzai as well as Mr. Abdullah-Abdullah and Zalmay Khalilzad, both have at least made one point in the past couple of weeks, repeatedly, that Taliban are still coming from Pakistan across the border on the northwestern side. What is the U.S. assessment of that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I think some Taliban are coming. They're not assisted by the Government of Pakistan at all. I don't think anybody should suggest that; I don't have any reason to think that. But to the extent that the Tribal Areas are very porous and people can go back and forth. And that is a situation that would obviously be worrisome to the Government of President Karzai.

QUESTION: How do you see the operations going on in Waziristan? Are you happy with the results so far?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, first I am terribly sorry by the deaths of up to 75 Pakistani soldiers and injuries to others. But it looks to me as if they have been quite successful. But I think there is another point. It's not for me to be satisfied or for the United States to be satisfied. Pakistan is not conducting those operations because the United States tells her to. Pakistan is doing it because the Government of Pakistan has come to the conclusion that it's in Pakistan's interest.

QUESTION: What's the U.S. assessment of what is being chased in Waziristan. Are we looking at some high-value targets? Are we looking at outlaws? Who are we chasing in Waziristan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, as I understand it, there is a certain foreign fighter element. In past operations, I know that the valiant forces of Pakistan have captured or killed some foreigners up there. We do think that there are high-value targets in the area and we'd love for Pakistan to be successful and capture them, so we could all make more rapid progress in the war in terror.

QUESTION: Does this high-value target list also include Osama bin Laden, Al Zawahiri or others?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it certainly includes Osama bin Laden and Al Zawahiri, though Dr. Zawahiri's whereabouts and Osama bin Laden's are unknown to us, so they could be anywhere. They could be on the Afghan side. They could be in the tribal areas. They may go back and forth, who knows? But sooner or later they will be found out.

QUESTION: Sooner or later?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I do not know sooner or later, but sooner or later they will be found out.

QUESTION: There have been reports in some American magazines suggesting that the U.S. is putting extra pressure, that the administration is putting extra pressure on Pakistan to catch Osama bin Laden or Al Zawahiri before the Democrat's convention starts. Do you think there has been extra pressure in the context of the U.S. politics?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: There has been absolutely no extra pressure in the context of U.S. policies and I would refer you to the Government of Pakistan on that.

QUESTION: Talk about also the role that Pakistan plays in the development of Afghanistan; stabilizing the situation inside Afghanistan. What would you expect Pakistan to do? What sort of a role do you have in mind for Pakistan in terms of stabilizing the situation?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I found in my discussions here, a great deal of support for President Karzai and for what President Karzai is trying to do for the nation. There is no question that Pakistan has come to the conclusion that a stable Afghanistan will make continued improvements in the quality of life and stability here in Pakistan very possible. So we are quite pleased. And also reconstruction efforts and things of that nature that Pakistan can and does take part in. For instance, we, the United States, were part of building the Kabul to Kandahar highway, which we are quite proud of and were happy to do for the Afghan people. But I would note that the gravel that was used to build that road was Pakistani.

QUESTION: Pakistan has also been suggesting that Karzai administration and the U.S. policy is unfair to the Pashtoon element inside Afghanistan, that there is a need to have better engagement with the Pashtoons in the south. Do you think that's one way to probably stabilize the situation inside Afghanistan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I think that -- President Karzai is a Pashtoon himself, of course -- and he has reached out, will continue to reach out. Clearly, all elements of society in Afghanistan, and all tribal elements, have to be engaged and have to feel part of the process. There is no difference of opinion, I think, whether you are Afghan, or whether you are a Pakistani, or a citizen of the United States: you share that view.

QUESTION: There is been a CIA assessment of the threat that the U.S. is facing during the course of elections. There was news couple of days ago that probably a terrorist attack larger than the 9/11 could be anticipated. Has that got anything to do with the situation inside Afghanistan, on this part of the world, or is it going to be, or is it purely indigenous?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I don't know that it has anything to do with here. We have not received reports and our Director of Homeland Security Governor Tom Ridge has pointed out that we believe that al-Qaeda elements will try to disrupt in some fashion our electoral process. From their point of view, they were quite successful in the Madrid bombing, and we feel they like nothing better than to do this. That's why we've gone more public. But I have no information that it emanates particularly from Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Is it Osama bin Laden who is still planning these or is it other members of al-Qaeda?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it's Al Qaeda, and I can't say with assurance that Osama bin Laden sat down and wrote the instructions, but he certainly is the founding spirit behind the al-Qaeda movement and in that regard, he's guilty.

QUESTION: Nuclear proliferation. There have been some reports in the American media suggesting that Pakistan probably is not extending kind of helping hand, even after breaking up the Khan network, in terms of stemming illegal proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related technology. What's your assessment of that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: This issue, the issue of AQ Khan, is one we are grateful for the activities of the Government of Pakistan. And we find that they have been fully helpful to us, and I think to the world, by making proper information available so that we can stop proliferation. There was no complaint that I had during my recent stay here to make to the Government of Pakistan about proliferation. So, I think those stories to which you refer are a bit overblown.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. expect Pakistan to do more on this front?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We expect Pakistan to do what is in her national interest. And we find that we share a view about the proliferation of technologies that can be used to develop Weapons of Mass Destruction that are in no one's interest.

QUESTION: Last QUESTION: How important is General Pervaiz Musharraf to the stable equation between the Pakistan and the U.S.?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We've had relations with all sorts of Governments of Pakistan. And we value very highly President Musharraf. We find him a man of his word, and a man who has a vision for Pakistan. But, our relationship, we believe, is larger than any one person.

QUESTION: Mr. Armitage, thank you very much.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you.

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