



Interview by GEO Islamabad Bureau Chief Hamid Mir

Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

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QUESTION: First of all, tell us about your agenda to your visit to Pakistan, you're visiting Pakistan, what is your agenda?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well I wanted to discuss, first of all, our views of the situation in Iraq. Second of all, to discuss Afghanistan. And third of all, because I traveled to Delhi prior to coming to Islamabad, I wanted to get an appreciation of the new Indian government and their views about the possibility of progress on the question of Jammu-Kashmir.

QUESTION: So, how many Pakistani troops do you need in Iraq?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I didn't ask for any Pakistani troops. I didn't ask the government. I simply explained to the government our view of what's going on, and our views of the situation there. Prime Minister Allawi of Iraq has requested some assistance in a letter to the Government of Pakistan, so these are decisions that the Government of Pakistan is going to have to make.

QUESTION: So how can the Pakistani Government help you in Iraq?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It runs the gamut. First of all, it's not so much helping the United States, it's helping the people of Iraq. It runs the gamut from political support, to reconstruction support, to trading, to -- if the Government of Pakistan were to decide -- to providing troops, perhaps, for the protection of the U.N. as we move toward elections in December.

QUESTION: So, you want Pakistani troops in Iraq for the protection of the U.N.?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I didn't ask for any troops. You asked me what the Government of Pakistan could do, and I listed a sort of an increasing order of things that the Government of Pakistan could possibly do.

QUESTION: So, according to some American magazines, the U.S. Government is putting pressure on Pakistan to kill or capture at least one high-value target before the presidential election in the United States. What is the truth?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we're not putting pressure on Pakistan regarding any domestic political issue or campaign issue in the United States. We have steadily worked with the Government of Pakistan to try to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, Dr. Zawahiri and other members. And in that regard, I would note that the Government of Pakistan has been quite rigorous in their military actions in Waziristan, to try to root out foreign fighters and al-Qaeda.

QUESTION: The U.S. Ambassador in Afghanistan, Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, is continuously saying negative things about Pakistan. So tell us, who is the real face of American foreign policy? Is it Mr. Colin Powell or Mr. Khalilzad?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Aw, that's an unfair question. It's Mr. Colin Powell. And he has spoken consistently about our views of the Government of Pakistan's assistance in the War on Terror. Ambassador Khalilzad, of course, is in Kabul where things are a little bit hotter in there, so, longer-term animosities that have existed in the past and I think these reflect themselves occasionally in his statements. But, Khalilzad is doing an excellent job for the United States, and I think an excellent job for Afghanistan, and we value his services.

QUESTION: So, if he is doing an excellent job, it means that he is reflecting views of the American administration?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I have reflected here in Pakistan our views. I say he's reflecting, I think, the views of some in Afghanistan. But the American view of what's going on is as I have stated.

QUESTION: So, why the presidential election in Afghanistan is delayed again? Who is responsible?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, my understanding is that the U.N. has made the decision that there needs (to be) a slight delay til the ninth of October for the presidential election. And this delay was deemed acceptable, particularly when you note the great number of Afghan citizens who are registering to vote. We're up well over six and a half million now. And the interesting thing is, the registering of women is at about 39 percent. And even more interesting to me is women in the countryside have registered at a higher percentage than women in the cities. So, I think it's a good thing.

QUESTION: So, why have the coalition forces failed to kill or catch any high-value target inside Afghanistan? Because a recent report of the Newsweek says that Osama bin Laden is present in some of the eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I don't know where Osama bin Laden is. I don't think anybody does. There is a lot of speculation. We've fought and defeated the Taliban. We, to some extent, kicked al-Qaeda out when we moved in after the 9-11 attacks. And I think the people of Afghanistan have a view that the coalition forces have aided greatly in bringing their lives back to a more pleasant situation.

QUESTION: A very close associate of bin Laden, Mr. Khalid al-Harbi, surrendered to the Saudi authorities recently. Do you want his extradition to the United States?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well I think that is something that we would have to talk to the Saudis about. He was a known associate of Osama bin Laden. He's been seen in photographs with him. He appears quite infirm from the pictures I've seen. I think we're mostly interested in his information.

QUESTION: So, his presence in Iran, what do you say about his presence in Iran?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We've long stated that Iran has had present in their country al-Qaeda elements so I find nothing surprising about this.

QUESTION: Do you want to send some fresh troops to Afghanistan for maintaining law and order situation?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Does the United States? (questioner: "yes") Well, we'd certainly like continued NATO participation in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. We've got 14 of them up and running now and I think there are three more scheduled to come. And that will aid in bringing about peace and stability as we approach the October 9th date for presidential elections.

QUESTION: You said something about the cross-border terrorism and India. Does it mean that fencing the Line of Control is useless?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Fencing the Line of...? Well, you know that there is a statement that good fences make good neighbors, but I think good fences can also interfere in an eventual solution to the question.

QUESTION: I'm talking about the iron fence on the Line of Control. Is it useless?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know that it's useless or not. It seems to me, and I think that many in India agree, that infiltration is down a bit. But, the fact is that there is a lot of violence. Some of it indigenous; some of it across-border. And whenever there is violence, things could spread out of control. So, we always urge both sides to think carefully through the consequences of their actions.

QUESTION: So in the recent past, the Indian Foreign Office is silent on cross-border terrorism. But you spoke on this issue. What is the reason?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Why the Indian Foreign Office is silent?

QUESTION: The Indian Foreign Office is silent, but you mentioned something about the cross-border terrorism. So, if they are silent and you are speaking on the issue, what is the reason?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well I was asked a question. And just as you are asking me questions, I try to answer them. So I was asked a question in Delhi at a press conference and I gave an answer.

QUESTION: So, what do you see the future of India's-Pakistan's talks?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I found the situation this time, both in Islamabad and in India, much more relaxed. I think that now that there is a process underway, there is some confidence being developed, and I think that confidence if it continues to be developed will eventually lead to a situation where the two sides can discuss the very important and the core issues.

QUESTION: Can the U.S. play a role of a mediator or a facilitator between India and Pakistan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, this is not the role we see for ourselves. We're a friend of both sides. We certainly want the resolution that is agreeable to both sides, and to the people of Kashmir. After all, their equities are very much at stake. But, as a mediator or facilitator, no.

QUESTION: And what do you think about the recent increase in the Indian defense budget?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I hadn't even focused on it, to tell the truth. I haven't even looked at it.

QUESTION: Hmm. So, do you think that the increase in the Indian defense budget can create some problems for this region?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, before I could answer that I'd have to look at it and see not only what it was but where it was applied. But I found no hostile intent while I was in Delhi. I found, as I say, a very calm atmosphere.

QUESTION: Both India and Pakistan are testing their nuclear missiles. So would you like to comment on this trend?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we've commented time after time. The testing of the missiles, et cetera, can be a provocative action. Now I think that both sides are taking pains to inform each other of upcoming activities so to lower the possibility that something might be misunderstood. But the real key is to develop a better set of relations between Pakistan and India so that we don't have to have questions like this at future press conferences.

QUESTION: So, the last, would you like to tell us how many Pakistanis will be released from the Guantanamo Bay prison?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't have the figure with me. We are intent, as I said earlier today, in trying to reduce to an absolute necessary minimum the number of people held at Guantanamo Bay. And we're trying to arrange, make arrangements with various countries, whose nationals are in Guantanamo, but I don't have at my fingertips the figures for Pakistanis.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

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