



Interview by Quatrina Hosain of Pakistan TV (PTV)

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Residence of the U.S. Ambassador
Islamabad, Pakistan
November 9, 2004

11:15 AM

QUESTION: Asalaam aleikum ladies and gentlemen, and joining us tonight is a very special guest, the Deputy Secretary of State Mr. Richard Armitage. Mr. Armitage, thank you so much for joining us on our special program tonight. Just starting off straight with what's been happening in the United States, with the reelection of President George Bush for a second term, looking back on his four years, what would you say were the defining moments of success and possibly any areas where you feel you didn't do enough?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I'll tell you one of the key areas of success was the reestablishing of a relationship with Pakistan, and look how far we've come in four years. Beyond that I think you have to look at your neighbor in Afghanistan. What we all witnessed in the election on October 9 was a tribute to the men and women of Afghanistan. In fact it is a tribute to Pakistan, who was so helpful in bringing about that election.

QUESTION: One of the campaign issues was the hunt for Osama bin Laden, and that hasn't happened. So looking at that now, are you going to be devoting more resources towards that? Are we going to see any particular efforts stepped up to find him at this point?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think the efforts have continued unabated since 9/11. We have thousands and thousands of U.S. soldiers, we have Afghan national army soldiers, and certainly Pakistani soldiers looking for Osama bin Laden. Sooner or later, we'll get him. So I don't think it is a lack of resources; he's just got a lot of holes in which he hides, and eventually we'll poke our heads into the right one.

QUESTION: And, of course, in terms of policy towards Pakistan, can we expect any changes in American foreign policy toward Pakistan in the second term?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I was just speaking with our colleagues today in the Foreign Ministry, and I expressed the hope to them that any changes we see are changes of acceleration. We want to have a relationship with Pakistan that's political, that's economic. That's lagging a bit, I think, and we need to get some foreign direct investment in here. We certainly want to continue our excellent cooperation with the military, and we want to develop more of a cultural exchange with Pakistan.

QUESTION: Regarding the situation between Pakistan and India, recently President Musharraf asked for people to suggest options to resolve the continuing problem with Kashmir. Would there be any kind of situation you would see where the U.S. would facilitate such a dialogue or even offer options of its own?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't think it's appropriate for the United States to get in the middle of a question that exists between Pakistan and India. We'll certainly, where appropriate, make suggestions to the two sides. We have in the past, I think, been helpful in calming things down. But this is, at heart, a question for Pakistan and India to resolve. I was very interested in the proposals that President Musharraf made. It looked to me that he was being very forward thinking. And I think he has caused a great deal of thinking, both in India and here in Pakistan about the way forward.

QUESTION: What about the role of the Kashmiris? There continues to be a lot of debate. What role would the United States like to see the Kashmiri people having in this process?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: The Kashmiri people are the ones that ultimately suffer the most, and their voice has to be heard, whether it is on either side of the Line of Control. The Kashmiris have to be able to speak their minds and to feel that they are being heard and that they are being listened to.

QUESTION: Switching to Afghanistan, as you mentioned earlier, with President Hamid Karzai's reelection, one of the things he keeps talking about is the fact that he hasn't received the kind of financial support that his government needs to fight the drug problem, the warlordism, and the various other issues. Will the United States be coming forward with some initiative to either restart the Bonn process, kick-start into Tokyo, anything? We don't see it happening.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We've put in excess of a billion dollars in, and we'll be continuing that. The Kabul-Khandahar road, for instance, which has enormously aided commerce, is a function of U.S. assistance. I understand the frustration on the narcotics area because the growth of poppy has continued unabated. We have to do a better job to assist the government of Afghanistan, and our friends the British, who are the lead country in the counter narcotics area, have to do a better job.

QUESTION: Moving on to the Middle East and the situation in Iraq. The situation is getting worse everyday in terms of the security problem, and now Prime Minister Alawi has announced a 60-day state of emergency. Does that worry you that this had to be done?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I was speaking to the Prime Minister. I came from a 36-hour visit in Iraq. He feels that he has to change the equation. He no longer could stand to have insurgents basically own a town and prevent the government from extending its influence there, and he's made a decision to route the insurgents out. You're correct about the 60-day emergency law, but it's only applied to certain areas, for instance the Syrian border, the al Anwar province, things of that nature. It's not nationwide.

QUESTION: And the situation in Fallujah, the United States has now started what was the anticipated assault on Fallujah. There has been severe criticism of the United States for not insuring enough precautions to make sure that civilian casualties can be minimized. Any efforts in that regard to minimize civilian casualties or even eradicate them?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: First of all, there are over 3000 Iraqi soldiers who are leading the activities, and we are certainly supporting them. This was called for by the government of Iraq. There is about 25 percent of the Fallujah population left in the town, about 60,000 people. The rest have fled and are awaiting the results of the battle. We'll be as careful as we possibly can. The government of Iraq has made every precaution to have medical supplies; equipment; blood, should it be needed, repositioned around Fallujah so that they can immediately take care of any civilian casualties.

QUESTION: There have been suggestions that the elections in Iraq scheduled for January could be held in only a few provinces or may even be postponed all together. If they are held in only a few provinces and not all of Iraq, what kind of legitimacy would that government have?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: None. These elections have to be held so that all Iraqis can take part in them, and that's what the government wants. They don't

want to have an election that disenfranchises some citizens, no more than we in the United States would like to have an election that disenfranchises, say, California.

QUESTION: Of course, in the Middle East, critics of the previous Administration, President Bush's first term, say that he didn't do enough on the Middle East peace process, that there was no actual work done during that time. Now that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is in critical condition, whom is the United States looking to talk to now?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We're waiting for the Palestinians to come up with new leadership. Of course, we don't wish anyone ill, and we're sorry for the ill health of Chairman Arafat. But should he pass, the Palestinians have 60 days to come up with a new leadership, and that will give the Israelis someone with whom to deal, as well as the United States. By the way, it was only George Bush among American presidents who spoke for the first time about a two-state vision – Palestine and Israel – living side-by-side. And it was only George Bush who laid out a roadmap for peace, and that roadmap is still the only map in town.

QUESTION: Let's talk about that roadmap, because we haven't seen it implemented. Are we going to see further work being done on that roadmap?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It has obviously, in recent months, been in abeyance, as it were. It's been stopped. The Israeli government has just pushed through their Knesset a disengagement from Gaza plan. We're very keen on this. We want the Israelis to disengage from Gaza and the Palestinians reoccupy this territory. We want them to see that it is possible for Israel to peacefully give back land, and hopefully that would be a good primer, if you will, as we move forward to the question of the West Bank.

QUESTION: On the question of Iran and Syria, let's quickly talk about Iran. Relations have been tense between the United States and Tehran recently. In this Administration, what are we likely to see on that front?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We're likely to see a continuation of the struggle over the nuclear question, though it looks, temporarily at least, as though the EU has been able to broker some sort of suspension of the nuclear program, which is a good thing. We don't wish Iran ill in the long term, but we also don't like to see Iran trying to undermine activities in Iraq. We don't like to see Iran, which has certain al Qaeda folks in Tehran, under surveillance, I believe, but we can't get any information from them. So there are a lot of stumbling blocks between ourselves and Iran.

QUESTION: We'll make this the last question here: the situation between what is now perceived as the war between terrorism, is often perceived as a war between Islam and the West. Even President Musharraf has talked about an "iron curtain" descending between the West and Islamic countries. What efforts will you be making in this new Administration about trying to ameliorate this perception?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: First of all, I think it's more than a question of "war" between Islam and the West. There is a struggle going on in Islam, between those who love this great religion and want to practice it the way it was meant to be and those who want to misuse it for secular aims or for extremist aims. That's a war that's going on inside of the Islamic community, inside the Muslim community. From our point of view, we are going out of our way to make sure that all of our Muslim citizens and all Muslims around the world realize how much we respect the religion, that Islam is one of the great religions of the world, and we look to increase our own understanding of Islam as a way to move forward.

QUESTION: Any changes likely in the State Department, Cabinet in this new term?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes.

QUESTION: Are you going to tell us which ones?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: (laughs) I don't know which ones yet. I've been traveling since the election, but, sure, inevitably there will be changes, we just don't know who will go where.

QUESTION: Mr. Armitage, thank you very much for joining us in Pakistan on our show.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thanks for having me. Good evening.

Released on November 9, 2004

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