



Media Roundtable With Senior Pakistani Editors

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Just to start off with a few words. Just to say it is a great pleasure for me to be back in Pakistan. I think this is my fourth visit this year and it is always useful for me to come. It is part of the whole series of visits that we have -- from the President's visit here, the Secretary of State's visit, and your President's visit to Washington.

I think we have a very active dialogue, a very active relationship between United States and Pakistan these days. What strikes me every time I come here is the breadth of the things that we talk about. Certainly the United States and Pakistan are key allies in the War on Terror. But we are also linked in strategic goals: the success of Pakistan as a nation, creating new opportunities for Pakistan's people, and cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistan on the international scene. So there are many things that I talk about when I am here and it is such a pleasure to come.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with lot of people so far. I will be rushing off later to see more people. I was given the opportunity to meet with the President this morning. We had a good chat. Yesterday I saw the Foreign Minister and the Foreign Secretary. I met with colleagues from the Foreign Ministry. I talked to people from the business community and a variety of others since I have been here.

We have talked about, of course, developments in the region - India and Afghanistan in particular. We have talked about the developments inside Pakistan, particularly in the border areas, prospects for economic development in that region. We are working together with the government of Pakistan to try to bring economic opportunity to the people who live in the outlying areas along Pakistan's border. We talked about our expanding, really already enormous cooperation, in areas like education, energy and science.

And we have talked about some of the regional economic issues that I deal with as part of this region that I work on, South and Central Asia - how to connect Central Asia and South Asia, to bring electricity to Pakistan and to bring opportunity to trade to the countries to your north. So we have a full agenda and I think one reflects the strategic goals that the United States and Pakistan share and the increasingly in-depth and important work that we are doing together in all these areas.

So with that I would be glad to take any questions.

QUESTION: You just mentioned that you talked to officials of Government of Pakistan. Can you tell us whether you also talked about the Bajaur incident?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We did talk about the incident in Bajaur as part of, I think, our look with various people at the situation in the border areas. Certainly our hope is that these areas can be made more peaceful through a combination of political steps and economic steps that we are supporting, through the political influence of people in those areas: the tribal leaders and others. But we also recognize that there will be militants and fighters there who may need to be dealt with by other means. And so the Pakistani government has said that they have carried out this initiative to deal with this serious threat from fighters who were at this location.

QUESTION: Mr. [Assistant] Secretary, Pakistan is an important ally of the United States in the War on Terror. Do you think that Pakistan is doing enough, because officially everybody recognizes that Pakistan is doing ok? But in the media and some think tanks and some other sections in America, they are accusing Pakistan of not doing enough. And it is said that because of that, the U.S. air strike was conducted in a religious school in Bajaur. So what is your assessment?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: This question seems to constantly come up and I really don't know why. It doesn't reflect the facts. Pakistan is a key ally in the War on Terror. The extremism, the violence that we are fighting against is the same violence that is threatening the government and the people of Pakistan, as well as other people in the neighborhood. So we have common cause because we have common interests along with others in this region.

Has anybody done enough? To me the question doesn't make sense. None of us has done enough. We have to keep at it. This is a strategic struggle for the future of this region, the future of this nation. President Musharraf and other Pakistani leaders have made clear that this means he wants to make this a moderate nation, an educated nation, a prosperous nation that is free from the ravages of violent extremism which threaten the people here. We will all keep working with him towards that goal. So we don't plan some day to say, "Oh, we have done enough, and then we all rest." Building a nation, building peace is a long-term proposition.

QUESTION: Two questions: one is about energy. You said that issues concerning energy were discussed. Have you discussed ways and means for how we would be getting energy, especially electricity from Central Asia? And the second thing, have you discussed the issue of providing nuclear energy for civilian purposes to Pakistan? This issue has been there for long time. And briefly can you tell us about Pak-Iran gas pipeline? Do you think the U.S. government is still opposing that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: On the field of energy, first of all I think those of us who work on this and the Foreign Ministry, our main goal is to get the energy experts to talk to each other. So much of what we discussed today was how to continue the excellent contacts that our energy partners have had and how to move those into increasing depth to talk about fossil fuels and new energy sources of coal and technologies and all those things that the experts really have to discuss.

We have discussed in general terms the connections to Central Asia. That is certainly something that we have worked on in much more depth together in other fora. There was just a meeting in Dushanbe about a week or so ago that I think really put some more specifics to the discussion. Pakistan was represented there. The United States was represented there. So this project is really moving forward. It is moving forward fairly quickly. They have a time line and a series of issues they need to settle. I think that their timeline says that within the next year or so they should be able to reach agreement on doing this - bringing electricity down from Central Asia, particularly from Tajikistan, to Pakistan to help Pakistan with its energy needs.

Pakistan does have a growing economy. You have achieved some excellent economic growth rates. That requires more energy. So we understand that you are looking for a variety of sources. We are trying to help with that. Our dialogue concentrates on these regional opportunities, better use of your coal resources, use of new energy technologies. Those are the subjects that we discussed.

On the gas pipeline, that does raise certain questions under U.S. law, depending on how it is structured. But frankly I haven't really seen much news on that recently and it is not an active question for us.

QUESTION: My question is that there is a strong perception in Pakistan based on certain facts that the U.S. was involved in the bombing of Madressah in Bajaur. Do you confirm or deny it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No.

QUESTION: And secondly, since the government of Pakistan is not letting any journalist go there to visit the area and the information is not coming out, this impression is continuing. So did you discuss this issue -- because hatred against America and the American people is rising because of this incident all over the country -- because of this one incident in Bajaur, which has never happened earlier? So do you feel concerned about it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I am always concerned about, you know, anti-American feelings. But, I mean, you have the facts in front of you. The Pakistani government said it carried out this action, initiated this action, and that it was necessary because militants, terrorists were at a training center. That I think speaks for itself. I don't think one needs to speculate or go farther than that.

QUESTION: Just a supplement to this Bajaur thing. Did the U.S. government provide any technological support including predators because Pakistan does not have such predators to?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: You know, those are kinds of question that we don't answer. I have just answered the question before. You asked the same question in a different way. I can give you the same answer but I stand by what I said today.

QUESTION: In the recent days there has been escalation of the situation in Afghanistan also. And despite your actions in Bajaur and other tribal areas of Pakistan, things are not under control, either of the U.S. or of Pakistan. So what is the reason and what is the remedy for this situation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: To some extent the problem on both sides of the border is similar. On both sides of the borders we need to extend the writ of the government, the authority of government, to the edges of border. In Pakistan, obviously, in the tribal areas the governing arrangements that go back a long time are different than in other parts of this country, much less on the Afghan side. So we are working separately, but in some ways together as well, with both governments, to achieve these goals.

On the Afghan side we mean to do a better job of extending the benefits of government to the people who live in those areas, so that the government could bring them the safety, the justice, the economic opportunity, the roads, the electricity that people need to live normal lives. On the Pakistan side, you are fully aware of all the measures the government here has taken, whether political measures, the economic development or the military measures they have taken to try to ensure that this is a peaceful area for people to develop and to live normal lives.

So we try to help with both of those. I talked today to people in the Pakistani government about our support for the economic development plans for the tribal areas, talked about support for the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones and how we are moving forward towards defining that and opening up that opportunity for people who want to invest and create jobs and businesses in the border areas. On the Afghan side we are working very closely with the government to support their projects to bring better government down to the south of the country, to build roads in that area, to create other economic opportunities so that we can get rid of narcotics cultivation and really give people other alternatives to subjugation by the Taliban again.

Obviously, there is still fighting to be done on the Afghan side. We are prepared to do that. NATO is there; Afghan forces are there; the United States is there. We are going to fight against people who are trying to attack us, who are trying to attack the Afghan system. But it is not just the military side of things. It has to be successful on the development side. The governance side has to be successful as well. We recognize that, bringing those things to these areas. So what's the solution? Bringing better governance as well as security is, I think, a central part of solving the problems in southern Afghanistan.

QUESTION: How much time will you need to finish the job?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: As long as it takes to finish the job. We are here for the long-term. We are here to help the Afghan government for the long-term. We are here as a partner for Pakistan for the long-term. This is a key part of the world for us. The future of Pakistan, the future of Afghanistan are strategic questions for us. And we are going to commit the time and efforts, the resources necessary to make sure that both these countries are successful.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, it must be a very important visit for you because obviously today is an election day in the U.S. and you chose to visit Pakistan instead of polling your vote there. It must be an important visit and a visit of urgency. Are you ruling out any U.S. role in the Bajaur incident? And secondly do you see any change in U.S. policy towards Pakistan or elsewhere after the elections if Republicans lose the House, the Senate or both?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: It is an important day in the United States, it is election day. I was able to file my vote by absentee ballot last week before I left. So this is not a problem for me to be away on this day.

As far as Bajaur, I answered the question before and I don't have anything to add.

Obviously, the U.S. has elections in order to create a new mix and new political dynamic. But I think if you look at United States, support for the War on Terror, support for Afghanistan and the funding effort there, support for the partnership with Pakistan has gone across the board in United States politics. It has strong support from both parties. It has strong support from not only the President but also from the legislative branch and key members of Congress particularly in the Foreign Affairs Committee. So I don't think one should doubt that these policies have widespread support and reflect the best interest of the United States as well as the best desires of United States to help people here succeed. So I would not expect much change, any change really, no matter what happens with the various pieces of the U.S. government.

Q: I have two questions. The first one is again on the issue of Bajaur. In January one incident took place where 17 civilians were killed on the suspicion that they were high value targets. Again now, the people of the area are saying that these are Madressah students. You are saying they were militants. I think the intelligence mechanisms that you people have, both the government of Pakistan and the U.S. forces, that needs to be explained to the people of Pakistan - whether they were civilians or militants. Secondly, on the issue of full return to democracy. Have you discussed this issue with the President of Pakistan, particularly for the forthcoming elections?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Once again, on Bajaur, I leave you the statements of the Pakistani government has made that these people were militants and that they were at a training center. I have no reason to doubt that and frankly from what I have seen I have every reason to believe it.

QUESTION: Your State Department says that the intelligence was provided by the U.S. government?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I haven't said anything about intelligence. We don't talk about that.

As far as full return to democracy, yes, it has been discussed. It came up with the President today. This is part of his program to move to a nation characterized by enlightened moderation. We fully support the program including elections next year. We talked about that somewhat today. But I think it is a whole process that involves many aspects. It is the economic opportunities, the education provided to the people, the development of democracy, it is a political process here and the elections next year. We are fully supportive of all that process.

QUESTION: Do you think that the engagement of peaceful Taliban, not militant Taliban across Pakistan-Afghan border, can help resolve the crises in this region if you involve these Taliban. Can the crisis be resolved?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I'm not exactly sure who you are talking about exactly. I haven't seen anybody stand up and say, "I am Taliban and I want peace." What we do think is that the engagement of people who live in these areas is very important. That is why local leaders, tribal leaders, need to be involved in the process. That is why we need to work with them on their hopes for the region, their development plans for the region. That is why we want to work with people on both sides of the border. That is why both the Presidents, President Musharraf and President Karzai, came up with an idea in Washington to have jirgas on both sides of the border to work, both of them, with the people who live in this region, whether they live on one side or the other of the border. We are very supportive of those plans and think that working with the people of this region is vital. They are the ones whose lives are disrupted by the fighting, disrupted by the Taliban. Many on them are the ones who suffered during the Taliban period and many of them are people who want a chance and an opportunity to construct new and peaceful lives. So we are very supportive.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, we have heard a great deal about the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between Pakistan and the United States and then we are hearing about the ROZs. But when are these going to materialize?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The Bilateral Investment Treaty negotiation got very, very far along and then kind of hit a couple obstacles. I'll talk a little bit I think with the Prime Minister today about that. I have spoken to some others here. We need, I think, to clarify the difference a bit between the United States and Pakistan and really make an effort to see if we can solve them. So we remain hopeful and committed to try to conclude a Bilateral Investment Treaty. But given the nature of the difficulties, even though there are few, they are legal issues and I cannot predict how long it will take to find solutions. But certainly we are working avidly on that and trying to get the appropriate experts really to focus on that.

As far as the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones, we have been doing a very serious feasibility study that is just about finished. We have to have legislation in the United States for duty free entry of goods. So we hope to be in a position to propose that legislation early in the new session which would be in a few months, next year. And hopefully our Congress will act on it and would be able to move forward some time during the course next year.

QUESTION: Are there some difficulties you are facing in the treaty?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. There are really very specific legal questions that both sides feel are important to them.

QUESTION: Anything special do you think that is creating a hurdle to have this bilateral treaty signed?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: No. I don't have any particular solutions at this point. As I said, I think the next step is to get quite clear with each other as to where the problem is and what solutions there might be. And then we would see if they can't be solved.

QUESTION: Regarding stability in Pakistan, it must be important for you. And we have seen that there is lot of difference between the government and the opposition parties who are really not ready to accept elections under the supervision of President Musharraf. Is the American government willing to play any role to bridge this gap between the opposition and the government towards free and fair elections?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I mean, from what I have seen, everybody feels there needs to be free and fair elections. We are prepared to support that process. As I said, this is part of President Musharraf's program and something the opposition parties always call for. We are not going to take sides and pick a political party or a winner in this. What we are going to support is the election process, the overall progress of Pakistan towards free and fair elections, and a good democratic basis for society. We support that in variety of ways, whether it's, you know, education and information programs or support we can give to the Election Commission or other key institutions involved there. So we would continue to support that progress, but politically not to take sides or back any particular party.

QUESTION: Can I have a supplementary question? You are talking about democracy and you have talked to the President. My question is, do you see President's role beyond 2007? And if yes, with uniform or without it? And can you help Pakistan get rid of this uniform?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, those are all questions that the people, and the politicians, the legislature and the President of Pakistan will decide in the course of moving towards elections. So it is not for me to specify one thing or the other. There are a lot of questions that arise in the context of the elections. I am sure that would be dealt with as the election approaches.

QUESTION: You met Tariq Aziz also. Did you discuss anything special?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I haven't talked to him yet.

QUESTION: As we read the U.S. press, we get the feeling that you are in great difficulty in Iraq and Afghanistan in regard to the War on Terror. Do you think there is any thinking in Washington to review this policy and change this policy and not to rely purely on the military force but to talk out and to discuss with the people and find out a solution of this extremism and terrorism and not relying totally on military force?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Who says we are relying totally on military force?

QUESTION: The comments that I read that you have faced in Afghanistan and in Iraq. There is a change in thinking or at least people are asking for it...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Let it put it this way: first, I think the two situations are different. Since I work on Afghanistan everyday and I don't work on Iraq every day, let me just deal with the situation in Afghanistan.

The construction - the reconstruction of Afghanistan is in fact probably not an accurate term, because Afghanistan for many years has been one of the least developed countries in the world. In the 50s, 60s and 70s it was a very poor country in the world. Then it went downhill for 25 years. So one should not be surprised at the task of building Afghanistan. And giving the people there what they need - building of the roads, the electricity grids, power generation systems, government institutions, educational systems - this is a big task. But it is a task that we are committed to. And it is a task that has been at the forefront, I think, of our efforts.

I don't think anybody could say that our goal, our strategy has been purely military in Afghanistan. We have worked, certainly, to support the Afghans militarily and to help train police and army for the people of Afghanistan. And I think you have seen Afghan army be quite capable in many ways in its actions. But there is an enormous amount that we have done and we will continue to do in terms of development, in terms of training people, in terms of building government institutions and of helping Afghanistan develop as a modern economy and modern state. That has all been the fundamental goal of our policy.

Now as circumstances have changed, as we have seen a resurgent threat from southern Afghanistan, we have certainly adapted that policy. We have adapted military tactics. We have deployed NATO - the United States still has as many troops in Afghanistan as when NATO started to deploy. So there is no question of our commitment. But I think we have added to it. NATO has added to it. We have added money to the commitment and are prepared to do more.

So we always adjusting to circumstances, we are always building on what we have done before. Many of you are familiar with Afghanistan, have been there many times. I have been there a number of times since January 2002. In some ways what you see, the change is striking. There are goods in the market. There is money and people and goods in circulation. Children everywhere are going to school. Cars are everywhere. There is traffic. There has been enormous change already. There is a democratically elected government, a democratically elected parliament, a new supreme court. All these institutions of government are working and working together. There is a lot more to be done, absolutely. We should be proud what we have achieved. But we should be determined to see it through - to keep building the national

institutions, keep building the infrastructure, keep building what is necessary for lives of the people to improve throughout the country and for government to operate successfully for the benefit of the people throughout the country. If you look at the areas where the problems are, in many ways those are the areas where the government hasn't operated yet, or hasn't operated successfully. We have been going through this building process. So that remains a goal and I think we have been able to adjust and shift and improve our tactics as we go along.

QUESTION: Regarding the Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in the tribal areas, you spoke about it in your earlier visit. What has happened since then? And now you talk about the legal procedure that has to go ahead. Can you give us background as to why the legal necessities are not in place now though the policy has been made and nothing has happened since you visited that area?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Well, I think you note that when we announced this in March and when the Presidents talked about it, we made it very clear at that time that first of all we had to study the economics of it and the feasibility. It is great to have zones but zones aren't jobs. Zones are opportunities for investors to come. Zones are opportunities for people to create jobs. So we wanted first to do the economics right. And we sponsored an economic feasibility study. A team that has been over here working with experts in Pakistan, working with experts in Afghanistan and they are doing what you might say is economic design or at least giving us the economic parameters of what we have to do. We also made clear from the beginning that duty-free entry of products into United States is something that requires legislation. It is not something that the President can do on his own under our system. The Congress is very careful that tariffs and duty free entry. So we have to get legislation and now having done the economics study, I think we are in a position to tell our Congress what it is we intend to do and how we intend to do it, what the kind of rules might be for duty free entry, and to get their approval. So I think there is nothing unusual about this. It is not an instant process but it is one that is proceeding quite well.

QUESTION: What about the realities on ground for such an ambitious project?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: From what I have seen in the feasibility study, there is really some economic opportunity in these areas whether it is new industries like marble or granite....

QUESTION: Given the fact that there is so much turmoil there, is it possible to bring in something so ambitious there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes it is. I mean it is economics not alone; the politics is not alone; the military strategies are not alone. I think your government had undertaken a combined political, economic and military strategy of which development and reconstruction zones can be a part, can play a helpful role. But no single piece stands on its own. They all contribute to a more stable environment of opportunity for people who live there. And that's our goal as well as the goal that your government has put forward.

QUESTION: I have a very brief question. First, are you also meeting some leaders of political parties who sit in the opposition? And secondly, being the most powerful democracy, which is almost a kind of icon democracy, whenever you people go to India you also meet the Leader of the Opposition there. Now General Musharraf's government has a Leader of Opposition. His name is Maulana Fazlur Rehman who played a key role in bringing peace in Waziristan. Are you thinking of engaging him as well so that he might help you as well as he has helped the Pakistan Army to pullout from there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I am seeing a variety of political leaders tonight. I think, you know, I am not seeing everybody. I think these are mainstream leaders in parliament who I'll be meeting because I wanted to talk about the political process, I wanted to talk about politics here, and I wanted to talk to all of them as we head towards elections next year and the role that they can play and their parties expect to play in the elections. So, yes, I am seeing a variety of opposition politicians.

QUESTION: Without the Leader of Opposition?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I am not here to appoint anybody the Leader.

QUESTION: He is already there, sir?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I appreciate it. But I would be seeing a variety of people tonight. I think that takes care of things for me. Okay?

QUESTION: Any particular reason for not meeting him?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I am seeing a variety of people tonight for a variety of reasons. I am looking forward to it.

QUESTION: Any variety of reasons?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Several hundred million Pakistanis that I am not going to see and I don't want to have to explain why I am not seeing each one. So I am seeing some people tonight. Thank you.

