



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Background Press Briefing by Teleconference on the Meeting Between President Bush and President Musharraf of Pakistan

10:10 A.M. EST

MR. McCORMACK: Thank you for listening in, everybody, this morning. We have a senior administration official who is going to do a short run-through, make a few points about the President's meeting with President Musharraf this morning. Then we'll open it up to questions. Just a note for all of you listening -- we're going to try to do a transcript of this and get it out later. So I will turn it over to our briefer now.



SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thank you. President Musharraf met with President Bush and his national security team today in the Oval Office. President Musharraf is en route from Latin America to the U.K. He'll be seeing Tony Blair tomorrow. And the President invited him on the way to stop in on a Saturday, which is not normally when the President does these meetings. It was a demonstration of the importance of his friendship with President Musharraf and of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship that he did so.

President Musharraf wanted primarily to come and congratulate the President on his reelection. And the President thanked him, and talked about some of the things he wanted to do -- he, the President -- with his second term, and focused, in particular, on working towards a Palestinian state living in peace, side-by-side with Israel. And he exchanged views with President Musharraf on that, and President Musharraf said this is important and it was a development that was going to help him, help South Asia, help the entire Muslim world, and that he, as President of a moderate Muslim state, wanted to work closely with the President to help bring success to that effort.

They talked a bit about, as they always do, the relationship between India and Pakistan. And President Musharraf reiterated his commitment to moving forward with what is called the composite dialogue, and said that he's willing to be flexible and move forward with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India to work towards a peaceful resolution. And the President thanked him and praised his work on this and said the U.S. is improving relationships with India and with Pakistan, and that should help.

And they turned to the economic issues. President Musharraf brought with him his commerce minister, who gave the President an update on Pakistan's trade and economic developments. Pakistan's macroeconomic picture is very good. President Musharraf said that one of his key strategies to

defeating extremism in Pakistan is to provide livelihood and a better future for all the people of Pakistan and that the economic figures are promising for that. And the President said he was impressed and promised to work closely on our bilateral trade relationship to help keep Pakistan moving on that positive path. They agreed they'd work together also in the WTO to work for global trade liberalization.

President Musharraf gave the President an update on the Pakistan military operations against extremism in the border areas near Afghanistan, in south Waziristan and north Waziristan. He pointed out that the forces from Pakistan's army have smashed the communications and logistics hub of the al Qaeda and other extremist elements in south Waziristan, cut them off from access to finances, and suffered casualties. And the President expressed his deep appreciation and his recognition that Pakistan had taken the fight into this difficult mountain area and suffered casualties.

President Musharraf said they're now moving up to go after those who they didn't kill or capture who are taking refuge in north Waziristan. The President offered to continue working closely with Pakistan and supporting them in this important operation, which is part of our global war on terror and an important part of our partnership with Pakistan.

They talked about Afghanistan. And President Musharraf reported that his relationship with President Karzai, and Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan overall is now very positive. President Musharraf said the elections in Afghanistan were very important for Pakistan. And President Bush thanked President Musharraf for Pakistan's work to provide security along the border during the elections and to allow Afghan refugees in Pakistan to vote absentee. And many of them did. I think about 60 percent, in fact, voted for President Karzai. So it was encouraging to see that relationship between Kabul and Islamabad is moving forward.

And they talked about a number of other bilateral issues, and then went to press comments, which I think you may have seen or will see. And I'll stop there and be happy to answer questions.

Q Thanks. Was there any discussion of F-16 sales?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In most all of our discussions on U.S.-Pakistan cooperation, Pakistan's defense requirements come up, and F-16s often come up, as they did today. But there's nothing to announce on that.

Q Two things. First, if you could answer Mark's question -- even if you don't have anything to announce, can you characterize the nature of the conversation about the F-16s and what the U.S. reservations are, and all that? And my question is, we didn't hear any discussion about A.Q. Khan, although it seems clear from President Musharraf's public comments that he still refuses to allow the U. S. to engage with him directly. We also didn't hear anything about President Musharraf's decision on retaining his post as the head of the military.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't have anything more to say on the F-16. It came up, as it has in past meetings, and probably will in future meetings. On --

Q What is the position of the President at this point?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: As I said, I don't have anything more to say on F-16s. On A.Q. Khan, that did come up. And the President thanked President Musharraf for a decisive move he made to work with us to roll up the A.Q. Khan network, a move that was initially quite unpopular in Pakistan. But now the Pakistani people have come to recognize that A.Q. Khan was a traitor to Pakistan and a threat to Pakistan's interests, and have supported President Musharraf's efforts to crack down on the A. Q. Khan network and work with us. And that effort and cooperation yielded a good volume of information that helped us go out and, on a global basis, go after and dismantle this network.

And the President expressed appreciation for that, said we need to make sure we're getting every nook and cranny in this global network. And President Musharraf said that it's absolutely in Pakistan's interests to do that, and that he was going to take this on when he got back to Islamabad and make sure that the information that is available is fully shared -- and we believe it has been -- and that they work with us to make sure we find out any remaining elements of the global network that we need to go after.

But the initial years of work on this have yielded a lot of important insights that helped us go after the network and unravel it.

On the democracy issue, President Bush has, both privately and publicly, been quite clear that he thinks democracy is important not just in Pakistan, but anywhere in the world, to developing progress in the economy and political and security stability. He did so today; in fact, talked about this in the press availability.

If you look back at the joint statement that President Bush and President Musharraf worked on last time they met, you'll see that President Musharraf -- and by the way, he personally worked this -- that President Musharraf is committed to moving at a pace that works for Pakistan towards full democracy. There is in Pakistan a very high rate, for example, of participation by women and -- women in local and national parliaments and assemblies and legislatures. Anticorruption and transparency are quite strong in Pakistan. The institutions of democracy are in pretty good shape. And President Musharraf is reaching out to the opposition and taking steps that you'll see to continue moving forward and strengthening these institutions, with an eye towards full restoration of direct election of the presidency, as well.

This whole process you can read about in the Pakistani press where there is a very hot debate because it's one of the freest presses in the world. So the institutions of democracy are strong; he's making them stronger. He's made it clear he intends to go the full way, and that's important.

Q Just to finish up on the A.Q. Khan thing, it sounded like you were saying there that you actually believe that they have been fully cooperative, where the sense that we get from others is that the fact that you and others have not been able to interview either A.Q. Khan or other members, key members of the Pakistani side of this has resulted in significant frustration on the part of American officials about what may or may not be withheld. Are you suggesting that the President did not express any displeasure, unhappiness --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't think I would characterize our view of this as -- what did you say, extreme frustration, or even frustration. The reality is we obtained a treasure trove of information from this cooperation with Pakistan. It allowed us to roll up some pretty significant proliferation networks that we would never have known about had it not been for President Musharraf's decision to crack down internally on these guys. And we've rolled up a lot of the network. But we're also -- we realize from that that it was pretty expansive, it was pretty large, globally, and we need to go back and make sure we've gotten every nook and cranny, as I said, and every element of this.

Q Did he say he would let you directly access --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they didn't talk the sort of tactics of negotiation -- excuse me -- of interrogations and so forth. But what President Musharraf said is it's absolutely in Pakistan's interest to make sure that this network is rolled up, and that he's going to go back and make sure his people are figuring out if they've gotten everything, and working with us to figure out if we've gotten everything we can to figure out every element of this.

We had a huge amount of good information; we've acted on it. This is a somewhat opaque global network, and we need to make sure we've squeezed out every last element of information about it from every quarter we can. And President Musharraf is committed to doing that.

Q A couple of questions for you. First, did they talk at all about Putin's visit to India and his comments about the United States having a "dictatorship" over world affairs? And can you characterize any exchanges between Musharraf and Vice President Cheney, Rice, Powell, Rumsfeld, who were all in the room?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The Putin comment didn't come up.

Q Did the visit?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. The principal -- you know, President Musharraf and President Bush did almost all the talking, and occasionally, principals on our side weighed into fill in a point here or there. The only substantial discussion that wasn't between the two Presidents was a very concise, but helpful briefing from the commerce minister of Pakistan on their plans for trade and economic policy.

Q I didn't see the press availability. Did the question of the Iraqi elections and the question for the search for Osama bin Laden come up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I suggest you look at the transcript, because I wouldn't want to do it from memory and get it wrong.

Q But they did come up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Elections did not. The fight against extremist elements in

Pakistan's border area did come up, and you can see it in the transcript.

Q Did they specifically mention in their discussion, Osama bin Laden?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They talked -- well, sure. I mean, but it's not just Osama bin Laden in this area; there are Uzbekis extremists, there are al Qaeda -- other al Qaeda elements, there are -- there's a variety of bad guys. And so those are the targets that President Musharraf said he's going after. And so, in that context, his name came up.

Q Thanks for doing this. Were any discussions brought up about additional financial assistance from the U.S. to Pakistan beyond the ongoing talks on defense support?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, not really. In a very general way, President Musharraf expressed thanks for the financial support that the U.S. and the President and the Congress have provided Pakistan. He wasn't here with a shopping list. He said at the beginning he was here to congratulate the President and think through how we would strengthen U.S. -Pakistan relations over the next four years. So he didn't have a detailed shopping list of that kind.

Q Would the President have been prepared to talk about it, had Musharraf said anything about improved trade relations, lower tariffs, anything of that nature?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, in a general way, President Musharraf and his commerce minister and others talked about, with justifiable pride, the success in their macroeconomic picture, how important trade was and how important the economic relationship with the U.S. is, and their interest in working with our new Commerce Secretary and other members of the Cabinet to deepen that.

MR. McCORMACK: Okay, well, that's it, then. Thanks, everybody.

END 11:05 A.M. EST

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