South and Central Asia:

Administration Critiques Iranian Post-Election Repression, Vows Not to Interfere

Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates, April 3, 2009[1]

Secretary Robert Gates was interviewed by Afghan TV

Q. Thank you, Mr. Gates—Secretary Gates, to give us the time to have an interview.

Secretary Gates. (Inaudible.)

Q. Mr. Secretary, the first question I'm going to ask you about is civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The civilian casualties in Afghanistan is day-by-day increasing. And we know the people as being in an anger somehow in rural areas of Afghanistan. What do you think how does the—strategy can address that problem in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. I think one of the ways that it will address the problem is that by having more forces partnering with Afghan forces, there will be less of a requirement for air power. Usually air power is called in when units, ours or our coalition partners or Afghan troops, get into trouble. And I think having more troops on the ground will make a difference in this.

This is a source of great concern to us. As I said when I was in Kabul last time, we are deeply, deeply regretful of any casualties, any civilian casualties. Our aim is to try and go after those who are hurting the Afghan people, the extremists and the insurgents, and they mingle with innocent people and make it very difficult sometimes.

And so what we have tried to do is change our strategy and make sure that we apologize if there's any chance that someone innocent has been hurt or killed, and make amends, and then do an investigation. So both our change in approach as well as the change in our strategy we very much hope will lead to further reductions in civilian casualties.

I think it's worth pointing out it is a great regret when there are civilian casualties, but when they are the result of our operations, they are accidental. The violent extremists kill these people—kill innocent Afghans on purpose.

Q. There seems to be a lack of understanding also between the U.S. military objectives and the Afghan people over there. It has been almost like eight years of conflict back there since 2001 that the Taliban regime was ousted by U.S. and its allies' forces. What needs to be done to convince the people to be more patient? And can you assure them that the end is near?

Secretary Gates. I think first of all that the new strategy, involving significant additional development assistance and a large number of civilian experts in agriculture and veterinarians and physicians and lawyers to help with governance issues, all will, hopefully, working with the Afghan government both at the national level and at the provincial and district level, show the Afghan people that their life will be better, that life will improve thanks to these international efforts. And I expect we will have significant additional resources along these lines.

It has been a long struggle. The Afghan people have suffered for a long time from people trying to tell them how to run their lives—the Soviets and now the Taliban and the extremists. And we're there as partners with the Afghan people to help them be able to govern themselves, and without somebody from the outside telling them how to do it.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you mentioned a good point, the things that happened politically are not visible to those people who are living in rural areas. The most concerning—the big concern that the people of Afghanistan are having nowadays is about the security, which has been worsening since 2001. How you can (inaudible) them that security will get better, because it has not been improved yet?

Secretary Gates. I think that there are two things. The most important thing is for us to help the Afghan people expand their own army and police. After all, Afghans must protect their own security, when all is said and done. And so we want to help them do that. And we are sending a lot more trainers. We are going to provide money to expand the army and the police so that they can, in partnership with us, provide better security for the Afghan people in the near term.

Ultimately, it will all be the responsibility of the Afghan army and the Afghan police. We have no desire to be in Afghanistan any longer than we have to to help Afghans make their own country secure.

Q. So when will the United States forces leave Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. I think we will leave when the Afghan forces are strong enough to ensure security in Afghanistan itself.

Q. So can you—(inaudible)—a defini-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tion for ensuring the security for the Afghan people, when they're going to be—feel—I mean, feeling secure?

Secretary Gates. Well, my hope is—and I think that it certainly is the president's hope—that with the additional forces we are sending in, with the additional police training that the Europeans are going to provide and with the expansion of the Afghan army, that they will begin to see an improvement in security fairly soon. That certainly is our hope.

Q. Mr. Secretary, the new Obama administration policy calls for increased engagement with the people in order to overcome this trust deficit. Can you talk about some of the concrete ways the U.S. plans on overcoming this challenge in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. Clearly, we want the Afghan people to trust us and to trust our coalition partners that we are there to help them, not for purposes of our own other than the same purpose that the Afghan people have, which is for Afghanistan not to be a safe haven for terrorists who kill them and want to kill us. And so we need to build the trust that we are in this together, that we are partners and that we have no objectives in Afghanistan other than helping the Afghan people secure their own country.

Q. And Secretary Gates, what concerns the U.S. about Pakistan's agreements with the Pakistani Taliban in Swat Valley?

Secretary Gates. Some of the agreements in the western part of Pakistan are a concern to us. In fact, it was some of those agreements in 2006—2005, 2006 that we believe led to the increase in the number of violent extremists coming across the border into Afghanistan. They no longer had to worry about Pakistani troops because of the deals were—that were made under President Musharraf.

I think the Pakistani government is coming to understand that what is going on in western Pakistan is as great a danger to the government in Islamabad as it is to Afghanistan. And they have—the Pakistani army has been doing a lot of fighting. A number of—thousands of Pakistani soldiers have died in the western part of the country fighting these extremists. And one of our goals in this new strategy is to see how we can improve cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, who have a common interest in getting rid of these extremists.

Q. President Obama called on Pakistan to take stronger action against insurgents and terrorism. What could the U.S. actually do to push Pakistan into a more effective policy within its territory or within its borders?

Secretary Gates. Well, like Afghanistan, Pakistan is a sovereign country, and so we will need to partner with them as well. What we are doing is making clear to them that we are prepared to be a long-term ally and partner of Pakistan, that we will help them deal with their security problems. We're prepared to provide gear and training to enhance their counterinsurgency capabilities there in the western part of the country.

We're also prepared to try and provide additional economic assistance to Pakistan, because they face a number of challenges in that area as well. So I think the key here is the partnership with Pakistan and the partnership with Afghanistan.

Q. So, Mr. Secretary, what kind of pressure do you think U.S. would put on ISI to stop cooperating with Taliban?

Secretary Gates. The ISI's contacts with some of these extremist groups—with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Haqqani network, Commander Nazir (sp) and others—are a real concern to us, and we have made these concerns known directly to the Pakistanis. And we hope that they will take action to put an end to it.

Q. And a question about U.S. drones. Are U.S. drones flying from Afghanistan to hit militant hideouts in Pakistan territory?

Secretary Gates. Well, I can't talk about our military operations, obviously. But the president has made clear that we will go after al Qaeda and their planning cells and their training centers, wherever they are in the world.

Q. But I will ask you this question, because President Karzai has assured Pakistan that he's recognizing and—respect the sovereignty of Pakistan, and that's why if drones are flying from Afghanistan, and if they attack Pakistan, the hideouts of Taliban (in there ?), wouldn't it be a disrespect or a disloyalty to Pakistan from President Karzai?

Secretary Gates. Well, all I can say, again, is that our priority is going after al Qaeda. And we will go after them wherever they are.

Q. Secretary Gates, you have now served both Presidents Bush and Obama. Is the Obama administration less supportive of President Karzai than the previous administration?

Secretary Gates. The government of the United States supports the government of Afghanistan. Who is president of Afghanistan is up to the Afghan people, and whoever they elect, the United States will support and work with. Our interest is in having free and fair elections in Afghanistan.

Q. In Afghanistan, it appears that the Obama administration is kind of less tolerant of Karzai government, even to being like a—the strategy to be a little bit more tough on the President Karzai government in there?

Secretary Gates. No, I wouldn't characterize it that way. I think that—that the U.S. government has been straightforward with the Afghan government about the need to improve governance, and particularly in the provinces and the districts; to deal with the narcotics problem; and to deal with corruption. But I would tell you that the Bush administration made those same points.

Q. So about corruption, as you know, corruption is an ongoing problem in Afghanistan. President Obama has said that we cannot turn a blind eye to the corruption that causes Afghans to lose faith on their leaders. What can you tell me about a proposed regimen with the Afghan government to crack down the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

corruption in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. What we are trying to do and what our strategy is with respect to narcotics is really focused on the drug lords, the drug kingpins and the laboratories that provide money that support the violent extremists. And that really has been the focus of our efforts. We're less interested in individual farmers than we are those who are profiting from their efforts and supporting the extremists. So that's the focus of our strategy.

Q. And the Obama administration has said it's willing to negotiate with the Taliban, with those kind of Taliban which are so-called good Taliban, or low-level Taliban. And Karzai has also said that, but Karzai has asked even Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, to come on the negotiation table. Will the Obama administration, or the U.S. administration, follow this order? Because Mullah Omar has been named as a terrorist.

Secretary Gates. Yes, I—I don't know about Mullah Omar, but it is clear that—to us, that there are a number of Taliban who fight mainly because they get paid, but they are not ideologically committed. They are not extremists, if you will. They do it because they get paid. And there is some hope that if there is alternative employment, if there are alternatives for some of these people, that in fact we could reconcile.

Our position has been very fundamental, though. Any reconciliation must be on the terms of the Afghan government, and has to be on terms that recognize the sovereignty of that government and its monopoly on the use of force within the country.

Q. President Karzai endorsed the new Obama plan; call it more than Afghan expected. It includes 4,000 U.S. troops to help train Afghans, on the top of 17,000 new U.S. combat troops. But it also calls for contribution from other countries. Basically, what specific countries, what type of contributions can Afghanistan expect? And when will the training end?

Secretary Gates. I think that the contributions will come in several forms. First, we're asking for contributions to the NATO trust fund for sustaining Afghan National Army and police over the long term. So we're asking for money for that trust fund.

Second, we're asking them to provide particularly police trainers. The Gendarmerie, the Guardia Civil, the Carbinieri in Italy, these different European police forces have the kind of capabilities that we believe the Afghan National Police need. And I believe that you will see these European countries making some commitments to provide those kind of trainers.

A third area that we're asking for help is civilian experts—I mentioned earlier in the—in our interview—people who are experts in agriculture, veterinarians, people who can help with governance and making government more effective, providing potable water and so on. And so we are asking for a substantial increase in the number of experts in these areas that can come in and actually help improve the lives of the Afghan people.

Q. Mr. Secretary, about Iran role in Afghanistan, there are some reports that Iran is supporting the Taliban somehow, with money or arms, in order to undermine United States influence in that area. How will the—(inaudible)—United States-Iranian relationship affect U.S. strategy in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. Well, I'm struck by the fact that the Iranians apparently are sending a representative to the conference in The Hague, where we will be talking about assistance for Afghanistan. So I think that the Iranians are interested in good relationship with the government of Afghanistan, but there's no doubt that they also are providing at least limited support for the Taliban in an effort to create problems for the U.S. and for our coalition partners.

Q. And you talked about the new strategic stresses on narcotics and drug dealers and the strategic stress on the importance of breaking the link between narcotics and the insurgency. And it's also calling for the focus to shift from farmers to drug—to drug lords. Now, why is it important and how will it be achieved? And what's the importance of this? Why has it not been done before? Because it was the poppy eradication fields process going on since 2005 and 2006. But how you can—how you can follow drug lords now?

Secretary Gates. I think that we require good intelligence, which we often get from our Afghan partners in terms of finding out who these people are. It is important to identify the labs—where are the drug labs.

The narcotics trade is a concern for two reasons.: First, it provides money for the extremists. Estimates range anywhere from 70 to $100 million a year that the extremists get, the Taliban and others get, from the drug traffic. The second concern is that the narcotics trade in Afghanistan, just like in every other country in the world, feeds corruption and undermines the legitimacy of government. And so for both of those reasons, it's important to go after this.

As far as eradication is concerned, my opinion is that unless farmers are provided with alternative means of earning a living and unless they're provided with the resources to get them through the winter, until a new crop of wheat or whatever they're growing is able to be harvested and marketed, unless you can provide the resources for those people, to make a living and support their families, crop eradication only radicalizes people. And so I think it has to be done very carefully and in a way that provides an alternative means of living for the farmer.

Q. And I understand that a major component of the new narcotic strategy, in Afghanistan, involves sending dozens of drug enforcement agents to that country, to battle the drug-finance elements of the insurgency.

How will these agents be fit into Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. I hadn't heard about that part of the strategy. But I'm sure that it will be to partner with the Afghan army and the Afghan police, in trying to deal with this problem, because the army has its own unit to deal with—its own units to deal with—the Afghan army has its own units to deal with narcotics.

Q. About the American strategy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

towards Afghanistan, do you believe Americans are supporting the action of the government?

Secretary Gates. Yes, I do.

Americans remember that Afghanistan was dominated, ruled by the Taliban. It was a safe haven for al Qaeda, for the people who attacked this country and killed 3,000 of our citizens. And so I think Americans have continued to be supportive of our efforts, to try and help ensure that a democratically elected Afghan government is not threatened by the extremists who were once overthrown.

Q. There are some sayings that the Americans are divided into two parts, one supporting sending troops to Afghanistan and keeping them there, and the others, that they are not supporting it.

What would it be like, one day, [if] they should call for a stop? And what would Afghanistan do on that day?

Secretary Gates. I don't think that that's likely to happen anytime soon. I think the president has laid out a very strong strategy. I think most of the political leaders, in our country, have come out in favor of this strategy and in support of it. So I think that the Afghan people can count on the partnership and the commitment of the United States for a long time.

Q. President Obama has said that after years of assistance to Pakistan, the U.S. will not provide a blank check. Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out al Qaeda and the violent extremists in its territory.

He also talked about the use of soft power, like the pending—(inaudible)—legislation that links economic assistance to—(inaudible)—eliminating militants. But will you please talk about this two-pronged approach?

Secretary Gates. Well, clearly we want to make sure that the money we are spending, both in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, is being spent to good effect and to deal with the threats to both countries. And one of the things that is new about the strategy is that we are going to create benchmarks or criteria by which to evaluate the success of the efforts that we are making, the efforts the Afghan government is making in recruiting soldiers to its army and its police, as well as the effectiveness of the Pakistanis in dealing with the problems in their western part.

Q. And about Karzai asking cooperation from Russia, I'm going to ask you, like, in response to a request that Karzai made to Russia, the Russian government has said that they're willing to equip Afghan military forces or Afghan army, beside that the United States is training Afghan forces. How do you think United States will come on this (inaudible) from Russia in that time?

Secretary Gates. Russia is concerned about instability and the threat to the government of Afghanistan, as are we. They are particularly concerned by the amount of drugs coming out of Afghanistan and into Russia, which has become a problem for them. So I think they are willing to help. They are providing us with some assistance in getting our supplies into Afghanistan. So I think that they can play a constructive role here.

I think the real issue is the eagerness of the Afghan people and government to engage once again with the Russians. They have some long experience in that respect.

Q. It wouldn't be a conflict of two different strategies, Russian strategy and U.S. strategy in Afghanistan? It wouldn't be a conflict again in there?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think if they were going to be training, clearly we would have to work together to make sure that there was consistency in the process, just as we do with our other coalition partners.

Q. And one more question about the narcotics. Why do you think Helmand has been a bit—being the second-largest producer of narcotics in Afghanistan, and there are British forces located there, why it is happening Helmand is not getting better?

Secretary Gates. Well, part of the problem is that a lot of extremists are coming across the border from Pakistan into Helmand, and security has been a big problem in Helmand. That's one of the reasons why a number of the new U.S. forces will go into Helmand, to help the British and to help the Afghan army as well down there.

I think a big reason that Helmand has been a particular problem is that it is where the Taliban had been the most entrenched, and it would be the most difficult to get them out of there.

Q. Mr. Secretary, I would like to ask you the last question, and it will be on Iraq. A lot—what are the main challenges that lie ahead for Iraq to stand on its own militarily, politically and economically? And what are the key benchmarks to hit for U.S. troops to come home?

Secretary Gates. Well, first of all, U.S. troops are coming home. And they—we are bringing out two additional brigades. We are down from a high of 20 brigades to—we'll be at 12 a little later this summer. And we have to be out of the cities by the end of June this year and out of Afghanistan altogether by the end of—out of Iraq—

Q. Iraq.

Secretary Gates.—by the end of 2011. The president has announced that all of our combat units will be out by August of 2010. So we are coming out of Iraq, and I think it's a manifestation of our confidence in the progress that has been made there.

They do have problems. They still need to get a hydrocarbon law passed in terms of sharing the revenues from their oil. There clearly are challenges ahead in terms of reconciliation. This is a brand-new democracy. But I think we were very heartened by the outcome of the provincial elections in January.

So they're making good progress. They still have some challenges ahead of them.

Q. And do you think in addition to training Iraqi (inaudible) it would—I mean, is rebuilding infrastructure a part of that equation, is also—

Secretary Gates. Well, at this point, the Iraqis are responsible for rebuilding their

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

infrastructure. And I think they're partnering with some Western companies, Western governments in that respect. But that's fundamentally an Iraqi responsibility at this point.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Gates. My pleasure.

Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates, April 23, 2009[2]

Secretary Robert Gates delivered these remarks in Camp Lejeune, NC

Secretary Gates. Good morning.

Had a great morning out here. I actually haven't given a press conference with that kind of a background since my first visit to Baghdad—December 2006.

But—now this has been a great visit, great opportunity to visit and talk with these Marines who are—part of their unit is already deployed, and the remainder will be deploying in the next couple of weeks, over the next few weeks; an opportunity to watch their training in going after IEDs, in taking care of each other, in terms of medical care, and other aspects of getting ready to go.

They are incredibly impressive, and I was—really welcomed the opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their service.

I'd also like to thank the local communities for all their support to Camp Lejeune and the families of those men and women in uniform who are deployed. Without that kind of local support, this all would be a lot more difficult.

I would just say one more thing before taking your questions, and that is that this visit and spending some time with these Marines who are about to deploy simply reminds me of one of the basic themes of what I'm trying to do in the fiscal year '10 budget. One dollar of pork in our budget is a dollar I can't spend to support these Marines. One dollar spent on capabilities we don't need is a dollar that I can't spend in getting ready for future threats. One dollar spent for equipment excess to our military requirements is a dollar that I can't use to help protect the American people.

And so I'm hoping that the Congress will take a careful look at this budget and the changes that we're trying to make, in no small part to provide the necessary support for these men and women who are about to go into combat.

So with that, I'll take some questions.

Q. Mr. Secretary, can you confirm for us reports coming out of Iraq that the head of the Islamic State of Iraq has been captured in Baghdad?

Secretary Gates. I just heard actually from Geoff that that story was out there. I have no confirmation of it at this point. I literally heard about it five minutes ago.

Staff. Anybody else? We don't have much time, so don't be bashful.

Secretary Gates. Ed?

Q. With this deployment to Afghanistan, how does the strategy in Afghanistan become affected by what's going on in Pakistan at this moment? There are now reports the Taliban has moved beyond the Swat Valley, grave concern being expressed yesterday by the secretary of State.

Secretary Gates. Well, I'm—my hope is that there will be an increasing recognition on the part of the Pakistani government that the Taliban in Pakistan are in fact an existential threat to the democratic government of that country. I think that some of the leaders certainly understand that, but it is important that they not only recognize it but take the appropriate actions to deal with it.

The stability and longevity of democratic government in Pakistan is central to the efforts of the coalition in Afghanistan, and it is also central to our future partnership with the government in Islamabad. We want to support them. We want to be helpful in any way we can. But it is important that they recognize the real threats to their country.

Q. Mr. Secretary, we haven't spoken with you since the release of the Justice Department memoranda on harsh interrogation techniques. Given your experience as director of Central Intelligence and now, were you among those who advocated for their release? And now that they're out, what is your view of the calls in Congress for an investigation or for some sort of independent truth panel?

Secretary Gates. Well, my view in the discussions of all of this—first of all, I deferred to the Justice Department on the extent of the redactions in the documents. I was in no position to make that evaluation or that judgment.

The things that I was most concerned about was, first and foremost, the protection of the CIA officers who were involved in the interrogations and who performed their duties in accordance with the legal guidance that they had been given by the Justice Department. And I wanted to make sure—I felt very strongly the importance that they be protected, and against all different kinds of possible prosecutions.

I also was quite concerned, as you might expect, with the potential backlash in the Middle East and in the theaters where we're involved in conflict, and that it might have a negative impact on our troops.

All that said, you know, we just had a significant investigation release by the Senate Armed Services Committee. There are a number of suits that we're dealing with for detainee photographs and so on. And so there is a certain inevitability, I believe, that much of this will eventually come out; much has already come out. And therefore, I was focused principally on the potential impact on the CIA professionals and on our own military forces.

Q. Secretary Gates, we're from Italy, and we'd like to know what kind of support and cooperation you're going to ask Europe in the coming months for Afghanistan.

Secretary Gates. Well, the—there have been—there has been a lot of discussion of that at the meeting at the Hague and at the NATO summit. I think that, if I'm not mistaken, Italy has volunteered to send a significant contingent of Carabinieri to do training.

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This is actually something that I had proposed at a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Krakow some weeks ago. One of the real needs in Afghanistan is for, in effect, paramilitary police training, and it seemed to me that the Carabinieri and the gendarmerie and the Guardia Seville and others in Europe could make a real contribution there. So we're very grateful for that, and I think that the Italian government, if I'm not mistaken, has also indicated a willingness to send some additional troops in the period leading up to the elections in August.

What we continue to be interested in from all of our allies and partners is additional civilian capacity, people who are agronomists, veterinarians, who know how to put in water supplies, educators, accountants, lawyers and so on. And obviously anyone who can contribute there is welcome.

(Inaudible)

Q. A lot of the Marines that you spoke with today and saw and a lot more here, in Camp Lejeune, are on their fourth and fifth deployment. What do you think about that?

Secretary Gates. Well, one of the things—well, first of all, because they're on their fourth or fifth deployment, this is the most battle-hardened force the United States has probably ever had in its history.

It's also important to remember that every single one of these young men and women are volunteers. And in fact, one battalion commander here told me that he knew of a unit that was being assigned to Okinawa, and something like 200 Marines decided not to re-enlist. The unit's orders were changed. And the unit was shifted to Afghanistan. And something like 180 of the 200 came back and re-enlisted.

So I think these men and women want to be in the fight. Frankly for months, General Conway has been telling me that the Marines in Anbar province, in Iraq, are frankly bored and want to get into the fight. And that certainly was the impression that I got this morning.

By the same token, we're trying, by increasing the end-strength of the Marine Corps, by more than 10 percent, by 27,000, and with the drawdowns in Iraq—our hope certainly is perhaps beginning, toward the end of this year or into next, to begin to lengthen the time at home for all of these units.

Q. Are you concerned at all about their mental well-being?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think that we are monitoring that very carefully. We've put a lot of new procedures in place. There's a lot more sensitivity to the potential impact of repeated deployments. And frankly the effort, to look out for each other, in the psychological as well as the physical realm, now is—not only starts with Marine to Marine and soldier to soldier, buddies taking care of buddies, but then NCOs and then officers, and then the processes that they go through, when they either—prior to when they deploy and when they come back.

Q. Secretary Gates, on the release of the recent interrogation memos, do you expect that to impair at all this unit or any other units going over to fight terrorism, moving forward?

Secretary Gates. Well, I certainly hope not. I mean, I think, that's kind of an unanswerable question. We don't know how—we talked—there was realization, in the discussions, that some of these disclosures could be used by al Qaeda and our adversaries.

But as I say, there are—there are a lot of other documents coming out, including the leak of the International Red Cross—Committee of the Red Cross with some pretty graphic information as well. So I think pretending that we could hold all of this and keep it all a secret even if we wanted to I think was probably unrealistic. So we'll just have to deal with it.

Staff. Just a couple more now.

Secretary Gates. Yeah.

Q. (Off mike)—saw that Marines here are training to learn how to fight, but they're also receiving training from USAID to do humanitarian work. Are you at concerned about the balance of that mission that soldiers and Marines have to do when they go overseas?

Secretary Gates. No. In fact, one of the messages that I had for the Marines when I had the opportunity to talk to a group of them is the importance of making sure that the Afghan people know that we are there as their friends and their allies, and that we are there to help make their lives better as well as to protect ourselves and them from the Taliban and these other extremist groups.

I am concerned about the—there have been some stories in the press the last few days—I am concerned that we will not get the civilian surge into Afghanistan as quickly as we are getting troops into Afghanistan. And therefore, I've raised the possibility of whether we could provide a bridge, using our Reserve component—not calling any units up but rather perhaps asking for volunteers who have specific skill sets along the lines of the ones that I just described a few minutes ago—veterinarians, agronomists, accountants and so on—who might serve as a bridge; getting them out there quickly and then bringing them back when their civilian replacements are hired and gotten into the theater.

I just think we have a finite amount of time to show that we're going to make progress in Afghanistan. And I just don't want to see any delays, whether it's on our military side or whether it's on the civilian side.

Q. What will victory in Afghanistan look like?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think victory in Afghanistan will be represented by—it will look, in—I suspect, in many respects, like success in Iraq, and that will be the Afghan national security forces increasingly taking responsibility for the security of their own people, both the police and the army, as we then move from a direct combat role, which we're very heavily engaged in right now, more into a support role and then eventually being able, as we are in Iraq, to draw down and leave.

Q. Is it too soon to put a time on it?

Secretary Gates. Absolutely.

Q. Is it fair to say, despite your reservations, that you supported the release of those memos? And I also wanted to ask you about benchmarks for Afghanistan and what you see as being

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

some of the key benchmarks.

Secretary Gates. Well, I think—you know, I think that the White House and the president have been pretty clear that this was a very difficult decision for all the reasons that I just described.

And I think all of us wrestled with it for quite some time, in terms of where we were on it. As I say, my own view was shaped by the fact that I regarded the information about a lot of these things coming out as inevitable. And therefore, how do we try and manage it in the best possible way?

Q. On the benchmarks for Afghanistan, I note that Michelle Flournoy spoke of devising those. What do you see as some of the key benchmarks for Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think, you know, frankly, I haven't been involved in the drafting of them, so I'm not quite sure where they are. But I think it clearly has to do with if we authorize 134 or more thousand Afghan National Army, are they meeting the recruiting standards? Are they meeting the goals that we—that they have set, in terms of how fast they build up the army? Same thing with the police.

I would say getting the civilian support out there, and perhaps actions against—against the narcotics networks that help fund the Taliban—I think all of those things—those kinds of things need to be part of the measures of effectiveness.

Staff. Okay. Thank you all.

Secretary Gates. Thank you all.

White House Statement, April 24, 2009[3]

On Continuing Conflict in Sri Lanka

The United States is deeply concerned about the plight of innocent civilians caught up in the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers, and the mounting death toll. We call on both sides to stop fighting immediately and allow civilians to safely leave the combat zone.

We call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to stop shelling the "safe zone" and blocking international aid groups and media from accessing those civilians who have managed to escape. International aid workers should have access to all sites where internally displaced persons are being registered and sheltered. The United States is working with international partners to attempt to care for those civilians who can be reached.

We call on both sides to strictly adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law. We are very concerned about reports of violations, and take these allegations very seriously.

It would compound the current tragedy if the military end of the conflict only breeds further enmity and ends hopes for reconciliation and a unified Sri Lanka in the future.

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates, May 3, 2009[4]

Secretary Robert Gates was interviewed by CNN in Washington, DC

Q. Secretary Gates, thank you for doing this.

Secretary Gates. My pleasure.

Q. You have served eight presidents, and so you have, in a sense, watched 800 days, eight periods of the first 100 days. How do you think this one is distinctive? What do you think people will look at when they look back at these 100 days?

Secretary Gates. I think that what makes them distinctive is the magnitude of the challenges that confronted this president when he took office. Not only did he have all of the international issues that faced his predecessor—the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, piracy and others; North Korea, Iran, so on and so forth—he faced the most dramatic economic downturn in two generations or more in the United States and in the world; and now, as we are all saying, as if all of that wasn't enough, swine flu. So I think just the magnitude of the challenges that he faces perhaps is unprecedented among certainly the eight presidents I've worked for.

Q. How's he doing compared to the seven others?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think he's doing very well. I think that he is—I think he has taken them on. I think he's assembled a good group of people to work with him and to help him. He listens. He's very calm. He's very measured, very analytical. So I think the proof is sort of in, already, based on the polls, the beginning of a return to some confidence that the country is on the right track and the sense that, as difficult as some of these issues are, we're headed in the right direction, at least.

Q. You've heard a lot of Republican criticism that he's going around the world apologizing about America. Do you accept that?

Secretary Gates. Well, I like to remind people that when President George W. Bush came into office, he talked about a more humble America. And, you know, you go back to Theodore Roosevelt and his line about speaking softly but carrying a big stick. I think that acknowledging that we have made mistakes is not only factually accurate—I think that it is unusual because so few other governments in the world are willing to admit that, although they make them all the time, and some of them make catastrophic mistakes.

And in speeches myself, I have said that at times we have acted too arrogantly. And I didn't feel that I was being apologetic for America. I just was saying because—I was just saying that that's the way we are in terms of being willing to recognize our own limitations, and when we make a mistake, to correct it, because I think the next line that I always use is, no other country in the world is so self-critical and is so willing to change course when we feel that we've strayed from our values or when we feel like we've been too arrogant.

So I think—I have not seen it as an apology tour at all, but rather a change of

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tone, a more humble America. But everybody knows we still have the big stick.

Q. Let me ask you about perhaps the most pressing crisis on your plate right now, which is Pakistan. In your view, has the Pakistani military regained the initiative in Buner and perhaps even in the areas around the Swat Valley, where the Taliban had gained strongholds?

Secretary Gates. It is my impression from a great distance that they have begun to regain the initiative. I think that the failure of the agreement in Swat and then the movement into Buner particularly, I think, was a real wake-up call for the Pakistani government.

We and others have been talking with them about how what is happening there in the western frontier area is truly an existential threat to democratic government in Pakistan. And I think the movement of the Taliban into Buner really got their attention.

I think that the leaders of Pakistan do understand this—President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani, General Kiyani and others. But I think that there's a need for them to help the rest of Pakistan understand why it's an existential threat.

Q. But you do think that the leadership gets it? Because I look at what's happened, Mr. Secretary. They have these Taliban forces, insurgency, 60 miles from the capital, 100 miles from the capital. And what they've done so far is move 6,000 troops from the eastern border to the western border out of an army of about a half-million.

This does not strike one as a full-throated response at every level that mobilizes the nation and its defense forces. Do you think that there is still a way to go for the Pakistani military in terms of focusing on this threat?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think what you have to do is look at it in some historical context. For 60 years Pakistan has regarded India as its existential threat, as the main enemy. And its forces are trained to deal with that threat. That's where it has the bulk of its army and the bulk of its military capability.

And historically, the far western part of Pakistan has generally been ungoverned. And the Pakistani governments going back decades would do deals with the tribes and the Pashtuns and would play the tribes against one another, and occasionally, when necessary, use the army to put down a serious challenge.

I think that—and partly it's because the Punjabis so outnumber the Pashtuns that they've always felt that if it really got serious, it was a problem they could take care of. I think the—that's why I think the movement of the Taliban so close to Islamabad was a real wake-up call for them.

Now, how long it takes them to build the capabilities, the additional military capabilities and the training that goes into counterinsurgency and so on and to develop the civilian programs that begin[] to push back in that part of the country, I think, is still a period ahead of us.

But I would just remind that, you know, the first al Qaeda attack on the United States was in 1993. We really didn't change much of anything we did until after we were hit on September 11th, 2001. So al Qaeda was at war with us for eight years, at least eight years, before we acknowledged that we were at war with them as well. And I think a little bit of the same denial has been going on in Pakistan. But I think that the recent developments have certainly got their attention.

Q. Do you think they have the counterinsurgency capacity? Because at some level armies don't like to fight these kind of wars, as you well know. What armies like to do is have a big enemy so they can have a big budget and never have to fight a war. And that is, in effect, what has happened with Pakistan with India, which is they have this big enemy. It justifies a very large budget for the Pakistani military. But they don't actually have to fight, whereas this one, the insurgency, is one which they have to fight. They could lose. And so they worry, I think, that they even have the capacity. Do they have the capacity for real counterinsurgency?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think that they are at the beginning of the process of developing that capacity. But again, to provide some perspective, in 2003, when we went into Iraq, or even in 2001 and '02, when we went into Afghanistan, our Army didn't have that capacity either. We had forgotten everything we learned about counterinsurgency in Vietnam. And it took us several years to change our tactics and to get ourselves into a position where we could effectively fight a counterinsurgency.

So institutions are slow to change even in the face of a real threat. And I think that the Pakistanis are beginning to open up to others, to get additional help. I certainly hope that's the case. But I don't—it's not something where I would sort of blame the Pakistani army, because we went through the same process ourselves as we confronted a building insurgency in Iraq.

We had to learn all over again how to do this, and we had to acquire the equipment to do it effectively, completely outside the normal Pentagon bureaucracy, for the most part. So perhaps I have a little more understanding of the challenges that our Pakistani counterparts face than perhaps others.

Q. Well, they're blaming us. The Pakistani ambassador wrote an article in The Wall Street Journal in which he says basically that Washington has been reluctant to share critical technology and training, the modern equipment and training for our military. Basically what they want is helicopters, night-vision goggles, that kind of thing.

Is it true that we have been reluctant to give them some of this equipment and training?

Secretary Gates. Well, of the kinds of things that you've described, I think that we have been willing to provide all the training and that kind of equipment that we possibly can, as much as they would take. There has been a reluctance on their part up to now. They don't like the idea of a significant American military footprint inside Pakistan. I understand that. But we are willing to do pretty much whatever we can to help the Pakistanis in this situation. I think that we have been willing to do that for quite some time.

Q. Will there be American military advisers in Pakistan now training the Pakistani military in counterinsurgency?

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Secretary Gates. Well, I think that remains to be seen. There are some very small number now. But I think it will depend on how the situation develops and the views of the Pakistani government. I would just say we are prepared to provide whatever help in developing this counterinsurgency capability to the Pakistanis that we possibly can. But it's their country, and they're sovereign, and we'll let them dictate the rules.

Q. Let's move east; Afghanistan. You've said a number of times that no civil war, no conflict, no insurgency is ever really ended without some kind of political reconciliation. And you've talked about the fact that some part of the Taliban, perhaps even the majority of the people fighting, though not the leadership, might be reconcilable. There are reports that there have been efforts made by American military officers. Dexter Filkins of The New York Times followed one such reconciliation effort.

What is your sense about how these efforts are going? How is the effort to in some way draw away parts of the Taliban from the central leadership?

Secretary Gates. I think there are several aspects to it. First of all, for—based on the information available to us, some considerable proportion of the Taliban essentially do this as a job. They get paid for it. And if alternative means of employment can be found, they probably could be fairly easily drawn away. And there really is no political agenda associated with it at all.

In terms of political reconciliation, first of all, in my view, it has to be on the terms of the Afghan government, that they will have the monopoly on the use of armed force inside the country. But I think as long as the Taliban think the momentum is with them, that the prospects for political reconciliation are probably not very bright.

If we are successful in restoring significant security, particularly in the south and in the east of the country, I think then, as we are more successful along with our Afghan partners in re-establishing security, then I think the opportunity for political reconciliation will probably grow.

Q. But right now there are no real prospects on hand?

Secretary Gates. I think there may be in some limited areas, but not of consequence as far as I can tell.

Q. You've talked about trying to secure the population. There's also the effort now to take on the drug cartel, which is effectively run by the Taliban, providing most of the money for their operations.

All of this suggests you're taking the battle to the enemy. Should we expect to see higher numbers of casualties in Afghanistan, American casualties, in just the way we did in the early months of the surge, when, for the first time, you took the battle to the enemy?

Secretary Gates. I think that's a prospect we have to be willing to face, particularly in Regional Command South, as our forces go into parts of Afghanistan where there have been no government or coalition forces, ISAF forces, really for the last several years. So we will be turning over rocks that haven't been turned over in quite some time.

And so that does raise the prospect of greater casualties, although it will be interesting to see whether the Taliban are prepared to stand and fight or whether, in the face of significant military force, they will just dissipate and then return later.

The key, particularly in the south of Afghanistan, it seems to me, is the ability of the Afghan government, with our help, to hold on to the areas that have been cleared. It's very much the same principle as in Iraq. The people are going to be ambivalent as long as they can't tell who's going to win. They're going to try and not take sides, because they're afraid that once we leave, the Taliban will come in and kill them.

And so we have to work with the Afghans to establish an enduring presence in some of these places, perhaps with some of our people, but mostly with Afghan soldiers and Afghan police, to hold these places against the Taliban so the people will have confidence, and then be willing to side with the government in a more enduring way. That, I think, is the real challenge that we face.

Q. That sounds like an Afghan government that is strong, legitimate, has a lot of capacity to do things like securing local areas. Some people, as you know—Henry Kissinger argues that this is sort of a bridge too far, that this is probably more than you can achieve in Afghanistan.

Secretary Gates. Well, first of all, I think that the priority, at least from the standpoint of the Department of Defense, is the continued growth and increased effectiveness of the Afghan national security forces, both the army and the police. And we are now looking at a significant increase in the size of the Afghan army, and it is probable that there will be a need to increase the size of the national police force as well. And I think that those are genuine—

Q. Which is riddled with accusations of corruption.

Secretary Gates. But I think, under this new minister of interior in Kabul, there have been some real—there has been some real progress in beginning to clean up the national police and make them more effective. And we also have a program called Focused District Development which takes the police out of villages and districts and retrains them and gives them equipment and gives them new leadership, and so on, that seems to hold promise. So it's a work in progress; there's no doubt about that. But I think that we have to pay more—we have to continue to try and build the capacity of the Afghan government, work with them in their capabilities. But I think we also have to focus at the provincial and the district level.

This is where I think development programs and assistance are more likely to actually happen, and for school rooms to be built, for roads to be built, for wells to be dug, and so on and so forth, where the people can actually see government, Afghan government—it may not be the national government, but the provincial government or the district government actually delivering a service and improving the quality of life.

So I think part of the reason that the civilian surge is such an important part of the administration's new strategy is that it's this kind of capability at the provincial

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the district level, in my view, that really has to be strengthened. We have to make the provincial reconstruction teams much more robust, with civilian experts, so we can begin to help the Afghans deliver these kinds of services. I think, at the end of the day, that, plus the increased effectiveness and strength of the army and the police, are really the pathway forward.

Q. You once said that the chief lesson you learned from 40 years in government was the limits of power. So apply that lesson to Afghanistan today. What do you think of—what are the limits to what America can do in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. Well, I have been quoted as accurately as saying I have real reservations about significant further commitments of American military—of the American military to Afghanistan, beyond what the president has already approved. The Soviets were in there with 110,000, 120,000 troops. They didn't care about civilian casualties. And they couldn't win. If there's ever an example that military power alone cannot be successful in Afghanistan, I think it was the Soviet experience. And I think there's a lot we can learn from that. And so I worry—it is absolutely critical that the Afghans believe that this is their war. It is their war against people who are trying to overthrow their government that they democratically elected.

For all of its flaws and shortcomings, it is theirs. And they—we must be their partner and their ally. If we get to the point where the Afghan people see us as occupiers, then we will have lost. So the way we treat the Afghans, the importance of keeping the Afghans in the lead in many of these activities, the military as well as the civilian, I think is absolutely critical, so that they know—so that these villagers know that it's their people who are leading this fight. This isn't some foreign army coming in there, like all the previous foreign armies, to just occupy them.

Q. But that means that a year from now, six months from now, you are unlikely to approve a request for additional troops in Afghanistan.

Secretary Gates. I would be a hard sell; there's no question about it. And I have not made a secret of that, either publicly or in government meetings. I think we will have—between the American military commitment and our coalition partners, the ISAF partners, we will have about 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. That's only about 10,000 shy of what the Russians had. And I think we need to think about that.

My view is it would be a far better investment to focus on building the strength of the Afghan army and the Afghan police, making sure that of the numbers of people we have there, there are adequate trainers so that we can accelerate the growth of those forces.

It's that combination of a certain level of international support for the Afghan military effort and the growing of the Afghan security forces themselves. It's that partnership that I think eventually will be successful in Afghanistan. As long as—if we try to do it all ourselves, I think it won't work.

Q. I'm going to take you west to Iraq. There has been some renewed violence in Iraq. And some of it does seem to be related to the Sunni community that feels still dispossessed. There is some controversy about exactly who is spearheading it. You and Secretary Clinton have talked about al Qaeda remnants. But Prime Minister Maliki has pointed the finger at former Ba'athists, as he puts it, and used it as a way of explaining why he's not going to make more concessions to Sunni demands.

Is this core problem, the Shi'a and Sunni political disagreement, going to produce more and more violence as U.S. troops draw down?

Secretary Gates. I actually think that that kind of sectarian violence—I guess I would say I hope not. And I actually think it probably will not grow. I think that they do understand that this is al Qaeda. This is certainly the view of our commanders, that most of this—most of these high-profile bombings are part of a campaign that was started a few weeks ago by al Qaeda, as we begin to draw down our forces, to both demonstrate—to try and make the point to the Iraqi people that it was this kind of terrorist acts that led us to draw down rather than our success, but also to try—for al Qaeda to try and provoke the kind of sectarian violence that you're talking about.

This is al Qaeda trying to set Shi'a against Sunni. Now, regardless of what he says, Prime Minister Maliki also is reaching out to elements of the Sunni community as potential political allies. And so, you know, the key for us is the Iraqis themselves working these differences out and their problems in a political way. And so far the record of the past year, year and a half, has been pretty encouraging in terms of the progress that they've made.

There's no question that the roots of democracy are still very shallow in Iraq. But there's been a lot of progress. And I don't think there are very many Iraqis who want to return to the kind of violence that they saw in 2006. So I think this is mainly al Qaeda.

I think we do have to watch very carefully, perhaps more importantly, the situation between the Arabs and the Kurds, to make sure that that relationship—that they continue to solve their problems, work through their problems politically.

So, you know, they have a lot of challenges; there's no question about it. But I'm really—I'm reasonably optimistic that the gains in terms of solving problems between the sectarian elements will continue to be done politically rather than violently, despite all of al Qaeda's best efforts.

Q. But you don't have an oil revenue-sharing law. You don't have much resolution over Mosul. You don't have much resolution over Kirkuk. And when I talk to members of the Sunni leadership in Iraq, they tell me that they feel completely excluded from government jobs, from patronage, from all the kind of power-sharing that they were promised.

Secretary Gates. Well, I think that the election of the new speaker of the Council of Representatives is an important step forward, as the newly elected provincial councils begin to allocate positions and so on. We see alliances being made. So I think that there has been progress in that way. The Sunnis have taken charge of several of the provinces where they won the elections this time, where they could have won them before, had they not boycotted. So I think they continue to show progress.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

On the oil law, the new speaker of the Council of Representatives has said that's one of the highest priorities that he has. I think that Kirkuk—from an Arab-Kurd point of view, Kirkuk is a bigger problem by far than Mosul. Mosul is really still a security problem from the standpoint of al Qaeda still using it as kind of their last redoubt, if you will. But, you know, they continue to work these things through.

Q. Two larger questions before we thank you for your time. President Obama has laid out a vision for a nuclear-free world, a world free of nuclear weapons. Now, since 1945 there has been no war between a major power, and many people attribute that to nuclear deterrence. So would a world free of nuclear weapons be more stable without nuclear deterrence?

Secretary Gates. Well, I don't know, and I don't think anybody does. I think that it's—you know, we have had a number of countries forgo nuclear weapons, countries that had nuclear weapons programs who really voluntarily walked away from them—South Africa, Libya, Taiwan, South Korea, Argentina, Brazil. So total pessimism with respect to nonproliferation, I think, is unwarranted. I think that—I have worked—President Obama is the fourth president that I have worked for who has said that he would like to—has said publicly he would like to see an end to nuclear weapons and having a nuclear weapons-free world. I think that's a laudable objective.

I think it's clear to everyone it's a goal that you have to move toward step by step. I think that continued nonproliferation efforts, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, another post-START agreement with the Russians in terms of further reducing our stockpile, I think these are all important steps in that direction. But my guess is it's a long march.

Q. But if we went to zero and the Chinese went to zero, would the relationship be more stable? I mean, certainly the U.S.-Soviet case, it seemed as though the fact that we both had nuclear weapons kept the peace.

Secretary Gates. Well, you're asking about a hypothetical world, and I think that's—we don't know the answer to that question. The question is, how do you deal with the technology? I mean, when you get down to very low numbers of nuclear weapons, and you contemplate going to zero, how do you deal with the reality of that technology being available to almost any country that seeks to pursue it? And what—what conditions do you put in place, what U.N. verification measures or IAEA verification measures do you put in place, to prevent others from getting that?

So I think this is an important goal for everyone to have in the world, but I think that it's—it's a long road to get there.

Q. Your Defense budget has gathered a huge number of opponents. There's the contractors, people in Congress, parts of the Services. Are you going to get through the budget you want, or do you think some significant compromise is inevitable?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think that, since the budget isn't even on the Hill yet, I'm not prepared to talk about compromises. But you know, I think there—I will tell you I have actually been surprised by how limited the criticism has been. And where—where I have heard criticism, it has come from predictable places. And I think that there also have been some voices raised, some important voices, in support, including Senator McCain on the Armed Services Committee and others as well, on both sides of the aisle.

So I'm—I'm relatively optimistic, actually. I think we've presented a very—as one news magazine referred to it, "radically sane" set of a proposals. They don't represent a cut. And where we have eliminated one program, we have added to others. So it's a question of how do we balance our preparations for some future conflict with the capabilities necessary to be successful in the conflicts that we're engaged in today. And so it's that rebalancing that I'm trying to do.

But at the end of the day, 50 percent of our procurement budget is still for these high-tech modernization programs; about 40 percent for dual-purpose capabilities, such as C-17 cargo planes; and about 10 percent for irregular conflict. So the notion that I've sort of abandoned looking at future threats is contrary to reality, and I look forward to the opportunity to go to the Hill and make that case.

Q. Final question, Mr. Secretary. Do you worry—you're a student of history. Do you worry that we are falling into a kind of imperial trap? We have the largest defense budget in the world. We spend more, basically, than the rest of the world put together. Meanwhile, the Chinese are building this great industrial machine. We are in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have to deal with Somali pirates. It does begin to have this image of the British Empire putting out the fires all over the world in somewhat proliferal area as well. The great industrial/economic challenges are coming up and we're sort of—we're caught by the—the reach of our own power.

Secretary Gates. Well, if we are an imperial power, we are a unique one in history in that we are the only one in history that has—is always looking for an exit strategy.

The reality is the United States has global interests, and our defense budget is about the same as the defense budgets or military budgets of every other country in the world put together. But, as I say, we have global interests, and that defense budget is still less than 4 percent of our gross domestic product. During the Korean War, it was as high as 9 percent; much higher, obviously, during World War II. It was 7 or 8 percent during Vietnam. So I think, first of all, that the size of the military we have is not a burden on our economy, compared historically to where we've been.

I think that—I think a former Secretary of State put it in a different way than an imperial power. She said we are an "indispensable power" because the reality is that if you look around the world and the variety of problems that exist, nothing ever gets done without American leadership, at the end of the day. And I think that's going to continue. We're going through our economic troubles today.

I think it ties back to the first question you asked me, about, you know, is the president on an apology tour. Absolutely not. This is about how the United States exercises global leadership. And being willing to listen, as well as to talk, is important in that regard.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Q. And we thank you for having talked to us. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense.

Secretary Gates. Thank you.

Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates, May 5, 2009[5]

Secretary Robert Gates delivered these remarks in Cairo, Egypt

Secretary Gates. Good afternoon. It was good to be in Egypt again. I'd like to start by thanking President Mubarak, the Egyptian government, and the Egyptian people for their gracious hospitality during this visit.

This morning I have very productive meetings with both President Mubarak and Field Marshal Tantawi. I first met President Mubarak nearly 20 years ago, and over the years multiple American presidents and administrations have benefited from his wise counsel. I appreciated the opportunity to continue that dialog today.

We discussed a number of security issues including Iran, the Palestinian-Israeli issue, next steps in Iraq, and the opportunities for more cooperation among the nations of the Middle East.

It will take full participation and leadership from Egypt to see progress on these issues, as has always been the case. For some time I have considered Egypt to be one of America's most important partners. The United States has longstanding military-to-military relationships and other activities with the Egyptian military, to include the Bright Star exercises.

Our own military has benefited from the interaction with the Egyptian armed forces, one of the most professional and capable in the region. We are always looking for ways to expand these ties through education, training and exercises. In these and other security matters, I look forward to further cooperation between our two countries in the future.

Thank you.

Q. (Inaudible)—Al Jazeera English. You mentioned before coming here that your country assured both Egypt and Saudi Arabia about the new approach towards Iran and also to be realistic. By 'realistic' did you mean that what the United States did before, confrontation and sanctions, or that the new approach of—(inaudible)—and things like that? There is only one goal is to solve the Iranian nuclear program, and that means reassuring the region that this won't be used against them?

Secretary Gates. Our goal really is two-fold. Obviously we want to try and stop the Iranian nuclear weapons program, but we also are interested in stopping Iran's destabilizing efforts throughout the region. And I think that there is very broad concern in the region about Iran and its activities. And our goal is to continue working with our friends in the region but at the same time see if there is an opportunity to begin trying to influence Iran to change its activities, its behavior, in the area.

Reaching out to Iran with an open hand in no way minimizes or changes the strong security relationship and strong political relationship that the United States has with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and our other long-term friends in the region.

If we encounter a closed fist when we extend our open hand, then we will react accordingly. But we think, the President believes that it is important for us to at least reach out to Iran and provide an opportunity to begin a dialog. But the focus of that dialog is on Iran's behavior, and uppermost in our minds is taking measures necessary with our partners in the region to maintain their security and their stability, in particular against Iranian subversive activities.

Q. The U.S. military relationship with Egypt—(inaudible)—the U.S. military declaration—(inaudible)—U.S. assistance to Egypt under the previous administration was linked to human rights progress. Is the Obama administration changing or shifting that policy? Did you hear concerns here in your talks about the level of U.S. military assistance to Egypt?

Secretary Gates. Well, clearly, the United States always is supportive of human rights, and that is no less true of the Obama administration than other administrations. By the same token, it is important to continue our work and our friendship with these countries. And the position of the administration is that as an example the foreign military financing that's in the budget should be without conditions. And that is our sustained position.

Q. (Inaudible)—the U.S. eager to do everything concerned with—(inaudible)—in the future and the fear of Israel—(inaudible)—Middle East free from mass destruction weapons? Thank you.

Secretary Gates. Well, I think the President has been very clear in his speech when he was in Europe about his desire to have a nuclear-weapons-free world. He hasn't broken that down by region. Clearly that is our long-term objective.

Q. Mr. Secretary, given the rising concern over instability in Pakistan, what are your expectations for a high-level meeting in Washington this week regarding the way that Saudi Arabia could play a greater role? What specifically could the Saudis do in helping to ease the problems in Pakistan, and are you going to make any request of them in that regard?

Secretary Gates. Well, as I said the other day, I think that the recent Taliban attacks that reached within 60 kilometers of Islamabad perhaps served as a wake-up call, if you will, to many in Pakistan that the Taliban operating inside Pakistan and other extremist groups have become a real danger to the Pakistani government. I think their response in sending the Army into Buner and beginning to deal with that situation is really a recognition of that threat.

And so my hope is that during the talks in Washington next week that their role during the next few days is that there will be a common agreement on the nature of the threat and the importance of Afghanistan and Pakistan working closely together and with the United States to try, and our partners, to try and deal with that threat.

With respect to Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia clearly has a lot of influence

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

throughout the entire region. They have a long-standing close relationship with Pakistan. And I think the key here is all of us doing what we can to help the Pakistani government deal with the emergent threat to its own existence from these violent extremists. And I think the Saudis along with other countries can play a constructive role in that.

Q. (Off mike.)

Secretary Gates. I'm not sure I understood the question.

Q. (Off mike)—critical. Next month is the election of Iran—(inaudible)—so if not, do you support Israel if they have to attack Iran?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think those are completely different questions. I would say that I do not expect this dialog to—first of all, there is no dialog yet. There have been a few initial contacts, but there is no sustained dialog yet between the United States and Iran. And I expect it to develop, if it develops at all, will develop over a period of time. The United States goes into this with its eyes wide open. There have been previous attempts to establish a dialog with the Iranian government, and they have not proven successful. Our hope is that this time, as the President expressed it, if we extend an open hand that perhaps we will get something similar in response.

But I don't expect this to develop in a way that would have any impact whatsoever on the Iranian election. I don't think it will develop that quickly. And I'm not sure that even as it develops it would have any impact on that.

I continue to believe that we need to address our concerns with Iran. While all options are available of course, I believe that it is important to try and address our concerns about their nuclear weapons program through diplomatic and economic pressures, through trying to isolate Iran, toward building up the security capabilities of our friends in the region, and through cooperation with the Europeans, the Russians, and others to try and show Iran that its behavior is unwelcome to virtually all of the countries in the world.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you mentioned on the plane on the way over that you felt some concerns in this region about the U.S. outreach to Iran were the result of an exaggerated sense of what might be possible. Can you expand on that? What in your view is a realistic expectation of what might be possible for an improved relationship with Iran?

Secretary Gates. Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know what might be possible. I've been around long enough to see these efforts attempted before and with no result. The question is whether circumstances in Iran have changed in such a way that with the new administration offering an opportunity for contact, whether the Iranians are willing to take advantage of that opportunity.

I think that there's, as I say I think it's a dialog that if it happens at all will probably develop slowly. And I think what is important for friends and partners here in the Middle East to be assured of is that the United States will be very open and transparent about these contacts, and we will keep our friends informed of what is going on so that nobody gets surprised.

I think one of the areas where I think there has been some exaggerated concern has been some notion here in the region that there might be some grand bargain between the United States and Iran that would suddenly be sprung on them. And I would say that I believe that kind of prospect is very remote.

I think it's highly unlikely, and we will just have to see how the Iranians respond to this offer from the President. Frankly, some of the first things that have happened subsequent to his extension of that open arm, open hand, have not been very encouraging in terms of statements coming out of Tehran.

We're not willing to pull the hand back yet because we think there's still some opportunity, but I think concerns out here of some kind of a grand bargain developed in secret are completely unrealistic, and I would say are not going to happen. And what is important for our friends to understand is that we will keep them informed and be transparent about this process.

Q. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Remarks by President Obama, May 6, 2009[6]

President Barack Obama delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

President Obama. Good afternoon, everybody. We just finished an important trilateral meeting among the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And earlier today I was pleased to have wide ranging bilateral discussions with both President Karzai of Afghanistan and President Zardari of Pakistan.

We meet today as three sovereign nations joined by a common goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their ability to operate in either country in the future. And to achieve that goal, we must deny them the space to threaten the Pakistani, Afghan, or American people. And we must also advance security and opportunity, so that Pakistanis and Afghans can pursue the promise of a better life.

Just over a month ago, I announced a new strategy to achieve these objectives after consultation with Pakistan, Afghanistan and our other friends and allies. Our strategy reflects a fundamental truth. The security of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United States are linked. In the weeks that have followed, that truth has only been reinforced. Al Qaeda and its allies have taken more lives in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and have continued to challenge the democratically-elected governments of the two Presidents standing here today. Meanwhile, al Qaeda plots against the American people—and people around the world—from their safe haven along the border.

I'm pleased that these two men—elected leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan—fully appreciate the seriousness of the threat that we face, and have reaffirmed their commitment to confronting it. And I'm pleased that we have advanced unprecedented cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan on a bilateral basis—and among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States—which will benefit all of our people.

Today's meeting is the second in the trilateral dialogues among our countries. And these meetings will coordinate our

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

efforts in a broad range of areas, across all levels of government. To give you a sense of the scope of this effort, Secretary Clinton, Attorney General Holder, Secretary Vilsack, Director Panetta, Director Mueller, and Deputy Secretary Lew will all host separate meetings with their Pakistani and Afghan counterparts. And these trilateral meetings build on efforts being made in the region and in the United States, and they will continue on a regular basis.

Now there's much to be done. Along the border where insurgents often move freely, we must work together with a renewed sense of partnership to share intelligence, and to coordinate our efforts to isolate, target and take out our common enemy. But we must also meet the threat of extremism with a positive program of growth and opportunity. And that's why my administration is working with members of Congress to create opportunity zones to spark development. That's why I'm proud that we've helped advance negotiations towards landmark transit-trade agreements to open Afghanistan and Pakistan borders to more commerce.

Within Afghanistan, we must help grow the economy, while developing alternatives to the drug trade by tapping the resilience and the ingenuity of the Afghan people. We must support free and open national elections later this fall, while helping to protect the hard-earned rights of all Afghans. And we must support the capacity of local governments and stand up to corruption that blocks progress. I also made it clear that the United States will work with our Afghan and international partners to make every effort to avoid civilian casualties as we help the Afghan government combat our common enemy.

And within Pakistan, we must provide lasting support to democratic institutions, while helping the government confront the insurgents who are the single greatest threat to the Pakistani state. And we must do more than stand against those who would destroy Pakistan –- we must stand with those who want to build Pakistan. And that is why I've asked Congress for sustained funding, to build schools and roads and hospitals. I want the Pakistani people to understand that America is not simply against terrorism—we are on the side of their hopes and their aspirations, because we know that the future of Pakistan must be determined by the talent, innovation, and intelligence of its people.

I have long said that we cannot meet these challenges in isolation, nor delay the action, nor deny the resources necessary to get the job done. And that's why we have a comprehensive strategy for the region with civilian and military components, led by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and General David Petraeus. And for the first time, this strategy will be matched by the resources that it demands.

U.S. troops are serving courageously and capably in a vital mission in Afghanistan alongside our Afghan and international partners. But to combat an enemy that is on the offensive, we need more troops, training, and assistance. And that's why we are deploying 21,000 troops to Afghanistan and increasing our efforts to train Afghan security forces—and I'm also pleased that our NATO allies and partners are providing resources to support our strategy. And that is why we are helping Pakistan combat the insurgency within its borders—including $400 million in immediate assistance that we are seeking from Congress, which will help the government as it steps up its efforts against the extremists.

And to advance security, opportunity, and justice for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, we are dramatically increasing our civilian support for both countries. We were pleased that these efforts were recently amplified through the $5.5 billion that was pledged for Pakistan at an international donors conference in Tokyo—resources that will help meet the basic needs of the Pakistani people.

The road ahead will be difficult. There will be more violence, and there will be setbacks. But let me be clear. The United States has made a lasting commitment to defeat al Qaeda, but also to support the democratically elected sovereign governments of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. That commitment will not waiver. And that support will be sustained.

Every day, we see evidence of the future that al Qaeda and its allies offer. It's a future filled with violence and despair. It's a future without opportunity or hope. That's not what the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan want, and it's not what they deserve. The United States has a stake in the future of these two countries. We have learned, time and again, that our security is shared. It is a lesson that we learned most painfully on 9/11, and it is a lesson that we will not forget.

So we are here today in the midst of a great challenge. But no matter what happens, we will not be deterred. The aspirations of all our people—for security, for opportunity and for justice—are far more powerful than any enemy. Those are the hopes that we hold in common for all of our children. So we will sustain our cooperation. And we will work for the day when our nations are linked not by a common enemy, but by a shared peace and prosperity, mutual interests and mutual respect, not only among governments but among our people.

I want to thank President Zardari and President Karzai for joining me here today. I look forward to continuing this close cooperation between our governments in the months and years ahead. Thank you very much, everybody.

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton, May 6, 2009[7]

Secretary Hillary Clinton delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Secretary Clinton. As you know, earlier we met in a bilateral with both President Zardari and President Karzai, and then we had the large delegations meeting. So let me just quickly run through some of what occurred and then I'd be glad to take your questions.

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At the formal bilateral that I held with President Zardari at the State Department, I reaffirmed our government's strong support for him as the democratically elected President. Being able to say "democratically elected President of Pakistan" is not a common phrase, and I think it's imperative that we support President Zardari and work with him as he extends the reach of the government not only on security, as essential as that is, but also on the range of needs of the Pakistani people.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

With President Karzai, it was a very future-oriented conversation. We talked about the necessity to take real, concrete actions to make the kind of progress that Afghanistan desperately needs to see to really deliver for the people of the country.

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The format of the meetings were to hear from our Obama administration officials what the specifics of what the next day's meetings, tomorrow, will focus on in each instance. So, for example, Secretary Vilsack kicked it off because, as you know from our strategic review, we think it's imperative to focus on the agricultural sector. We certainly intend to provide assistance with issues ranging from water rights to anti-erosion measures, to specific seeds that can grow alternative crops in Afghanistan, to continue to help the agricultural sector in Pakistan, as well.

I thought it was a very significant meeting, in some ways a breakthrough meeting. The high-level participation from our government was very important, and the high-level participation from each of the delegations. A number of the comparable ministers had never met each other. They may have talked on the phone about border security or police training or intelligence sharing, but they hadn't actually met in several instances.

I was extremely impressed by the candor that was really evidenced throughout the meeting. And it was a physical manifestation of our strategy, of viewing Afghanistan and Pakistan as a regional challenge but also a regional opportunity.

The Trade Transit Agreement memorandum of understanding that was signed today commits both countries to finalizing a trade transit agreement that deals with all of the obstacles and problems of goods and people crossing borders. It was started 43 years ago, and we're determined to bring it to a resolution. The kind of economic development that will spring up if we see increased trade and commerce between the two countries is one of the best ways that we can provide alternatives for those who might otherwise be dragged into this conflict.

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Q. Thank you, Madam Secretary. You talked about this being a breakthrough and about the focus being on what you can do, what you will do—specific things. Can you list any specific things that either leader agreed to go back to their country and do to make the kinds of changes that are so desperately needed?

Secretary Clinton. There were such commitments, but I think we would rather talk about those after conferring with each of the Presidents and probably at the end of this two-day process, because there have been commitments made, there will be much more in-depth work done tomorrow to see how we're going to realize the way forward on those commitments. And I think it would be more appropriate to wait to talk specifically.

Q.—that on behalf of this country, and perhaps—

Secretary Clinton. Yes.

Q.—what the administration is committing to that we haven't already seen in these plans?

Secretary Clinton. Well, some of it is very specific. If you look at agriculture, we're going to establish a training program, the Borlaug Fellows Training Program. You remember, Norm Borlaug was one of the architects of the Green Revolution, which transformed life in India and in other places. And we're going to do intensive training with Pakistani and Afghani agricultural experts and researchers and policymakers. We're going to establish a trilateral body to identify the cross-border water issues, one of the critical issues as to whether agriculture can be revitalized, particularly in Afghanistan.

With respect to economic commitments, both Afghanistan and Pakistan confirmed their commitment to the Central Asia/South Asia energy agreement. We're going to press ahead to try to help alleviate some of the blockades that exist for both countries getting reliable sources of energy, particularly electricity.

The Trade Transit Agreement is a commitment to a time line to adopt customs harmonization strategy, pass legislation and create the institutions necessary to prevent illegal transshipments, finalize the reconstruction opportunity zones that are part of the Kerry-Lugar legislation.

We are also looking to deepen our work on the cross-border issues, joint parliamentary exchanges and military training, border coordination centers. We want broader based law enforcement reform, a vigorous anti-corruption agenda that removes the impunity that too often has existed in the past. And they committed to vigorous judicial reform and counterterrorism legislation and improving prison conditions. Those are just some of the things that are part of our dialogue going forward that they've already committed to working with us on.

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Q. Madam Secretary, as this plan was being developed, the U.S. believed that a lot of the insurgency issues were going to be in eastern Afghanistan. Obviously the problem has now emerged more heatedly in Pakistan. How has that affected this strategy of the U.S. as this summit came together?

Secretary Clinton. Well, Jake, I think that the wisdom of the approach that we took even before the President was inaugurated has been borne out by the events of the last months. We were determined to see Afghanistan and Pakistan as a region, as two countries that were dependent upon each other, influenced each other, and needed to figure out a way forward together. So, if anything, the fast-moving conflict and, frankly, the adaptability of the enemy that we are all fighting has demonstrated clearly the wisdom of that approach.

One of the other comments that was made today is that Afghanistan and Pakistan are conjoined twins—and, in effect, they are. But they were never treated that way. They were kind of one-off: What are we going to do about Afghanistan, and, oh, by the way, what are we going to do about Pakistan? And we have a history there, as you know. We have a history of having been deeply involved and then having withdrawn. And so I think seeing the two countries as connected geographically as they are, and in this common

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

struggle against al Qaeda and the Taliban and their allies, has given us the flexibility to be able to move more agilely than we did before.

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Q. Madam Secretary, a couple of questions. One, the Zardari government said it wanted time to have this negotiated arrangement in Swat Valley to see what would happen. They've now seen what has happened and are responding militarily. There are some reports in the region that the civilians on the ground now see the government in a different light, and saw that they tried to negotiate, saw what the Taliban did, and there's a backlash against the Taliban. Do you believe that was an inherent wisdom that maybe the U.S. did not detect before in the strategy?

And number two, with the sense that the refugee crisis in that area—now that the Pakistan government has asked civilians to try to leave—is that going to be something the U.S. and both these nations are going to have to confront in the very near term?

Secretary Clinton. I'm sorry, say that again.

Q. Well, the military's advice being to try to exit parts of the Swat Valley because of a assumed military offensive—will that create a humanitarian issue that all three of these countries are going to have to deal with in a very near term?

Secretary Clinton. You know, Major, I'm not going to second-guess the approach that was taken by the government of Pakistan vis-à-vis the Taliban in Swat Valley. Whatever the motive behind it might have been, the reality on the ground soon proved otherwise; that one had to confront the increasing influence and geographic spread of the Taliban. There aren't that many Taliban fighters, but they are so intimidating and they are so ruthless that a very few can control a large swath of territory, which is something that I think everybody learned in watching this unfold.

So the other point to remember—it goes back to Chuck's earlier question—is there have been areas of Pakistan that have been ungoverned for a very long time. The British Empire did not govern them; no Pakistani government, civilian or military, attempted to govern them; and they were basically left alone, and they left the central government alone—it was kind of a unspoken agreement.

But what nobody bargained for was foreign fighters and foreign money and a foreign ideology that would in some way link up disparate elements within these regions into a network, a syndicate, if you will, of extremist groups. And I think that has changed—that's another one of the paradigm shifts. You know, you could leave those folks alone and they took care of their own business, but that was fine, we were okay in Lahore and Islamabad and Karachi and other places. But as they became more aggressive, and as they kind of broke out of the traditional model of how they had stayed close to home and basically controlled their own surroundings, that produced a new challenge.

And I think that it's part of the change in attitude that we're seeing in the Pakistani military and intelligence services, and in the civilian government.

Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton, Afghan President Karzai, and Pakistani President Zardari, May 6, 2009[8]

Secretary Hillary Clinton, President Hamid Karzai, and President Asif Ali Zardari delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Secretary Clinton. Good morning, and welcome to the State Department. This is what's called the Benjamin Franklin Room, after one of our early and most important leaders. And today, we are welcoming to the Franklin Room two very important leaders who are leading their countries at a difficult time in history, who are working hard to maintain and nurture democracy, and who understand that we face a common enemy. We may come from different places and have different backgrounds, but we are facing a common enemy and we have therefore made common cause together.

And so it is a great privilege to welcome President Karzai and President Zardari. I have known President Zardari for a longer period of time, going back many years now. And I was a great admirer and a friend of his late wife, who I thought was an extraordinary leader. And I am pleased to welcome him here as the democratically elected president of his country.

And I have known President Karzai now for about seven years.

President Karzai. Seven years.

Secretary Clinton. And I have greatly appreciated our relationship. I was very moved when President Karzai came to Fort Drum in far upstate New York on one of his early trips to the United States to thank the men and women of the 10th Mountain Division, the most deployed division in the U.S. Army, for their service in Afghanistan during the war that has gone on.

So it's going to be a great privilege and pleasure for me to work on behalf of our common cause. Now, both presidents bring with them very distinguished delegations, their ambassadors and ministers, many of whom I also know and respect and have worked with. And we are especially pleased to welcome President Zardari's son, Mr. Bhutto Zardari, to be here as well.

Now, presidents, we have with us a number of members of President Obama's cabinet and high-ranking officials in departments in the United States Government. We will be hearing from them during the course of the morning. But let me introduce Ambassador Patterson, whom you know, the Ambassador to Pakistan; Director Mueller, the leader of the FBI; of course, you've met Director Panetta of the CIA and Special Representative Holbrooke.

Secretary Vilsack may be a new face to you. He is the Secretary of Agriculture, and it is an area that we intend to work on with each of you. We think that there are great opportunities to assist the farmers of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. I was very pleased to learn, Secretary Vilsack, that one of the early decisions President

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Zardari made is paying off because they're back to being self-sufficient in wheat, maybe even selling some to their neighbors in the future. So we have a lot that we can bring to the table to work with you.

Jack Lew is the Deputy Secretary for Resources and Management in this Department. He has been to both of your countries recently and is working with your finance ministers and others on very specific planning. Next is Acting Administrator of USAID Alonzo Fulgham, and of course, Michele Flournoy, who is Under Secretary for Planning—Policy, who is a very experienced expert in defense matters. And then, of course, you all know General Petraeus.

Now, the presence of this distinguished group of U.S. officials from different federal agencies reflects President Obama's and my strong belief that promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan must be an all-government effort. Now, this is not just the State Department's responsibility or the Defense Department's, but it is all of us working together. And based on the delegations that are here, I think both the presidents agree with that as well.

We have made this common cause because we face a common threat, and we have a common task and a common challenge. We know that each of your countries is struggling with the extremists who would destabilize and undermine democracy. An ancient Afghan proverb says "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet." We know that this consultation is part of a continuing process. It began with our first trilateral. It continued with the international conference in The Hague, with the Tokyo donors conference, and now we are once again meeting here in Washington.

Through these ongoing consultations, we believe we can strengthen our partnership and our cooperation. Now, we are not perfect. No human being is. We will make mistakes. But we need to have the kind of open dialogue where we express our concerns about those mistakes. I am very grateful for the excellent relationships that I have with Minister Qureshi and Minister Spanta, and we want to create those relationships throughout our governments so that we learn from each other, we listen to each other, and then we do better—do better tomorrow.

On that note, I wish to express my personal regret and certainly the sympathy of our Administration on the loss of civilian life in Afghanistan. We deeply regret it. We don't know all of the circumstances or causes, and there will be a joint investigation by your government and ours. But any loss of life, any loss of innocent life, is particularly painful. And I want to convey to the people of both Afghanistan and Pakistan that we will work very hard with your governments and with your leaders to avoid the loss of innocent civilian life. And we deeply, deeply regret that loss.

We are working with Congress to provide additional support to augment security in both countries. We are deploying additional U.S. soldiers and military trainers to Afghanistan. But we know that success will not come from military means alone, that what we must do and what both Secretary Gates and I emphasized in congressional testimony is the importance of diplomacy and development aid. And we reiterated our support for Congress's efforts to triple nonmilitary spending for these democratically elected governments. We believe you earned it and deserve to have that level of support.

We will be increasing our civilian presence in cooperation with the ministries that are present here and other elements of both governments. And today's discussions will center on concrete initiatives. I like to know specifically what we're going to try to do together. I like us to reach agreement on that, and then to specify the steps we will take together to achieve our common goals. I think that helps to eliminate the confusion that comes with distance and misunderstanding. So we will start today to create the kind of work plans that will guide our efforts together.

And we'll be talking today about the concrete initiatives to expand economic opportunities and trade, to bolster the agricultural sector as an essential source of revenue and jobs in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, to help build up the industrial sector in Pakistan again so that it is creating more jobs and opportunities for people, and to improve our joint cooperation on security.

I will also reinforce, as I have on many occasions, that this is not just me speaking, but this is the American Government speaking; that we do not believe either Afghanistan or Pakistan can achieve lasting progress without the full participation of all of your citizens, including women and girls. The rights of women must be respected and protected. This is a time for, as we say, all hands on deck. The entire population, the talents of everyone, must be engaged.

I am pleased to announce that Afghanistan and Pakistan have reached an important milestone in their efforts to generate foreign investment and stronger economic growth and trade opportunities. Before President Karzai and President Zardari meet with President Obama this morning, the two ministers, Minister Qureshi and Minister Spanta, will sign a Memorandum of Understanding committing their countries to achieving a trade transit agreement by the end of the year, which we believe will have great economic benefits for both peoples.

This is an historic event. This agreement has been under discussion for 43 years without resolution. But when I think about Afghanistan and Pakistan, and I look at the map of the world and see how strategically located both countries are, this is an agreement that will bring prosperity to both countries, along the trade routes and beyond. Nothing opens up an area to economic development better than a good road with good transit rules and an ability to transport goods and people effectively. So we think this will be enormously beneficial, and I congratulate both countries.

It will also help us bring more foreign direct investment into both countries, because that's always the first question: How do we get our goods to market? How do we get them to another economy in another country? This is a very concrete and positive step.

So we are encouraged by the progress that this agreement and this second trilateral meeting represent, and we see it as a harbinger for the productive consultations we anticipate over the next two days.

I would now like to introduce President Karzai to deliver brief remarks. He will be followed by President Zardari to also deliver remarks. President Karzai.

President Karzai. (Traditional blessing/greeting in Arabic.)

Thank you very much, Madame Secretary. It's a pleasure for us, and I can speak on behalf of both Afghanistan and Pak-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

istan at this point, to thank you and the President for giving us this unique opportunity of the presence here in the United States to discuss the issues of terrorism and of combating terrorism, and stability and peace, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and by consequence in the region and beyond. This initiative, I'm certain, through the implementation of the strategy outlined earlier by President Obama, will bring us the needed relief towards a better, more peaceful life in both of our countries.

Madame Secretary, thank you very much for showing concern and regrets for the civilian casualties that are caused, especially for the one that was caused yesterday. We appreciate that, and we hope we can work together towards reducing and eventually completely removing the possibilities of civilian casualties as we move ahead in our war against terrorism or in our struggle against terrorism.

Madame Secretary, Afghanistan would like to assure the United States, its most valued strategic ally, and Pakistan, its neighbor, brother, friend. What I described yesterday is exactly true. Pakistan and Afghanistan are conjoined twins. Our suffering is shared, our joys are always shared. The life that we live is affected by the opportunities that we have and the lack of opportunities that occurs because of the circumstances in which we live today.

Madame Secretary, I will be very brief in my remarks. At this point, I would suffice that at occasions like today, Afghanistan will use, to the best of its possibility and ability, to deliver to the effectiveness of what we are doing together for stability and to do the right thing with regard to relations with Pakistan in bringing more confidence, more trust, and a working environment in which the two countries together can wage a more effective struggle against the menace of terrorism and the violence that radicalism causes both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan and the danger that they pose to you in America and the rest of the world.

I would request our brothers and sisters in Pakistan to count on us in the best possible manner that Afghanistan will go along in order to eventually provide a life of peace and prosperity to both countries. Now as we move ahead, there will be areas of practical work and cooperation. In that too, Afghanistan will contribute.

Madame Secretary, do have full confidence in us, as the two countries sit together, that we'll be friends with you and colleagues with you. And the journey that we have together will take us where we intend to be. And the right environment, as it is created today, I hope we'll continue to insist upon and have kept. Thank you.

Secretary Clinton. Thank you.

President Zardari. (Traditional blessing/greeting in Arabic.)

Madame Secretary, thank you for having us. My dear brother President Karzai, thanking for being here and giving—Madame, thank you for giving us this opportunity. Let me begin by thanking President Obama for his vision and, of course, my friend, my wife's friend and my friend, and the hope for the beacon of the world, Secretary Clinton, for her leadership in arranging this historic meeting of our three democracies.

And today, we sit here as three democratic states and joined together in the history of democracy looking forward to working together. Pakistan faces many challenges. Our democracy is trying to overcome these challenges. We need the nurturing of democracy of the world. The oldest most powerful democracy of the world, the extended democracies of the world, we need—my democracy needs attention and needs nurturing.

We thank the United States for its support for democracy, for security in Pakistan and look forward to further support. Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States are all victims of terror, as is indeed the entire world. Our threat is common and our responsibilities should be shared. I am here to assure you that we shall share this burden with you all. For no matter how long it takes and what it takes, democracies will deliver. My democracy will deliver. People of Pakistan stand with the people of the United States and the people of Afghanistan. We stand with our brother Karzai and the people of Afghanistan against this common threat, this menace, which I have called cancer. This is a cancer. It needs to be done away with. Pakistan carries a huge burden confronting al-Qaida and Taliban together. But we are up to the challenge because we are the democracy, and democracy is the only cure to this challenge.

Just as the United States is making progress after seven years of engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, we will—we too will make progress over time. Democracies in—democracy in Pakistan is only seven months old. And during this period, we have performed better than the dictatorships in the previous many years. I look forward to our discussions, especially our meetings with President Obama, with whom the whole world attaches a lot of hope and especially our coming generations in Pakistan.

I think the U.S.—I thank the U.S. Congress for supporting the emergency economic and security assistance for Pakistan. I am here to assure Americans, partners that while we will need high level of support in the days to come, we will also be far more transparent in our actions. Democracy will avenge the death of my wife and the thousands of other Pakistanis and citizens of the world. Pakistani democracy will deliver. The terrorists will be defeated by our joint struggle. And here, me, my friend President Karzai, and the United States assure the world that we will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the world to fight this cancer and this threat.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Secretary Clinton. Thank you very much, presidents. And now, I am pleased to witness the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding to commence the transit treaty negotiations.

(The Memorandum of Understanding is signed.)

Secretary Clinton. Thank you. Thank you very much. That was very good.

Remarks by National Security Advisor General Jones, May 6, 2009[9]

General James Jones delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

General Jones. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm pleased to be here to talk a little bit about the meetings that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were held this afternoon that you've already heard quite a bit about. I'd just like to add a couple of points to those that have been already been made.

The President started out his meeting with President Karzai by commenting with great sympathy on the tragedies that have happened out in western Afghanistan, and indicating that we regret the loss of life, particularly of innocent people, and that the investigations underway will be pursued aggressively with full intent to discover what, in fact, did happen, how it happened, and how we can make sure that things like that do not happen again. And it was clear that President Karzai was moved by that—by the President's statement, and he thanked the President for starting off the meeting with that expression of condolence.

The President also continued to offer considerable support to Afghanistan, emphasizing the fact that the U.S. would be supporting in as many ways as possible, stressing the fact that the upcoming elections in Afghanistan should be as fair and open as possible, and certainly as much as possible, beyond any question that they're not honest elections.

He also commented on the new strategy that we're implementing in Afghanistan as a result of the strategic review; emphasizing that it's not just about military options, that despite the fact that we're going to contribute 21,000 U.S. troops to help stabilize the southern part of the country; but also emphasizing that the role of reconstruction, the role of governance and rule of law are all things that have to be undertaken in concert with the security efforts, so that the security-economic development and governance and rule of law—and especially good governance at the local, regional, and national levels—has to be put in evidence. So the emphasis on civilian and military efforts is a cornerstone of the new strategy, as is the more accelerated development of the Afghan army and the Afghan police capabilities.

He also made reference to judicial reform and encouraged the President to do whatever he could to stamp out corruption wherever he found it, or the perception of corruption, and asked that we see concrete results in that regard.

He also commented to the President he was very encouraged, as we all are, by the new relationship with Pakistan. It's obvious that the two Presidents get along well and it's obvious that both governments have pledged to work together to cross a wide range of potential areas of cooperation to include security measures, but also economic measures and the like. We'll continue to work on things like cross-border trade, for example.

And finally, the President emphasized that Afghanistan should be encouraged to continue to develop civil liberties and human rights. And the Afghan President responded that one of the great pleasures of his administration was seeing the rise in education and the number of Afghan students participating in higher education. He quoted the figure of 4,000 students in 2002, and 75,000 Afghan students, men and women, participating at the university level, and emphasized the fact that in 2002 there were no female students at all in the university system. So he was extremely proud of that.

President Karzai responded that in addition to his appreciation for the President's gesture on the casualties, that he supports the new strategy fully and that—asked for more focused assistance on not only military training but civilian training for young people.

And I might say that throughout the discussion the President had with both heads of state, that the idea of doing things for the young people came up time and time again—with some emotion, I might add, on some of the participants—that this is about the future of two new, young democracies and within those democracies we are talking really about the future of the next generation. And so this was said several times.

President Karzai also indicated that he wanted to do whatever he could to restore an Afghan economy. He wanted to develop its export business; wanted focused help on agriculture; and wanted to do things where people would notice the change in their lives. If they're surrounded by good governance, if they have secure living conditions, if they have the applied and focused help that they need in order to develop their economies, they will do better.

He recognized that they need to do more with regard to judicial reform and pledged to go after corruption wherever it existed. And he closed by saying that above all, whether he's reelected or not, he would like to make sure that he contributes to institutionalizing democratic ideals in Afghanistan.

With President Zardari, the President started out by declaring that he wanted to be of help to the people of Pakistan not just in a military way, but to help Pakistan with a new beginning; to again help the government institutionalize democracy and make progress, recognizing that these are difficult times, and the threat of extremists to Pakistan requires a concerted action. And on that score, he emphasized that this is a regional problem and this is why getting together with both Presidents and our government for these few days of very intensive conferences are going to be very important, because we're going to approach this as a regional problem.

As you know, the AFPAK strategy review emphasized the fact that we have several countries but we have one theater. And this is the way we're looking at it. It's important to occasionally remind ourselves that this is a common struggle, and we're approaching it that way.

So the central goal here is to make sure that all parties understand that this is a united front, not only among the Presidents, but among the Ministers of Defense, the Foreign Ministers, and the various echelons of government involved with economic reconstruction, judicial reform, and all of those things that go into stabilizing a situation.

The President pledged to do whatever we could, to do as quickly—to do what we can as quickly as possible to help the Pakistani government, and said this type of aid would not just be restricted to military, but we would aid in any ways we can to help with health and education, institution-building, advisors, whatever we can do to help the government and the military resist this very serious threat. Miracles will not happen, so this won't happen quickly. But with a common focus, we can make strides hopefully in the near future.

President Zardari responded by affirming his commitment to work within this regional context to preserve democracy in Pakistan; to want to do more economically for the people—he spoke of building schools and hospitals—but underlying all of his remarks was a pledge to meet the threat and to be successful, and assured the President that they were properly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

focused on it; was thankful for the assistance that the President offered, and looked forward to working with us in a concerted in the weeks and months ahead.

I think it was a very warm meeting between the three Presidents. They have embraced common themes, an intent to work together, and I think was a very good start. And we will have more meetings the next couple of days at the ministers' levels to continue to develop these issues.

And I'll be happy to take any questions.

Q. General Jones, if I'm reading between the lines, forgive me here, but it sounds like in the first meeting with President Karzai, there was more telling him that he should be more—do more on human rights and corruption, whereas, with President Zardari, there wasn't that tone. Am I reading that correctly?

General Jones. Oh, I don't know. I think the—the tone of both meetings was pretty much the same. We have a longer history with Afghanistan in terms of understanding and having the ability to do more things because of that relationship having taken a number of years now.

I think with Pakistan we are learning about the things that we can do. But I think the balance of tone was just about the same and I wouldn't say that he was more directed one way or the other.

Q. General Jones, you said that President Zardari—underlying all of his remarks with a pledge to meet the threat and to be successful. Is there anything specific we can point to as far as what the Pakistani army or the Pakistani government is going to do on meeting the threat of the Taliban insurgence in the eastern part of the country?

General Jones. Well, I'd characterize it by saying that it's clear that he and his fellow Presidents have come to an agreement that this is not a individual national belong that belongs to either Afghanistan or Pakistan; that this is in fact a regional problem. We have adopted that as our centerpiece of our strategy.

And so the dialogue between the three about not only doing things militarily to correct the situation, but politically between the two principal countries in the region, Afghanistan and Pakistan, to work on economic issues, and to do those things that show their respective populations that there is an alternative, there is a better way and there is greater hope for their children in the future. And as I said, this was a common theme.

I think this was a pretty powerful expression, a recognition of what the right attitude and the right approach has to be. The details will be worked out over time, but I think all three were focused on the seriousness of the threat and I think, in Pakistan's case, he made a number of points to illustrate that he was focused on it and that they had every intention to do something about that in very real time. And I think there's some evidence that they've started doing that, which is encouraging.

Q. As part of President Obama's message of condolence about the airstrike, did President Karzai ask that they be suspended pending the end of this investigation, or reduced in intensity? And also, did President Zardari bring up the idea that—the Predator strikes in those areas?

General Jones. The answer is no to both questions. The President was genuine in his acceptance. I think he deeply appreciated the President's words. And the issue of—operational issues did not come up with President Zardari.

Q. In the past the Presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan have come to Washington and said, okay, we're going to do this, we're going to fight together against extremism. What specific steps would you seek in the next few weeks, few months so that people who aren't privy to intelligence or defense information can judge that this time it's actually going to be different?

General Jones. Well, as you know, in developing our strategic review concerning Afghanistan and Pakistan, we did this in concert with both countries. Both countries had teams here; they participated with us in the development of a strategy. We also extended a wider hand to our NATO allies, as well, And brought in, probably in an unparalleled way, just an awful lot of countries to make sure that we had the benefit of their thinking collectively, so that we could develop a document that other people could buy into.

And so this was accomplished. And one of the characteristics, I think the telling characteristics of the document and the agreement was that it does focus on things beyond simply military capacity. It focuses a lot on reconstruction.

In Afghanistan, of course, this is going to be a particularly important part of the strategy. It focuses a lot on rule of law and good governance. And as we continue to develop our relationship with Pakistan, which as you know is somewhat embryonic in some terms because we've had no mil-to-mil relations—military-to-military relations—with Pakistan for almost a decade, and so we're trying to build these relationships up in very real time to face a very real threat.

So the fact that people recognize that this is a regional problem—that's relatively new I think, within the last six months—the fact that we have a written strategy to address this regional problem which requires regional solutions, the fact that we're going beyond military solutions and stimulating economic development—trade, bringing in other countries—we have a regional representative, Richard Holbrooke; we have a new ambassador in Kabul; we have a new deputy to the U.N.'s special representative in Kabul—we have a lot of things in place now that allow us to take a regional approach and a regional focus to implementing the strategy.

Q. General, the President mentioned al Qaeda repeatedly, but he never said the Taliban in his remarks, and I was wondering if that was purposeful. Also is General Kayani mobilizing and deploying the 11th Corps? And if not, why should we take his efforts seriously?

General Jones. I'm sorry, why should you take General Kayani's effort seriously?

Q. No, the Pakistani President, I mean his word that he's serious about this. Is the 11th Corps crucial to that, and what commitment have you got on

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that?

General Jones. I think those issues will be discussed in follow-on meetings, so I don't have an answer for you on that as of today because we didn't get down to that level of specificity.

The President—of course, his focus—we are focused on al Qaeda, but we're also focused on extremism of any form, especially those extremists that want to strike outside of their borders and destabilize democratically elected governments. And that's what we're there to defeat. And I think this meeting was an affirmation that we will be successful.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Press Release from the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, May 7, 2009[10]

At today's meeting of the second U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan Tri-Lateral Consultations, USTDA, together with the Planning Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Ministry of Finance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreeing to pursue a Pakistan-Afghanistan Infrastructure and Trade Initiative. The Initiative will seek to foster economic development in underserved western provinces of Pakistan and promote trade with Afghanistan and other regional partners. The MOU is intended to support the efforts that Pakistan and Afghanistan committed to yesterday in agreeing to establish a new Transit Trade Agreement between the two countries. More broadly, the Initiative reflects USTDA's strategy of focusing on programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan that create mutually beneficial relationships for advancing bilateral and regional cooperation and opening markets to greater trade.

"USTDA is pleased to announce this Initiative, which is designed to accelerate the development of needed infrastructure to foster economic growth in border provinces of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to promote the regional trade that is necessary for sustainable growth," said USTDA Acting Director Leocadia I. Zak. "With a focus on transportation, energy and communications, we plan to engage the U.S. private sector in working with our partners in both countries to resolve the critical issues affecting trade and economic growth."

The MOU establishing the Initiative was signed during economic policy consultations held at the U.S. Department of State and led by Deputy Secretary of State Jacob J. Lew. Acting Director Zak, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Finance Shaukat Fayyaz Ahmed Tarin and Afghanistan's Minister of Finance, His Excellency Dr. Omar Zakhilwal, signed the MOU for the U.S., Pakistan and Afghan governments, respectively. Parts of the Initiative are dependent upon future appropriations and other Congressional procedures, including notification requirements.

Under the Initiative, USTDA intends to sponsor three separate assessment missions covering transportation, energy, and communications. Teams of technical experts will visit Pakistan and Afghanistan to identify specific regional infrastructure project opportunities for development. The teams will prepare detailed terms of reference for feasibility studies; identify opportunities for technical assistance, training and other trade capacity building assistance; and analyze the viability of obtaining financing for project implementation.

USTDA also intends to organize workshops and business missions under the Initiative to bring representatives from Pakistan and Afghanistan together to discuss specific regional infrastructure projects. As an initial step, USTDA plans to sponsor a high-level orientation visit to the United States for transportation officials and operators from the region on the development of roads and intermodal port-rail-road networks to connect the western provinces of Pakistan and establish links with Afghanistan. The technical and business-oriented visit will focus on the potential for developing critical links between Gwadar Port and Pakistan's interior, improving transit links to and from Karachi, and improving thru routes to Pakistan-Afghanistan border checkpoints, such as Towr Kham and Spin Boldak.

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates, May 7, 2009[11]

Secretary Robert Gates delivered these remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan

Secretary Gates. Well, it's a pleasure to be back in Afghanistan. And I'm glad to have had this opportunity to get a first-hand perspective and assessment of the situation here from General McKiernan and our troops. After meeting with General McKiernan last night, I've had a full day visiting with our soldiers and Marines from both incoming and outgoing units, along with personnel from other troop-contributing nations. In partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces, they are doing an extraordinary job under difficult and dangerous conditions.

This trip has been an opportunity to thank our troops for their service, to see firsthand the work they are doing, to hear about the challenges they face and to make sure they are getting everything they need to be successful.

I also emphasized today to our troops the importance of showing respect and courtesy to our friends and hosts, the Afghan people; to be a true partner for them in securing and building and governing their own country, in defending their democracy and freedom from those who are waging a terrible and ruthless war to deny Afghans that freedom.

This was also my first visit since the new administration has come into office and since the launch of President Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. And I am hopeful that the meetings this week in Washington of the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the United States will produce new solidarity in the fight against violent extremism.

We are entering a critical period with the deployment of significantly more American forces, as well as the upcoming Afghan presidential election. It is important that the Afghan people be able to choose their leaders in a secure environment without terror and intimidation.

I will close by reaffirming that the United States, along with our allies and Afghan partners, is committed to doing what is necessary to see that Afghanistan, with a government elected by its people,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

does not become a haven for terrorists or return to the brutal rule of the Taliban.

And with that, I'd be happy to take some questions.

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Q. Sir, the question has two parts. The first part is, as we know, the Taliban in Pakistan is advancing, and there's a worry about this to—if they're going to reach or that—(inaudible)—a nuclear weapon in Pakistan. This is a—do we have some worry about this?

And also, the second part of question is as to—do we know safe haven in Pakistan impacts our power in Pakistan—is getting—advancing every day? [Doe]s [the] United States—have any policy to attack them inside Pakistan territory?

Secretary Gates. Thank you. First, I think that the Taliban in Pakistan overreached with their offensive in Buner district, coming within dozens of kilometers of Islamabad. I think that it has served as a—an alarm for the Pakistani government that these violent extremists in the western part of Pakistan are a significant danger to the government of Pakistan.

And so we have seen, in the last week or two, significant Pakistani military action against these—against the Taliban in Buner district, and clear recognition that the agreement in Swat has failed. And so I personally have been very satisfied with the strong response that the Pakistani government and army have taken in response to this, and that there is very little chance of the Taliban in Pakistan achieving a level of success that would give them access to Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

With respect to the U.S.—

Q. Hold a minute, sir. I have to translate.

Secretary Gates. With respect to the second part of your question, I believe that the reaction of the Pakistani army shows their recognition of the danger that exists in the western part of the country, and I do not anticipate at all that there will be American troops going into Pakistan from Afghanistan to deal with this problem.

Our goal is to work with the Pakistani army, with the Pakistani government, as they deal with this problem. And we are willing to do all we can to help.

Q. Okay. Mr. Secretary, as you know, there was an incident in Farah a few days ago which caused dozens of civilian casualties, according to the ICRC. The allegations are that those were caused by U.S. forces. What's your response to those allegations?

And in particular, there have been some suggestions that the Taliban themselves caused the casualties by putting civilians in houses and then throwing grenades in. Is that your understanding of what happened?

And why not apologize, as you've urged people in the military to do in the past—apologize quickly, and then move on and compensate?

Staff. So I think the translation works. Let's proceed.

Secretary Gates. All right, we'll hope for the best.

The—first of all, I'm well aware of this. And as I have—have said many times before, we—from the United States and our coalition partners—do everything we possibly can to avoid civilian casualties.

Representatives of General McKiernan and the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior have gone to Farah to investigate what happened there. The information that you cite about Taliban throwing grenades into houses to create civilian casualties and put the blame on the United States is a report I have heard. But I think we will have to wait—to wait and see what the results of the investigation are.

We regret any—even one—Afghan civilian causality—innocent civilian causality, and we will make whatever amends are necessary. And I believe that Gen. McKiernan's spokesman, in fact, has already expressed regret about this incident, regardless of who caused it.

We all know that the Taliban use civilians casualties, and sometimes create them, to create problems for the United States and our coalition partners. We will have to wait and see what happened in this—in this particular case.

But I would make one additional point.

Since the beginning of this year, civilian casualties in Afghanistan are down 40 percent. Casualties American, coalition partners, and Afghan security forces are up 75 percent.

So I believe that the Afghan government, the Americans and our international partners are doing everything we can to avoid civilian casualties. And we will continue to do that.

Q. (Inaudible.)

Secretary Gates. First of all, I believe, in many instances, the Taliban used civilians as shields. They mingle with civilians and then attack ISAF partners. And so while there have been civilian casualties caused by American and our coalition partners' troops, the reality is that in virtually every case, they have been accidental. Whereas when the Taliban creates civilian casualties, it has been deliberate, as part of their strategy for trying to build an adversarial relationship, between the Afghan people and those who are trying to help the Afghan government.

Our technical capabilities provide certain assets, but the reality is this is, at the end of the day, a war on the ground, in rural areas, village by village, block by block. And very often, modern techniques are very limited in what they can contribute to this fight. It's one of the reasons why at home I have been seeking additional capabilities for our troops who are here in the fight.

As I said, we deeply regret any civilian casualty. But fundamentally, people need to recognize that exploiting civilian casualties and often causing civilian casualties are a fundamental part of the Taliban strategy. And it is a measure of the ruthlessness with which they fight.

Q. Secretary Gates—Secretary, Laura Jakes from Associated Press. You heard a Marine today say he needed more communications equipment. Is the surge in troops outpacing the equipment and supplies that they need that are coming into country? And if so, why is that?

Secretary Gates. I—this is something that I have to look into when I get back to Washington. I heard this on several occasions today, that the equipment is coming in behind our troops and is not here and available for them when they arrive. And I

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intend to look into this and find out what the situation is. But I did hear it from several of our military folks today. And it is a considerable concern to me.

Q. Is it, perhaps, Iraqi equipment—(audio break)—equipment that's still in Iraq?

Secretary Gates. No, it's not an Iraq problem. It's basically just the magnitude of the—the amount of equipment that has to be brought in, and frankly, the relatively limited infrastructure in terms of airfields and so on, how you get it into Afghanistan. It's not extremists' interference with the lines of communication; I think it's more really a logistical challenge than it is anything else. And that's what I intend to pursue.

Q. (Inaudible.)

Secretary Gates. I think civilian casualties in Afghanistan, however they occur, pose a risk to our efforts here. What is critical for the success of the Afghan government, and for us as the government's and the Afghan people's partner, is that the Afghan people believe that we are on their side, that we are here to help them win a victory to protect their own freedom, that we respect Afghans and that we are here to protect them, not to hurt them. And so whenever civilian casualties occur, it tends to undermine that important point, and it is—and is therefore such a source of great concern.

The last time I was here, I made a statement to the Afghan press and television, about our concern about civilian casualties and that our rules of engagement were being changed and being toughened up, to make it less likely that there would be civilian casualties. I think there is importance in partnering, with the Afghan security forces, so that they are with us when there are operations.

So I think that this—it is a concern. And it has been a concern for quite some time frankly. And it doesn't matter that it's part of the Taliban's strategy. It's what matters in the eyes of the Afghan people. And so it's so important for us to be seen as their partner and their ally, not as somebody who has come to do them harm.

We are here to help the Afghan people. That partnership, that friendship is absolutely critical to the success of Afghans and our own success here. And so I think we have to continue to work at this problem. And even if the Taliban create these casualties or exploit them, we need to figure out a way to minimize them and hopefully make them go away.

In terms of the election security, there will be a number of election monitors from around the world. A number of the coalition partners will be sending additional troops here, to try and provide security for the election.

One of the reasons that we are bringing forces into the country, as quickly as possible, from the United States, which is part of the logistical issue, is to provide security, before the elections take place, in the period before and during the elections.

So I think that as best I can tell, the circumstances right now seem quite favorable for a reasonably safe and secure election process here in Afghanistan. We look forward to seeing that go forward.

Q. Secretary Gates, Chris Lawrence of CNN.

You had a chance to speak with a lot of your counternarcotics experts here in Afghanistan. After speaking with them today and seeing some of the work that they're doing, do you feel that the U.S. mission now is to stamp out the narcotics trade in Afghanistan quickly or to allow some drug trafficking to continue, while the Afghans wean themselves off of that?

Secretary Gates. Well, we have no desire to see the drug traffic continue, and frankly, neither do most Afghans. Our primary purpose here is not to stamp out the drug trade. Our primary purpose here is to make sure that Afghanistan does never again become a haven, a safe haven, for violent extremists who would attack the United States or anybody else. That's our fundamental mission.

We're also here to help the Afghan people. Afghanistan, until 20 or 30 years ago, 30 years ago or so, was a breadbasket.

It not only grew enough food to feed itself but to export food.

We would like to see that kind of agricultural success return to Afghanistan. The farmers of Afghanistan will not find that kind of prosperity and that kind of diverse economic success through growing poppies. You can't feed poppies to your family. You can't feed poppies to your herd. When you grow poppies, you have only one customer, and he does not negotiate. And so it's actually in the best interests of the Afghan people to stamp out this trade.

The reality is, in many of the provinces of Afghanistan, good governors and the Afghan people have stamped out the narcotics trade in those provinces. And most—in fact, perhaps 95 percent—of all of the poppy growing in Afghanistan now is in something like seven provinces, most of them in the south, where the Taliban are most prevalent and the most powerful. So I think that the key to stamping out the narcotics trade in Afghanistan, to begin with, is to defeat the Taliban.

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Q. (In one of the local languages.)

Secretary Gates. I'm sorry. There was interference and I didn't—what is closing in a week?

Interpreter. Sir, updating you on that question, the question was as to the parliament of Afghanistan issue a decree. One that gives the coalition forces, international force in Afghanistan to legalize their activity. Otherwise, in one week they will close parliament by itself. And what is your assessment or reaction? Because—(inaudible)—

Yes, sir. That's the question. Is—

Secretary Gates. The first that I've heard of it, and I would prefer not to answer without knowing the background and having some understanding.

Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen, May 11, 2009[12]

Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Michael Mullen delivered these remarks in Arlington, VA

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Secretary Gates. First, I would like to express my horror and deep regret over today's shooting incident at Camp Liberty in Iraq. I offer my sympathy and condolences to the families of those who were killed. We are still in the process of gathering information on exactly what happened, but if the preliminary reports are confirmed, such a tragic loss of life at the hands of our own forces is a cause for great and urgent concern, and I can assure you that it will get this department's highest-priority attention.

As you know, I just returned from a trip to Afghanistan, where I met with our troops and commanders in the field. My purpose in going was to see firsthand the preparations and plans under way to execute the president's strategy for the region, especially as significantly more American troops begin arriving in country. I thought it critically important to get a sense from the ground level what needs—what the needs are, what the challenges are and what the solutions to some of the problems are.

As I have said many times before, very few of these problems can be solved by military means alone. And yet, from the military perspective, we can and must do better. We have not been able to fully resource our military effort in Afghanistan in recent years, but I believe, resources or no, that our mission there requires new thinking and new approaches from our military leaders. Today we have a new policy set by our new president. We have a new strategy, a new mission and a new ambassador. I believe that new military leadership also is needed.

After consultation with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the commander of Central Command, and with the approval of the president, I have asked for the resignation of General David McKiernan. He will remain in command of both ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan until such time as a relief can be nominated and confirmed.

I am today recommending to the president that Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal be nominated to replace General McKiernan as commander U.S. Forces Afghanistan.

I am also recommending that Lieutenant General David Rodriguez be assigned to the new position of deputy commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan. I have advised the secretary general of NATO and the minister of defense of Afghanistan of these prospective changes.

I made these decisions only after careful consideration of a great number of factors, including the advice of Admiral Mullen and General Petraeus. In the end, I believe my decisions are in the best interests of our national security and the success of our mission in Afghanistan. I urge the Senate to swiftly confirm Generals McChrystal and Rodriguez so they can begin their important work as soon as possible.

Let none of this detract from, nor cause us ever to forget, General McKiernan's long and distinguished career of military service. For decades, in peace and war, Dave McKiernan has led hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform with conviction, integrity and courage. He has dedicated his life to the preservation of the freedoms we in this nation enjoy. And on behalf of the Department of Defense and the nation, I thank him for his years of selfless service.

Pam.

Q. Are you worried at all that switching horses in midstream has an air of desperation, or that you—that you—what you saw on both of your recent trips there was worse than you had expected to see?

Secretary Gates. Well, let me start and then turn to Admiral Mullen.

I think that the—as the statement suggested, that—that with agreement on a new strategy and a new mission, and a new national approach and international approach in Afghanistan, that if there were to be a change, this is the right time to make the change, at a time when we are at the beginning of the implementation of a new strategy. And it is in that context that I emphasize that the focus here is simply on getting fresh thinking, fresh eyes on the problem, and in how we implement the strategy and the mission going forward.

Admiral Mullen. In fact, for me, based on my recent trips, the opposite is true. In the time that I spent in RC East, I was very encouraged by the progress that we'd made and the depth of understanding of what the requirement was from our people on the military side to generate success.

Clearly that is not the case in the south, because we have not had the forces there, and putting them there this year is critically important. And I would only echo what the secretary said, from the standpoint of, with the new strategy, with the new team across the board, I felt it was very important for new leadership, and supported this decision completely.

Q. Mr. Secretary?

Q. Admiral Mullen? Mr.—for both of you gentlemen, while you say you felt there needed to be fresh eyes, fresh thinking, General McKiernan, of course, has only been there for a period of months. He's yet to get the resources he asked the Obama administration for. The troops that he has asked for aren't even there yet.

So what specifically was he not doing that he—you said you wanted fresh thinking, fresh eyes. Did he resist your ideas? Did he resist change? Was he uncooperative with the new thinking, the new way forward? What went wrong here?

Secretary Gates. Well, first of all, General McKiernan has been in Afghanistan, I think, 11 months. And—first of all, I would say, nothing went wrong, and there was nothing specific.

It is—it simply was my conviction, based on my consultations with Admiral Mullen and General Petraeus, that a fresh approach, a fresh look in the context of the new strategy, probably was in our best interest.

Q. Mr. Secretary?

Q. Admiral Mullen?

Q. Admiral Mullen—excuse me. Admiral Mullen, what—why couldn't, in your mind—you said you supported the recommendation; in your mind, why could General McKiernan no longer do the job?

Admiral Mullen. Again, he's been there almost a year. And, in fact, under normal circumstances, he would have rotated somewhere between 18 and 24 months, depending on timing.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I have said that we must focus all of our effort in terms of making Afghanistan better.

There probably is no more critical ingredient than that—than leadership. And again, along with all the other changes, it's time now. And that's why I made that recommendation.

Q. Is it just loss of confidence? I haven't heard anything yet—I'm so sorry—about why you both think he couldn't do the job.

Admiral Mullen. Well, I'm not going to say a whole lot more, other than the—I thought there was a need for new leadership—clearly we have in the two that the secretary—the two officers that the secretary mentioned a rich experience level—General Rodriguez in particular deep in Afghanistan, having been there before—and that I think these two officers will bring a—not just a renewed but a focus, which we really need in 2009, and I just didn't think that we could wait until 2010.

Q. Mr. Secretary, having talked to people who are involved in all this, they say McKiernan was maybe too conventional, too "old Army" in his outlook, not nimble enough to deal with the complex counterinsurgency. And as the admiral mentioned, McChrystal has a lot more experience in Afghanistan. Could you just comment on some of that?

Secretary Gates. Well, it's—you know, I won't—it's hard to say anything more than we've already said. I would—Admiral Mullen just talked about the experience that—in counterinsurgency that both General McChrystal and General Rodriguez have.

I would tell you that those who are speculating on the ingredients in this decision, if it's not Admiral Mullen or me or General Petraeus, ha[ve] no inside information on our thinking.

Q. So McKiernan just lacked a certain counterinsurgency experience or wasn't nimble enough on this?

Secretary Gates. I think what the admiral said is exactly where we are. It's time for new leadership and fresh eyes.

Julian?

Q. Secretary Gates, for you, talk to me a little bit more about why General McChrystal and his—whether it's the Special Operations background came into your thinking.

And Admiral Mullen, if you would talk a little bit about the effort that General McChrystal has been doing for you in terms of how to resource the Afghanistan mission, what—why you assigned him that, what his mission was in that.

Secretary Gates. I would simply say that both General McChrystal and General Rodriguez bring a unique skill set in counterinsurgency to these issues. And I think that they will provide the kind of new leadership and fresh thinking that the admiral and I have been talking about.

Admiral Mullen. I just—for both of them, as—whenever you look for replacements—I mean, whenever that occurs, you—I took a broad range of inputs from military officers.

And McChrystal and Rodriguez rank—outside this discussion, outside this change, McChrystal and Rodriguez have ranked, for the entire time that I've been chairman, at the top of the list. So we couldn't pick two better officers.

And then specifically, Julian, with respect to the—the discussions and focus on getting the best people to Afghanistan, making sure that we resource that as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible, making sure that leaders who go there that—have that experience so that our ramp-up time when we turn over is absolutely minimal—all of that focuses on the importance of Afghanistan, and actually lessons that we learned from Iraq where some of our rotations would—you know, we were starting over from an experience level. So it's how to do that and keep that focus and move as fast as we can from a resourcing people, training, expertise standpoint in Afghanistan.

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Q. Well, can you talk a little bit about how and when you started thinking about this? Is this some months ago? Is it—

Admiral Mullen. General McKiernan was—originally planned to be there between 18 and 24 months. So as far back as six or seven months ago, I was looking at his relief, potentially his relief, as well as General Odierno, who's due to leave sometime early in 2010. So there had been discussions about this over an extended period time. I think certainly for me it's been in the last several months, as we've focused heavily on Afghanistan and resourcing it and how we were going to move forward, that this issue—that the specifics of this really came to bear and that—that I concluded that it was time for a change, and made that recommendation to the secretary.

Q. So is it fair to say that in terms of a—unique skill sets, that General McChrystal—for those who don't follow his career, he specializes in black—commando special operations.: the capturing of Saddam Hussein, the killing of Abu Zarqawi, the melding of intelligence and special-ops units in the—during the surge. Is that what you're looking for from him in terms of Afghanistan—replicating some of those successes in that terrain?

Secretary Gates. Well, let me say something and then invite the admiral. The way I look at this is as—McChrystal and Rodriguez as a team. They each bring tremendous skills in a variety of areas that are very pertinent to the kind of fight that we have in Afghanistan. And it is their combined skill set that I think gives us some fresh opportunities looking forward.

Admiral Mullen. And while General McChrystal has that background that you described, Tony, his background is much deeper and much broader than that. And I've been privileged to work with him over the better part of the last year and seen that, you know, the broadness and the depth that go far beyond just high-end special-operations skills. And I'm extremely confident that he will be able to carry out this mission in its fullness to include, obviously, those skills, but others as well.

Q. Those kind of missions, though, to make this more a SOF-like fight?

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Admiral Mullen. I wouldn't be specific about what kind—you know, exactly the kinds of missions we would increase specifically. But certainly his focus and his background, I think, are very relevant to our needs there. And then—but it really is also the combination of he and Rodriguez which are so important.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you've often said that you were worried about establishing too big a military footprint in Afghanistan. Yet General McKiernan, it seemed like every few months, was asking for more and more and higher levels of forces. Is that one of the areas that wasn't new-think, in your mind? And did you and General McKiernan have a difference there?

Secretary Gates. No, that had nothing to do with it, as far as I was concerned.

Q. And about keeping the troop levels lower, you were talking, Admiral Mullen, about the lessons learned in Iraq. Wasn't that one of the lessons learned in Iraq, that we didn't have enough troops in Iraq initially?

Admiral Mullen. Well, as I've looked at the analysis for what we need, certainly, in the immediate future, the troops we have in the east recently are—have recently put in there, as well as those going in the south, those meet the needs that we see that we have right now. And I'm very comfortable that they will be able to provide the hold after the clear, which is where we've been short, particularly in the south.

Q. Mr. Secretary, can you talk a bit—now that these changes have been made at the very top, what follow-on changes may take place? I mean, for instance, as an organizational issue, will there be an RC South—American commands in RC South paralleling RC East? And even in general terms, can you talk about on the ground, tactically, what we may see differently going forward in the months ahead that was not the case up until now?

Secretary Gates. Well, I don't know that I can speak very well to the strategy and tactics going forward. I don't expect there to be a change in the command rotation in RC South. The Dutch are in command now. They will be replaced for—at the end of a year by the British, who will be in command for a year, and then we will take command in 2010.

And some of the additional troop levels that General McKiernan has asked for are, in fact, a two-star headquarters to support when the U.S. takes command of RC South in the fall of 2010, in November, I think. So I don't anticipate any change in that arrangement.

Q. Can you talk even in general terms about what might take place differently on the ground, as far as the prosecution of the war?

Secretary Gates. No, I don't know.

Admiral Mullen. I think—I mean, in some ways, we're learning as we go here. I mean, we're—what General McKiernan has recommended, in terms of the troops that are going there now, are the ones that we're resourcing.

But I'd also certainly want to hear from new leadership what their beliefs are once they get there, get on the ground and make some recommendations about how to move forward as rapidly as possible.

So I'm not aware of any changes. And I wouldn't speak to exactly how they're going to—how they'd fight it, although I've been briefed, for instance, on, you know, how it's going to apply in the south here over the course of this year.

But certainly with new leadership, there will probably be some fresh views, which we will have very, very good discussions about.

Q. Admiral, you said, we can and must do better. And so I'm surprised you don't have any more solid idea of how we need to do better.

Admiral Mullen. I can't think of a more important decision than putting in new leadership, with respect to that, and then having the impact that is so critical.

Q. Actually the secretary said, we must and can do better.
Any thoughts on how?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think, that's the challenge that we give to the new leadership. How do we—how do we do better? What new ideas do you have? What fresh thinking do you have? Are there different ways of accomplishing our goals? How can we be more effective? The admiral and I aren't the source of those ideas. General McChrystal and General Rodriguez are. And that's what we expect from them.

Q. Let me ask it a different way.
One of the criticisms of General McKiernan was that he hadn't implemented a joint campaign plan, essentially an implementation of the way the strategy would be used on the ground.
When the new leadership gets there, do you have a sense that then they will provide new feedback that could change the Af-Pak strategy as we know it? And what might it be?

Secretary Gates. Well, I—first of all, the new strategy is a strategy approved by the president. And it is a whole-of-government strategy. If there are any changes that they would recommend, it would be in the military part of that strategy.

Q. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.
Recently North Korea said that if South Korea participated in—(inaudible)—then North Korea will regard it as an act of war.
What is your comment on this?

Secretary Gates. Well, I've been frankly surprised and disturbed by the kind of rhetoric coming out of North Korea in recent weeks. And I think that North Korea has effectively isolated itself internationally, even greater than was the case before, by some of this rhetoric. But that's what I think it is, rhetoric.

Q. (Off mike)—you can give us any more detail of the shooting in Iraq—what you know about the soldier, whether he'd been on multiple deployments, whether he was seeking help for combat stress? Are there any details you can give us?

Admiral Mullen. No, I don't—I don't have a whole lot more than what—than that which is already out there. Clearly,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the tragedy occurred in a—in a—in a place where individuals were—were seeking help. And I'd also like to certainly extend my condolences and thoughts and prayers to the families of those who were killed.

It does speak to me, though, about the need for us to redouble our efforts, the concern in terms of dealing with the stress, dealing with the whole issue of those kinds of things. And it also speaks to the issue of multiple deployments, you know, increasing dwell time, all those things that we're focused on to try to improve to relieve that stress. But I just don't have the specifics of this particular incident.

Q. Mr. Secretary, where do we stand now on the bombings in western Afghanistan? A lot of blame was thrown each way—senior Defense officials blaming the Taliban; Taliban blaming U.S., saying there was the use of white phosphorous. Where does that investigation stand? Is there any light you can shed on that?

Secretary Gates. Well, let me tell you what I think the status is and ask the admiral to correct me if I get it wrong.

My understanding is that General McKiernan has sent a general officer to Farah province to participate with the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior in an investigation of what happened. I also understand that General Petraeus is either considering or has already decided to send someone to Afghanistan from outside the country to investigate the tragedy.

Is that—

Admiral Mullen. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you have an update on how many civilians may have died?

Secretary Gates. No.

Q. And have any payments been made to civilian families, as you suggested they would be done immediately last time you were in Afghanistan?

Secretary Gates. I don't—I just don't know.

Q. Clarification? Mr. Secretary, just a clarification. Does General McKiernan's resignation end his military career?

Secretary Gates. Probably.

Q. Sir, can I follow up on that other issue of the bombing? You've expressed concern and frustration the military is unable to counter Taliban or al Qaeda propaganda. In this case, with the bombing in Afghanistan, it seems that they have—they have a storyline, and the U.S. and McKiernan hinted at another narrative, that the Taliban had killed a bunch of people.

How, going forward, do you hope that that changes? And do you see the new leadership there kind of jumping in on that issue?

Secretary Gates. Well, one of the—one of the disadvantages we have in these situations is that the Taliban don't tell the truth and they don't care what the truth is. And so when you're making it up, you can respond a lot faster than when you're trying to figure out what actually happened.

And we have—and that has been a disadvantage for us on an ongoing basis. And we have to figure out how to get inside that strategic communications cycle to get in front of this issue. This is a principal strategic tactic of the Taliban, is the use—is either provoking or exploiting civilian casualties.

And we have done a lot—and I must say, General McKiernan has done a lot—in recent months to try and reduce the level of civilian casualties. The fact of the matter is, civilian casualties since January in Afghanistan are down 40 percent over a year ago during the same period. And U.S., Afghan and ISAF casualties are up 75 percent during the same period.

So there is a tremendous effort going on on our part to try and avoid civilian casualties. But figuring out how to come out better on the strategic communications side of this is an ongoing challenge for us.

Q. Is it more of the process, or is it just cultural resistance in the military to just come out and say the truth as soon as you know it?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think—I'm not sure I would characterize it as a military cultural aspect. I think it's more an American characteristic to try and figure out what happened before you decide—

Q. (Off mike)—President Karzai came out over the weekend. He called upon the U.S. to stop using airstrikes and also to stop nighttime raids. Is that at all practical, do you think?

Secretary Gates. Well, I can't improve on General Jones' statement yesterday, that we can't fight this war with one hand tied behind us. But one of the things that General McKiernan has been working on and that I am confident that Generals McChrystal and Rodriguez will work on is how we can do better in this area.

Q. Let me ask you about Swat Valley very quickly. We have seen now perhaps half-a-million Pakistanis displaced in their own country. You've given billions to Pakistan. You've urged them to engage in counterinsurgency. Is this kind of aerial and artillery bombardment the kind of—with thousands displaced—the kind of counterinsurgency strategy you wanted them to embark on?

Admiral Mullen. Actually, I spoke in a continuing dialogue with General Kiyani. I spoke to him earlier today. He called me just to update me specifically. And I won't go into the—into the details of that, but they actually have made considerable progress in recent weeks and in—in ways that many of us—many—not many of us, but many would have not predicted.

Clearly, there is a concern for the refugees and taking care of that. I know that the prime minister has been out speaking to the need for the Pakistan people to support that. That's also an important strategic both shift and emphasis.

And then I guess I wouldn't get into the details of his planning or his execution, but he's certainly aware of the challenges in particular with respect to the IDPs and the need for his government and other NGOs to address that issue.

Q. But are you satisfied with the strategy that you're seeing? Because there are now potentially hundreds of thousands of IDPs? Are you satisfied?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Admiral Mullen. I think, at least historically in counterinsurgencies, particularly when you're in the—in the aggressive—when you—when you start them, you do—we do see lots of IDPs and have to address that. And certainly, we're all concerned about that. I know that it's—that it's—that concern is being addressed specifically by the Pakistani government as a priority.

Secretary Gates. Thank you all very much.

Statement by the Department of State, May 12, 2009[13]

United States and United Kingdom Joint Statement On the Humanitarian Situation in Sri Lanka

During their meeting today, Secretary Clinton and U.K. Foreign Secretary Miliband expressed their profound concern about the humanitarian crisis in northern Sri Lanka caused by the ongoing hostilities. They expressed alarm at the large number of reported civilian causalities over the past several days in the designated "safe" zone.

Secretary Clinton and Foreign Secretary Miliband call on all sides to end hostilities immediately and allow for the safe evacuation of the tens of thousands of civilians trapped within the safe zone. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam must lay down their arms and allow civilians free passage out of the conflict zone. The government of Sri Lanka must abide by its commitment of April 27 to end major combat operations and the use of heavy weapons.

Secretary Clinton and Foreign Secretary Miliband express their appreciation for the continued efforts of the United Nations and their staff on the ground in Sri Lanka. They call on the government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers to allow a UN humanitarian team to visit the conflict zone to facilitate the safe evacuation of civilians. They urge both sides to allow food and medical assistance to reach those trapped by fighting, cooperate with the ICRC to facilitate the evacuation of urgent medical cases, ensure the safety of aid and medical workers, and permit humanitarian access to all sites where displaced persons are being registered or being provided shelter. Secretary Clinton and Foreign Secretary Miliband call for a political solution that reconciles all Sri Lankans, and establishes a meaningful role for Tamil and other minorities in national political life.

Remarks by President Obama, May 13, 2009[14]

President Barack Obama delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Sorry to keep you guys waiting. Good to see you. I want to take a few moments at the top to talk about something that, with all the big issues going on, hasn't received much attention, but I think is worth talking about briefly.

As some of you know, we have a humanitarian crisis that's taking place in Sri Lanka, and I've been increasingly saddened by the desperate news in recent days. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians are trapped between the warring government forces and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka with no means of escape, little access to food, water, shelter and medicine. This has led to widespread suffering and the loss of hundreds if not thousands of lives.

Without urgent action, this humanitarian crisis could turn into a catastrophe. Now is the time, I believe, to put aside some of the political issues that are involved and to put the lives of the men and women and children who are innocently caught in the crossfire, to put them first.

So I urge the Tamil Tigers to lay down their arms and let civilians go. Their forced recruitment of civilians and their use of civilians as human shields is deplorable. These tactics will only serve to alienate all those who carry them out.

I'm also calling on the Sri Lankan government to take several steps to alleviate this humanitarian crisis. First, the government should stop the indiscriminate shelling that has taken hundreds of innocent lives, including several hospitals, and the government should live up to its commitment to not use heavy weapons in the conflict zone.

Second, the government should give United Nations humanitarian teams access to the civilians who are trapped between the warring parties so that they can receive the immediate assistance necessary to save lives.

Third, the government should also allow the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross access to nearly 190,000 displaced people within Sri Lanka so that they can receive additional support that they need.

The United States stands ready to work with the international community to support the people of Sri Lanka in this time of suffering. I don't believe that we can delay. Now is the time for all of us to work together to avert further humanitarian suffering.

Going forward, Sri Lanka must seek a peace that is secure and lasting, and grounded in respect for all of its citizens. More civilian casualties and inadequate care for those caught in resettlement camps will only make it more difficult to achieve the peace that the people of Sri Lanka deserve.

Now, let me also say a few words about an issue that I know you asked Robert Gibbs about quite a bit today, and that's my decision to argue against the release of additional detainee photos. Understand, these photos are associated with closed investigations of the alleged abuse of detainees in our ongoing war effort.

And I want to emphasize that these photos that were requested in this case are not particularly sensational, especially when compared to the painful images that we remember from Abu Ghraib, but they do represent conduct that did not conform with the Army Manual. That's precisely why they were investigated—and, I might add, investigated long before I took office—and, where appropriate, sanctions have been applied.

In other words, this is not a situation in which the Pentagon has concealed or sought to justify inappropriate action. Rather, it has gone through the appropriate and regular processes. And the individuals who were involved have been identified, and appropriate actions have been taken.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It's therefore my belief that the publication of these photos would not add any additional benefit to our understanding of what was carried out in the past by a small number of individuals. In fact, the most direct consequence of releasing them, I believe, would be to further inflame anti-American opinion and to put our troops in greater danger.

Moreover, I fear the publication of these photos may only have a chilling effect on future investigations of detainee abuse. And obviously the thing that is most important in my mind is making sure that we are abiding by the Army Manual and that we are swiftly investigating any instances in which individuals have not acted appropriately, and that they are appropriately sanctioned. That's my aim and I do not believe that the release of these photos at this time would further that goal.

Now, let me be clear: I am concerned about how the release of these photos would be—would impact on the safety of our troops. I have made it very clear to all who are within the chain of command, however, of the United States Armed Forces that the abuse of detainees in our custody is prohibited and will not be tolerated. I have repeated that since I've been in office, Secretary Gates understands that, Admiral Mullen understands that, and that has been communicated across the chain of command.

Any abuse of detainees is unacceptable. It is against our values. It endangers our security. It will not be tolerated.

All right. Thank you very much, everybody.

White House Statement, May 16, 2009[15]

On Elections in India

President Obama congratulates India on its historic national elections. By successfully completing the largest exercise of popular voting in the world, the elections have strengthened India's vibrant democracy and upheld the values of freedom and pluralism that make India an example for us all.

While the world awaits the formation of a new government in India based on the elections result, the United States recognizes the significance of the election for the people of India, who remain the strength and foundation for India's prosperity and democracy.

President Obama looks forward to continuing to work with the Indian government to enhance the warm partnership between our two countries.

Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton, May 19, 2009[16]

Secretary Hillary Clinton delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Mr. Gibbs. A renewed guest appearance. Thank you all for coming. As we talked last week here, you all know the national security priority that Pakistan is for this administration. President Obama asked all those in the administration to respond quickly to the conditions that we're seeing now in the Swat Valley and in Pakistan. And I will turn it over to the Secretary of State for an announcement on that.

Secretary Clinton. Thank you very much, Robert. And I appreciate the opportunity to provide some information about what our government and the people of the U.S. are doing with respect to the humanitarian crisis that is affecting Pakistan.

The last time I was in this room, on May 6th, I spoke about the United States' commitment to stand by Pakistan's people and the democratically elected government as they work to restore security in their country. And President Obama is determined to match our words with our actions, because Pakistan's government is leading the fight against extremists that threaten the future of their country and our collective security.

At the same time, though, Pakistan is facing a major humanitarian crisis. Approximately 2 million people have fled their homes, and Pakistan's government, their military, and relief organizations are working to meet the needs of these displaced persons. So many are finding refuge with family members, or in schools or mosques; they are relying on the generosity of relatives and friends. And I'm confident that Pakistan's institutions and citizens will succeed in confronting this humanitarian challenge if the international community steps up and provides the support that is needed.

So today I am announcing that the people of the United States are responding to a request for assistance from the government of Pakistan with more than $100 million in humanitarian support. Now, this money comes on top of almost $60 million that the United States has provided since last August to help Pakistanis who have been affected by the conflicts, and in addition to the other funding for Pakistan that we are already seeking from the Congress.

Providing this assistance is not only the right thing to do, but we believe it is essential to global security and the security of the United States, and we are prepared to do more as the situation demands.

The United States has a history of working with the Pakistani authorities to alleviate suffering. When an earthquake struck the country in 2005, we moved quickly to assist. Altogether, the United States has provided more than $3.4 billion since 2002 to alleviate suffering and promote economic growth, education, health and good governance in Pakistan.

A U.S. Disaster Assistance Response Team—a so-called DART team—and embassy personnel from our embassy in Islamabad are on the ground working with and supporting Pakistani authorities in evaluating needs for shelter, food, health, water and sanitation services. And supplies from the U.S. are already flowing to Pakistan. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has delivered 30,000 family relief kits, 5,000 tents, FM radios, and generators to provide both light and water.

At the request of the government of Pakistan's special support group, the U.S. military is providing water trucks, halal MREs, and large tents within environment units for hot weather.

At the same time, one of our guiding principles of this assistance package is that it should be more than just the delivery of supplies. It should also be an investment in the people and the economy of Pakistan. So a significant portion of our pledged food aid will go to buy Pakistani grain in local markets, taking advantage of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the country's bumper crop of wheat. And we will work to create quick-impact job programs that will put Pakistanis to work, making supplies that will help their countrymen who have been forced to flee the fighting. Our approach to the aid reflects our conviction that all Pakistanis have a stake in resolving this crisis.

In addition to supporting the work of Pakistan's democratically elected government, we are coordinating closely with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. And we appreciate the work that U.N. agencies, the ICRC, and nongovernmental organizations are already doing.

The United States is also deploying new tools to meet these challenges. We are working to support the Pakistani government in launching a text-messaging system that will alert local communities to assistance efforts and will help family members keep in touch.

We have been hard at work in this area for a number of weeks, looking for ways that we can get communications directly to people on the ground. And we know that a lot of the Pakistanis who are being displaced by the conflict have cell phones. So we're going to try to reach directly to them, not only to give them information that will be of assistance to them, but also to provide a way of connecting them up with other people, with the military, with the governing authorities.

Now, Americans can use technology to help, as well. Using your cell phones, Americans can text the word "swat"—to the number 20222 and make a $5 contribution that will help the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees provide tents, clothing, food, and medicine to hundreds of thousands of affected people. And before I came over here, we did that in the State Department. So we are making some of the first donations to this fund.

President Obama and I hope that individuals who have fled the conflict will be able to return home quickly, safely, and on a voluntary basis. Some have already gone back to their communities. And as they do, the United States stands ready to help Pakistan's government support displaced persons as they rebuild their lives.

But as long as this crisis persists, our assistance will continue. We face a common threat, a common challenge, and now a common task. And we know that the work ahead is difficult, but we have seen an enormous amount of support and determination out of the Pakistani government, military, and people in the last weeks to tackle the extremist challenge. And we're confident that with respect to the humanitarian challenge the people of Pakistan and their government, as well as the international community, can come together and forge not only the assistance that is needed, but stronger bonds for the years ahead.

So I'd be happy to answer any of your questions.

Q. Madam Secretary, how much of this money goes directly to U.S.-run programs that are there where it's sort of the U.S. is in charge of how the money gets disseminated, and how much of it goes to the Pakistani government? And then can you also talk about President Clinton's role with Haiti?

Secretary Clinton. Well, with respect to the money, the money is going primarily to international assistance efforts that the United States is deeply involved in supporting and helping to coordinate. The top United Nations disaster experts are either on the ground or shortly will be on the ground. We also have a very good working relationship with the Pakistani military coming out of our earthquake experience with them. And we believe that the person who's been put in charge, who was in charge of the earthquake relief, is especially well suited for that.

So we're going to be providing a lot of in-kind contributions and we're going to be providing financial support to multilateral organizations and NGOs. And as I said, we're going to try to be creative in buying locally produced goods and labor, so that the people of Pakistan have a stake in solving this humanitarian crisis. So it's a multitude of approaches, Chuck, and we think that's the smartest way to go.

Q. But not much of it actually goes directly to the government?

Secretary Clinton. No.

Q. It's just mostly—okay.

Secretary Clinton. Yes, yes, that's right.

Well, with respect to Haiti, we're very pleased that the United Nations is taking such an affirmative role in trying to assist the people of Haiti. They have not yet recovered from the four hurricanes of last year. This is a high priority not only for the U.N., but also for the Obama administration. And we think that Ban Ki-moon has chosen a high-profile envoy to raise the visibility of the needs of the people of Haiti. And it's the kind of partnership that we're looking for across the board.

We had already begun putting a team together, led by my Chief of Staff and Counselor, Cheryl Mills, to harness the support of the United States government to assist Haiti. And this is going to be an added bit of leverage and focus for us that we can all work on together.

Q. Thank you, Madam Secretary. How much money do you expect to raise through these $5 increments from text messages? And can you really improve the situation in the Swat Valley at $5 increments? And secondly, what does the United States expect in return for this $100 million?

Secretary Clinton. Well, I think we can do a lot to improve the conditions of the displaced people coming out of the conflict areas. I'm hoping that we'll have a big response to the text messaging. Just think if a million people in the United States gave at least $5, that's $5 million. And that would be a significant contribution from ordinary citizens, just people who care about what's happening.

We're enlisting the Pakistani American communities. One of the results of our trilateral meetings has been a commitment to help assist Pakistani Americans to establish a 501(c)3 that will solicit contributions from the Diaspora, and then be able to provide that money for this kind of assistance.

So I think it's important on the financial front, but equally important is enlisting people-to-people diplomacy and assistance, which is something that we believe very strongly in. We don't want this just to be government to government. We want Americans weighing in to try to help, and we think this does that.

What we're looking for is what we're seeing, the kind of commitment from the Pakistani government and the military to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

go after the extremists who threaten the safety and security of Pakistanis and of the nation. And I've been encouraged by the very strong positions that have been taken across the political spectrum in support of the military actions. And that's why it's important that we step up now and help on the humanitarian front.

Q. What assurance do you have that our assistance will not go to expand their nuclear power and arsenal? And what brought it center stage? We've been helping Pakistan for years and years and years, poured a lot of money into it. Why now—I mean, I don't say why now—I know the challenge of extremists. But what is it that that has been broken down?

Secretary Clinton. Well, first I have to say how honored I was to share the podium and the stage with Helen Thomas last week at the NYU graduation ceremonies—where we were both given honorary degrees, and in Yankee Stadium, which was a pretty exciting experience.

You know, Helen, I think that it is fair to say that our policy toward Pakistan over the last 30 years has been incoherent. I don't know any other word to use. We came in in the '80s and helped to build up the Mujahideen to take on the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis were our partners in that. Their security service and their military were encouraged and funded by the United States to create the Mujahideen in order to go after the Soviet invasion and occupation.

The Soviet Union fell in 1989, and we basically said, thank you very much; we had all kinds of problems in terms of sanctions being imposed on the Pakistanis. Their democracy was not secure and was constantly at risk of and often being overtaken by the military, which stepped in when it appeared that democracy could not work.

And so I think that when we ask that question it is fair to apportion responsibility to the Pakistanis, but it's also fair to ask ourselves what have we done and how have we done it over all of these years, and what role do we play in the situation that the Pakistanis currently confront.

I believe that what President Obama is doing with our new approach toward Pakistan is qualitatively different than anything that has been tried before. It basically says we support the democratically elected government, but we have to have a relationship where we are very clear and transparent with one another; where we have the kind of honest exchanges that have come out of our trilateral meetings, where we're sitting across the table and we're saying, what do you intend to do about what we view as an extremist threat to your country, which by the way, also threatens us.

And so in the last week I think we've seen an answer, which is very encouraging. And, therefore, it is our responsibility to support the democratically elected government, to be a source of advice and counsel where requested, but also to step in with aid that can try to make this government as successful as possible in delivering results for the people of Pakistan. That's what we are engaged in.

Now, we're doing this because we believe that the future of Pakistan is extremely important to the security of the United States. If we did not believe that I wouldn't be standing here, the President would not be directing us.

Q. Why do you believe that?

Secretary Clinton. Well, because we think that the advance of extremism is a threat to our security; that al Qaeda and their extremist allies are intent upon attacking not only our friends and allies in places like Pakistan and Afghanistan, but our homeland and American citizens and interests around the world. And as the President has said, our goal, coming out of our strategic review of Afghanistan and Pakistan, was to defeat and disrupt and dismantle the al Qaeda network.

We have seen al Qaeda driven out of Afghanistan to find refuge in the mountains of Pakistan. I don't think anyone doubts their continuing efforts to plot against us. They have not given up on their desire to inflict damage, harm and murder on the United States of America. That is how we in this administration view the threat coming from al Qaeda and their allies. We have walked away from Pakistan before, with consequences that have not been in the best interests of our security, and we are determined that we're going to forge a partnership with the people of Pakistan and their democratically elected government against extremism—and that's what we're pursuing.

Q. So what is the U.S. role, actually? Is it just transferring money, or is there also going to be a physical presence on the ground, and in particular, any boots on the ground in Pakistan to deliver this aid?

Secretary Clinton. Chip, we're doing what the Pakistan has requested of us. Obviously our military will be delivering a lot of these supplies, but they'll be handing them off to the Pakistani military and to the relief groups, both international and non-governmental organizations. And we think that's the appropriate way to proceed.

We were very pleased that the government appointed General Nadeem Ahmad to head up these efforts, because he directed civilian relief efforts after the earthquake of 2005. He was extremely capable and produced positive results, and where necessary asked for help not only from the United States but from other international groups. And that's what we're expecting will happen this time.

Q. Do you have any idea what the numbers of military would be involved in this? And is there any danger that they could get caught in the crossfire here?

Secretary Clinton. No, no. We are not engaged in any military action whatsoever, and we are not engaged in the delivery of any civilian relief. We are there to facilitate the Pakistani military and the international and NGO relief agencies to be able to do that.

Q. Thank you. Madam Secretary, are you worried the Pakistanis might abandon the fight against the Taliban without this aid? And is the lack of this kind of aid, in your opinion, the reason that former President Musharraf did not prosecute the war against the Taliban as efficiently as the current government?

Secretary Clinton. You know, Wendell, I can't speculate on why former President Musharraf did what he did while he was in power. I just know that at the end of his time in office, the extremists had found

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

safe havens in Pakistan and were stronger than they had been when he came into office, in terms of their willingness to make alliance with al Qaeda as part of what we view as a terrorist network—a syndicate, if you will.

But what I do believe is that the current democratically elected government and the opposition has recognized the serious threat posed by the Taliban's advance out of their usual territory, moving closer and closer to Islamabad. And I am very encouraged by the comments that the Prime Minister has made, that opposition leaders like former Prime Minister Sharif has made. There is a real national mood change on the part of the Pakistani people that we are watching and obviously encouraged by. And I think it has to do with a recognition that this is no longer about a part of their country that seems quite distant from population centers, like Lahore or Islamabad or Karachi. That this is a potential direct threat to their way of life in Pakistan.

The beating of the young woman that was videotaped had an electric effect on people throughout Pakistan. I've talked to a number of Pakistanis and Pakistani Americans who said, "We were shocked by that." You know, sometimes it just takes a visual image or an act to break through your everyday concerns about the economy and politics as usual, and I think that's happened in Pakistan.

The humanitarian relief is the right thing to do, no matter what the politics. People are in need, they're having to leave their homes and their possessions. We hope that they'll be able to return home quickly if the military not only clears the Taliban from their communities but also holds that ground with a combination of military and policing forces.

But this is a tough battle and I don't think anybody should underestimate how difficult it is for the Pakistani military to wage this battle in very challenging terrain. I don't know how many of you have either flown over or visited that terrain, but this is hard. And that's why what the Pakistanis are doing now deserves our full support. They're doing it. And we're encouraging them to do it because we think it's in their interests, but we also believe it's in the interests of our long-term struggle against extremism and, in particular, the al Qaeda network.

Mr. Gibbs. Thanks, guys.

Secretary Clinton. Thank you all.

Remarks by USAID Director Beyer, May 19, 2009[17]

Director James Beyer delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Director Beyer. Chairman Tierney, Ranking Member Flake, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this timely forum and to describe to you the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) plans to increase our civilian presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, USAID plays an important role in the Administration's new, comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan by providing vital economic, development, and humanitarian assistance to the people in these two countries. Our current effort to add staff in both countries is essential to advance critical development goals that support the new strategy.

Today, I would like to detail USAID's plan for resourcing the influx of civilian talent and experience to critical assignments in each country—from USAID's mission offices in Kabul and Islamabad to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) throughout Afghanistan and our FATA office in Peshawar, Pakistan. I will also describe how we will continue to integrate our work with other agencies, including the military, in order to achieve optimal results through our coordinated efforts.

USAID's Plan for Resourcing an Increased Presence

USAID's staffing plan reflects the resources that will be required to help implement the Administration's new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, which definitively links U.S. policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan together in order to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country."

USAID's additional staff will be stepping into assignments in a dangerous part of the world. We fully recognize the special challenges this situation presents, in terms of attracting and retaining qualified candidates, ensuring a safe and secure environment, and preparing new hires for the rigors of their assignments. Nevertheless, the civilians we are sending to these challenging positions are qualified individuals with extensive experience for their positions.

In Afghanistan, USAID has pledged to provide an additional 150 American staff. Of these, 45 will be located in Kabul, with the remainder deployed to directly support PRTs and expand reach into the district and provincial level. This will bring our total staffing level to the authorized level of 721 personnel in-country, including U.S. citizens and locally employed staff. The President's FY 2009 supplemental request includes $100 million in Operating Expense (OE) funding to resource this staffing surge. We must fill these positions quickly with strong candidates to correspond with the new wave of 17,000 U.S. troops arriving in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, USAID's program has grown from a $200 million dollar a year cash transfer in Fiscal Year 2002 to an over $1 billion dollar request in Fiscal Year 2010. To meet the demands of such a large program, USAID's approved U.S. and Foreign Service National staffing ceiling in Pakistan increased twice in the past year: once in July 2008 from 114 to 162 and again in January 2009, from 162 to the new level of 243. The President's FY 2009 supplemental request includes the support costs of these additional staff. Parallel to recruiting for these positions, we are pursuing the construction of additional office buildings to address space constraints.

We are well on our way to fulfilling our civilian staffing goals in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additionally, I would also like to note that we are working to increase the numbers of locally employed staff. Serving at great personal risk to themselves and their families, these individuals provide critical support to our ongoing activities and serve as the institutional memory of USAID's Missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

USAID's overall staffing plans for

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Afghanistan and Pakistan are supported with a combination of Economic Support Funds (ESF) and OE funds enacted in the Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus and requested in the President's the FY 2009 Supplemental.

Attracting and Recruiting Skilled Personnel

Mr. Chairman, we take the need for additional USAID staff in Afghanistan and Pakistan extremely seriously. This is why our plan for increasing civilian staff levels includes a variety of provisions to encourage service in these countries. We have announced to our entire Agency headquarters staff as well as all USAID missions worldwide that we are prepared to break or curtail assignments to allow current USAID foreign and civil service staff to serve in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

We have also put forward a wide array of incentives in our 2010 budget that we believe will help us attract the best candidates to these difficult assignments. These incentives include "priority consideration" for onward assignments, danger and hardship pay, leave for R&R (rest and recuperation), and a regional rest break. USAID also supports our employees in these difficult assignments by providing a hotline for assistance with problems ranging from mental health to financial troubles. In Afghanistan USAID employs an ombudsperson who can assist staff with issues regarding their service.

For positions that cannot be filled internally, we are taking a proactive approach to advertising open positions in order to attract and hire personnel with appropriate skill sets and experience. We have placed open and continuous job announcements on the FedBizOpps and USAJOBS websites for Personal Services Contractors and Foreign Service Limited employees. We recruit former Peace Corps Volunteers and former military—especially civil affairs specialists—through their formal and informal publications and associations. Finally, we are reaching out to our Foreign Service and Civil Service retirees through alumni networks. The FY 2010 budget includes annuity waiver authority to help with the recruitment of our retirees to fill positions in these critical countries.

Thus far, in Afghanistan, we have been successful at identifying many American staff who have relevant experience and are familiar with Afghan culture and language. Fully 85 percent of our current PRT staff have had prior professional experience in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the Muslim world. Ten percent of our field program officers are proficient in an Afghan language.

Over the long term, USAID is aggressively increasing the capacity of its Foreign Service Officer corps (FSOs) through the Development Leadership Initiative (DLI). The FY 2009 enacted Omnibus included 300 new FSOs under this initiative and the President's FY 2010 request includes an additional 350 Foreign Service positions through the DLI. A limited number of these new officers are already sufficiently experienced with USAID to take on the challenges of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and several have done so already; the remainder, by taking positions in other countries, will free up other, more seasoned officers to serve in these priority countries. In addition, new staff hired under the DLI will acquire the necessary training and experience over the next several years to assume these more challenging assignments in the future.

Concurrent with USAID's internal staffing increase, the Agency has a great force multiplier in the thousands of U.S. and other expatriate and local employees of our implementing partners and grantees in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These men and women, at great personal risk, provide a great service to USAID and to the multitude of ministries and non-governmental organizations with which they work.

Retention of Qualified Staff

Our plan for increasing USAID's presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan acknowledges that retaining qualified staff in difficult, stressful, and dangerous work environments can be a challenge. Over the years in Afghanistan, however, we have had limited success in recruiting tandem couples and in identifying Eligible Family Member (EFM) positions at post. We have also implemented provisions allowing USAID employees transferring to Afghanistan from an overseas post to keep their families at that post, minimizing disruptive moves. Thus far, this latter measure has contributed to a high rate of extension: nearly 75 percent of employees in Afghan PRTs elect to extend their assignments at least an additional six months. In addition, the FY 2010 budget includes language allowing the Agency to provide incentive pay for retention of staff in these countries.

Also under discussion is the development of support hubs in nearby countries, where certain staff may be able to be based. Ultimately, families of staff working in Afghanistan and Pakistan may be encouraged to reside in one of these hubs, which would be just a short flight away from post, and would create additional incentives for officers to serve two year tours. This model was followed during the Vietnam War.

Pre-Deployment Training for New Employees

As we carry out our plan to expand our USAID workforce in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is important for new staff, especially staff newly hired to the USG, to receive common pre-deployment training. All USAID employees assigned to Afghanistan and Pakistan are required to attend the State Department's Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) course. From this training, employees are better positioned to anticipate and address security threats. New hires also participate in a one-week Afghanistan Familiarization Orientation Course. Finally, USAID direct hire employees must also complete the Serving Abroad for Families and Employees (S.A.F.E.) course, which includes relevant elements of two Department of State courses, the "Security Overseas Seminar (SOS)" and "Working in a U.S. Embassy."

A key lesson we learned from our experience in Iraq was the importance of joint training and orientation programs for PRT staff in order to provide the best possible preparation for new PRT employees so they can be effective members of their PRT teams from the first day of deployment. Consequently, if USAID staff assignments for Afghan PRTs coincide with certain military unit deployments, these staff have participated in the military's three-week predeployment training, which is offered at Camp Atterbury in Edinburgh, Indiana. In addition, upon arrival in Afghanistan, our PRT staff and some Kabul-based staff from our technical support offices, are placed in the "COIN Academy," a one-week joint training program involving the U.S., Coalition, and Afghan militaries, NGOs, and others that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

emphasizes best practices in counterinsurgency. Finally, USAID staff assigned to PRTs also participate in Afghanistan PRT Orientation, a newly designed course delivered at the Foreign Service Institute, which focuses on sub-national governance in Afghanistan.

Interagency Coordination

The successful execution of USAID's plan to increase its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan will require seamless coordination with not only the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, but also our military colleagues to find security and mobility solutions that allow civilian and military personnel to carry out their missions. On that note, I would like to thank our Defense Department colleagues for the military's expert assistance thus far, and for their active support for increased civilian deployments throughout the country.

Areas for greater coordination with the military include: (1) integration of military and civilian missions where appropriate; (2) some re-prioritization of current activities; and (3) the allocation of additional security/mobility assets. USAID is working closely with our military and State Department colleagues to determine additional staff protection requirements and availability, and what will be necessary to allow civilians to effectively do their jobs, especially in highly kinetic environments such as Regional Commands South and East.

We support and are active participants in the civilian-military planning process facilitated by the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, with the help of S/CRS, through the Integrated Civilian-Military Action Group (ICMAG), which is integrating civil and military campaign plans for the country in order to facilitate the creation of a national plan that is focused on counter-insurgency.

Finally, I would like to point out that the increase in civilian staffing in Afghanistan is happening throughout the USG. Our colleagues with the Departments of State, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Treasury, Justice and others have identified the need for increased civilian presence to support their respective missions in Afghanistan and are currently working to fill those positions. We have good collaboration among such civilian agencies. We are particularly engaged with the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, under Ambassador Holbrooke's leadership. In addition, we look forward to working with our Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, as appropriate.

I hope that this brief description of USAID's plan to increase our civilian staffing in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been helpful. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

White House Statement, May 23, 2009[18]

Today, President Obama called Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India to congratulate him on being sworn-in for a second term as prime minister. He also congratulated India on successfully completing the largest democratic exercise that the world has ever seen, calling it a testament to the strength of India's democracy. The two leaders recalled their warm meeting in London on April 2 and discussed their mutual desire to strengthen U.S.-India relations and work together to address common global challenges, such as the economic downturn, climate change, and counterterrorism. President Obama also invited the Prime Minister to visit Washington.

Remarks by USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Brause, June 16, 2009[19]

Deputy Assistant Administrator Jon Brause delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

On behalf of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), I want to express our appreciation for the opportunity to discuss the agency's recent humanitarian assistance efforts in response to significant population displacement within Pakistan

USAID and Humanitarian Assistance to Internal Displacement in Pakistan

USAID is the lead U.S. Government agency for addressing internal population displacement. With its strong operational presence in the field and decades of experience responding to a broad range of complex emergencies, natural disasters, and post-conflict situations throughout the world, USAID is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's effort to place greater emphasis on protection during the immediate humanitarian response to population displacement, as well as during the longer-term transition toward development and stability.

No single donor or organization-including USAID-possesses sufficient resources to address all of the needs associated with internal displacement in every situation. Since USAID adopted an agency-wide policy for internally displaced persons in October 2004, we have worked with other U.S. Government partners, United Nations organizations, international organizations, bilateral donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to mobilize resources needed for an effective response, including emergency relief, transitional assistance, reintegration and resettlement, and long-term development assistance.

A broad and integrated approach is required to reduce the human costs of population displacement and resume progress toward long-term development. The provision of coherent, comprehensive assistance and a durable solution to internal displacement is a USAID priority.

U.S. Government Response to the Current Situation in Pakistan

In response to significant and evolving humanitarian needs among displaced populations, the U.S. Government has provided to date over $168 million in assistance to conflict-affected populations in Pakistan in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 and to date in FY 2009, including nearly $124 million in USAID assistance.

Renewed conflict beginning late April, between Pakistani Taliban insurgents and Government of Pakistan (GoP) forces in Swat, Lower Dir, and Buner districts, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), has caused significant internal population

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

displacement in Pakistan. According to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of June 11, approximately 1.9 million officially registered individuals had been internally displaced in NWFP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). UNHCR estimates that an additional 300,000 internally displaced individuals are residing outside NWFP and FATA, particularly in Punjab and Sindh provinces. Humanitarian organizations also expect current GoP operations in North and South Waziristan, in FATA, to displace an additional 200,000 individuals.

USAID identifies priority interventions based on humanitarian assessments conducted by field staff, U.N. agencies, and NGO partners. Currently, USAID is working through U.N. and NGO partners to support life-saving assistance, including emergency health interventions, logistical support, emergency food assistance, shelter materials, relief supplies, safe drinking water, and sanitation and hygiene facilities. In addition, USAID-funded interventions include livelihood support and early recovery assistance to reduce the economic impact of displacement in NWFP and FATA. To support GoP relief efforts, manage the increased humanitarian response, and encourage better U.N. agency and international community coordination, USAID has deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Pakistan, supported by a Washington D.C.-based Response Management Team (RMT).

In addition to USAID assistance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM), and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) are providing assistance to Pakistan. To date in FY 2009, USDA has provided 50,000 metric tons of Food for Progress assistance, valued at $16.8 million as of June 16, through the World Food Program for distribution to conflict-affected populations. In FY 2009, State/PRM has provided $24.6 million to UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to support the provision of relief commodities, as well as health, protection, humanitarian coordination, shelter and settlements, and water, sanitation, and hygiene activities. To date in FY 2009, DoD has provided approximately $3.8 million in humanitarian assistance to Pakistan, including halal meals, air-conditioned tents, and generators.

Addressing the Needs of Populations Residing Outside Camps

Internally displaced persons in Pakistan have largely sought shelter with host communities. According to U.N. agencies, relatives, friends, and strangers have opened homes to approximately 80 percent of displaced individuals, straining most families' already limited resources. Humanitarian agencies have established a network of hubs to provide for this population but note challenges in providing assistance to displaced individuals residing in host communities, as these individuals are more widely dispersed and may be more difficult to identify. As the current crisis is in its second month, host families are encountering diminished resources to support displaced person families, resulting in increasing numbers of individuals moving to displaced person camps.

To support families with already scarce resources and populations residing outside of camps, creative and flexible solutions are needed. Sometimes these have included cash stipends or vouchers as the only practicable way to provide needed support. Recognizing this need, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) has provided $45 vouchers per household to approximately 20,000 households in response to immediate humanitarian needs throughout Mardan District. The voucher program enables displaced families to purchase exactly what they need at local markets, putting money back into the local economy and providing much needed assistance to struggling families. The USAID-funded voucher program will benefit more than 90,000 displaced Pakistanis residing in host communities and schools, as well as approximately 5,000 host families now struggling to provide not only for themselves, but also for displaced families.

Addressing Concerns within Camps

United Nations agencies report significant needs among the 235,000 to 245,000 individuals currently residing in internally displaced person camps, although they represent a smaller percentage of the displaced population. According to the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO), many of the camps are overcrowded, with poor sanitation and hygiene conditions, contaminated water supplies, and inadequate provision of healthcare. Further exacerbating the situation, humanitarian agencies have expressed concern regarding increases in water-borne diseases and flooding in the camps during the imminent July monsoon season, which is typically associated with seasonal increases in diarrheal diseases. Humanitarian agencies note particular concerns in displaced person camps, where cramped and unsanitary living conditions have heightened the risk of disease outbreaks and the population has low vaccination coverage and poor nutrition status, according to WHO.

In response to significant humanitarian needs for populations living in internally displaced person camps, USAID implementing partner WHO is working closely with federal, provincial, and district authorities to coordinate and deliver health services and prepare for potential disease outbreaks. WHO and health partners are investigating all water-borne disease cases, collecting samples for analysis, and establishing diarrhea treatment centers in camps. On June 11, WHO and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) started a measles vaccination campaign for two new internally displaced person camps in NWFP, targeting an estimated 7,000 children between six and 13 years of age.

In preparation for the upcoming monsoon season, USAID implementing partners are conducting water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions in internally displaced person camps and host communities, including programs designed to prevent and reduce the spread of water-borne diseases. Because the provision of effective health care relies on the provision of adequate safe drinking water, USAID/OFDA implementing partners are supporting emergency rehabilitation of water systems, conducting public health awareness training, distributing hygiene kits in camps, schools, and other buildings where displaced populations are living, and working to improve access to essential primary healthcare with an emphasis on maternal child health.

Local and Regional Food Procurement

USAID/OFDA, through an implementing partner, the U.N. World Food Program

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(WFP), is supporting local purchase of food to address the acute food needs of conflict-affected internally displaced persons in Pakistan. The local and regional food procurement (LRP) program has been effective in meeting acute emergency food needs, such as those currently observed in Pakistan. Because the LRP program allows for procurement of food within the country or region where the food is distributed, food requires less time to reach beneficiaries. The Pakistan LRP program will focus on procuring basic food commodities that are staples within the Pakistani diet-wheat and pulses. The LRP program's ability to deliver timely and appropriate food commodities to displaced populations in Pakistan makes it an effective food aid mechanism to meet emergency needs.

Protection

Vulnerable populations-including women, children, and widows, as well as elderly, disabled, and displaced populations-often bear a heavy toll in complex emergencies, having lost family and community support structures and occupying low economic and social positions. In many instances, these groups are overlooked by traditional assistance mechanisms. In insecure environments where women and children make up the majority of the displaced population, clear protection interventions with cultural considerations need to be incorporated in the relief response. USAID recognizes that material assistance alone often cannot ensure the well-being of internally displaced persons. In situations of armed conflict, principles and rules of international humanitarian law guide USAID assistance to internally displaced populations. As a matter of priority, USAID works where possible to ensure that at-risk populations receive basic protection during the immediate humanitarian response to population displacements and the longer-term transition phase. USAID seeks practical protection mechanisms that can be easily integrated into ongoing programs. According to WHO, the displaced population in Pakistan includes an estimated 500,000 children under five years of age and approximately 64,000 pregnant women. UNHCR has developed criteria to identify vulnerable displaced populations and improve referral mechanisms and protection for individuals with special needs. On June 8, UNHCR reported that U.N. Protection Cluster members had provided assistance to more than 3,500 households headed by vulnerable individuals, such as women, children, and disabled persons, to access relief services in camps. UNHCR has also established child protection monitors to identify and arrange care for separated children in camps.

USAID-funded projects support the establishment of adequate protection measures for conflict-affected displaced populations, including programs designed to provide safe spaces for women and children, as well as strengthening the host government's commitment and capacity to protection children against abuse and exploitation.

Looking Ahead

USAID continues to monitor new displacement and ongoing needs throughout Pakistan to minimize gaps in humanitarian assistance and meet the needs of the population. Currently, meeting emergency humanitarian needs remains the priority for USAID, but we are also looking forward to assisting with recovery and reconstruction efforts in the coming months. While USAID stands ready to assist Pakistan in supporting displaced persons as they return home and rebuild their lives, USAID notes that returns should only occur under international standards and once security permits returns to be sustainable. As part of the long-term economic development strategy, the President supports passage of duty-free trade benefits under the Afghanistan and Pakistan Reconstruction Opportunity Zone legislation being considered by Congress.

Thank you.

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton, June 17, 2009[20]

Secretary Hillary Clinton delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Introductory Remarks Omitted

Secretary Clinton. It is early in our new Administration, and we are clearly committed to furthering and deepening our relationship with India in every way possible. I'm also pleased to welcome India's new Minister of Commerce and Industry. Anand Sharma is here with us, and newly arrived Ambassador Meera Shankar.

It is exciting to see the election results in India as well, as the Congress Party and the people of India made such a strong statement about the future that they hope to make together. And I look forward to working with Minister Sharma and the ambassador and others on our common agenda and goals.

I will be visiting India next month, which I'm looking forward to. It is exciting for me to have an opportunity to return again, and it is also a great privilege and honor to be doing so representing the United States.

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The broad range of talents in this room is an indicator of how important the relationship is. Now, when I first had the great delight of visiting India in 1995, I was just overwhelmed by not just the hospitality and the warmth of the people with whom I met, from the very highest to women in villages who were working for better lives for themselves and their families, but how easy it was, even back in '95, for India's many accomplishments to be overlooked in other places in the world. Here was a country defined by democracy, diversity, and dynamic growth, a country that had over 1.1 billion opportunities to enhance not only individual potential, but the nation's. And when I was elected to the Senate, I co-founded and co-chaired the Senate's India Caucus, the first time we had done that. And I have returned to India to talk about this partnership which I think is critical not only to both of our countries, but literally to the future of the world, the kind of world we want to shape together.

And it is great for me to be standing in front of this significant crowd and to say that the word about India has obviously spread. People know what kind of business and investment opportunities are there. India's growing role in the global economy is accepted the way we accept the law of gravity. And the partnerships that are blooming at all levels of our societies are indeed exciting.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Now, I tell you this because I want you to place me and where I stand as Secretary of State. It is in a position of deep commitment to building stronger ties with India, a commitment based on mutual respect and mutual interests. And I know that President Obama feels the same way. We see India as one of a few key partners worldwide who will help us shape the 21st century. The forces of positive change versus those of destruction, the forces that move people forward rather than holding them back. We are both eager to build on this relationship, and of course, we're not alone. We build on the past.

It is now three successive United States administrations from different parties that have identified the U.S.-India relationship as a foreign policy priority. For the United States, this is a project that transcends partnership and personalities, and I believe the same is true in India. When the U.S.-India nuclear deal passed the United States Congress, it had strong bipartisan support, including backing from two former senators named Barack Obama and Joe Biden, as well as a senator from New York.

But the agreement also received support from across the political spectrum in India. The formation of India's new government is an opportunity to strengthen our ties and launch new initiatives. Now that the government is in place, we are moving quickly to strengthen our ties. Our senior career diplomat, Under Secretary of State Bill Burns, and his newly minted Assistant Secretary of State Bob Blake have returned from India this weekend to tell me of the enormous potential for progress in our relationship with New Delhi.

In a world where, let's admit it, frankly, the headlines can get depressing, our relationship with India is a good news story. And I think it's going to get even better. But it's important to place this in history and to remember that the United States and India haven't always had such a promising partnership. We need to acknowledge the road we have traveled together. We have already come through two distinct eras in U.S.-India relations on our way to this new beginning.

The first era opened with India's founding and lasted through the end of the Cold War. It was colored by uncertainty about each other's motives and ambivalence about whether to pursue closer cooperation. The relationship between our countries was never hostile. But the missed opportunities for closer partnership during this period were casualties of old conflicts between East and West, and North and South.

After the Cold War ended, President Clinton opened a new chapter of engagement with India. I love saying that, and it has the benefit of being true. Talks between former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and his Indian counterpart helped to establish a new foundation for our relationship. And of course, my husband and daughter had an extraordinary visit toward the end of his term in office.

This second stage in our history continued through the last U.S. and Indian administrations and culminated in completion of the Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement this past October under the Bush Administration. This landmark accord, which the Obama Administration is fully committed to implementing, provides a framework for economic and technical cooperation between our two countries and allows us to move beyond our concerns about the status of India's nuclear program, an issue that dominated our relationship for much of the last decade.

The nuclear deal, which was completed through the efforts of former President Bush, removed the final barrier to broader cooperation between us. And that brings us to today. We find ourselves at the beginning of a third era. I'll call it U.S.-India 3.0. The new governments in Washington and New Delhi will build this future together, and we will be discussing the details of that partnership when I visit India next month.

But today, I can tell you my hope and President Obama's hope that the next stage in our country's relationship will see a dramatic expansion in our common agenda, and a greater role for India in solving global challenges. We recognize the extraordinary progress that India has made already, and we know that many of these advances have not come easily, and we don't take them for granted. As we pursue an enhanced bilateral partnership, we should recognize that compared to other metrics of our cooperation, our official ties are past due for an upgrade.

You see, a funny thing happened on the way to this third era of U.S.-India relations. Our scientists and business people, our universities and movie studios, and vibrant Indian-American personal familial connections accepted the truth that cooperation between our countries can be a driver of progress long before our policymakers did.

Today our trade between our nations has doubled since 2004 and now exceeds $43 billion; there are over 90,000 Indian students studying in the United States; and the new Fulbright-Nehru program strengthens educational exchanges between India and the United States with both countries acting as full partners in governance and funding.

We find ourselves in an unusual position. We need the bilateral cooperation between our governments to catch up with our people-to-people and economic ties. We need to make sure that the partnership between Washington and New Delhi, our capitals, will be as advanced and fruitful as the linkages that already exist between Manhattan and Mumbai, or Boston and Bangalore.

Now, that's not to say that our governments have not made significant progress in our cooperation over the past several years. Top officials see each other more often, and I think we speak more candidly with each other, which is a true sign of friendship. And we have found more common ground of late. But this is a relationship that has largely grown from the ground up. And I think our governments are ready to start following the examples of partnership established by our citizens, our companies, and our colleges.

I hope that an expanded partnership between the U.S. and India will be one of the signature accomplishments of both new governments in both countries, and I do plan to make that a personal priority. To achieve the goal of stronger ties between our countries, we will have to confront and transcend the mistrust that has hampered our cooperation in the past, and address the lingering uncertainties in our relationship still today.

Each of us have our own perspectives, as you would expect, about the challenges we face as individual countries and as partners in the world. Some Americans fear that greater prosperity and partnership with India will mean lost jobs or falling

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

wages here in the United States. Some Indians believe that closer cooperation with us runs counter to their nation's very strong tradition of independence.

But as friendly democracies, in fact, as the oldest and largest democracies in the world, we should work through any issues in our relationship and differences in our perspective by focusing on shared objectives and concrete results. I want to put us into the solutions business.

In order to achieve that and realize the benefits of this 3.0 relationship, we need to build on several natural platforms. The first is global security. India and the United States share an overriding interest in making the world more secure. The tragic attacks of 26/11 were a global event. They played out in slow motion on television screens across India, the United States, and the world. The violence inflicted on the people of Mumbai, and the loss of six American citizens in those attacks, was a reminder that terrorism represents a common threat to our nations and our people, and we must meet it with a common strategy.

As part of that strategy, we should expand our broader security relationship and increase cooperation on counterterrorism and intelligence sharing. As you know, America faced an extraordinary challenge ourselves after 9/11—how to organize as a government and a people to better prevent and prepare for future attacks. India faces that same terrible challenge. And the President and I are committed to working with India in whatever way is appropriate to enhance India's ability to protect itself.

Our own post-9/11 process had its strengths and its faults. And I think we can learn from India, too, as it develops new mechanisms for cooperation between federal and state security forces.

We should also work to realize a vision articulated by generations of Indians, Americans, and recently by President Obama, of a nuclear-free world. The Civil Nuclear Agreement helped us get over our defining disagreement, and I believe it can and should also serve as the foundation of a productive partnership on nonproliferation.

We have a common interest in creating a stable, peaceful Afghanistan, where India is already providing $1.2 billion in assistance to facilitate reconstruction efforts. The United States is committed to the task ahead in Afghanistan, and I hope India will continue its efforts there as well. And of course, we believe that India and Pakistan actually face a number of common challenges, and we welcome a dialogue between them.

As we have said before, the pace, scope, and character of that dialogue is something that Indian and Pakistani leaders will decide on their own terms and in their own time. But as Pakistan now works to take on the challenge of terrorists in its own country, I am confident that India, as well as the United States, will support those efforts.

As India and other nations play an expanded role in resolving international security challenges, we should be prepared to adapt the architecture of international institutions to reflect their new responsibilities. India's moral stature and its long tradition of leadership among developing countries means that it is particularly well-suited to take on the challenges that multinational institutions face. I have always believed states should be awarded enhanced roles in international bodies not only on the basis of their power, but whether they use that power constructively to advance the common good and address global problems. India already is a major player on the world stage, and we will look to cooperate with New Delhi as it shoulders the responsibilities that accompany its new position of global leadership.

Human development—particularly in the fields of education, women's empowerment, and health—is another platform for cooperation. In both India and the United States, the most important national asset we possess is the energy and creativity of our citizens. In Prime Minister Singh, we have a partner who is determined to leverage India's progress to improve the lives of his people. We need to work together to ensure that every child, girl or boy, born in our countries can live up to their God-given potential.

As part of that commitment, we should build on the goals articulated by India's leadership to boost literacy, expand vocational training, and improve access to higher education. I hope we can partner with India to improve outcomes at all levels of education. Our countries should continue the tradition of intellectual exchange by increasing opportunities for interaction by American institutions of higher learning and their Indian counterparts as well.

India's women have made great strides. The country has a woman president, a woman leader of the nation's largest political party, more women in parliament than ever before. In many areas, the United States can learn from India. But there is more work to be done in both of our countries. We should continue working together to promote initiatives like microlending and provide training programs for rural women as tools to help lift them and their families out of poverty.

We can also work together to address health challenges including nutrition, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious diseases, as well as the growing problem of chronic disease in both of our nations. We need to share knowledge and best practices to improve human development at home and around the world. And I appreciate all that is being done by this group and certainly this Council to promote economic and trade cooperation. We should begin negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty soon. And I'm confident that our Trade Representative and Minister Sharma will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas to help move the Doha Round negotiations to a successful conclusion.

President Obama has been clear that the United States has learned the lessons of the past. We will not use the global financial crisis as an excuse to fall back on protectionism. We hope India will work with us to create a more open, equitable set of opportunities for trade between our nations.

Encouraging greater agricultural cooperation should be a major focus of our economic agenda. India is ripe for a second green revolution. A significant expansion of India's agricultural sector would have dramatic benefits for Indians, but also could help to spur agricultural revolutions in Africa and other parts of the globe where food security remains a persistent problem.

All of you in this room will be critical partners as we work to expand economic cooperation. Our commitment to work with the business community means that in September we will re-launch the CEO Forum on the margins of the United

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nations General Assembly. We hope that effort, along with other initiatives, will channel the power of the private sector and entrepreneurs to build and improve the lives of both Indians and Americans.

Finally, we should bring together the best of our technological and scientific brains to encourage breakthroughs in both science and technology. This is particularly important on issues related to energy and climate. We are committed to working with India to see India's economy continue to prosper, to create more economic opportunity, rising incomes. We want Indians to have a higher standard of living. And we hope our countries can work together to achieve that overriding goal, while avoiding the mistakes that were made by everyone in creating the climate crisis we face today. We think there is great promise in a clean energy cooperation strategy focused on adopting low carbon technologies, improving energy efficiency, forestation, and water management. And these efforts should be supported by new and existing high-level dialogues between representatives of our governments.

We can also learn from Indian doctors and companies that are pioneering low-cost solutions to many of the health challenges we face today. The Serum Institute's groundbreaking work to reduce the cost of vaccine manufacturing is one example of this phenomenon. There are many others. Applying their discoveries to global health initiatives will help us save resources and lives.

Public-private partnerships between governments, industry, civil society will be vital to everyone of these platforms. Yes, we can use all of you to help us drive economic cooperation, but also to improve human development and technological advances as well. And I think that the security cooperation is not just government-to-government, but can operate much more broadly and deeply.

So four platforms of cooperation—global security, human development, economic activity, science and technology—can support us in launching this third phase of the U.S.-India relationship. I think our successes and our futures are intertwined. Obviously, we want India to do well on its own for its own sake, but we also have a stake in that outcome, because we want India to succeed as a model of democratic development. We want India to succeed as an anchor for regional and global security. And we want India to succeed so that the world's two largest democracies can work together as strong partners.

This is a relationship with deep roots. Both of our countries emerged from struggles against colonialism to become proud, independent democracies. And both are living proof that people espousing espoused different faiths, speaking different languages, and travelling different paths can unite and form nations that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Sixty years ago this October, then-Prime Minister Nehru told a joint session of the United States Congress that, quote, "Progress cannot go far or last long unless it has its foundations in moral principles and high ideals." The United States and India share an allegiance to what Nehru called the "fundamental human rights to which all [those] who love liberty, equality and progress aspire."

So let us build on those timeless principles, and let us create a new era in our relationship that will produce so much progress for our people, so much more peace for the world, and live up to those high ideals that both of our nations and our peoples represent and aspire to.

Thank you very much.

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen, June 18, 2009[21]

Secretary Robert Gates and Admiral Michael Mullen delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Secretary Gates. Good afternoon. First, I'd like to extend my sympathies and commiserate with the secretary of state, with her fractured elbow. Having broken my right arm as secretary of defense, and had the left arm operated on, I think I can truthfully say, I feel her pain. But I wish her a speedy recovery.

As you know, last week, I attended the NATO ministerial in Brussels, along with a meeting of allies and partners who are contributing troops to RC South and Afghanistan. In Brussels, I was pleased to introduce General McChrystal, the new ISAF commander, to the NATO defense ministers and to our troop-contributing partners. He is now, obviously, on the job and in the midst of a 60-day review of our operations there. He'll bring unparalleled energy and determination, as well as substantial counterinsurgency experience and expertise, to the international military effort in Afghanistan. I look forward to the results of his review, which should represent a more comprehensive and effective civil-military approach.

One of the key takeaways from Brussels was an agreement in principle to stand up a new ISAF command structure, including a new operational headquarters. On that front, I look forward to the North Atlantic Council's approval of the new command organization next month and to the Senate's confirmation of Lieutenant General David Rodriguez who, with NAC approval, would assume command of the day-to-day military operations of this intermediate headquarters.

Another important takeaway from last week, and one of the highest priorities for General McChrystal, is a commitment from NATO to do everything possible to prevent civilian casualties during ISAF military operations. It is clear that we need to do much more to overcome what I believe is one of our greatest strategic vulnerabilities. The Afghan people must be reassured that U.S. and NATO forces are there as friends, partners and, along with Afghan security forces, they're protectors as well.

With a comprehensive new civil, military and diplomatic strategy, a great new leadership team, I think the United States, our allies and partners, and above all the Afghan people, will be able to achieve the goal of an Afghanistan that does not provide a sanctuary for al Qaeda, rejects the rule of the Taliban and has an elected government that is working to provide for the needs and security of the Afghan people.

And with that, we'd be happy to take your questions.

Ann?

Q. Question for both of you. Why has the report into the May 4th-5th Farah incident in Afghanistan not been

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

released? Do either of you oppose its release? And does the fact that it hasn't yet been released, after word that it would be, sort of play into the idea that the United States has something to hide?

Secretary Gates. No, we—there's—first of all, we do not oppose its release, and I don't think anybody else in the administration does either. And I expect that the report will be released in the next day or two.

What we have here is—this is the first major situation where there were potentially a number of civilian casualties since the new administration came into office and since the development of the new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. And what we've been trying to do is to give our colleagues in the interagency the opportunity to become familiar with this report and—and then go ahead and release it. And as I say, we expect it to—I expect it to be released in the next day or two.

Admiral Mullen. I would only add that I thought this was important enough to review with the Joint Chiefs, which we just recently did at the beginning of this week. In fact, it's—it's a report that I discussed with the combatant commanders who are in town for one of our major conferences, and that it is—as the secretary said, it is a strategic vulnerability that we've got to get right and get the lessons from it both understood and then embedded in our training and in our execution.

And it is also—the whole area of civilian casualties is something that General McChrystal has made very clear he's going to review very—very quickly while he's there. But again, there's—there's support for releasing it, and it will be out here very shortly.

Secretary Gates. This is—I made a point at the NATO meeting last week that I think is important, because dealing with this problem is not just a U.S. military challenge.

Somewhere between 40 and 45 percent of the close air support missions that are flown are flown in support of our allies and partners. And so it also is going to involve a much greater degree of integration of military operations by General McChrystal and presumably, soon, General Rodriguez, to avoid getting into situations that—where—as much as we possibly can—involving not only our troops but the troops of the other contributing nations where we have civilian casualties.

Q. What did the investigation find? Did it find that civilians were killed? And were American forces responsible in any way?

Admiral Mullen. I think there certainly is responsibility. I thought Ambassador Eikenberry, weeks ago, said that it would—it is going to be—we may never know how many. And certainly, as I've looked at the investigation, there are some estimates, but I agree with what he said: I don't think we ever will really know how many. There were command-and-control challenges, chain-of-command challenges, some training issues that we've got to address, as well as—you may remember there were changes that General McKiernan made in January as a result of incidents last year.

And we've evolved through those changes, and there are additional changes that I think that we're going to clearly have to make to ensure that we do absolutely everything to make sure civilian casualties are eliminated, if possible, or certainly minimized in every situation.

Q. "Command-and-control challenges"—does that mean mistakes were made?

Admiral Mullen. One of the things that we've been challenged with in Afghanistan for a considerable period of time is the whole chain-of-command issue. And there were some—there were—and those—we've made adjustments in that regard by changes that have been made in the chain of command, as—last year with U.S. 4A and ISAF—the combination at the commanders level.

But there are others that down through the chain of command that we're—that we think we need to address as well. And I know that General McChrystal, who had seen this investigation as well, is going to address those as he takes over.

Secretary Gates. I think one of the reasons that the allies so readily supported the creation of this intermediate headquarters was the recognition of the need for a tactical day-to-day commander who had purview over all of the regional command areas of Afghanistan to get at this chain-of-command issue. Tony?

Q. A couple airplane questions. You've got two looming here.

What is the status of your decisions on the tanker program in terms of when a re-competition will start?

Two, what's your reaction to the House Armed Services Committee's markup yesterday that put in money to continue the F-22 line? How much—how hard will you fight that? And is that potential veto material if in fact it remains in the final bills?

Secretary Gates. First of all, on the tanker, I have—I'm probably within a few days of making a decision on the structure of how we're going to go about the process and who will be the acquisition authority and so on. And I still am hoping that we can get an RFP out midsummer or thereabouts.

With respect to the House mark, I would say it's a big problem. I have a big problem with it.

Q. Why?

Secretary Gates. Well, because it continues the F-22 program, which is contrary to the recommendations I made to the president and that the president sent to the Congress in his budget. That's why it's a problem.

Q. Is it veto material?

Secretary Gates. I'm not going to go that far at this point. I think describing it as a big problem suggests where I am on it.

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Q. With regards to Farah, Mr. Secretary, is there evidence in the report that the mistakes or the problems that you both mentioned contributed directly to the civilian casualties? And does it rise to the level where there needs to be any accountability or disciplinary action?

Secretary Gates. Let me ask the admi-

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ral.

Admiral Mullen. Again without going into the specific details of this, this was a lengthy firefight, a number of hours, on the order of about seven or eight hours. It was very intense. It was by the—handled very well, by the young captain on the ground, who essentially—who was in charge of it. And at least in my review, I found nothing that would lead to the need to do—to take any specific action, along the lines of what you're asking.

A tough fight. What he was mostly concerned about was defending his people. There were some injuries. There was a MEDEVAC involved in this. And I thought what he did with the capability that he had, certainly was supportive of the overall requirements at the time. It went from day to night. It was a very complex operation, sustained, et cetera.

So—and were there some issues with—along the lines of what I talked about that we've got to adjust? Absolutely, and we'll do that.

Secretary Gates. I think it is worth making the point that there should be doubt in no one's mind that we will do what is necessary to protect our troops. The question is, how do we carry out our operations in a way to minimize the need for the use of close air support? And I think those are the kinds of things that General McChrystal is going to be looking at.

Admiral Mullen. And there have been suggestions that close air support would be somehow in jeopardy in terms of using that capability. And I just don't see that. It's got to be used very carefully, so it meets the standard that the secretary just described.

Q. Are you satisfied, sir, that the air forces that were involved were sufficiently sure of their targets and that civilians would not be injured when they released their ordnance?

Admiral Mullen. Yes, I am.

Secretary Gates. Barbara.

Q. Mr. Secretary, I'm sure both of you have watched this week the use of social networking unfold on the streets of Iran, and I want to ask you about that, not from the standpoint of the politics going on in Iran, but social networking as a tool. Given your—some of your previous government jobs in the information business, what do you think about all of this? I mean, certainly—it certainly must strike you that social networking, regardless of the mechanism, impacts decision-making speed, national security. A lot of people say that it's something to be considered these days.

Secretary Gates. I think one of the more—maybe more significant developments in the last 20 years or so has been the advance of communications technology in the hands of average citizens around the world. There is no question but that the easy availability or the easy access to Western communications and media played a part in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the liberation of Eastern Europe.

It is increasingly difficult for an authoritarian government to maintain control of all the means of communication that are available to its citizens, and especially when—I mean, you either have economic stagnation and backwardness, or you allow modern communications.

And it makes the control of communications, by a government, extremely difficult.

And frankly I think it's—you know, it's a huge win for freedom, around the world, because this monopoly of information is no longer in the hands of the government.

Q. So when you look at a country like Iran and the government there right now, which is clearly trying to control modern communications, what is it—will they succeed, do you think? And how do you think about this, in terms of U.S. national security? Is it something that we need to take into account, in this country?

Secretary Gates. Well, I think, frankly the freedom of communication and the nature of it is a huge strategic asset for the United States. And without being specific about Iran, there are clearly a number of governments, around the world, that try to control these communications—that try to control the Internet and so on.

And I would just say, I think, their efforts, while successful in some respects, they just can't draw the net tight enough to stop everything. And you know, if you can't text, then you Twitter. And you know, my guess is, in some of these countries, that the leadership is kind of like me. They don't have a clue what it's about.

Q. Well, I want to ask you both that because, I mean, I mean this with all respect. Do you both—do either of you have a Facebook page? Do either of you actually Twitter yourselves? Or does your staff Twitter for you?

Secretary Gates. Absolutely not.

Admiral Mullen. Well, actually I do.

Secretary Gates. He's more technologically advanced.

Admiral Mullen. But let me—let me just see if I can take a crack at part of what you asked about, which is the speed issue, because I think the speed of communications and information for—in lots of domains, but let me talk about security, creates a flexibility and an adaptability. It meets needs for flexibility and adaptability, which we have to have in our forces, first of all.

Secondly I think our force, whose average age is 20ish, 20-21, you know, they—this is how they live. It's what they've grown up on. And so for leaders—I mean, I'll take myself in particular—I think, it's really important to be connected to that and understand it, certainly not be as facile as they are on it, but to understand because I think communicating that way and moving information around that way, whether it's administrative information or information in warfare, is absolutely critical.

Secretary Gates. I would just add—I would just add one point. What Admiral Mullen just said, I think, is absolutely critical.

So what I have been saying in terms of our hiring a new assistant secretary for public affairs in the Department of Defense—and when I have talked to people and when I interviewed Price Floyd,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the key issue that I have been after is, we have 2 million people, most of them around the—in uniform, most of them around the age that Admiral Mullen described. And how do we communicate better with them? How do we—how do we get reactions from them to things that we're doing? How do we get better plugged in with what they're thinking?

Also, in terms of our strategic communications, that's the age, or—if not younger, of many of the people around the world we are trying to reach. And how do we reach them in a way that they understand? And this department, I think, is way behind the power curve in this, and it's an area where I think we have a lot of room for improvement.

Q. Well, what do you think as to how the people of Iran are doing it—

Q. Have you—has either you or Admiral Mullen or anyone else in this building been stepping up your communication with the Chinese, the South Koreans, the Japanese about interdicting North Korean ships? And if so, are you sensing more of a willingness, particularly on the part of the Chinese, to monitor and, if necessary, to interdict North Korean ships?

Secretary Gates. I'll just say that when I was in Singapore I had bilateral meetings with both my South Korean and Japanese counterparts, and then we had the first-ever trilateral meeting of the defense ministers of the three countries. And our focus was on how do we improve our defensive capabilities together in response to what's going on in North Korea. I'm not aware of—I certainly have not had any communications with the Chinese in terms of the North Koreans.

Admiral Mullen. No, I haven't, although I know Admiral Keating has, as a combatant commander in the Pacific—has engaged both Japanese and Korean—my counterparts in Japan and Korea. And I'm not aware of any contact with the Chinese.

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Q. Mr. Secretary, the department is engaged in the Quadrennial Defense Review, department-wide review of strategy, weapons systems. And I take it from your public comments in recent months that the framework is that the U.S. should be focusing, at least right now, on the current conflicts it's engaged in, conflicts of the irregular type that could last into the foreseeable future.

There are officers in the military who at least privately express some reservations that large numbers of conventional forces for an open-ended commitment in a place like Afghanistan or—perhaps less so—Iraq is the way the United States should be looking at the world in terms of its defenses.

If you do this review, will that construct itself be under review? In other words, will you analyze whether or not this type of operation is what the U.S. should be focusing on for the next decade?

Secretary Gates. Those who believe that is what we are trying to do, and that that's what I believe, do not understand what we are trying to do or what I believe.

The reality is, the vast preponderance of the Defense Department procurement budget will still be for large systems used and sophisticated systems useable against near peers and that will continue to give us a technological edge for the next 20 to 25 years.

What I am trying to do is simply get a place at the table, when resources are passed out, for those who are fighting today's wars, and to institutionalize what we've learned about counterinsurgency, so that we don't forget it like we did after Vietnam.

So this notion that I'm tilting the scale dramatically against conventional capabilities, in order to fight irregular or whatever, asymmetric wars or whatever you want to call it, is just not accurate.

You know, $1 trillion for the Joint Strike Fighter, a fifth generation fighter that has some capabilities the F-22 does not, is not a trivial investment in the future. Neither is—I have hardly read about the fact that we're initiating the replacements for the Ohio-class SSBN with this budget.

So the notion that we are not taking seriously the range of potential future conflicts, I think, frankly is just a misunderstanding of what we're trying to do. It derives from my view that the old way, of looking at irregular warfare as being one kind of conflict and conventional warfare as a discreet kind of warfare, is an outdated concept.

And my belief, that conflict in the future will slide up and down a scale, both in scope or scale and in lethality. And we have to procure the kinds of things that give us—the kinds of equipment and weapons that give us the maximum flexibility, across the widest range of that spectrum of conflict.

And frankly I think that there is broad agreement, on the part of the senior military leadership, that that kind of a construct going forward is what we ought to be looking at. If there is one major aspect of the QDR that I have insisted that we try and get away from, it is this construct that we've had, for such a long time, that we size our forces to be able to fight two major combat operations.

I think that is not a realistic view of the world. We are already in two major conflicts. So what if we have a third one or a fourth one or a fifth one? And how do you—along that spectrum, how do you—where do you characterize a Hezbollah that has more missiles and rockets than most countries or a violent extremist group that may acquire a weapon of mass destruction?

So it's this—it's the versatility of our force and our ability to be able to respond, to a wide range of conflict, that we're trying —that I think is important, in trying to build the programs for this department, for the future. But there is a huge investment in trying to protect our technological edge for the future. And frankly, to be blunt about it, the notion that not buying 60 more F-22s imperils the national security of the United States I find completely nonsense.

But mark me down as undecided.

Q. Yesterday in President Obama's announcement on federal worker benefits for gay employees—in this building there's a whole lot of civilians alongside military personnel. Did you or do you have concerns about any type of a double-standard, and with reports this morning even of possibility of a high-ranking official named Bill White from the Intrepid Foundation possibly being nominated for a high civilian position?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But also, before that announcement yesterday, there seemed to be a bit of back and forth between the White House and Congress over who should be or is taking the lead on "don't ask, don't tell." Without allowing them to speak over your heads, who should be taking the lead, do you think, from this department?

Secretary Gates. This department's position is dictated by the fact there is a law. And the law only applies to people in uniform. So on the civilian side, we will absolutely comply and implement everything the president announced yesterday. But until the law is changed, our ability to change the policy is extremely limited, if not non-existent.

Q. Sir, it's been some weeks since you removed David McKiernan from Afghanistan. There continues to be head-scratching, though, about the way in which it was handled. Recognizing that what's done is done, do you have any regrets at all about the way it was done?

Secretary Gates. I think that—I think I probably could have framed it better when I announced it, and particularly in terms of the desirability of, just as we installed a new commander in Iraq when we initiated a new strategy, the belief that it was important to have a new commander in Afghanistan as we initiated and began to execute a new strategy, and in particular to have one—to have a commander who could be there for a prolonged period of time in the implementation of that strategy, for a year, 18 months or more.

Q. At the beginning?

Secretary Gates. Whatever period of time. And so, in all honesty, in retrospect, I would have done General McKiernan a better service to have described it that way.

Q. Have you reached out to him since?

Secretary Gates. No. Jim?

Q. You had said earlier that in the event where collateral damage and civilians are killed in Afghanistan, that the U.S. should be as up-front as quickly as possible.

Are you at all concerned that by this investigation being dragged out, that America's credibility in Afghanistan is being undermined and—or do you think that in this particular case in Farah, the battle for the hearts and minds of the Afghanistan people is already lost?

Secretary Gates. No, I don't think that battle's lost at all. But I think that, you know, I—what I have said in the past is that where we believe there may have been civilian casualties—what I've said months ago was we should immediately express regret if there were indeed innocent civilian casualties; if necessary and appropriate, make amends; and then investigate; because the truth is, the way we do investigations, which is to say thoroughly, takes time. And that's the problem.

In the past, we have not taken the first two steps until we finished the third step. And so the changes that General McKiernan put in place months ago—put more emphasis on doing the expression of regret and making amends, if necessary, and then carrying out the investigation. So I don't think the length of time of the investigation itself is an issue. I think what we do in the immediate aftermath of one of these tragedies is what's important.

I don't know if you want to add any more?

Admiral Mullen. No, sir.

Q. And you said that there was a training issue? After the priority, Mr. Secretary, that you, and you Admiral, gave to this issue, how could there possibly be a lack of adequate training in regard to avoiding civilian casualties in Afghanistan?

Admiral Mullen. Very, very complex environment for an extended period of time—complex change of platforms involved in the fight, and it exposed some deficiencies from a training standpoint that we have to back all the way up in to our schools here, and then make sure that that's trained to in our rehearsal exercises, et cetera.

And we—you know, as the fighting changes over time, you know, we constantly adapt. And what we've found from this investigation very thoroughly is there were some things—there's an awful lot of things that went well. There are some things from a training perspective that we've got to fix.

Q. Was there excessive force in this case?

Admiral Mullen. I won't go into that. Thank you.

Remarks by President Obama, June 19, 2009[22]

President Barack Obama was interviewed by CBS in Washington, DC

Q. Let's move on to the news of the day. The Ayatollah Khamenei gave his speech today, gave his sermon. He said that the election in Iran was, in fact, legitimate. He said, "The street demonstrations are unacceptable." Do you have a message for those people in the street?

President Obama. I absolutely do. First of all, let's understand that this notion that somehow these hundreds of thousands of people who are pouring into the streets in Iran are somehow responding to the West or the United States, that's an old distraction that I think has been trotted out periodically. And that's just not going to fly.

What you're seeing in Iran are hundreds of thousands of people who believe their voices were not heard and who are peacefully protesting and seeking justice. And the world is watching. And we stand behind those who are seeking justice in a peaceful way. Already we've seen violence out there. I've said this throughout the week, I want to repeat it, that we stand with those who would look to peaceful resolution of conflict and we believe that the voices of people have to be heard, that that's a universal value that the American people stand for and this administration stands for. And I'm very concerned, based on some of the tenor and tone of the statements that have been made, that the gov-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ernment of Iran recognize that the world is watching. And how they approach and deal with people who are—through peaceful means—trying to be heard will I think send a pretty clear signal to the international community about what Iran is and is not.

But the last point I want to make on this—this is not an issue of the United States or the West versus Iran; this is an issue of the Iranian people. The fact that they are on the streets, under pretty severe duress, at great risk to themselves, is a sign that there's something in that society that wants to open up. And, you know, we respect Iran's sovereignty and we respect the fact that ultimately the Iranian people have to make these decisions.

But I hope that the world understands that this is not something that has to do with the outside world; this has to do with what's happening in Iran. And I think ultimately the Iranian people will obtain justice.

Q. People in this country say you haven't said enough, that you haven't been forceful enough in your support for those people on the street—to which you say?

President Obama. To which I say, the last thing that I want to do is to have the United States be a foil for those forces inside Iran who would love nothing better than to make this an argument about the United States. That's what they do. That's what we're already seeing. We shouldn't be playing into that. There should be no distractions from the fact that the Iranian people are seeking to let their voices be heard.

What we can do is bear witness and say to the world that the incredible demonstrations that we've seen is a testimony to I think what Dr. King called the "arc of the moral universal." It's long but it bends towards justice.

Statement by President Obama, June 20, 2009[23]

On Iran

The Iranian government must understand that the world is watching. We mourn each and every innocent life that is lost. We call on the Iranian government to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people. The universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected, and the United States stands with all who seek to exercise those rights.

As I said in Cairo, suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. The Iranian people will ultimately judge the actions of their own government. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect the dignity of its own people and govern through consent, not coercion.

Martin Luther King once said—"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." I believe that. The international community believes that. And right now, we are bearing witness to the Iranian peoples' belief in that truth, and we will continue to bear witness.

Remarks by President Obama, June 23, 2009[24]

President Barack Obama delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Good afternoon, everybody. Today, I want to start by addressing three issues, and then I'll take your questions.

First, I'd like to say a few words about the situation in Iran. The United States and the international community have been appalled and outraged by the threats, the beatings, and imprisonments of the last few days. I strongly condemn these unjust actions, and I join with the American people in mourning each and every innocent life that is lost.

I've made it clear that the United States respects the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is not interfering with Iran's affairs. But we must also bear witness to the courage and the dignity of the Iranian people, and to a remarkable opening within Iranian society. And we deplore the violence against innocent civilians anywhere that it takes place.

The Iranian people are trying to have a debate about their future. Some in Iran—some in the Iranian government, in particular, are trying to avoid that debate by accusing the United States and others in the West of instigating protests over the election. These accusations are patently false. They're an obvious attempt to distract people from what is truly taking place within Iran's borders. This tired strategy of using old tensions to scapegoat other countries won't work anymore in Iran. This is not about the United States or the West; this is about the people of Iran, and the future that they—and only they—will choose.

The Iranian people can speak for themselves. That's precisely what's happened in the last few days. In 2009, no iron fist is strong enough to shut off the world from bearing witness to peaceful protests [sic] of justice. Despite the Iranian government's efforts to expel journalists and isolate itself, powerful images and poignant words have made their way to us through cell phones and computers, and so we've watched what the Iranian people are doing.

This is what we've witnessed. We've seen the timeless dignity of tens of thousands of Iranians marching in silence. We've seen people of all ages risk everything to insist that their votes are counted and that their voices are heard. Above all, we've seen courageous women stand up to the brutality and threats, and we've experienced the searing image of a woman bleeding to death on the streets. While this loss is raw and extraordinarily painful, we also know this: Those who stand up for justice are always on the right side of history.

As I said in Cairo, suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. The Iranian people have a universal right to assembly and free speech. If the Iranian government seeks the respect of the international community, it must respect those rights and heed the will of its own people. It must govern through consent and not coercion. That's what Iran's own people are calling for, and the Iranian people will ultimately judge the actions of their own government.

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Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Your administration has said that the offer to talk to Iran's leaders remains open. Can you say if that's still so, even with

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

all the violence that has been committed by the government against the peaceful protesters? And if it is, is there any red line that your administration won't cross where that offer will be shut off?

President Obama. Well, obviously what's happened in Iran is profound. And we're still waiting to see how it plays itself out. My position coming into this office has been that the United States has core national security interests in making sure that Iran doesn't possess a nuclear weapon and it stops exporting terrorism outside of its borders.

We have provided a path whereby Iran can reach out to the international community, engage, and become a part of international norms. It is up to them to make a decision as to whether they choose that path. What we've been seeing over the last several days, the last couple of weeks, obviously is not encouraging, in terms of the path that this regime may choose to take. And the fact that they are now in the midst of an extraordinary debate taking place in Iran may end up coloring how they respond to the international community as a whole.

We are going to monitor and see how this plays itself out before we make any judgments about how we proceed. But just to reiterate, there is a path available to Iran in which their sovereignty is respected, their traditions, their culture, their faith is respected, but one in which they are part of a larger community that has responsibilities and operates according to norms and international rules that are universal. We don't know how they're going to respond yet, and that's what we're waiting to see.

Q. So should there be consequences for what's happened so far?

President Obama. I think that the international community is, as I said before, bearing witness to what's taking place. And the Iranian government should understand that how they handle the dissent within their own country, generated indigenously, internally, from the Iranian people, will help shape the tone not only for Iran's future but also its relationship to other countries.

Since we're on Iran, I know Nico Pitney is here from Huffington Post.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama. Nico, I know that you, and all across the Internet, we've been seeing a lot of reports coming directly out of Iran. I know that there may actually be questions from people in Iran who are communicating through the Internet. Do you have a question?

Q. Yes, I did, I wanted to use this opportunity to ask you a question directly from an Iranian. We solicited questions last night from people who are still courageous enough to be communicating online, and one of them wanted to ask you this: Under which conditions would you accept the election of Ahmadinejad? And if you do accept it without any significant changes in the conditions there, isn't that a betrayal of what the demonstrators there are working towards?

President Obama. Well, look, we didn't have international observers on the ground. We can't say definitively what exactly happened at polling places throughout the country. What we know is that a sizeable percentage of the Iranian people themselves, spanning Iranian society, consider this election illegitimate. It's not an isolated instance—a little grumbling here or there. There [are] significant questions about the legitimacy of the election.

And so ultimately the most important thing for the Iranian government to consider is legitimacy in the eyes of its own people, not in the eyes of the United States. And that's why I've been very clear: Ultimately, this is up to the Iranian people to decide who their leadership is going to be and the structure of their government.

What we can do is to say unequivocally that there are sets of international norms and principles about violence, about dealing with peaceful dissent, that spans cultures, spans borders. And what we've been seeing over the Internet and what we've been seeing in news reports violates those norms and violates those principles.

I think it is not too late for the Iranian government to recognize that there is a peaceful path that will lead to stability and legitimacy and prosperity for the Iranian people. We hope they take it.

Jeff Mason of Reuters.

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Q. Right here, sir. In your opening remarks, sir, you were—you said about Iran that you were appalled and outraged. What took you so long to say those words?

President Obama. I don't think that's accurate. Track what I've been saying. Right after the election, I said that we had profound concerns about the nature of the election, but that it was not up to us to determine what the outcome was. As soon as violence broke out—in fact, in anticipation of potential violence—we were very clear in saying that violence was unacceptable, that that was not how governments operate with respect to their people.

So we've been entirely consistent, Major, in terms of how we've approached this. My role has been to say the United States is not going to be a foil for the Iranian government to try to blame what's happening on the streets of Tehran on the CIA or on the White House; that this is an issue that is led by and given voice to the frustrations of the Iranian people. And so we've been very consistent the first day, and we're going to continue to be consistent in saying this is not an issue about the United States; this is about an issue of the Iranian people.

What we've also been consistent about is saying that there are some universal principles, including freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, making sure that governments are not using coercion and violence and repression in terms of how they interact with peaceful demonstrators. And we have been speaking out very clearly about that fact.

Q. Are Iranian diplomats still welcome at the embassy on the Fourth of July, sir?

President Obama. Well, I think as you're aware, Major, we don't have formal diplomatic relations with—we don't have formal diplomatic relations with Iran. I think that we have said that if Iran chooses a path that abides by international norms and principles, then we are interest-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ed in healing some of the wounds of 30 years, in terms of U.S.-Iranian relations. But that is a choice that the Iranians are going to have to make.

Q. But the offer still stands?

President Obama. That's a choice the Iranians are going to have to make.

David Jackson.

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Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Following up on Major's question, some republicans on Capitol Hill—John McCain and Lindsey Graham, for example—have said that up to this point, your response on Iran has been timid and weak. Today, it sounded a lot stronger. It sounded like the kind of speech John McCain has been urging you to give, saying that those who stand up for justice are always on the right side of history, referring to an iron fist in Iran—"deplore," "appalled," "outraged." Were you influenced at all by John McCain and Lindsey Graham accusing you of being timid and weak?

President Obama. What do you think? Look, the—I think John McCain has genuine passion about many of these international issues, and I think that all of us share a belief that we want justice to prevail. But only I'm the President of the United States, and I've got responsibilities in making certain that we are continually advancing our national security interests and that we are not used as a tool to be exploited by other countries.

I mean, you guys must have seen the reports. They've got some of the comments that I've made being mistranslated in Iran, suggesting that I'm telling rioters to go out and riot some more. There are reports suggesting that the CIA is behind all this—all of which are patently false. But it gives you a sense of the narrative that the Iranian government would love to play into. So the—members of Congress, they've got their constitutional duties, and I'm sure they will carry them out in the way that they think is appropriate. I'm President of the United States, and I'll carry out my duties as I think are appropriate. All right?

Q. By speaking so strongly today, aren't you giving the leadership in Iran the fodder to make those arguments that it is about the United States?

President Obama. Look, I mean, I think that—we can parse this as much as we want. I think if you look at the statements that I've made, they've been very consistent. I just made a statement on Saturday in which we said we deplore the violence. And so I think that in the hothouse of Washington, there may be all kinds of stuff going back and forth in terms of Republican critics versus the administration. That's not what is relevant to the Iranian people. What's relevant to them right now is, are they going to have their voices heard?

And, frankly, a lot of them aren't paying a lot of attention to what's being said on Capitol Hill, and probably aren't spending a lot of time thinking about what's being said here. They're trying to figure out how can they make sure justice is served in Iran.

Q. So there's no news in your statement today?

President Obama. Chuck Todd.

Q. Mr. President, I want to follow up on Iran. You have avoided twice spelling out consequences. You've hinted that there would be, from the international community, if they continue to violate—you said violate these norms. You seem to hint that there are human rights violations taking place./

President Obama. I'm not hinting. I think that when a young woman gets shot on the street when she gets out of her car, that's a problem.

Q. Then why won't you spell out the consequences that the Iranian—

President Obama. Because I think, Chuck, that we don't know yet how this thing is going to play out. I know everybody here is on a 24-hour news cycle. I'm not.

Q. But shouldn't—I mean, shouldn't the world and Iran—

President Obama. Chuck, I answered—

Q.—but shouldn't the Iranian regime know that there are consequences?

President Obama. I answered the question, Chuck, which is that we don't yet know how this is going to play out.

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Q. We also have people on the ground who have been saying that the streets are quieter now and that is because they feel that they're paralyzed by fear—fear of people gone missing, fear of violence, that perhaps this is a movement that's gone underground or perhaps is dying. Do you have any concern over that?

President Obama. Yes. I have concern about how peaceful demonstrators and people who want their votes counted may be stifled from expressing those concerns. I think, as I said before, there are certain international norms of freedom of speech, freedom of expression—

Q. Then why won't you allow the photos—

President Obama. Hold on a second, Helen. That's a different question. And I think it's important for us to make sure that we let the Iranian people know that we are watching what's happening, that they are not alone in this process. Ultimately, though, what's going to be most important is what happens in Iran. And we've all been struck by the courage of people. And I mentioned this I think in a statement that I made a couple of days ago. Some of you who had been covering my campaigns know this is one of my favorite expressions, was Dr. King's expression that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." We have to believe that ultimately justice will prevail.

All right. Thank you, guys.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Excerpts of Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton, June 29, 2009[25]

Secretary Hillary Clinton delivered these remarks in Washington, DC

Secretary Clinton. Let me also say a word about the detention of five British Embassy staff in Tehran. We are following this situation with great concern. We have noted the statement from the European Union. We find that the harassment of Embassy staff is deplorable, and we will continue to support the United Kingdom in calling for their release.

Finally, on Iraq. Tomorrow, June 30th, marks the end of U.S. troop presence in Iraqi cities and localities. This is a significant milestone in the responsible withdrawal of our forces from Iraq and in Iraq's journey to become a stable, sovereign, self-reliant state.

This morning, I held a secure videoconference with Ambassador Hill and some of his senior team in Baghdad. The ambassador provided updates on the security, political, and economic situation in Iraq, and we discussed a number of the challenges and opportunities that we are facing.

As you remember, this withdrawal is occurring under the so-called SOFA agreement, the Status of Forces Agreement, and it is occurring in concert with the Iraqis. There is another document that we will now be turning our attention to with even greater concern; that is, the Strategic Framework Agreement which sets forth the way forward for the relationship between the United States and Iraq.

So there is a lot going on, and I wanted to come down and talk about some of what we are doing. And I'd be happy to take some of your questions.

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Q. On Iran, the sense we've been getting from your aides that we've been talking to is that the U.S. policy of engagement obviously is somewhat in abeyance right now as we wait to see this fluid situation on the ground in Tehran and throughout the country evolve. But I wonder what you would say to the argument that any prospect for meaningful engagement by the U.S. and the P-5+1, of which the UK is obviously a member, are drastically set back by what we've seen; in fact, that you've gotten your answer to all of your attempts at engaging this regime, that you've seen an authoritarian regime unmask itself, and that, in essence, they're never going to strike any grand bargain with you on the nuclear question or terrorism or anything else.

Secretary Clinton. Well, there certainly is reason for us to be cautious in our dealings with Iran. There is not yet a final outcome of the process that they're engaged in internally to demonstrate to their own people the credibility of the electoral process that has just been completed. So I am well aware of the daunting challenges ahead of us or any group that tries to deal with the Iranian regime.

Having said that, I think the President has made clear in several statements in the last week that we're going to watch this unfold and we're going to act in America's national interest. That's what this has always been about. It's never been about Iran as much as it's been about the values, goals, and the interests of the United States of America. And we remain committed to doing all we can to try to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons power.

So we're going to watch this and we're going to gauge our actions accordingly.

Q. But there's no sense you get in which these events might have somehow enhanced the prospects for engagement, have they?

Secretary Clinton. I'm not going to make a value judgment on what they may or may not have done. I'm just going to reiterate that everything we intend to do is in light of how we view America's long-term interests and security, as well as those of friends and allies, not just in the region but around the world.

Mr. Kelly. Mary Beth Sheridan.

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Q. Madame Secretary, back to Iran. The Guardian Council has just announced that it—just after a limited recount, that they consider the vote valid. Is this enough for the international community? Do you plan on recognizing the government of President Ahmadinejad? I mean, we've seen this crisis over the last few weeks illustrate a real division in the regime. Do you think that this is the beginning of the end of the Iranian regime?

Secretary Clinton. Well, I'm not going to speculate on what happens with their internal regime. Obviously, they have a huge credibility gap with their own people as to the election process. And I don't think that's going to disappear by any finding of a limited review of a relatively small number of ballots.

But clearly, these internal matters are for Iranians themselves to address and we hope that they will be given the opportunity to do so in a peaceful way that respects the right of expression. And it has been my position and that of our Administration that we support the fundamental values of people's voices being heard, their votes being counted. And we'll have to see how this unfolds. You know, it's—this is a historic moment for Iran and for the Iranian people. And I don't want to speculate on how it's going to turn out.

Q. Well, will you recognize President Ahmadinejad as the democratically elected president?

Secretary Clinton. We're going to take this a day at a time. We're going to watch and carefully assess what we see happening.

Thank you all very much.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1052703609000914 Published online by Cambridge University Press