

REMARKS FOR THE RECORD

AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

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Chairman Ackerman, Ranking Member Burton, Distinguished Members of the
Committee:

Thank you for inviting me here today. I appreciate the Committee's sustained interest in the South Asia region and welcome the opportunity to provide an overview of recent developments and our initiatives.

The past several months have seen rapid change in South Asia. Elections in India and approaching elections in Afghanistan; Pakistan's offensive in its northwest and the humanitarian crisis affecting more than two million displaced people; and the cessation of Sri Lanka's long running civil war; are examples of the challenges and opportunities that require the United States to maintain its focus on long term objectives, while being nimble enough to respond to a rapidly changing environment. I'd like to highlight the emerging developments as well as areas where we are pursuing our long terms goals in the region.

Implementing the President's Strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan

As you know, the President has made it a top foreign policy goal to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al-Qaeda and affiliated extremist groups and

eliminate their safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Under the direction of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the broad-based, interagency strategy to achieve this goal is now being implemented. We have engaged the Afghans and Pakistanis as partners in achieving this goal through high-level consultations, including trilateral meetings. We have invigorated dialogue and cooperation with the international community, including with both our ISAF partners and regional countries, around key issues, such as support for the upcoming Afghan elections, urgently needed humanitarian assistance for Pakistan, and coordination and prioritization of assistance for development and reconstruction in line with the principles of our new policy. Efforts are also underway to communicate our message to the Afghan and Pakistani people through new methods such as expanded radio projects, cell phone messaging and other means. The Department is also on track to hire and deploy an increased number of civilian experts for our mission in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has demonstrated a renewed commitment to countering the militant threat. Since May of this year, the Government has made progress in pushing back the extremist encroachment in Swat, Lower Dir, and Buner. The United States and the international community have worked together to respond quickly to the internal refugee crisis in Pakistan resulting from these operations. We have committed over \$300 million in immediate relief efforts and mobilized an international response. Our assistance has brought food, medical care, water, and sanitation to the internally displaced people living in camps and host communities. Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Holbrooke have personally rallied the international community for assistance, most recently in Europe and the Gulf, to help ensure that the UN agencies on the ground are able to respond effectively to the needs of those displaced. We will continue to work with international donors,

UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the Government of Pakistan to provide humanitarian relief to those displaced and to enable their return to their homes as quickly and safely as possible.

U.S. support for long-term political stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan remains strong. We encourage political leaders in both countries in their commitment to the democratic process. We understand that the Government of Pakistan needs the full support of the Pakistani people and key political figures in the opposition to continue the military offensive against the Taliban and affiliated extremist groups in Swat and other parts of northwestern Pakistan. To retain that support, it is critical that the government ensure the protection of civilians, meet the needs of the growing population of displaced persons, and implement a long-term plan for effective civilian governance and economic development in affected areas and throughout the country. Ambassador Patterson and her staff at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Pakistan continue to relay this message, and are in regular communication with the full spectrum of Pakistani political parties, including Nawaz Sharif's "Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz" party.

As the Afghan elections approach, we are encouraging the Afghan people to determine the issues important to them, demand that candidates explain their programs, and vote for their future. We are working with the Afghan government and international community to help ensure an electoral process that is credible, secure and inclusive. These elections are an important milestone on the road towards a government that reflects and accountably responds to Afghan popular will. We have provided \$120 million to support the elections. USAID is also funding separate elections-related projects through a number of local monitoring groups in-country, as well as U.S. NGOs such as the International Republican

Institute, the National Democratic Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

Focus on Long-Term Regional Integration

South and Central Asia is one of the least economically integrated regions in the world. As we implement the President's strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan, we are working to more closely knit these two countries with their surrounding neighbors and region as a whole, and to open up foreign markets to their products. Integration is vital to creating interdependence which will foster peaceful relations, closer cooperation, and to sustaining vibrant economies in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the broader region, and should be accelerated. The establishment of Reconstruction Opportunity Zones, as called for in legislation currently being considered by the Congress, will be an important step in stimulating economic growth in both countries and drawing people away from extremism.

In partnership with other U.S. departments and agencies, my staff has engaged donors, host governments and the private sector, and established working groups to define and implement projects on regional economic integration and cooperation. Key sectors include: power transmission; gas pipelines; road development; railroads; trade facilitation and border crossing coordination; information and communication technology and water usage.

To create and strengthen information, education and people-to-people linkages, the Bureau is also working with universities in the region to develop networks between South and Central Asian faculty, students and researchers in areas such as English language and journalism training. Particular focus should be given to expanding vocational education to serve the needs of disaffected youth

across the region, who are often a ready recruiting ground for extremist groups, as well as professional development programs to supplement formal education, which in many countries is not aligned with market needs.

Expanding the U.S. Strategic Partnership with India

President Obama and Secretary Clinton have both expressed a deep commitment to building stronger ties with India, a commitment based on mutual respect and mutual interests. As Secretary Clinton recently put it, “We see India as one of a few key partners worldwide who will help us shape the 21st century.”

Under Secretary Burns’ recent visit to India paved the way for the Secretary to visit later this summer and underscores our commitment to an expanded partnership with India. The U.S.-India relationship has been on a positive trajectory for over a decade. Secretary Clinton recently noted that both she and President Obama “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.” The implementation of the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative established this new level of trust between our countries and set the stage for the next level of U.S. India cooperation in which we can become global partners while also focusing on India’s still huge development needs.

This spring, the ruling Congress Party won a substantial victory in India's recent elections. They have formed a coalition supportive of a stronger U.S. – India relationship and we look forward to working with Prime Minister Singh's government to make that vision a reality.

We will also continue to support dialogue between Indian and Pakistani leaders. The timing, scope, and content of any such dialogue are strictly matters for Pakistani and Indian leaders to decide. Most recently, Prime Minister Singh and President Zardari met at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit on June 16. This marks the first meeting of the two leaders since the Mumbai terrorist attacks. Such high-level engagement in the aftermath of the attacks is encouraging. India and Pakistan face common challenges, and we will support continuing dialogue to find joint solutions to counter terrorism and to promote regional stability.

Preserving post-conflict gains in Nepal and Sri Lanka

In Nepal we continue to press for progress on implementing the peace agreement signed in 2006, including a new constitution. We believe it is important for the Maoists to remain involved in the political process and avoid a return to armed conflict. We will continue to use our diplomatic resources to press upon all parties the importance of full participation in the democratic process.

In Sri Lanka we continue to press the Sri Lankan government to grant humanitarian relief organizations full and unfettered access to the internally displaced persons residing in camps in the north, and to engage in political reconciliation with Sri Lanka's Tamil minority. Overall access has improved since

the immediate aftermath of the fighting, but more progress is needed. The actions the Sri Lankan government takes now, in the aftermath of the war, with respect to both humanitarian relief and political inclusion for minorities, will be important to securing an end to terrorism and a lasting peace.

Nurturing Democracy in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives

Last December, on the heels of a two-year state of emergency under a caretaker government, Bangladesh held the fairest and most transparent election in its history. In many ways, this moderate Muslim nation of 150 million people deserves our support: the people and government are firmly committed to building an inclusive democracy; the economy has grown by more than 5 percent every year since the early 1990s; and extremism finds little popular support. This promising backdrop makes it important for the United States to engage Bangladesh as it confronts daunting challenges, including chronic political partisanship, widespread poverty, civil-military tensions, porous borders, and corruption. We are working with Bangladesh to strengthen institutions that deter violent extremism, and have encouraged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to engage with the opposition and include them in the decision-making process. There are many pockets of excellence and positive momentum in Bangladesh that we hope to assist, including women's literacy and employment programs.

Bhutan's transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy has gone smoothly. As the country, under the guidance of current King Jigme Khesary Wangchuck and Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, continues to expand interactions with the outside world, new opportunities for U.S. – Bhutan cooperation will emerge.

The Maldives continues to consolidate its democracy after holding historic democratic elections last year that ended former President Gayoom's thirty years in power. Maldivian Vice President Waheed visited Washington last week and met with Secretary Clinton and U.S. government officials to discuss areas of mutual concern and cooperation. Secretary Clinton offered U.S. support for the Maldives' goal to be carbon neutral by 2020.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman for giving me this opportunity to discuss one of the most dynamic and important regions to U.S. foreign policy and security interests. At this time I would be pleased to answer any question that the Committee might have.