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INTERVIEW WITH MARIAM CHAUDHRY OF PAKISTAN TV

Interview

John Kerry

Secretary of State

Islamabad, Pakistan

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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, a pleasure and honor to have you in Pakistan.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you. Glad to be here.

QUESTION: Let me start by asking you: How have your interactions been today in Pakistan. Were they fruitful?

SECRETARY KERRY: Very positive, very constructive conversations. Very grateful for a very generous welcome.

QUESTION: Well, like I said, it's always a pleasure to host somebody like you and Pakistanis see a friendly face in you, and we're hoping that a lot of mutual misunderstandings would be resolved by your presence here.

Mr. Secretary, let's start with the end-game in Afghanistan. I think that's posing the largest questions in South Asia. A lot of people are asking, while the Taliban have been engaged, or an effort has been made to engage them in a conversation, things seem to not work out in a repetitive cycle. Could you first share an update vis-a-vis what's exactly happening and what's the game plan vis-a-vis the U.S. withdrawal in 2014?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, first of all, it's not a withdrawal. We are drawing down the number of troops, but we're not withdrawing. And the President of the United States, at the appropriate time, will make a decision about how many troops he plans to leave in order to continue to do counterterrorism and training, advising, and equipping the Afghan military.

So the Afghan military is now already taken the lead on security operations in Afghanistan. We're already in a support role, and that's the way it should be. The Afghans need to be taking on the responsibility of security for their country. But there's a very strong, serious effort that's been made to try to build up their army, give it the capacity to defend their country.

Our belief is that with the election next year, Afghans will have the ability to choose their future, find new leadership, and hopefully, together with Pakistan and our help and the help of many other countries, Afghanistan can share a democratic future.

QUESTION: What is the progress vis-a-vis the talks with the Taliban? And why is there a general sentiment prevailing that talks with the Taliban always fizzle out and there's been no success even with the recent overtures towards them?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, you'll have to ask the Taliban. We're ready to negotiate.

QUESTION: Surely there must be an assessment from the U.S. side whether there's actually going to be --

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, the assessment is that the Taliban broke their word in Doha. They had accepted a certain set of requirements and they went back on their word. Our plans do not hinge on having the Taliban talks. Is it better to have the talks? Yes, of course. Because it's always better to have a political settlement that people agree on. But we're proceeding whether the talks take place or not to continue to help the Afghans be able to defend themselves against any threat.

QUESTION: Well, Pakistanis are always glad to play the role of the facilitator, but in this scenario Pakistanis are wondering what exactly does the U.S. demand from the Pakistani side? Or what exact deliverables are you hoping that Pakistan will be able to offer up as a facilitator in this situation?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, let me be clear: A friend does not demand of a friend. And we want a good relationship with Pakistan, so we're not demanding. What we're doing is we're talking together about the mutual interests that we have.

Pakistan is facing its own insurgency. Pakistan has Tehrik-e Taliban, it has Haqqani Network, al-Qaida, other threats on the ground, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, there are others. And so Pakistan as an interest in making sure that its own security is strong. We want to work with Pakistan as closely as we can, respecting its interests, respecting the country, and find a way to cooperate to deal with the mutual threats we face. They are threats that come from the western part of the country mostly and people crossing over into Afghanistan and engaging in violent activities. We think we can find a good means of cooperation, and we look forward to working with Pakistan on many other issues.

I want to make it very clear: President Obama does not want the relationship of the United States and Pakistan defined by counterterrorism, by Afghanistan, by al-Qaida, et cetera. We want a relationship with the people of Afghanistan^[1], which is why today I went to an energy plant to talk about how we can help provide more energy. We've already helped provide an additional 1,200 megawatts of power for 16 million Pakistanis. There are many other things we would like people in Pakistan to know that we're doing.

QUESTION: We will definitely ask you a question about that. But just to speak a little bit more on this terrorism issue, Pakistan has been facing a grievous scenario vis-a-vis internal security. There has been a lot of tension between the United States and Pakistan, especially vis-a-vis the subject of drones. People in Pakistan feel that not only has it been causing human casualty in Pakistan, but also it has been kind of a blatant disregard of the territorial sovereignty of Pakistan. Can we expect a cessation in these drone strikes, which are causing and mobilizing a lot of sentiment against the Pakistani Government and the United States?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, President Obama is very, very sensitive and very concerned about any kind of reaction to any kind of counterterrorism activities, whatever they may be. And the President has spoken very directly, very transparently, and very accountably to our – to all of our efforts. We want to work with the Government of Pakistan, not against it.

This is a program in many parts of the world where the President has really narrowed, whatever it might be doing, to live up to the highest standards with respect to any kind of counterterrorism activities. And I believe that we're on a good track. I think the program will end as we have eliminated most of the threat and continue to eliminate it.

QUESTION: And there is no timeline that you envisage for ending this strike?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I do. And I think the President has a very real timeline and we hope it's going to be very, very soon.

QUESTION: And you don't care to share that at the moment?

SECRETARY KERRY: I think it depends really on a number of factors, and we're working with your government with respect to that.

QUESTION: All right. There's been a great public demand in Pakistan, which people feel would improve relations between the United States and Pakistan, and that has been the release of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui. People feel that if some kind of pardon is envisaged or maybe a prisoner swap or something along those lines is thought out of, it would help regain goodwill and a good sentiment in Pakistani people vis-a-vis U.S. Can we hope for such a scenario?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we could hope. You can always hope. Hope springs eternal, right? But I don't know that there's anything specific at this moment that is doable because of the nature of the offenses and the legal process. But I'm going to investigate it when I get back to the United States, but I don't want to make any promises that I can't keep.

QUESTION: But you're going to try?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I'm going to look into what – there were very serious charges. She fired a gun, I mean, shot at American personnel, and is currently under an 87-year sentence in a Texas prison, and I'd have to see what the circumstances are. I'm not – that's not normally my department, so I'll take a look at it.

QUESTION: Secretary, you've been credited with a lot of success in the Middle East, and some people are wondering whether you'd be possibly able to play a role in breaking the ice vis-a-vis the detente that Pakistan and India have over Kashmir. And do you think that you could possibly play a role in the future, given that that has also been a source for jihadist propaganda in this region?

SECRETARY KERRY: Kashmir has been too long a source of conflict, obviously. I know that president – that Prime Minister Sharif was very focused on this when he was prime minister previously. We talked about it today. I would certainly hope that over time that tension could be worked out. I know there have been three wars with India, mostly around Kashmir. It would be wonderful if something were able to be done. But I think we need to sort of approach it carefully and slowly, and I want to talk to a lot of different people before I make any commitments at this point in time.

QUESTION: One last --

PARTICIPANT: Thank you very much. It was really great question. I'm so glad I don't have to answer them.

QUESTION: Okay. Can I just take one last comment, because there was a lot of disturbance in the room?

PARTICIPANT: No, I'm sorry --

SECRETARY KERRY: Make good on that. One last comment, come on.

QUESTION: Okay. Secretary Kerry, basically people are attaching a lot of hopes with your visit vis-a-vis a reset between the relationship of the U.S. and Pakistan in hopes that it could be more comprehensive. Is there a new game plan that you've envisaged vis-a-vis making this a broader based relationship, something that is not purely overshadowed by the conflict in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY KERRY: Absolutely, for certain. And I think today we began that. I think the Prime Minister was very focused on trying to broaden this. I'm focused on it. President Obama is very committed to having this not be a transactional relationship but a strategic, larger relationship. I know he looks forward to visiting with the

Prime Minister in the United States sometime in September or October, and we really look forward to seeing him here.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, best of luck in your endeavors here.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you. Thank you so much.

[1] Should be "the people of Pakistan"

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