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## South and Central Asia Update

By

**Richard A. Boucher**

**Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia**

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I have been at this new job now for about five or six months so I thought it was maybe a good chance to come by and talk to you about the many things that are going on in this region. I was just out in Pakistan and Afghanistan with the Secretary of State and, as you know, one of the first things I did on the job was to accompany the President to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. So we have certainly devoted a lot of high-level attention to this region over the past several months.

I think one of the most interesting things to me is sort of coming in to take the Secretary of State's logic of putting South and Central Asia together and see what we could actually accomplish in concrete terms. And I think you have heard us talk and brief before about the potential of South and Central Asia, the energy potential of Central Asia, the markets of South Asia, Pakistan and India, the sources of supply and goods from the south, the sources of financing and investment from the north. Many opportunities here and I think we all see those theoretical opportunities and the overwhelming opportunity of developing a region of stable democracies between the Middle East and South Asia, between Russia and China, a region that can stand on its own and move forward in the world as a region of, as I said, democratic stability and newfound prosperity.

And so a lot of what we have been doing is trying to make these ideas become a reality and indeed putting the region together in this way makes sense. We want to see Central Asia and the others maintain their ties to Russia and China and Europe and Turkey and everywhere else. We want to see new ties develop. The more options they have, the more choices they have, the more independence they have.

- We have been working on electricity, and indeed funded electricity studies and see develop the prospects of electricity lines from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan down to Pakistan, and the countries of the region themselves are working on this.
- We have been working with the Asian Development Bank, the Kazakhs and others on an all-weather highway from Almaty to Karachi, with other pieces that can go in different places, and the United States is funding the bridge a key component of that, a bridge from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, as well as getting the ring road finished in Afghanistan. So Afghanistan is now a place of transit and a place of contact and not an obstacle to cooperation.
- We have also been working with countries in the region on the issues of trade policy, customs procedures, border security. All these things can make trade flow so that the production of Central Asia, the melons of the Ferghana Valley, can make it to the markets of the south. And making sure that all those trade relationships are in play is another important part of integration.

And then there is cooperation in South Asia itself. Obviously there are difficulties with this. South Asian free trade and South Asian regional cooperation remains very important to us and we will be working with the countries of the region to try to encourage them to cooperate with each other.

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It is an ambitious agenda for the whole region and for many of the individual countries that the United States is promoting here. We have, I think, accomplished a lot with India and it is also coming up tomorrow, the one-year anniversary of Prime Minister Singh's visit to the United States. So it is a good occasion, I think also, to recognize that we are taking the vision that the Prime Minister and the President enunciated, taking many of the concrete programs that the President and the Prime Minister announced during the President's visit to India in March, and turning those into reality, turning those into commissions and funding and studies and legislation and especially moving forward very quickly on the U.S.-India civil nuclear arrangements.

Our Congress has been very supportive. We have seen legislation move now from committees in the House and the Senate. We look forward to seeing votes in the House and the Senate, maybe this month. There are some I think the House will be acting, perhaps in the next week, and we hope the Senate will as well.

The United States and India civil nuclear agreement is on track. The legislation is moving forward quickly and the United States is keeping our commitment of turning the President's and the Prime Minister's vision into reality that the companies can use for cooperation and that we can use to help support Indian economic growth and India's economic future.

The other area that I would like to talk about a little bit is Pakistan and Afghanistan, the war on terror. Our relationship with Pakistan is much broader and we have initiated a whole series of dialogues with Pakistan the Strategic Dialogue, the Economic Dialogue, the Education Dialogue, the Science Dialogue, all these areas where we have real practical cooperation going on with Pakistan, helping Pakistan with its energy needs as well. In addition to that, there's a lot of cooperation with Pakistan in terms of helping the Pakistani Government support its efforts out in the border regions.

You have in both Pakistan and Afghanistan a similar process going on of government extending its control, extending its peaceful and beneficial activities to the edges of the frontier on both sides, and we're supporting the Pakistani Government in doing that and on the Afghan side of the border we're supporting the Afghan Government in doing that. So that with the deployment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops, the deployment of policemen, drug eradicators, but also the building of roads, building of electricity lines, irrigation schemes, government offices, we're helping both Pakistan and Afghanistan extend their authority out to the edges of the country so that these places can't be used by terrorists to fight us, to fight NATO, to fight the Afghan government and to fight the Pakistani government; and in the end, in addition to the actual fighting that has to take place, bringing the benefits of government, the benefits of good government and development, to these regions, because I think what we think in the long term will bring peace and security to the people who live there.

So those are some of the big things we are doing. We can talk about any of the countries and specific issues in this region, but I thought at this moment, five or six months after I started and one year after the Indian meetings with the President, it was a good time to come out and tell you things are going quite well in this region and there is a lot of progress in turning the visions into reality.