

Beat: Politics

THE PARTNERSHIP THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS WITH PAKISTAN CONTINUES TO GROW

PRESS ROUNDTABLE IN ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN

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USPA NEWS - Press Roundtable in Islamabad, Pakistan given by United States Deputy Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on December 9, 2015 about the official growing partnership between the United States and Pakistan...

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First I just want to say thank you all for being here and apologies for being a little late and keeping folks waiting. But this is I think a good opportunity to tell you a little bit about what we've been doing here today and in recent days.

Let me just start by saying it's a great pleasure to be in Islamabad to advance the longstanding important relationship between the United States and Pakistan and to underscore our support for greater regional peace and prosperity through this Heart of Asia process, which was the main purpose of the visit here today.

The partnership that the United States has with Pakistan continues to grow across a range of priorities: from security and economic matters to scientific and educational initiatives, some of which I'll be touching upon throughout this brief but packed visit.

The diversity, the scope, the significance of our relationship I think was evident in the visit of Prime Minister Sharif and also Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif when they were in the United States over the last month or so. Meetings here in Islamabad have tried to build constructively on those visits and we look forward to convening the next round of the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue early next year and further advancing our shared interests in the security and prosperity in Pakistan and indeed in the wider region.

When we look around the region, one of the most critical relationships is that between Kabul and Islamabad. We welcome Pakistan's facilitation of the first meeting between the Afghan government and fully authorized representatives of the Taliban in July, as well as its ongoing efforts to support the launch of a peace process.

To that end the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States held a series of meetings today to reaffirm our collective commitment to enabling an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of reconciliation and cessation of violence which is the surest way to ensure the long term stability of Afghanistan and indeed of the region.

Pakistan is also engaged in a critical effort in North Waziristan to combat and defeat terrorist groups. It has made a major investment of troops and resources. It's having important success and it has suffered significant sacrifice in the process including the horrific murder of more than 130 school children just about a year ago.

At the same time, we've expressed our deep concern to the government about terrorist safe havens inside its borders that have given violent extremists the ability to undermine Afghanistan's stability and also target U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

And we've urged the government to redouble its standing commitment to closer counter-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan against all groups that pose a long term security threat to both countries.

We also have a significant economic agenda going forward. This morning we met with Helga Schmidt, the Deputy Secretary General for External Action Service at the European Union and with Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Rabbani to recognize Afghan leadership ahead of next year's Security and Development Conferences in support of Afghanistan that will take place in Brussels and Warsaw.

Those conferences will be important opportunities to demonstrate the international community's support for the Afghan government as it works to advance reform in governance.

So today I want to commend Pakistan for its leadership in hosting the Heart of Asia Ministerial and also extend real appreciation to all of those who have taken part in the valuable discussions today. More than two dozen countries were here, among them India, and I would say having come from Delhi as well, that we were very pleased to see senior representatives from Pakistan and India meet in Bangkok earlier this week.

The United States supports any efforts that both parties can take to reduce tensions, increase stability and improve their relations.

As I mentioned a minute ago, we really do see our partnership with Pakistan as growing not only within the region as the Ministerial demonstrated today, but increasingly around the world. Pakistan's continuing contributions of military and police personnel to UN peacekeeping play a vital role in preserving peace around the world. We honor the sacrifices the Pakistanis have made in this global mission and in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism, and we'll continue to do all that we can to support those efforts.

I also want to mention Pakistan's generosity in sheltering millions of Afghan refugees for decades, until they can safely and voluntarily return home.

Even as we work to identify threats and confront difficult challenges, we're also trying to build a deeper, broader engagement with the people of Pakistan to spur growth, to expand opportunity, improve energy security, strengthen civil society. Pakistan's steps to enact an economic reform program in line with recommendations from the IMF will serve to make Pakistan more competitive economically and more attractive to foreign direct investment.

We also have to ensure that our investments in economic growth and development benefit the whole and not just the half of our populations. Our economies cannot reach their full potential unless women reach theirs. When women cannot raise capital or secure loans or rise to senior ranks in companies, the economy as a whole suffers.

At the same time, civil society, in our judgment, plays a uniquely important and central role in our societies. Community groups, NGOs, labor unions, charities, faith-based organizations, professional associations, foundations, they hold government and leaders accountable, they help drive innovation, they develop solutions to problems that governments can't tackle alone.

Just as important, they provide peaceful avenues for citizens to advance their interests and express their convictions and ideas, and this we know is the best guarantor of both progress and stability. International non-governmental organizations and civil society groups not only provide life-saving services to vulnerable communities, they also are an investment in Pakistan's long term strength and resilience. So we encourage Pakistan to continue to streamline the registration process so that these groups can continue their very important work. They will only be able to contribute to Pakistan's growth and development if given the space they need to operate.

Our partnerships in education have been as shared focus for decades. We're proud to have helped thousands of Pakistani youth and professionals achieve the technical, academic and linguistic tools they need to become innovators and entrepreneurs and to succeed in this increasingly global economy.

Today Pakistan and the United States have 19 university partnerships. We're establishing three Centers for Advanced Studies in the fields of Energy, Water and Agriculture, and we're proud to invest more in the Fulbright program here than in any other country in the world. I'm going to have the opportunity to meet with over 200 Pakistani students and Fulbright alumni tomorrow at a town hall.

We're deeply committed to the future of their nation just as we are to the future of its citizens.

Let me just conclude by saying we look forward to the opportunity to further strengthen our partnership as we work together to advance peace and security, stability for the region and beyond, and as we increasingly strengthen a partnership between our countries that's acting not just on issues between us but increasingly on issues throughout the region and around the world.

With that, let me stop talking and listen to you for a minute and then try and respond.

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