

**Ambassador Marc Grossman
Special Ambassador to Afghanistan and Pakistan**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

August 2, 2011

Foreign Secretary Bashir: Let me first of all welcome all of you for joining us at the later day in Ramadan for a press conference.

I would like to first of all also welcome Brother Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Mr. Javed Ludin and Special Representative of the United States Ambassador Marc Grossman for being in Islamabad. We have just a short while ago concluded a very, I would say, important and productive meeting of the Trilateral [Core Group] that is U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan. This is an important type of engagement that was initiated in May in Islamabad between our three countries and we have had three meetings before. Today was the fourth meeting.

I think essentially the purpose of this group is to cooperate and coordinate on matters relating to peace, security, stability, prosperity, and development. More specifically, we have been discussing various aspects of the ongoing Afghan-led process of reconciliation. In a way, for Pakistan, this is one way in which we express our solidarity with our foreign brothers, and we fully support an all-inclusive, broad-based process of reconciliation that is underway under the leadership of Afghanistan and of course both Pakistan as an immediate neighbor and the United States. We want to be helpful to that process.

The second aspect of our consultative mechanism that we call the core group is also to focus, and I must say with a great deal of satisfaction, that increasingly we are focusing more on issues relating to development and cooperation. That is Afghanistan and Pakistan and the broader region and with the support of the United States and the international community.

We are very happy to see Ambassador Marc Grossman here in Islamabad once again. He has had a very full day of meetings today and yesterday. And the Foreign Minister had a very good interaction with Ambassador Grossman and also bilaterally with Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Javed Ludin. We have had very good bilateral interaction, that is Pakistan and Afghanistan, and bilateral interaction. Very productive, very constructive, and we feel very confident that our common interests which are based on a very broad degree of convergence of interests and convergence of our strategic objectives in building stability and peace and prosperity leadership will bear fruit.

With these words, I wish you welcome my two friends, once again, is Islamabad. May I ask the Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Javed Ludin, to say a few words.

Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin: Thank you Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir. I am grateful for your hospitality, for today's more than one engagement, very very fruitful engagements that we have had. And for the very productive session of the fourth meeting of the core group that you very ably chaired today. We are very thankful for that. For a delightful dinner, by the way, after which it's not easy to confront the media. But everyone, I am bringing you greetings from Kabul. I am very pleased to be back in Islamabad. I wish you a very happy Ramadan. It has been really nice being back here.

As my brother Salman said, it was the fourth meeting of the core group that we just finished today. What I can share with you is that we are all very encouraged by the fact that it has become quite an established process now. It's a process that we have invested a lot of confidence, a lot of energy, a lot of time and effort into. We have every reason to believe that the process is living up to the expectation of producing good opportunities for consultation as was just mentioned.

We from the Afghan side are very interested and very eager to make the core group process into one that's responsive to some of the immediate challenges that we all face. In the first instance we in Afghanistan have a real challenge on our hand. The challenge is to establish peace and bring to an end the current violence and terrorism in the country.

We also are aware of the long-term potential for cooperation that exists between the three countries, potential for economic cooperation and for the long-term vision of prosperity and peace that this region so much deserves.

We bring a message of urgency to the working group. The situation in the country in Afghanistan is one that requires the fruits of our cooperation. We are making progress on the one hand. The transition process has started which is the outcome of ten years of very intense, very constructive international cooperation, the result of which finally the Afghan people are now gradually taking control of our own affairs, of our own security.

On the other hand, that progress is not really as much as we expect, associated with the level of peace that should be enjoyed by our population. We see violence that's affecting our lives every day. We see change in the tactics of the terrorists that are creating the violence. So we are interested first and foremost in the establishment of peace in the country. We are depending on every bit of cooperation we can have in that regard.

We need to make this process into a message of solidarity between the two countries but also a message of common purpose, particularly on the question of reconciliation as the Foreign Secretary mentioned. We need to work as we have been over the past few months, but make our work more urgent, make it more result oriented. We need to make the reconciliation process a centerpiece of the strategy for bringing stability, peace, and security to Afghanistan, but also to the wider region.

This core group and the cooperation that this represents is really in the common interest of the three of us. Of course when we talk about reconciliation, we talk about an Afghan agenda. It's an agenda that Afghan owns and it's Afghan led. But it must be an agenda that Pakistan assisted, that the United States assisted. Without the assistance of our friends from the international community we Afghans will continue to face challenges in this arena.

So really, that's my message today, was to bring a message of urgency that is reflective of the situation in my country, but

also a message of cooperation that's a result of [inaudible] that [infuses] the outcome that we want.

But we also, I echo what my friend the Foreign Secretary said about the [inaudible] vision, about the economic cooperation as really the long-term potential for the three countries to work together. I was quite encouraged that today we have quite a lot of grounds on that front as well. The two countries stand to benefit from common projects, from common initiatives, from a vision of an integrated and economically developing region. There are already steps that have been taken. We have already spoken in our previous meetings about Af-Pak, the Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade agreement as a really historical development. We need to build on that now. We need to not stop there. But there are more specific projects as well that we are in this process as well as other processes we are talking about and which is really about a vision for the future. We would also, I'm sure I can also speak for the Foreign Secretary that we are pleased to see the United States involved in that regard in terms of the economic development of the region.

So just to say with that, I'm truly pleased to be back here and to just have had this very fruitful meeting of the core group. We look forward to our future interaction in this very very worthwhile process that we have, and I'm very very pleased to be in Islamabad, as always.

Foreign Secretary Bashir: Thank you Brother Javed.

May I request you sir, Ambassador Marc Grossman, to say a few words?

Ambassador Grossman: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. I will be short.

Let me first of all begin by saying what an honor it is for us to be here on Pakistan's first day of Ramadan. Thank you very much for having us. I'm also delighted to see our friend Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin.

I just wanted to echo, if I could, the words of the Foreign Secretary which is why we find this Core Group to be so useful. That is because it is the chance for Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States to consult and to cooperate and to coordinate

the efforts we are making, as the Deputy Foreign Minister said, in support of an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process.

I think both of my colleagues have done a very good job in taking you through the agenda today. First on reconciliation, which as you know the United States is in support of as an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process. Secondly, the very important work that is being done on the regional economic aspects, what Secretary Clinton has called perhaps a New Silk Road, thinking about economic advances everywhere from Central Asia to New Delhi.

If I might be allowed by my two colleagues, there was one other very important point from my perspective that the Foreign Secretary put on the agenda, and that was the regional aspect of support for reconciliation. We believe, all three of us, that the neighbors and near neighbors of Afghanistan have an extremely important role to play in supporting not just Afghan-led reconciliation but the economic vision as well. So we had a chance to consult a little bit among ourselves about the possible meeting in Turkey in November of Afghanistan's neighbors and near neighbors to talk about the regional aspects of this challenge; and also of course the Afghan chaired and German hosted meeting in Bonn on the 5th of December which we hope will speak clearly to our support for Afghan-led reconciliation, success and transition, and also very importantly the economic vision of the New Silk Road.

If I might just end for our audience here in Islamabad and in Pakistan, just to say that from my perspective this Core Group highlights the unique role, the important role, that Pakistan must play in supporting this reconciliation process. I think Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin captured it very well. Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, but Pakistani supported and supported also by the United States of America.

So it's not a mistake, it's not a coincidence that we are here now for the second time for meetings, and I end by again thanking you for your hospitality and for having us here on this day. Thank you.

Question: [Inaudible] Foreign Minister from Afghanistan. Peace and reconciliation process. Would you specify the issues you

have discussed during the two days meeting, and what is the objective, what is the result of the process initiated by Afghanistan government so far? Would you highlight that aspect as well?

Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin: Thank you for that question.

Reconciliation as far as the Afghan government is concerned is perhaps the single most important priority we have as a strategy to bring peace to our country after such a long time. Let's just remind ourselves that it's not the past ten years that we're talking about. Afghanistan has had, has really been searching for peace for the last three decades or more. So the need for peace and stability is so spoken in my country that it's unbelievable. There are people who have essentially run out of patience with the absence of peace, so that needs to be translated into an action. Of course everything else, where the [inaudible] of building up our military forces, our security forces are really a strategy to make sure that there is long-term stability and peace. The fact that the international community is helping us in that regard is also to do with the stability and peace.

But reconciliation is important because we didn't have to ultimately find the political solution for this and for the long term.

We have started a process and President Karzai has personally championed this and has invested a lot of time and effort and energy in the success of the process. However, the challenge we face is a regional challenge. The Taliban threat, the terrorist threat in general is essentially a regional threat and we have evidence of that here in Pakistan. Here in Pakistan you are dealing with terrorism as much as we do. Your security is also at risk. But obviously, you have your own approach to your own security.

As far as how the approach to reconciliation is concerned, we would depend on the cooperation that Pakistan can extend to us in terms of encouraging those elements in the leadership of the Taliban who could potentially be brought over to the reconciliation process, and we need to do that because although the process we have started within Afghanistan of bringing the rank and file, the foot soldiers of the Taliban and the mid-

level and low-level commanders to the peaceful process is working and it has been effective, but the challenge will not be addressed unless we really bring the leadership, the top leadership.

In that context there are a number of priorities, a number of initiatives, and I'll not go into details because it's an ongoing process. There has been progress since the last meetings of the core group, but we look forward to a greater outcome, greater cooperation as we move on. But also to add one thing, on the reconciliation question we also have a bilateral mechanism with Pakistan, the Joint Commission that was established during our President's last visit to Islamabad and that was chaired by the Prime Minister of Pakistan together with our President. That's another very important avenue and that's a meeting also on relatively similar timeframe on a monthly basis. That framework as well, we look forward to discuss in real specific aspects of cooperation that we expect to have from Pakistan in the interest of peace in Afghanistan, but emphasizing also that it's ultimately in the interest of peace in the entire region in the interest of Pakistan.

Question: Thank you very much. First of all my question addresses Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir. Excellency, can you please enlighten me and all my colleagues here. Have you raised the issue of cross-border raids across Afghanistan include [inaudible] Pakistan? It's the issue which is causing great concerns amongst the people.

The second question addresses Ambassador Grossman. Sir, can you please elaborate a bit on the kind of and the nature of the relationship between Pakistan and U.S.? And frankly, without going into details I would directly ask, we have seen the relationship is facing kind of things that does improve the nature of the relationship is very smooth between the two countries. Can you please enlighten us a bit on this issue as well? Thank you so much.

Foreign Secretary Bashir: On the first part may I just say that the question of what you say is cross-border raids or whatever. This is a matter of ongoing engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and I believe we have great degree of clarity on the sources of the issue, the nature of the problem, and we are determined to deal with it accordingly. We don't want to make

this into any acrimonious issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our relationship has seen huge improvement, and there are, this is likely the result of militancy that is affecting both the countries and the people of both countries and I think we are very much determined to deal with that in an appropriate manner.

The second question relates to Pakistan-U.S. relations, you asked Ambassador Grossman. If I may just say a word on that. I think we have an ongoing good, constructive engagement with Ambassador Grossman and the State Department and I personally feel very confident that whatever matters, we are addressing these constructively in a friendly manner.

Ambassador Grossman: Thank you very much. That's a good introduction.

I would answer your question this way. As you said in prefacing your question, I think it's clear that every relationship between friends has some ups and downs and we've had some over the past few months. As the Foreign Secretary said, we are committed to doing two things in this relationship. First of all, identifying where we have shared interests; and secondly, acting on them jointly.

I think you can see from the conversation we've had here today or my meetings all during the day today, we have a shared interest in counterterrorism.

Whenever I stand up in front of this audience, what's among the first things I try to do? First of all, it's to express my respect as Deputy Foreign Secretary Ludin did, for the thousands and thousands of Pakistanis that have been killed by terrorists and the thousands of Pakistani military people who have given their lives fighting terrorists.

So we have a great joint interest in fighting terrorism and fighting extremism.

As you can see from here, we have a great joint interest which we are acting on jointly in supporting Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation. I believe we will have an increasing interest together in the economic aspects of this relationship.

So we have work to do in any of these relationships, but I think if we keep to the fundamental prospect that Pakistan and the United States share interests. We have done so for many years. I believe we will do so for many years to come. If we can act jointly on those interests we will build ourselves a relationship with the Pakistani people that I believe the American people will be proud of.

Question: Ambassador Grossman, my question to you is regarding last week there was a report on the U.S. Treasury Department that Iran has got links with al-Qaida and al-Qaida and Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, they are sponsoring al-Qaida, the latest report. And [inaudible]. How would you comment on that?

What about this news that U.S. government has been restricted from traveling in the country [inaudible]? Thank you.

Ambassador Grossman: Everybody is sneaking in two questions. Very well done.

First of all on the question of the Treasury report, I'm sorry, I haven't seen such a report, I don't know how to comment on that report. Perhaps somebody from the embassy can follow up.

But on the general point, and it goes back to the answers I gave to your colleague. From all of my conversations here today and especially my conversations with the Foreign Secretary, the common enemy here is al-Qaida, so there should be no doubt that between Pakistan and the United States there has to be a joint effort now to finish al-Qaida and get it away from us so Pakistani people and American people and people all around the world are more secure.

On the second question, so far we've had a lot of conversation about this question of travel. American diplomats in Pakistan are free to travel. The government of Pakistan has some regulations and has some requirements and we're trying together to figure out how to meet those requirements. I'm absolutely certain we will be able to do so. I'm absolutely certain we'll be able to do so in a way that will allow the government Pakistan to meet its requirements and allow American diplomats to travel freely in Pakistan.

Question: Thank you, Excellency. I will build upon what [Sumara] said, that we have been hearing for a long time that United States will not leave Pakistan as it did in '90. Ambassador Crocker, a very warm welcome back in Pakistan. Again, we were listening to you for a long time. And even Ambassador Cameron Munter has been saying so. But yesterday President of Pakistan in meeting with Your Excellency, he stated that there is a need for clear terms of engagement between the two countries at the end of maybe 11th year of war against terrorism. [Inaudible] diplomats, and you're a diplomat, to say they are good, they say so. But in the deeper sense, the things are not very normal.

So how you respond to my question that whether the United States is once again leaving Pakistan alone like it did in 1990?

Then my brief question to Ambassador Ludin, you said that there is a need to talk to the top leadership of Taliban, not to the middle or lower level. Whether the Afghan government in its Afghan-led process has identified who are those top leaders, Taliban, with whom the Afghan government intends to speak to.

Ambassador Grossman: Thank you very much for your question.

I did have the good fortune yesterday to visit with President Zardari, and I join you in welcoming Ambassador Crocker, now our Ambassador to Afghanistan, back to Pakistan. He was here today for this meeting of the Core Group.

I did have the opportunity to visit with him, and we did have a long conversation about how to get to the assumptions and the fundamentals of the relationship between Pakistan and the United States. And we talked about the history, we talked about today, we talked about what we will do tomorrow.

And with respect, again, there's much work to do between diplomats and others going forward here, but I think the idea, and I don't mean to put words in President Zardari's mouth so I'll only speak for myself, the idea is that if you look across the range of issues that the United States and Pakistan are dealing with, we have shared interests in so many of these areas, and we ought to be able to, and indeed we do in many areas, but we ought to be able to find ways to work together on those shared interests.

That's a simple thing to say and a complicated thing to carry out, but our job as diplomats, our job as officials of our various countries is to carry this process out.

So the President, the Foreign Minister, the Foreign Secretary, we all talked about how we would work on this together.

But I think again, the basic philosophy here is find out where you have shared interests, and I believe there are many, and then find out how to work on them jointly.

Second, with great respect to you and to your question, I don't think that the United States is in any way repeating the mistakes of 1989 and 1990. I think the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill for civilian assistance to Pakistan, a long-term strategic investment in Pakistan, is an important part of that answer. The three of us standing here today are an important part of that answer. The future that we see not just for Afghanistan but for the region as a whole. The New Silk Road is not about Afghanistan, it's about Central Asia and Afghanistan and Pakistan and India, I think is an argument for not just a long-term commitment to the region but a long-term engagement and a long-term investment in the region.

So with great respect I don't accept the argument that this is 1989 or 1990 again.

Deputy Foreign Minister Ludin: On the question of Taliban leadership, it's fair to say that between us we have a pretty good understanding of the Taliban leadership and who they are and various levels. Some of them we have identified, we have even contacts with, but really the majority of the ones that really need to be brought into the peace process are the ones that we need to establish contact with. That's exactly based on the knowledge that we have. We need to identify who we can reconcile and then how we approach them, how do we then convince them to join the peace process.

That's the challenge, but I think the understanding in terms of who we are talking about, that's pretty much there. That knowledge does exist, but we have to translate that knowledge into some actionable cooperation.

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