

PERVEZ MUSHARRAF ON U.S.-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2011

12:00 P.M. ET

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WELCOME/MODERATOR:

George Perkovich,

Vice President for Studies,

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

SPEAKER:

General Pervez Musharraf,

Former President of Pakistan

Transcript by Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

GEORGE PERKOVICH: Hi everybody. Sorry to keep you waiting. My name is George Perkovich. I'm a vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment. It's my pleasure to welcome you and to admire your perseverance.

I think it's worth – it's worthwhile because few countries have been as important to each other as the U.S. and Pakistan have been since the early 1950s. And yet, as anyone who reads a paper or watches the news knows, the importance of U.S.-Pakistan relations does not make it satisfactory to either country, nor does the two – does the importance mean that the two governments trust each other.

[00:00:54]

In Washington, the feeling is that the relationship in the past was broken because Pakistan pursued interests and activities that it knew were contrary to U.S. interests, as in the nuclear program in the '80s, and that Washington would have to pull back. In Pakistan, it's felt increasingly that the United States is a fair-weather friend and that has abandoned Pakistan before and it will again.

And we see a similar tension here today in the relationship and discourse between the two – a concern that, in fact, the interests are contrary enough that there will be yet another separation. There are a number of elements of mutual frustration, but again that point of mutual importance remains. Therefore, it's worthwhile to try to explore ways of building shared purposes and understandings, even if mutual trust is a little too much to expect now.

There are few people better qualified to address these issues than former president Pervez Musharraf. Pervez Musharraf served in the Pakistani army for more than 40 years, rising to its highest position, the chief of staff. From that position, he took power in Pakistan in 1999, and became president in 2001. He continued as president until 2008. He's a civilian today, but remains keenly well-positioned to address the future of U.S.-Pakistan relations.

President Musharraf has been squeezed on the front end in Congress today. He has to go back to the Hill, but he has said that he will spend the assigned time here. He will make some remarks and then we'll take plentiful questions from you. So with that, let me ask you to welcome General Musharraf. (Applause.)

[00:03:00]

GENERAL PERVEZ MUSHARRAF: (In foreign language.) First of all, my profound apologies for being late; I was held back at the Hill. So with that, may I express my gratitude to Mr. George Perkovich and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for having invited me and giving me this opportunity of speaking to such an august gathering. Without much ado, I would like to straight get down to the subject. And I'm going to speak about South Asia, about our region and about Pakistan. And within that I must cover, obviously, the United States-Pakistan relations, which have achieved some kind of a criticality at this moment.

Talking of South Asia, I would like to start with recapitulating a little bit of history from 1979 onward because sometimes our memories are short and we forget about what where – has happened in the region – (so ?) that will be the case for what we ought to be doing and what we've – what we have now. I will take on the period of 1979-89 first of all.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

[00:04:20]

It was 1979 when Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and occupied Afghanistan. And this created a violation of a U.S. policy which – which believed in containment of Soviet expansion and also created alarm in Pakistan because United – Soviet Union was trying to get to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean through Pakistan – through Balkanizing Pakistan. So therefore, there was a collusion of U.S. and Pakistan interests. And therefore, we thought of assisting Afghanistan in fighting against the Soviet Union.

And we decided to launch a jihad. Jihad is a holy war. And when I – when I say “we,” the United States and also Pakistan in the lead role decided to launch a jihad, a holy war, for the reason of attracting mujahedeen – holy warriors – from all over the Muslim world. And may I say, we succeeded in growing about 25,000 to 30,000 mujahedeen from the whole – from the Muslim world extending from Morocco to Indonesia.

And not only that, we recruited, trained, armed Taliban from the tribal agencies of Pakistan and (pumped ?) them into Afghanistan. This continued for 10 long years, ladies and gentlemen, and this jihad – the holy war with the United States’ and Pakistan assistance for the people of Afghanistan. There are two points that I want to highlight here which are very significant: Number one, that the elites of Afghanistan abandoned Afghanistan during this period – they came to United States and Europe. And this war against – this jihad against Soviet Union was spearheaded by religious militant groups. This is the one point that we need to understand.

The second point is that when the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan, a year before that through their own machinations they deposed the king. Afghanistan was held together through an arrangement called “misak-i milli” – which translates into “a national covenant” – a national agreement between all the four major ethnic groups – the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks – to live together, stay together under the sovereignty of the king.

But when Soviet Union deposed the king, that glue which held, yes, Afghanistan together was no more there. So what we have – when we are talking of a political solution, we are talking of creating another “misak-i milli,” a national covenant which will hold the country together, which obviously implies a proportional representation of all the ethnic groups – the major ethnic group being Pashtun. I will talk more about it later.

[00:07:23]

So this much was ’79-’89. Then comes the period of ’89-2001. I generally recall this as a period of disaster – period of disaster because United States, somehow, decided to change course and abandon the place. They abandoned that place, Afghanistan, without any rehabilitation, resettlement of the 25,000 refugees, armed to the teeth and knowing only to fight. And this was unfortunate, and also maybe a shift of policy of Pakistan being put under sanctions. We remember as far as Pakistan is concerned the Pressler Amendment which denied all military assistance to Pakistan and also a policy towards more – tilted towards India – a strategic relationship developing with India.

So this was policy shift, unfortunately. And also, may I say, with this policy shift – because of this policy shift, abandonment of Afghanistan, the mujahedeen – 25,000, 30,000 mujahedeen in Afghanistan – coalesced and became al-Qaida. This – Osama bin Laden, Zawahri, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed – are all products of the ’80s. So the mujahedeen become al-Qaida now. And not only that, in 1996 Taliban emerged. Now, while from ’89 to ’96 in Afghanistan, about 10 ethnic groups, all were fighting among themselves. They ravaged the country and destroyed the country – total anarchy in Afghanistan.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

But in 1996, it became Taliban, who are all Pashtuns, versus Northern Alliance who was Tajik, Uzbek, Hazaras. This continued till 9/11. So total ravaging of the country, destruction of the country.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, another element started. Freedom struggle in Kashmir – in Indian-held Kashmir – started in 1989. Its impact on Pakistan was that there were dozens of mujahedeen groups which sprung up from our society inside Pakistan; volunteers preparing, wanting to go to Indian part of Kashmir to fight the Indian army.

So therefore, in effect, why I have highlighted these elements is that religious militancy was introduced by us from – in '79, continued to '89. Then, having abandoned the place by United States, it continued in a different form – all bodies fighting each other – ethnic groups; Taliban emerge; al-Qaida becomes – and Kashmir freedom struggle; mujahedeen in Pakistan.

Religious militancy from the east, from the west of Pakistan, from the east of Pakistan – Pakistan became a victim of religious militancy. So therefore, my deduction, ladies and gentlemen: Pakistan is not the perpetrator of terrorism. Till 1979, we were in perfectly harmony of situation. All that happened within Pakistan is that we became a victim of circumstances in the region.

Then comes 9/11, ladies and gentlemen. Now, I – now, after 9/11, there was obviously the terrorist attack here. It was most terrible. And obvious – attack by the United States in Afghanistan – my Pakistan joining the coalition. Now, I was on the scene then. I took the decision of joining the coalition, in Pakistan's own interest more than U.S. interest.

[00:11:15]

Pakistan's own interest was – that I realized, I knew that Pakistan is a moderate country. Pakistan wants to be a progressive, enlightened, moderate country. And Talibanization and Taliban culture of obscurantist understanding of Islam is not for Pakistan. Therefore, quite clearly, we could not – we would not have liked to be on the Taliban side. And therefore, we joined the coalition.

Now, here I want to highlight a few blunders en route. The first blunder I see was 1989, when the United States abandoned Afghanistan without rehabilitation, resettlement of the Pashtuns – of the mujahedeen. The second blunder was in 1996, when Taliban emerged and Pakistan was the only country which recognized Taliban. And at this moment – I remember back in 2000, March of 2000, when President Clinton came to Pakistan, he was persuading me not to deal with Taliban.

And I told him, at that time, that I have – I would suggest a different strategy, that we all recognize Taliban and the world should open missions in Afghanistan and let us then moderate them from within. Certainly, I'm not with their ideas of – obscurantist ideas – but confronting them, or not recognizing them – it is better to recognize them and moderate them from within. That – not doing that was the second blunder.

[00:12:51]

Had we done that, maybe we could have saved the Buddha statue, or even resolved the Osama bin Laden issue, if there were 100 missions threatening to quit Afghanistan if they did not agree to moderation. So that was the second blunder.

Now, the third blunder, after 9/11, was – I would like to highlight that after 9/11, with the U.S. attack, coalition attack in Afghanistan, and with Northern Alliance, the Taliban and al-Qaida were defeated. They ran helter-skelter

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

into Pakistan, into the mountains and cities of Pakistan. There was a vacuum in Afghanistan, a political vacuum. Here was a situation where the military had delivered. Military of United States delivered victory to you.

But this military victory had to be converted into a political victory. And political victory, meaning that a proportional – ethnically proportional – balanced, legitimate government to be placed in Kabul. Now, this was the time when, from a position of strength, we could have done that. When we say ethnically balanced, proportional government, we had to have Pashtun on board. It had to be Pashtun-dominated because Pashtun have always ruled Afghanistan. And 50 percent of Afghanistan is Pashtun.

So while all Taliban were Pashtun, I coined a term that all Pashtun are not Taliban. So we must (win ?) away Pashtuns from the Taliban and give them the dominant position in government in Kabul. This was not done. To date, it has not been done. To date, dominant position of governance in Afghanistan is by Tajiks and – a section of Tajiks which are called Panjshiris, who are 8 percent of Afghanistan.

[00:14:59]

Now, I personally feel that this window of opportunity that I'm talking of persisted from 2002 till early 2004, for two long years. Taliban, al-Qaida were dismantled. They were disorganized. Their command structure was totally broken.

They were in Pakistan, and we were acting against them successfully. All the people, al-Qaida people, from number three downwards – all of them were apprehended in Pakistan. All those who you see in Guantanamo or anywhere are all, actually, by ISI in Pakistan – all, I repeat. Not one has been caught in Afghanistan by anyone else.

So this was done very successfully in Pakistan, but then – (inaudible) – while the al-Qaida went down, Taliban resurgence started in 2004. It started because Pashtun were not taken on board, and this military success was not converted into a political success. Their resurgence started in 2004, and their resurgence carries on even now, unfortunately. So this was the third blunder, where we could have utilized this two-year window of opportunity and we failed.

And now, after – in 2011, we are trying to talk to Taliban now. Now, Taliban is not a monolith, by the way. So when we talk to Taliban, I don't really know, which Taliban is anyone talking to? Mullah Omar is a Taliban. Siraj Haqqani is a Taliban commander. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is Taliban. TTP of Pakistan is Taliban. TNSM of Pakistan is Taliban. Which Taliban are we talking to is not very clear.

So therefore, we are in a complex situation. Now, what is the complexity now? There is al-Qaida in Afghanistan. There is Taliban resurgence, and dominant position is Taliban now. In Pakistan, also, there are some al-Qaida, but mainly Taliban, Pakistani Taliban who go across and fight in Afghanistan also, and also harbor Afghan Taliban.

[00:17:25]

The third issue, as far as Pakistan is concerned, they try to spread their Talibanization into several districts of Pakistan. The fourth issue is that there are mujahedeen within Pakistan – the groups which initially were oriented towards fighting Indian army in Kashmir, but they have developed a nexus with the Taliban. The fifth issue is that there is extremism within our society in certain areas. They are rising because they are developing a nexus with the Taliban. So this is the complexity of the situation in Pakistan which we have to deal with.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

And each element, whether it is al-Qaida, who are foreigners – the military, actually, is the only solution – Taliban of Pakistan – military, political, socioeconomic requirement. Expansion of Taliban, trying to spread obscurantist Talibanization – force is the only requirement. Mujahedeen, orientation towards Kashmir, now involved with Taliban – resolution of Kashmir dispute and also political action is the requirement. Extremism in our society – a long-term strategy of education, of enlightenment, of economic welfare is the issue – poverty alleviation.

[00:18:47]

So this is the complexity of problems Pakistan faces. But I would be remiss if I did not point out what is there in India. There is mujahedeen activity in Kashmir, but there is a rise in the extremism in Muslim youth in India. And that is what Indians should realize themselves. The last bombing attacks in Bombay – the finding in India is that they had been by local mujahedeen, so there are local mujahedeen in India.

What is the reason? Whether the reason is unequal treatment of the Muslims, or their sense of alienation, or whatever, it is for Indian government to find out and rectify because there is a tendency to develop a nexus of all these people with extremists in Pakistan and all that.

Then, as if this is not enough, ladies and gentlemen, there is an ETIM – East Turkestan Islamic Movement – in China. They have – many of them have come into our tribal agencies and Afghanistan to join hands with al-Qaida. Then – (inaudible) – this is not enough, there is AQIM – al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Algeria, Mali, AQAP – al-Qaida in Arab Peninsula is Yemen and Somalia – the al-Shabaab in Somalia – all trying to have underground nexus.

Now, this is the complexity of the situation. I don't want to predict a doomsday scenario here, but certainly this is the complexity, and we must understand the entire complexity of the situation.

Now, within this, Pakistan-United States relations are terrible. They are at the lowest ebb. It's the most unfortunate thing because – I fear it is unfortunate because we have to have commonality of thought and action if we want to defeat terrorism and – if you're going to combat terrorism and extremism.

Now, one thing that I want to highlight here, with full conviction, that one is to – at this – one has to look at the strategic plane in Pakistan. What is Pakistan's policy? What is Pakistan overall strategy and direction as far as terrorism and extremism is concerned or Taliban and al-Qaida are concerned?

Certainly, it cannot be pro-Taliban, pro-al-Qaida. Why can't it be? Because Pakistan army has suffered over 3,000 dead; because the same ISI, the much-maligned ISI, has suffered about 350 operatives dead, killed through suicide bombings. By whom? By Taliban, by al-Qaida, the same enemy.

[00:21:41]

And this much-maligned ISI, may I also point out that this is the same ISI which has saved many lives around the world by unearthing lot of plots? The major one which ISI unearthed was in 2005 when ten airliners were – on trans-Atlantic flight were to be bombed. And it was ISI which unearthed it. And this issue of the containment of liquid now, that the rules that the airlines follow that you cannot have 3 milliliters or something – 3 liters (sic) more liquid in your hand carry is because of that, because they were going to blow them up with liquid explosives. Who did this? ISI did it. So (what?) I want to highlight is, ISI is much maligned today – that they are the rogue elements. So therefore, is it possible that strategically, they are pro-Taliban, those who are killing us? Thirty-five thousand civilians have died. This doesn't stand to logic.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

However, I would like to clarify, then, what the hell is happening? (Laughter.)

So we must understand there is a problem at the tactical, at the modality, at the handling of situation, at the dealing with situations. (Inaudible) – there may be a misunderstanding, there may be a difference of opinion, but anyone who tries to convert this tactical mishandling and difference of opinion to reflect or to cast aspersion that ISI and army, at the top level, by design, are facilitating, abetting, encouraging, arming maybe the Haqqani group to go across and kill United States soldiers and bomb U.S. embassy, I think is – (diverged ?) from reality, ladies and gentlemen.

So I'm very sad, may I say, that Admiral Mullen came here, I believe, and made certain remarks. Now, when Admiral – (one ?) person of Admiral Mullen's stature says that Haqqani group is an extension of ISI, he means that the DG-ISI, therefore the army, is against United States, is abetting with the Haqqani group, is with the Taliban. That means Pakistan is the enemy. Pakistan is not the friend. Pakistan is not the coalition member.

[00:24:34]

We have to be very, very discreet, very understanding, very accurate in this understanding. I think it is totally against the interest of United States and Pakistan and the region and also the world because it violates this – what I say as the unity of thought and action against Taliban, al-Qaida and terrorists.

Now, I would like to bring out why this has happened and what can we do to maybe bridge this problem. From United States' point of view, I would like to admit Pakistan needs to clarify two elements which are casting very negative aspersions and leading to this trust and confidence deficit.

Number one, why was Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad where he got killed? The issue – there – was there complicity or negligence? I will be prepared to answer questions, so with problem of limitation of time, I would only like to say that with all my honest conviction, it is a case of terrible negligence which ought to be investigated and punished. But it is not a case of complicity. The second issue – but the onus of proving this to United States, which is – it's a very difficult thing to prove because nobody believes, but we have to still – (to ?) prove because I know it to be truth that it is not a case of complicity.

[00:26:21]

The second issue is Siraj Haqqani, a group which (is there ?) in North Waziristan. Why is the army is not acting there? Now, again, the onus of clarifying lies on Pakistan. They must do it. And I would like to admit that they are not doing a good job of both these. They must prove to the world, and the United States, is there a problem? They – do they have a different strategy to – as far as Siraj Haqqani is concerned? Is there a problem that the army is overstretched? Is there a problem that this enemy is too strong and we will hold back later – till later? They have to clarify why.

But I would be remiss if I did not point out that there are some areas where United States should also understand Pakistan's sensitivity and also give comfort, I would say, to Pakistan. Number one is, United States has decided to leave in 2014 – leave Afghanistan. If even I was a leader there, I would have come in, interacted: You analyze, you give me an analysis; what do you see when you leave Afghanistan? Are you leaving a stable Afghanistan or an unstable Afghanistan? Because based on that, I in Pakistan will have to take my own countermeasures.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

This is very important. If we leave Afghanistan in an unstable condition, or not a fully stable condition – when I say “fully stable,” fully stable militarily and politically – then I presume there are two possibilities. This is my personal analysis. Either Afghanistan goes back to 1989 when all ethnic groups were fighting against each other, or it goes on back to 1996 when it was Taliban – Pashtun Taliban on one side and Uzbek, Tajiks, Hazaras and Northern Alliance on the other side.

In both cases, Pakistan has to fend for itself. And there is a different strategy required to deal with each, because its direct influence – impact – negative impact, adverse impact will be on Pakistan. So any leader in Pakistan must think of securing Pakistan’s interest. So I think it’s for United States to sit down with Pakistan and discuss these issues very seriously.

[00:29:15]

The second element which needs clarification – and I know there are lot of Indians, maybe, sitting here – (laughter) – unfortunately – yes, indeed – he’s a good friend of mine. And I – may I say, my bluntness doesn’t mean that I’m very unpopular in India. I’m reasonably popular in India.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You were born in India, sir.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes, I was. Yes. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You have Indian blood, like me.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Well, yes. I admit, yes indeed. (Laughter.) Well, I – that is why I say that India and Pakistan must have peace. I’m a strong – very strong believer: We must have peace.

Now, India is trying to create anti-Pakistan Afghanistan. This is most unfortunate, and I am not saying this because I have some (Indo-centric ?) – and I’m anti-India. I know this through intelligence; I know this to be a fact.

Today – and just to give you one proof: Today, in Afghanistan, Afghanistan diplomats, the intelligence people, the security people, the army men go – all go to India for training. I, in my time – (inaudible) – bending backwards, offering to President Karzai to send them to Pakistan, all our training institutions open, free of cost – not one till day – to date has come to Pakistan.

Now they go there, they come back, they get indoctrinated against Pakistan and, may I say, over the years since our independence, Afghanistan always has been anti-Pakistan because Soviet Union and India have very close relation in Afghanistan. And the intelligence agency, KGB, RAW and KHAD of Afghanistan have always been in cooperation and talking since 1950s. So we must not allow this to continue because then one must not grudge if Pakistan orders ISI to take countermeasures to protect its own interest.

[00:31:31]

So I think this needs a rapprochement certainly between India and Pakistan and rapprochement also between the two intelligence organizations: the RAW of India and the ISI of Pakistan. Because they have been on a confrontational course all through since the 1950s, harming each other. So this is, I would say and if I’m also allowed to – one rather minor but still becoming very significant – when leadership from the United States or anywhere say Pakistan has not done enough; we need to do more – now, this has become almost so annoying to a common man in the Pakistan. We have suffered 35,000 dead; 3,000 soldiers killed; 350 ISI people killed; generals

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

killed, generals' childrens killed. What more should Pakistan do? Yes, (indeed ?), we are doing our best. We are the – we are the first victims of terrorism and extremism. At least don't keep saying that we need to do more. Yes, we need to do together, we must – we must counter these – all these problems.

Having said that, lastly, let me come to a little bit on Pakistan itself. Today Pakistan is suffering; there's a dysfunctional government, a rise of terrorism and extremism, and – (inaudible) law-and-order situation in Karachi, which is the economic hub. There's an economic collapse in Pakistan; there's political turmoil, and also floods, et cetera. So Pakistan is in terrible shape.

[00:33:16]

My dismay is that Pakistan has all the resources and all the potential to stand on its own feet, and I say this is my dismay because in the eighth year that I governed, all the socioeconomic factors were going up, even if we see our strategic location in the center – with West Asia and Gulf on the west; landlocked Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, yearning to reach out to the sea in our north; east China – west China to our northeast; India, South Asia to our east – we provide the connectivity for all trade and energy activity in the region. No energy, no trade within this region is possible without Pakistan's involvement. That is the strength of our strategic location.

The other issue is that we are a country which is self-sufficient in water, self-sufficient in food, self-sufficient even in energy. We have hydroelectricity much more than our total requirement, double our total requirement. We have mastered nuclear technology. We have tremendous energy through coal, through gas, alternate source. The only thing we lack, maybe, is oil. So we have to fix (from terminal ?) to all these. But all the capacity is certainly available. Tremendous amount of natural resources.

So what is the problem? We are economically self-sustainable. The proof of it is that when I came into – in 1999, we were a failed or a defaultive (sic) state. But in 2006, Pakistan was declared one of the N-11 – Next 11, economically vibrant country of the world. After the BRIC Four – Brazil, Russia, India, China – the BRIC Four, who are doing exceptionally well, Pakistan was one of the N-11 – next 11 country of the world.

So how did this happen? Did I have a magic wand or something? I did not. It was the potential and the resources of Pakistan, (which said ?) – wherein we utilized our own resources, our own potential to control the budget imbalance, the budget deficit, the fiscal deficit, the balance of payment deficit, which was controlled by increasing our earning, reducing our expenditures – the problems the United States is facing – and when I say – may I say that the debt-to-GDP ratio, which was 103 percent, was reduced to 52 percent. That was how we turned the economy around – I don't want to get into the details – but the per capita income rose from \$430 to over \$1,000 in six years.

[00:36:18]

So how – so what is the problem again? Why is it that the same country, the same people, the same resources, in 1990 are a failed country; in 2006, '07, we are N-11; and now we are again going down, heading towards disaster again? The answer lies that there is a leadership vacuum.

It is the – it is the leadership. It is the governance which fails Pakistan, and governance – government and leaders are thrown up by the – through the political system, through the elections. It is here that we fail. No government elected through elections, in a democratic way, has ever done good governance for Pakistan. And when I say “good governance,” really the responsibility of every leader: welfare of the people, development of the state. This – these are the two things that I believe any leader and any government has to do, otherwise the people reject them. That is

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

the problem of Pakistan: no good leadership, not doing welfare of the people and the development of the state. So therefore the problem is in throwing up right leadership through the political process.

And now we are heading towards another election in 2013, a year and a half away. If at all we don't bring about a political change, breaking the political status quo, people of Pakistan rejecting those who have been tried and tested and failed, we will continue on the path – downward slide. So we have to produce another political alternative in Pakistan which can deliver, which can understand the problems of Pakistan, will have the courage to deal with these things and has – is honest and enough to deal with Pakistan's problems with determination.

[00:38:31]

It is for this reason that I, while I'm very comfortable delivering lectures through Harry Walker Agency, which looks after my interests – paying me very well also – (laughter) – not that I – not that I charge anything here, but – (laughter) – but I'm –

MR. : (Inaudible.)

GEN. MUSHARRAF: I am very comfortable for myself, but I have decided to join politics because there is a bigger cause than self, and that is Pakistan. And therefore I've decided to re-join politics.

We have to create a – either myself and my party – a third political alternative, or in combination with other like-minded people; we have to do that. So I'm going to try to do that. And that is why I've entered politics, and that is why I've decided to go back to Pakistan in March 2012 – or earlier, if I am to spring a military surprise and deception and go earlier than 2012. (Laughter.) So that is what I intend doing, whatever the – because I believe it's better to try and fail rather than go down without trying. And for the sake of the country, I will take further risks.

That is all that I have to say. Thank you very much, lady and gentlemen, and – (inaudible). (Applause.)

MR. PERKOVICH: I'm – I – we're going to take questions now. When I call on you, we'll try to bring a microphone, and just please, briefly say who you are. Let's start with this lady here in the fifth row, and then we'll come over here. So get a mic to each of them. Great, please.

Q: My name is Aisha Khaled (sp). I am a TV reporter with Voice of America, broadcasting to Pakistan. My question is that a few days ago, on one of our show – one of our shows, VOA's shows – English-language show – you said that democracy is a mindset, and that you did a lot of things which were pro-democracy. My question is, why has your party not been able to attract support from Pakistani public so far in this context?

[00:40:50]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Right. First of all, let me correct. I never said democracy is a mindset. I said dictatorship is a mindset.

Q: (Off mic, inaudible.)

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes, dictatorship, because they always call me a dictator, because I was in uniform. I'm a man in uniform. But actually, I believe dictator is a mindset. It's not the dress that you wear. I believe, I believed always, and I continue to believe democracy, in democracy. And many of the – most of the civilian governments in Pakistan are the biggest dictators. The people of Pakistan know that they've been the biggest.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

So it's not a matter of whether I'm in uniform or not. I did so much for democracy, on nurturing democracy. And democracy, I do believe, isn't – does not start and end at having elections and a political government. It starts from there. How you govern is the essence of democracy, and that is what I did – through empowerment of the people, empowerment of women, empowerment of minorities, freedom to the media. That is democracy, and I did all that.

[00:41:52]

So therefore, I am a strong believer in democracy. Now, coming to your next question, why do the people are not in support? I would be mad if I go back without people's support. Obviously, I know how much support there is and how much there is not. I am keeping a pulse, and certainly there is support. Do you know my support in 19 – 2007, March 2007? It was 78 percent. Now, is it possible that in one year, it dipped and there is no support at all? There is always a support.

When I resigned from my presidency, many, many people were crying in Pakistan. The six cameramen who were filming me, or recording me, four of them were crying right in front of me. It – and it was a great distraction because I was speaking at that time. So let me tell you that there is – there is – there is support for me. There is certainly support for me in Pakistan.

However, if I think – if I am to believe today that there is so much support that I'll win in the next election, I'd be too naïve. So I am a realistic person. I am a realist. While I must not over-assess myself, I must not under-assess myself also. So I try to carry out my own self-assessment. There is support, and I am now trying to build that support through organizing party, my party. I have already done that at the four provinces.

We have gone down and we have organizing committees in 82 of the 124 districts of Pakistan. And I've now told them to go down to 350 tehsils of Pakistan and to the 6,500 union councils of Pakistan. In one year, the achievement that I have done internationally, in the United States, U.K., UAE, Canada, and internally in Pakistan, I think nobody else has done from scratch, with a new party in place.

So let me assure you, I am giving it a good try. I can never be sure that I'll develop that kind of support that I'll win alone, but I'll give it a good try.

[00:44:04]

Q: My name is Judd Hering (sp). I'm a documentary filmmaker. When you are elected president in 2013, what – would you take a new approach towards the problem – the festering problem in the veil of Kashmir? Will you take a new strategy to try to resolve this with India? I am referring, now, to the activities of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Will you make efforts to bring these two under control?

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you very much when saying “when you'll get elected,” which means you are sure I'm going to get elected. (Laughter.)

Q: Yes. You will be, yes.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: OK – (chuckles). So I thought you should have said, if I get elected.

Q: No, no. When you are.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you very much for all your confidence in me.

Well, on Kashmir, yes, indeed, I have – let me say that it was a passion with me to resolve disputes and bring India and Pakistan closer. It was in my time that there was so much of interaction, people-to-people interaction, that when we had a cricket match between India and Pakistan at Lahore, which was the hub of cricket and which has been quite anti-India, the people of Pakistan were cheering the Indian team for the first time. It was unique. It was because I was encouraging the Indian team. I met them and – and I was then encouraging this interaction.

Now, the issue of Kashmir, it has to be resolved. Other than that, there is Sir Creek and Siachen also; they are minor. I think we are – we took them to a stage, myself and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, that they can be signed yesterday. It just needs leadership decision. Sign it and finish it off.

[00:45:52]

Kashmir is the problem. We had moved forward on Kashmir because of certain four parameters that I laid down – it was my thinking: demilitarization, graduated demilitarization; giving maximum self-governance; having an overwatch mechanism (with ?) India, Pakistan, Kashmiris; and also making the Line of Control irrelevant through opening routes, six routes, a route for trade and people(-to-people ?) movement.

So we were moving forward on these. And I think we need to do that again. So I don't have – (inaudible) – I'll do it again – I – because I believe in peace, because it is in the – to the advantage of India and Pakistan – socioeconomic advantage of both the countries. So therefore, I am for peace.

Now, when we talk over Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul – I had banned Jaish-e-Mohammed and Hizbul Mujahedeen, both of them in my time. Lashkar-e-Taiba is a problem area because they have great public sympathy. They need to be dealt with in a sensitive manner. But yes indeed, you will – we will pull the rug from under their feet if you resolve the Kashmir dispute. The dispute is over; what – what are you doing? Pack up and go home and let's – so we'll be –

But it's easier said than done. We need to handle them with care because when there is – they are very well organized.

As I said, public support. When we had the earthquake in 2005, their branch organization called – (inaudible) –

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Dawa – Jamaat ud-Dawa.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Jamaat ud-Dawa – Jamaat ud-Dawa was probably the best NGO and became popular there in Kashmir for their relief effort that they had – they were so well organized. And we couldn't ban them.

[00:47:45]

And there were a lot of people who were suggesting: Let's ban them and stop them from there. I said, if we do that, and if one of the – god forbid – one of the Chinook helicopters, which were – I – I call them the angels of mercy – if they shoot of them down, no relief will be possible in that area without the American Chinook. So let's go along with them. We have to handle these things with understanding and with care. And we would like to do that again.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MR. PERKOVICH: Can I – General, I would like to follow up on the Kashmir question because I – you – there was a lot of progress made in the backchannel with India during your time. But what you said about – and others say about now the importance of Afghanistan and the great concern that Pakistan has about India’s role in Afghanistan – even if you then somehow formalize an agreement on Kashmir, where would this Afghan concern then fit in the overall relation? Isn’t that – gotten more important, in a way?

[00:48:49]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes. Well, I personally am – have always been believing that interstate relations are more to do with interpersonal relations between leaders. And very proudly can I say that why was there so much trust and confidence between the United States and Pakistan when I was there? That was because I had excellent communication and interpersonal relation with President Bush and Colin Powell. I had – the day before yesterday I went for coffee with Colin Powell. I went to his house. And we used to speak to each other very, very regularly. I could pick up the phone and talk to President Bush, which I used to.

Now, this is the interpersonal relation. On Pakistan-India, I developed very good interpersonal relations with both Prime Minister Vajpayee and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. May I also add without any reservation that I found both of them to be very good people. I found both of them very flexible, very sincere to reach peace, and we were moving forward.

Now, with this relationship I am sure we can address all issues. What I said about Afghanistan is certainly with full knowledge, otherwise in a – in an – in an audience where there are Indians sitting I would not have mentioned anything which was in doubt. I know this that this is –this is happening. So this is unfortunate. But if the two leadership have relations, I am sure we will be able to address them to the common good of everyone. I think it is doable but you need to address it, yes indeed. But it needs all three to develop an understanding – Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

MR. PERKOVICH: This lady here, and then I got to go back and forth too. So there’s – right by – yeah, there. Yeah. Go ahead.

MR. : Sorry.

MR. PERKOVICH: No, no, right here. Go ahead.

[00:50:58]

Q: Nancy Baer (ph) with the Pakistani Spectator. My question today is regarding Nawaz Sharif. He was –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: I’m sorry, about?

MR. PERKOVICH: Nawaz Sharif.

Q: Nawaz Sharif.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: OK.

Q: He was –

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MR. PERKOVICH: Your friend.

Q: He was –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: My good friend. (Laughter.)

[00:51:11]

Q: He was – he was twice democratically elected. He was very pro-business, relaxing the business laws so that Pakistan became very attractive to foreign investment. And – which resulted in even more jobs for the people. And even today, he is one of the most popular viable leaders and very loved by his people. So my question is, did it not concern you when you deposed him with no democratic process whatsoever that it would be viewed negatively by the international community?

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Thank you very – this is my favorite question. (Laughter.) Let me tackle it. Ma'am – may I say, ma'am, your figures are totally distorted. 1999 I come on the scene. Pakistan is a failed and defaulted state. Do you know the FDI in Pakistan? Four hundred million dollars. This is the investment coming to Pakistan. And do you know where we took it? Eight-point-four billion dollars. Do you know our exports were stagnating? Do you know our revenue collection? Or it – it was – our revenue collection was at 408 billion rupees. Do you know where we took it? One trillion rupees. So this is the performance of Nawaz Sharif.

They – in joblessness, poverty, do you know? And I'm – the poverty was at 34 percent. We brought it to 17 percent. And these figures are not ISI figures, by the way – United Nations figures. (Laughter.) So please find out from United Nations whether this is true. And you are talking of a person who did this. I'm – I'm – I am amazed that you – please correct your figures. And don't believe me; go and find out on each. You know, I am not saying anything.

Go and find out about industry. Where was telecommunication in Pakistan? We had 2.9 percent tele-density, only 5(00,000) or 600,000 mobile telephones. Do you know what it is now? Our tele-density is over 70 percent and there are 18 million mobile telephones now. So this was his performance. And it was his government of three years.

And do you know what people were doing, because I was the army chief then? They were all coming to my office and telling me, when are you going to take over? When Pakistan finishes? This is what they were telling me. So please understand what was happening in Pakistan.

[00:53:41]

And now coming to the second part, that he's a very popular man: Well, yes indeed, let me admit, that the man when he came back – when Benazir came she got assassinated. We had to get him back. He gained in popularity. Yes, you are right to that extent. He had gone up in popularity. But then with the wonderful governance that they are doing in Punjab province, the biggest province, where there are power outages for hours at end, where villages get only two hours of electricity – and there's total mis-governance in Punjab – he is – there is a sharp decline in his – in his popularity.

He has notice in the three smaller provinces – that is Sindh, Frontier and Balochistan. In Punjab – in south Punjab he's almost out. So his base is north and central Punjab. So, I mean, I could go – talk for hours; let me cut it down. He is not as popular as you think.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

[00:54:43]

MR. PERKOVICH: Thank you very –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: And also, may I say – (laughter) – he’s a – he – I call him a closet Taliban. (Laughter.) He appeases extremists. There are extremist groups in Punjab who are now his political partners. So he will be a bigger disaster if he, god forbid, comes in governance – I’m very sure he will never – if he comes to governance in Pakistan – bigger disaster than the present situation.

MR. PERKOVICH: And we will be happy to host a debate between you and him here in Washington – (laughter) – if you like – (inaudible) –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Let me assure you –

MR. PERKOVICH: I just want to – (inaudible) – the record with – (inaudible) –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Let me assure you, he will never come.

MR. PERKOVICH: I know, I – (inaudible) –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: I – I am – (inaudible) – you call him, I will sit here right – (inaudible) –

Q: (Off-mic.)

MR. PERKOVICH: Wait, wait, wait, wait. That’s it – wait. Wait. All right, I’ll call on you, but if we’re going to have – you know, it’ll get – (inaudible) – while I call on this gentleman back there. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Professor Perkovich, and good afternoon, sir. My name is Nisan Ruben (ph). I am with the American Jewish Committee. And we were privileged to give a donation of \$50,000 in the Pakistan earthquake and partner with the American Association of Physicians of Pakistani Origin and the Washington Hebrew Congregation to send 800,000 kosher meals to the quake-affected area.

[00:55:55]

And in recent years we have reached out to the Indian-American community, tried to reach out to the Pakistan-American community. Sir, when you were –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Which community are you talking of?

Q: I’m – the Indian-American and the Pakistani-American – South Asian communities. Sir, during – when you were president your foreign minister, I believe Mr. Kasuri, met with the then-Israeli foreign minister, Mr. Silvan Shalom, in Ankara trying to open – because, you know, India has traditional strong ties with the Palestinian cause, strong ties with the Arab world, and now growing relations with Israel. And the Israelis, and many American Jews, saw Pakistan as a bridge between the – Israel and the Jewish world and the Islamic world.

And, sir, you also attended a kosher dinner –

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

[00:56:38]

MR. PERKOVICH: Is there a question – I'm sorry – (inaudible) – time, so –

Q: No, I'm sorry, so you attended the kosher dinner with Jewish leaders in New York. Would you reach out – see Pakistan being that bridge between Israel and the Jewish world?

GEN. MUSHARRAF: (Inaudible.) Were you the one I met at the American Jewish Congress when I addressed them?

Q: (Off mic.) Yes – (inaudible).

GEN. MUSHARRAF: OK. Now, yes indeed. Now, I personally believe that we have to bring peace not only to the region but to the whole world. And therefore, I even started a strategy – an idea of enlightened moderation, which I proposed at the OIC summit in Kuala Lumpur, which is a double answer – a two-pronged strategy: one prong to be delivered by the Muslim world – reject terrorism and extremism, (growing ?) the social-economic part. And for the West and United States the prong to be delivered – solve political disputes which bedevil Muslim world and also assist in the socioeconomic development of Muslim world.

Now, within this strategy I, personally, believe that we must have peace. If we are going to have peace, we have to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. This holds the key to al-Qaida and all this activity of Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Fata, et cetera, and also even maybe al-Qaida. And they are mainly politically indoctrinated or motivated people – those who did – carried out the 9/11, who were they? They were probably people who were antagonized at these Israel-U.S. relations and anti-Palestinian attitudes around.

So as far as I'm concerned – as far as Pakistan is concerned – I thought we need to have balanced relations. And I personally commented once that we need to review our relations with Israel as we progress forward on the resolution of Palestinian-Israeli dispute. Towards this end, I even came and addressed the American Jewish Congress. Towards this end, I requested the Turkish president to invite the foreign minister of Israel to Turkey, and I will send my foreign minister – they should meet so that there is progress towards – and if he can contribute toward the Palestinian-Israeli dispute resolution, I would like to play a role.

[00:59:16]

And, may I also inform this august gathering, in 2006 I initiated a different peace process. And that was, I thought that on one side, in the Muslim world, United States on Israeli side and dealing with peace maybe has become unacceptable to the Muslim world. Therefore, there's a requirement of maybe European Union and Mr. Solana, the secretary general, who is held in certain esteem in Pakistan – in the Muslim world, to play a role on one side.

And on the Muslim side I thought, instead of Arabs who have always been dealing – and maybe they failed to reach a conclusion – we include non-Arab Muslim players. And that, I thought, was Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

And I went around to do this, to develop this team or this group to deal with Palestine-Israel dispute. I thought this maybe a different approach. And maybe because Israel will have more confidence in the four that I have spoken of, and Muslim world will have more confidence on Solana, Mr. Solana, and we could make some progress.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

But I think we have to think out of the box. And I am for peace with – as far as Pakistan is concerned – with all countries and trying to resolve all disputes, political disputes.

[01:00:52]

MR. PERKOVICH: General, we'll take two questions at a time, because we're – I know we're running out of time, if that's OK with you. And I got this woman here and then –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: I will take my time because I was late, so therefore, I owe to them whatever question, whatever time you want to take.

MR. PERKOVICH: Right here. Thank you.

Q: Hello. Suzanne Kelly from CNN. Can you tell me if you – if you believe that Pakistan is doing enough when it comes to working with the international community on securing its nuclear facilities? Or should it be doing more?

GEN. MUSHARRAF: On the nuclear facility?

Q: Mmm hmm. (Affirmative.)

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Is – Pakistan is what? What did you say?

Q: Working enough with the international community, say, the IAEA, on securing these facilities? Or should they be more open?

[01:01:34]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Pakistan is very, very sensitive – first of all, Pakistan nuclear capability, everyone must understand, is a pride to every man in the street; number two, that Pakistan nuclear capability is in direct relation to the threat perception, to the existential threat that Pakistan has always faced, like Israel. So therefore, we are nuclear.

Now, unfortunately in Pakistan, a perception has got created that United States or many other powers that be are for Pakistan to be denuclearized. That goes totally against Pakistan's interest, and the people of Pakistan will never allow it because it is unfair, also.

And now, coming with – (inaudible) – IAEA and custodial control, what the world ought to be interested is, are they secure? Yes indeed, it is unfortunate for Pakistan that there was proliferation by an important personality like Dr. A.Q. Khan. That was most terrible, and we suffered in our prestige.

But may I say, after 2000, when I came on the scene, the first thing that I did was establish custodial controls, and that we had an NCA, National Common Authority, on top. We created an SPD, Strategic Planning Division, a big secretariat headed by a lieutenant general who heads it even now. And we took away all the autonomy from the science organizations, especially of finance and security, the two which were given to them – money used to be given to them and no questions asked; security was their own; and therefore, since nobody was overseeing, this proliferation was possible. When we took away these two, proliferation is not – no more possible.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

And then, while all these assets were held by the science organization at that time, I made – I took over those assets and I created an Army Strategic Force Command, a strength of about 20,000 of – men of the army. It is a corps of the army with two divisions, with a number of brigades, with a number of regiments, who physically hold all our assets. So they are (normal ?). While the development is by science organization, the holding is by the army. And the army has dispersed them and put them in places where nobody can access.

[01:04:27]

And may I also add that – a lot of misperception is there, that – when India and Pakistan were on a confrontation course in 2002, so they used to asked me, your finger is on the button and – nuclear button and all that. There is no finger on the nuclear button in India-Pakistan context. It's not like Warsaw Pact and NATO. In our case, thank god, including India, our weapons are not mated in that the bomb is separate and the missile is separate. Even during a confrontation, they were not mated. So there is nothing like an impulsive man pressing some button and – like in NATO and Warsaw Pact scenario where you have to maybe react in seconds. There is – that is not the case.

So let me – with this long answer, let me – let me say that Pakistan's nuclear capability is our existential requirement. It is the pride of Pakistan. We will go along with the world, certainly, on all safeguards as applicable to others of the world. Do not please single out Pakistan. It will not be acceptable to Pakistan.

MR. PERKOVICH: General, may I ask a follow-up, which is, if you're elected president, you would be a civilian leader in Pakistan, but it's a nuclear program that's always been controlled by the army. So by what process would you, then, for example, have a policy and make a decision to decide, do you have enough fissile material, do you have enough weapons? And as a civilian, would you be able to have actual authority in that discussion?

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Because I have commanded the army for 40 years, they can never forget that. I have fought wars with them. I faced dangers with them. But that aside, (even if ?) that's not the case, I – (laughter) –

The – it is not correct that the army controls everything. We have made the National Command Authority. The chairman is the president of Pakistan. The prime minister is there. Five important ministers are there and four chiefs are there – army, navy, air force and chairman joint staff. This is (organ ?) and the president commands it.

[01:06:47]

Now, even if you see historically, when we started this program, it was started probably after India exploded its first bomb in 1974 because that made our military strategy, our military strategy throughout was a strategy of minimum defensive deterrence, quantified into army, navy, air force.

But in 1974, when India exploded its bomb, this minimum defensive deterrence, although in place in the conventional, became untenable in the unconventional. Therefore, Pakistan decided to go nuclear.

MR. PERKOVICH: Well, it actually decided in '72 after the war with Bangladesh, but –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: After?

MR. PERKOVICH: In '72, January '72; after the '71 war is when the program started.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Well, the program, nuclear program was always there.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MR. PERKOVICH: Right.

[01:07:39]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: But to go nuclear, to make bombs, was after this – Dr. A.Q. Khan, enrichment of uranium, et cetera, started in – after, in 1977 or '78, et cetera.

Now, that was – now, at that time, since secrecy was required, it was the – it was under the president of Pakistan, who happened to be also a military man, General Zia ul-Haq. But when he died, it was a civilian president, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who was overseeing, but then he used the army commander, army chief to assist him.

So it has been – the course has been – following a normal course, but it is not that the army chief is – army chief is the boss of Army Strategic Force Command who hold the weapons. But the development, et cetera, is very much under – through the Strategic Planning Division, which is headed by a lieutenant general – he's a retired lieutenant general now, but it is overseen by the NCA.

So I think – I think this is the best practice that we acquired from the whole – from the world. And that is what we've – we've done. And I did this in 2000, by the way. I take credit for that.

MR. PERKOVICH: I know you did. Thank you.

This gentleman here, and then Seema (sp) back there.

Q: Thank you very much. Raghbir Goyal, India Globe and Asia Today.

Thank you, Mr. – I don't know how to address you, a general – a great general or a great president. Whatever – you may be both.

[01:09:08]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: (Inaudible) – with whatever name you give me, I remain the same.

Q: Thank you, Mr. President.

I must say one thing, that recently, in some think tanks, including Atlantic, some of the speakers were backing you as far as economic progress in Pakistan took place under your leadership. My concern – and also peace between India and Pakistan during your administration – my question is here that, as far as Afghanistan is concerned, Afghanistan's President Karzai always accused Pakistan of sending terrorism or Talibans – al-Qaidas across the border into Afghanistan. But now, recently, last week, what he said was, if there's a war between Pakistan and U.S., then he or Afghanistan will back up Pakistan, not the United States, after even getting all the billions of dollars and getting – (eliminator of?) terrorism.

And second, Mr. President, as far as Pakistan-U.S. relations are concerned, the survey in Pakistan shows that number-one enemy of Pakistan, according to Pakistan people, is not India but the United States after getting all the billions of dollars. Can – what can you make, Mr. President, out of these things? And also, one more thing –

MR. : (Inaudible.)

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

Q: – Osama bin Laden was found in your backyard and you were the ruler at that time, whether you knew or not, sir?

[01:10:43]

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes, yes, very good. Thank you very much. (Laughter.)

Firstly, Karzai's statement – first of all, let me thank him, for the first time, giving a pro-Pakistan statement. But, however, the statement that he will support Pakistan against United States is most preposterous, I would say. I find this idea itself very preposterous.

How can they – I mean, is he visualizing some kind of war between the United States and Pakistan? It's ridiculous and preposterous. The thought of it is preposterous. So therefore, I wouldn't like to even answer this; I find this a very, very strange idea. Who has propounded this idea? And God forbid, I mean, this can never happen. So why comment?

And thank you very much. Please look after the Taliban and al-Qaida; that is enough. Don't support Pakistan. Pakistan will look after itself.

The third – second issue was – was – what was the – (chuckles) –

Q: The survey in Pakistan about U.S. and India.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yes. I – you said about Osama bin Laden being found in –

MR. : No, no –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: No, no, the United States – antipathy against the United States?

Q: Right, yeah.

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Oh, yes, the enemy, yes, yes. Now, that is unfortunate.

[01:12:03]

While there is a dichotomy in Pakistan, unfortunately if you go to the masses level, yes, there's a great antipathy against United States, which has developed since 1989. As I said, till 1989, we were strategic partners; everything was going through Pakistan. I think that nothing was – there was no problem. So it is beyond 1989 that things have happened.

Everything that happened, whether the abandonment – there was a sense of betrayal in the people of Pakistan. Do you know that on 9/11, when I joined the coalition, it was a difficult – a difficult decision? The question that was asked from me, everywhere that I went: What makes you think that we will again not be betrayed and ditched by United States? This is a question that they – they used to ask me.

So this is the unfortunate reality of events and therefore – and then India's very partisan approach on nuclear issue, which I said is the sensitivity of the man in the street, partisan against Pakistan and very pro-India. Why Pakistan has developed nuclear bomb? Because of its existential threat; India has developed a nuclear bomb; I don't know

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

why. What for? Is there a threat from somebody? Or is there an idea of projecting your power in the region and in the world? So it's – their approach is totally different. Our nuclear is defensive; your nuclear, it may be offensive. Now, yet Pakistan is being told to control and stop and back roll its nuclear program.

So unfortunately the people of Pakistan have developed this antipathy. But, at the government level, may I say, at the leadership level, at the intellectual level, I think everyone understands the importance of Pakistan-U.S. relations.

[01:14:13]

Pakistan-U.S. relations are very broad in context. Not only is there military cooperation or terrorism and extremism, cooperation against that, but there is a great socioeconomic element in that. Our trade and investment interests are there. So everyone understands that Pakistan-United States relation have to be strong. It is the masses who are more emotional, I would say, and sentimental that because of these events, there's an antipathy which needs to be corrected frankly. I personally believe it has to be corrected. It'll take time and good leadership.

And your third – there were three questions – (laughter) –

Q: On Osama bin Laden, were you surprised earlier – did you –

GEN. MUSHARRAF: Yeah, I mean, Osama bin Laden was in Abbottabad. Yes, he was there for five years. First of all, I'm – I am not fully convinced that he was there for five years, frankly, unless there is some proof given. For five years, he was there? I'll relate a joke after something that I'm going to tell you. But if he was there for five years, two years were in my tenure.

Now I – why I say there was no complicity: As far as I'm concerned, I am 500 percent sure that I did not know, whether anyone believes it or not. (Laughter.) So, therefore, I am clear that there was no complicity, and I am also clear that the army and ISI could not have hidden this from me because I am from them and they are from me.

And if at all, there was some mis-doing at the top level, I am sure the second-, third-, fourth-tier officers, who were in very much in touch with me, who have always been, would have come and told me that this is not possible, that ISI and army could do anything – of what my policy was not – they – whether they were not following the policy. So there was no complicity, and I didn't know, frankly.

Q: Thank you.

MR. PERKOVICH: President, thank you very much. We've – we're keeping you late. Thank all of you for hanging in there. (Inaudible, applause.)

(END)

[01:16:20]

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery