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Interview of the President by PTV, Pakistan

The Map Room

11:20 A.M. EST

Q Mr. President, you are paying a visit to Pakistan at a very crucial juncture, at a time when changes are being experienced in the region. And people of Pakistan are pinning a lot of hope on your visit because they think many problems are there and your visit will play a very vital role in it. So what is your vision for making this trip more meaningful and productive?

THE PRESIDENT: The first thing that's really important for people to understand is that relations between our countries oftentimes depend on the relations between the leaders. In other words, President Musharraf and I can set a tone for the relationship because of our capacity to talk to each other. And it's important to be with each other and to share concerns and to talk about ideas. And so one object of the trip is to continue what is a good relationship. A good relationship between me and the President tends to permeate throughout our government.

Secondly, I -- and one reason we've got a good relationship is we speak frankly with each other. Listen, I understand he has got a difficult job -- made really difficult by the fact that people have tried to kill him, as you know -- extremists have decided that he is an obstacle to their vision and, therefore, have tried to kill him. And so he's not only a man who's shown great courage in the face of adversity, but he does have a vision of how to work together to achieve common objectives.

Secondly, I want the people of Pakistan to know that the American people care about them, that ours is a relationship that's much bigger than just the war on terror; that when our Chinooks flew supplies into the rural part of Pakistan, it wasn't out of a sense of just kind of pure diplomacy, it was out of a sense of care and concern about the individuals. And I understand sometimes people may have -- wonder about our motives, wonder about America's true concerns. And this will give me a chance to speak to the people of Pakistan and say, look, we care for you, and remind people that in our country there's great Pakistani Americans. We're a rich society because we've got people from around the world, including people who were born and raised in Pakistan and have now chosen America as a home.

And so it's a trip that's of goodwill and importance.

Q Mr. President, there is a common perception that the relations between the United States and Pakistan have fluctuated in the past. So what measures would you suggest to make it more durable and sustainable for the days to come and the longtime perspective?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's a really good question, because again, we want people to understand this relationship is a vital relationship that will exist throughout the years. One way we can do that is increase trade opportunities between our countries -- between our countries. And we'll be talking about a bilateral investment treaty.

Secondly, student exchanges. And I understand there's been some issues with visas and we've got to work through those, because I believe the more Pakistani youngsters who come to America to study will get to really see what America is all about. And as more Americans that go there to study will see what Pakistan is all about.

And so there's ways for us, beyond the war on terror -- and by the way, the war on terror is a critical aspect of our relationship, don't get me wrong. But the other thing that's interesting and I think important for the people of Pakistan to know is that President Musharraf, in his democracy initiative, can show the whole Muslim world, and the world itself, that it's possible to have a religion that is not extreme, and a state that listens to people and responds to the needs of people. And that's a really important message that Pakistan can show the world. And I will, of course, continue to talk to my buddy and my friend about his goals for a democratic Pakistan.

Q Mr. President, an early solution to the whole issue of Kashmir, about which you have also mentioned in your speech at the Asia Society -- that is vital for the region. So, in your view, being a close friend of both Pakistan and India, what role the United States can play in resolving this issue?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I started to play a role in my speech, and I spoke out on the issue and encouraged the President and the Prime Minister of India to continue down the road of solving the issue with a solution that's acceptable to all sides.

And that's very important. There's a temptation sometimes for countries to try to jump in the middle of dialogue. I believe a lasting solution can be achieved. I've seen the progress that's been made in the relationship from when I first became President. You might remember an early time in my presidency, there was real tension. And now, all of a sudden, there's some very encouraging signs -- transportation exchanges -- not transportation exchanges -- new transportation opportunities, trade. In just my discussions with both the President and the Prime Minister, there appears to be a different attitude. And part of it has to do with trust, but there's got to be tangible progress. I recognize that. And so I will use my trip to urge the leadership to continue solving this issue, with the idea that it can be solved.

Q Mr. President, what economic incentive would you offer to Pakistan during the forthcoming visit?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, trade is very important. And one of the steps on a robust trading relationship is what's called the Bilateral Investment Treaty, and that's an important part of the process. And believe me, every time the President talks to me, he's talking about markets, and I understand that. But he also understands that there's some steps needed before this robust trade.

I must applaud the President's vision for the Pakistan economy. And in our world, politics, there's a lot of talk and a lot of kind of big noise. But the truth of the matter is what matters is results. And Pakistan's economy is strong, and that's good news. That's really good news for the people of Pakistan, first and foremost, because, obviously, if people can make a living and do well, they can see the benefits of democracy -- tangible benefits of living in a system where people are free to express themselves, but where the marketplace is the economic determinant.

Q Coming to another subject, what strategy the United States has adopted for conquering terrorism in Pakistan, in a very holistic manner?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, freedom defeats an ideology of hatred. And the enemy -- I say "the enemy" because they'll kill -- they innocent Pakistanis, they kill innocent Americans. We need -- more Muslims have died at the hands of al Qaeda and these extremists than anybody else. These -- I don't view these people as religious people. I view them as people who have taken a great religion and kind of twisted it to meet their means.

And so they have a vision. And it's not a vision -- it's a vision that doesn't recognize the freedom of people to worship. It's a vision that doesn't understand the -- that recognize the importance of women in society, or free speech. And so the way to defeat that vision is with a better vision, more hopeful, and democracy provides that vision.

We are in close coordination, of course, with the government of Pakistan. We share a mutual interest. Nobody should want foreign fighters in their soil wreaking havoc. And it's hard for a part of a country to develop if there are people in that part of the country that are willing to kill innocent life to achieve an objective. And so we share short-term objectives with the Pakistani government. We also share the long-term objective, and that is -- that's freedom.

Q Thank you, very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm looking forward to the trip. And I really appreciate you coming.

Q Thank you, very much. I'm grateful and honored.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you, very much.

END 11:37 A.M. EST

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