

Opening Statement
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
The U.S. and South Asia: An Expanding Agenda
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On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to express a warm welcome to Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher, who is making his inaugural appearance before us today. Over the course of his distinguished career, Ambassador Boucher served as the Department of State's Spokesman or Deputy Spokesman under six Secretaries of State and has also served as Chief of Mission twice overseas. We honor your public service and look forward to a productive relationship with you and the newly expanded Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

The hearing today is intended to review recent developments in South Asia, particularly in light of expanding U.S. foreign policy interests in this increasingly dynamic region.

From a Congressional perspective, it would appear that today the United States is more engaged in South Asia than at any time in recent years. The region is now a focal point for major U.S. policy initiatives which run the gamut from expanded commerce, energy cooperation, defense relations, education, health, as well as collaboration on science and technology. Appropriately, South Asia will also be a recipient of repositioned U.S. foreign service personnel under the transformational diplomacy initiative of Secretary of State Rice.

In this context, it strikes me that this is an extraordinary time of opportunity for the United States in South Asia. The most difficult challenge is to establish and maintain constructive relations with the two most populous states in the region, India and Pakistan. There is virtually no dissent in Washington from the precept that a rising India and the United States are natural partners with compelling incentives over time to cooperate closely on a host of regional and global concerns. With respect to Pakistan, the Administration has likewise indicated that while we appreciate Islamabad's critical cooperation in the campaign against terrorism, our objective is the establishment of a broad and lasting economic and strategic partnership. Despite certain domestic challenges, Pakistan has begun to make impressive economic strides; progress which we strongly hope will be matched in the political realm through credible democratic elections in 2007.

Turning to the dramatic recent developments in Nepal, the people of that country have again demonstrated their widespread support for democracy in recent weeks. Both the Congress and American people recognize their determination and success in creating the conditions that led the King to hand over the reigns of power and

reinstate Parliament. We look forward to working closely with the Executive Branch to provide appropriate assistance to the Nepalese Parliament and the democratic political parties as they begin the hard work of turning the people's demands for democracy and good governance into reality. Likewise, it is incumbent on the Maoists to permanently renounce violence and join a peaceful political process.

In Sri Lanka, we are all deeply concerned by the continued erosion of ceasefire arrangements and the lack of substantive progress in the peace process. Although these are longstanding issues for the Sri Lankan people to resolve, we would like to help, if we can, to reenergize the peace process, de-escalate the current crisis, and urge the government and all parties involved to begin to cease violence and return to peace talks. Perhaps in this moment of peril all the parties to the conflict will at long last find the vision, courage and political will to make strides toward a lasting peace.

With respect to Bangladesh, our two countries have been close friends since 1971. Despite many handicaps, Bangladesh has made impressive strides in some key areas of development, including agricultural production, improved literacy rates, the delivery of basic social services, and empowering women through employment and education. As the fourth most populous Muslim country in the world, Bangladesh's voice of moderation in regional and world affairs is widely acknowledged. On the other hand, endemic political polarization, corruption and related governance concerns, and the rise of violent extremists all pose substantial challenges for Bangladeshi society. The Subcommittee is interested in learning how the U.S. intends to work with Bangladesh to advance human rights and democracy objectives, particularly in light of what we hope and expect will be free and fair national elections in 2007.

We look forward to your testimony and the exchange of views to follow.
