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The Frontier Post

Afghan-US strategic partnership pact to be reassuring to Pakistanis: Crocker

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KABUL (INP): US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker has said that the enduring strategic partnership agreement signed by US with Afghanistan is also going to be reassuring to the Pakistanis.

In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, just hours after President Obama's departure from Afghanistan and in the immediate aftermath of an insurgent attack in Kabul, the Ambassador reiterated President's call to eliminate safe havens for terrorists across the border in Pakistan.

"I am hopeful," said Crocker, "that the enduring strategic partnership agreement we've just signed with Afghanistan is also going to be reassuring to the Pakistanis." Crocker added, "They are suffering as much from terrorism in the tribal areas as we and the Afghans are. The Pakistanis are going to find some way to subdue those safe havens for their sake as well as for that of Afghanistan and the international presence here."

He then spoke of the status of negotiations with the Taliban. "I learned this in Iraq: You really can't kill your way out of an insurgency. Eventually there has to be a political settlement" the Ambassador said.

Ambassador Crocker responded to reports that a security breach some hours before the President's plane touched down at Bagram Airfield might have come from inside Afghanistan itself, potentially compromising Obama's security.

"The leak, such as it was, was incorrect," said Ambassador Crocker, "and our collective judgment was that it did not propose a sufficient threat to the president." However, he did acknowledge that "there is always a risk." In a memorable phrase, he seemed to encapsulate the years of American involvement since 2001: "Well, look, Christiane, this is Afghanistan."

Ambassador Crocker also addressed the suicide bombing in the heart of Kabul that occurred just after President Obama flew home to Washington. While admitting all the facts aren't in, he didn't think the attack was timed with the President's visit. "We looked at all aspects of that," he said.

"Everybody was comfortable. It went precisely according to schedule. We regret the loss of innocent Afghan lives. But overall, Kabul is a pretty normal, pretty secure city." Ambassador Crocker was asked if Afghan opposition to drone attacks into Pakistan would hamper the US's ability to conduct counter-terrorism against militants there? "There's nothing in the agreement that restricts the inherent right of self-defense of either party (the US and Afghanistan)," said Crocker.

But he preferred not to look into the future. "2014 is a long way off," he said. "My definition, frankly, is that the far future in Afghanistan is about a week from Friday." He added, "The one thing that can really defeat us here is ourselves.

If we decide we're tired, we don't want to do this anymore, that we're just going to pull the troops and we're going to go home before the Afghans are fully capable of assuring their own security, then we can lose this."