

Holbrooke's Testimony on Afghanistan/Pakistan Before the House Foreign Relations Committee, May 2009

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Testimony

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State Department Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, gave this testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Relations on May 5, 2009.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a great honor to appear before your committee again.

When I last testified before you, it was as a private citizen offering personal views on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Today, I appear before you as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I deeply appreciate the President's and Secretary Clinton's confidence in appointing me to this position.

A stable, secure, democratic Pakistan is vital to U.S. national security interests. We must support and strengthen the democratic government of Pakistan in order to eliminate once and for all the extremist threat from al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups.

Yet relations between the U.S. and Pakistan have been inconsistent over the years. In Pakistan, many believe that we are not a reliable long-term partner and that we will abandon them after achieving our counterterrorism objectives. Many in the U.S. question the dedication of some elements of the Pakistani Government to ending safe haven for terrorists on Pakistani soil. But our engagement has to be aimed at putting our relationship on a better long-term footing.

To assure a strong partnership in the fight against extremists, constancy and consistency must be the hallmarks of our engagement with Pakistan. This engagement must be conducted in a way that respects and enhances democratic civilian authority while also engaging the Pakistani people in our commitment to help them pursue a prosperous economy, a stronger democracy, and a vibrant civil society.

Administration Strategy

In March, President Obama announced the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan which reflected unprecedented input from both governments. The President's core strategic goal is to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al-Qaeda and to eliminate the safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The President's strategy makes clear the importance of Pakistan's future and stability to the United States and the rest of the world, and the need for increased security, governance and development assistance to Pakistan.

International Engagement

A critical objective of the Administration's new strategy is to forge an international consensus to support Pakistan. We will involve the international community to actively assist in addressing security, governance and development goals in Pakistan.

We have already made progress.

--At the April 3-4 NATO Summit, Allied leaders agreed to build a broader political and practical relationship

between NATO and Pakistan.

--On April 17, the World Bank and the Japanese Government co-chaired a successful Pakistan Donors' Conference in Tokyo where the international community pledged more than \$5 billion in new support, well above the \$4 billion requirement identified by the International Monetary Fund.

--We are also urging allies to work closely with us both bilaterally and through the Friends of Democratic Pakistan to coordinate development assistance. The Friends held a successful ministerial meeting in parallel with the Tokyo Donors Conference, at which Pakistan's international partners affirmed their political support for the democratically elected government.

Most notably, we have begun an unprecedented high level U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral engagement that will continue quarterly. Secretary Clinton and I lead this dialogue; we will convene its second round tomorrow in Washington. President Obama will host his two counterparts, President Zardari of Pakistan and President Karzai of Afghanistan at the White House, and U.S. explore new areas of cooperation on foreign policy issues, economic cooperation, agriculture, police and prison reform, and intelligence.

Strengthening Pakistani Civilian and Government Capacity

A key aspect to the new strategy is to put more attention and resources toward Pakistan's economic and governance challenges. By increasing economic and educational opportunities, expanding the reach of quality healthcare, reinforcing human rights – particularly women's rights – and empowering civil society, life for millions of average Pakistanis will improve. Towards this end, the President has voiced his support for the Congressional efforts to significantly increase non-military assistance to Pakistan. Introduction of bills in both Houses demonstrates Congress' support of our long-term commitment to helping the Pakistani people.

It is vital that we devote some of these resources to target the economic and social roots of extremism in western Pakistan with more economic aid. There have often been rebellions in that area historically, but this is the first time they have been tied to an international terror movement. Our assistance should support Pakistani efforts to "hold and build" in western Pakistan as part of its counterinsurgency efforts so extremists do not return to fill the vacuum once military operations have ended.

We must also do our part to enhance bilateral and regional trade possibilities by implementing Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) and encouraging foreign investment in vital sectors, such as energy. The Administration supports Congressional passage of ROZ legislation as a key way to boost private investment and sustainable economic development in targeted areas of Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan. I ask for your support in expediting this crucial legislation.

Building Counterinsurgency Capacity

Successfully shutting down the Pakistani safe haven for extremists will require consistent and intensive strategic engagement with Pakistan's civilian and military leadership. It is vital to strengthen our efforts to develop and enable Pakistani security forces – both the military and law enforcement – so they are capable of carrying out sustained counterinsurgency operations. The Pakistani Army has traditionally been arrayed in a conventional deployment in the east, against India. We must work with Pakistan so that it has the resources and training insurgent threat on its Western frontier.

Strategic Communications

We are developing a strategic communications plan to counter the terror information campaign, based in part on a strategy that proved successful in Iraq. This is an area that has been woefully under-resourced. The strategic communications plan – including electronic media, telecom, and radio – will include options on how best to counter the propaganda that is key to the insurgency's terror campaign.

Supporting Legislation for Assistance to Pakistan

Security assistance for Pakistan has to show results. In the President's words, "We must focus our military assistance on the tools, training and support that Pakistan needs to root out the terrorists" but "we will not, and

cannot provide a blank check.” Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out al-Qaeda and the violent extremists within its borders.

The Administration intends to implement measures of performance in its economic, social, and military assistance to Pakistan. We must ensure, however, that such tools do not impede the effectiveness of our assistance or play to the “trust deficit” that plagues our bilateral relationship and promotes distrust among the Pakistani people. Any legislation should engender the greatest level of cooperation by winning the trust of our civilian and military partners in Pakistan.

The Administration is committed to working closely with the members of this committee, and Congress, to ensure that together we are able to provide the resources necessary to carry out our new strategy in Pakistan.

All of our efforts in Pakistan are geared toward creating the vibrant, modern, and democratic state that Pakistanis desire and U.S. policy envisions as a partner in advancing stability and development in a key region of the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.