

**DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN SULLIVAN
TESTIMONY ON THE ADMINISTRATION'S
SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY ON AFGHANISTAN
U.S. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 6, 2018**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me here today to provide an update on the Administration's South Asia strategy.

I want to begin by offering my thoughts on Afghanistan, in light of my trip to Kabul last week, and talk about how we are engaging, together with the interagency, in a regional approach in South Asia to bolster stability in the region.

During my trip, I was first and foremost able to extend in person our condolences, thoughts, and prayers to the hundreds of victims and their families, and all those affected by the recent terrible acts of violence. The United States remains firmly committed to supporting the Afghan people and their government's efforts to achieve peace, security, and prosperity for their country.

While in Kabul, I met with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, and other Afghan partners. Every leader reiterated their support for

our strategy, and their commitment to creating the conditions that will bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and establish an environment for a sustained peace.

These leaders also reaffirmed their support for the Afghanistan Compact – a series of reform benchmarks established by the Afghans – to implement reforms in the areas of security, governance, rule of law, economic development, and peace and reconciliation. President Ghani and I co-chaired an executive committee meeting of the Compact, where we reviewed and highlighted progress on those benchmarks.

I also discussed with the Afghan leadership the critical importance of timely, credible, and transparent elections. It is vital that parliamentary and presidential elections take place this year and next, respectively, and that they reflect the will of the Afghan people and create an inclusive government that continues to implement these fundamental reforms.

In addition to shifting to a conditions-based approach instead of one predicated on arbitrary timelines, the South Asia strategy marks a change from the status quo in U.S.-Pakistan relations. We intend to hold Pakistan accountable for its failure to deny sanctuary to militant

proxies. We also encourage restraint in Pakistan's military nuclear and missile programs, and seek continued, closer alignment of Pakistan's nonproliferation policies with our own. We continue to value our relationship with Pakistan and recognize the benefits of cooperation. Pakistan has played an important role in pushing al-Qaida closer to defeat, combatting ISIS, securing its nuclear weapons, hosting Afghan refugees, and, importantly, providing access for supplies and equipment used by U.S. and Afghan forces. We also acknowledge the enormous sacrifices the Pakistani people and security forces have made to combat terrorism.

We have shared with Pakistan our South Asia strategy in detail and have made our expectations clear to Pakistan, emphasizing that they must take decisive action against all militant and terrorist groups based there.

In January, the President suspended security assistance to the Pakistani military, with limited exceptions for programs that directly support U.S. national security interests, on a case-by-case basis. We may consider lifting the suspension when we see decisive and sustained actions to address our concerns, including targeting all terrorist groups operating within its territory, without distinction.

The United States is committed to doing our part to reduce tensions in the region in ways that address Pakistan's legitimate concerns. To be clear, we oppose the use of terrorist proxies by any country against another country, anywhere in the world. The use of terrorism has no place in a rules-based international system.

We hope the Pakistanis will also help to convince the Taliban to enter a peace process.

We continue to deepen our strategic partnership with India. Secretary Tillerson traveled to New Delhi for consultations in October 2017, and we expect to launch our inaugural 2+2 dialogue with India in Washington this spring, when Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Mattis will meet with their Indian counterparts to further deepen our security ties.

The United States and India share economic and humanitarian interests in Afghanistan. India has allocated more than \$3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan since 2001. India further strengthened ties with Afghanistan with the signing of a Development Partnership Agreement

last year. We appreciate these contributions and will continue to look for more ways to work with India to promote economic growth and stability in Afghanistan.

The United States is also strengthening our partnerships with the Central Asian republics. We are committed to supporting their independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty, and fostering regional connectivity. Just two weeks ago, I attended a C5+1 discussion on Afghanistan at the UN Security Council, where we discussed our bilateral and multilateral efforts to support Afghanistan and enhanced Central Asian cooperation.

We value the Central Asian governments' support for increased stability in Afghanistan. Under the leadership of President Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan has provided education and training to hundreds of Afghan students and civilian experts. In December, Uzbek President Mirziyoyev hosted President Ghani in Tashkent, where they signed a number of important agreements to foster increased trade and cross-border connectivity.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan provide important logistical access for supplies and equipment used by U.S. and Afghan forces. These

initiatives and others have helped the effort to build stability in Afghanistan and have provided better security and more economic opportunity for the people of Central Asia.

Despite recent setbacks stemming from horrific and senseless acts of violence, the President's South Asia strategy is showing some signs of progress.

On the battlefield, we are seeing the Taliban's momentum begin to slow. No major population center has fallen to the Taliban since its temporary occupation of Kunduz city in 2015. Afghan forces are now on the offensive.

Our allies and NATO partners – contributing more than 6,500 troops – are actively supporting our vision for a stable Afghanistan and a more prosperous South Asia.

And in the Afghan government, we have a strategic partner that is tackling economic, political, security, and governance challenges – including corruption – that have greatly hindered progress to date.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.