

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for Hearing on Afghanistan's Impact On Pakistan
October 1, 2009

Kerry Opening Statement At Hearing On Afghanistan's Impact On Pakistan

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered the following opening statement at the hearing titled "Afghanistan's Impact on Pakistan":

Next week marks the eighth anniversary of the war in Afghanistan. A Pentagon officer said the other day that we haven't been fighting there for eight years—we've been fighting for one year, eight times in a row. That needs to change.

Some of our objectives have remained steadfast – defeat Al Qaeda, deny them safe havens, and insure the stability of the region. Others have fluctuated. In the previous administration, both the goals and the strategy lurched in directions that confused our troops, our allies and our partners.

None of those partners is more affected by our actions in Afghanistan than Pakistan. And none is more vital to our national security. Pakistan is a democracy of 170 million people, with a large nuclear arsenal and a major challenge from extremists within its borders.

It's no secret that the relationship between our countries has suffered its share of strains. Many Pakistanis believe the United States has exploited them for strategic goals. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that two out of three Pakistanis regard the United States as an enemy. Only one in 10 describe us as a partner.

From our side, it has been difficult to build trust with Pakistan's military and intelligence services over the years because our interests have not always been aligned and because ties between the ISI and Taliban remain troubling.

We need to fix this relationship. The Senate took a major step in doing that last week by passing legislation that Senator Lugar and I introduced to triple non-military assistance to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion a year for the next five years. The House passed the bill yesterday, and President Obama has pledged to sign it.

This is a landmark achievement, but it is not a panacea. The money will help build roads and improve schools and health care. But it will not solve Pakistan's problems. Only Pakistanis can do that. But Kerry-Lugar signals our determination to put our relationship on a new foundation, with the aspirations of the Pakistani people front and center.

Just as we strengthen our civilian ties, we must understand that our actions in Afghanistan have profound effects on the security situation across the Durand Line. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past when we pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989 and left the job undone. A flood of guns, drugs and refugees swept over Pakistan and its leaders reacted by supporting the Taliban and other militant groups.

President Obama and his team are working to develop the right strategy for Afghanistan. Only then can we make the right decision on resources. That decision must reflect our commitment to the Afghan people and to the security of the United States.

But let me be clear: No matter what strategy we adopt, it must recognize that the actions we take in Afghanistan will have direct repercussions in Pakistan.

We are here this morning to examine those potential repercussions. We want to understand the implications and impacts of the scenarios under discussion at the White House and elsewhere.

For example, we need to know what the impact on Pakistan would be of a major increase in U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Would successful nation building in Afghanistan translate into greater stability in Pakistan and elsewhere across the region?

The debate must extend beyond the preoccupation with troop numbers. We need to know whether we can build a legitimate government in Afghanistan, particularly in the restive Pashtun belt in the east and southeast that is of greatest concern to Pakistan. And we need to know how the Pakistani military and intelligence services might react to scaling down our presence in Afghanistan.

This is the Committee's third session designed to test the underlying assumptions about the war in Afghanistan and stimulate the kind of debate that will clarify our goals and strategies. Next week, we will hear about how to deal with the worldwide threat from Al Qaeda.

This debate and the clarity that we hope results are essential if we are going to use our military resources wisely and obtain the consent and cooperation of the American people and our allies in NATO, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Finally, our actions in Afghanistan will influence events in Pakistan and we must take that into account. But the ultimate choices about the country's future will be made by the Pakistanis themselves.

The witnesses this morning are well positioned to help us answer these and other questions and I want to thank all of you for coming.

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