

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for U.S. Strategy Toward Pakistan
May 12, 2009

Chairman Kerry Opening Statement At U.S.-Pakistan Strategy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) released the following opening remarks at the hearing titled, “U.S. Strategy Toward Pakistan”.

Full text as prepared is below:

With its nuclear arsenal, terrorist safe havens, Taliban sanctuaries and growing insurgency, Pakistan has emerged as one of the most difficult foreign policy challenges we face. We are fortunate to have with us today one of America’s most accomplished diplomats, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, to provide a clear picture of the options available to us as we move forward.

Last Thursday, this Committee hosted Pakistani President Asif Zardari, along with Afghan President Karzai, for a working lunch. The Trilateral meetings held in Washington last week were a significant step forward. For most of the past eight years, just getting Pakistani and Afghan officials in the same room required a Herculean effort. Committee Members asked some tough questions—and that’s exactly as it should be. We should all be asking tough questions and demanding good answers. We’re not looking for perfection, but we must work together—Congress, the Administration, and the Pakistanis. The stakes are just too high for anything less.

Pakistan today has the potential either to be crippled by the Taliban, or to serve as a bulwark against everything the Taliban represents. For many of us in Congress and the administration, recent events have only reaffirmed our belief that we urgently need a bold new strategy.

The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, which I have introduced with Senator Lugar, is the centerpiece of a new approach designed to redefine not only America’s policy toward Pakistan but also our relations with the Pakistani people. I am pleased that the President has asked Congress to pass it.

Ultimately, it will be Pakistani people, not Americans, who must determine their nation’s future. The good news is that for all its current troubles, Pakistan remains a nation whose 170 million citizens are overwhelmingly moderate, whose own soldiers and police have died fighting terrorism and insurgency— a country that has committed itself to a difficult democratic transition even at a moment of enormous strain. I look forward to hearing Ambassador Holbrooke’s thoughts on how we can empower those Pakistanis fighting to steer the world’s second-largest Muslim country onto a path of moderation, stability, and regional cooperation.

Since President Obama called on Congress to pass a Pakistan aid bill, the dangers of inaction have risen almost by the day. The government has struck an ill-advised deal that effectively surrendered the Swat Valley to the Taliban. Predictably, this emboldened the Taliban to extend their reach ever closer to the country’s heartland.

In recent days we have seen encouraging signs that Pakistan’s Army is finally taking the fight to the enemy, but much remains to be done.

Even as we help Pakistan’s government to respond to an acute crisis, we also need to mend a broken relationship with the Pakistani people. For decades, America sought Pakistani cooperation through military aid, while paying scant attention to the wishes of the population itself. This arrangement is rapidly disintegrating. Today an alarming number of Pakistanis actually view America as a greater threat than Al Qaeda. Until this changes, there’s little chance of ending tolerance for terrorist groups— or persuading any Pakistani government to devote the political capital necessary to deny such groups sanctuary and covert material support.

I have seen firsthand how American aid can have a transformative effect. After the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, America spent nearly \$1 billion on relief efforts. I can personally attest that the sight of American servicemen and women saving the lives of Pakistani citizens in places like Mansehra and Muzaffarabad was invaluable in changing perceptions of America. Now we must recreate this success on a broader scale.

The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act is an important first step. On the economic side, it triples non-military aid to \$1.5 billion annually, for five years, and urges an additional five years of funding. These funds will build schools, roads, and clinics—in other words, they aim to do on a regular basis what we briefly achieved with our earthquake relief. Of course our aid to Pakistan aims to achieve more than just good deeds: It will empower the civilian government to show that it can deliver its citizens a better life.

To do this right, we must make a long-term commitment. Most Pakistanis feel that America has used and abandoned their country in the past—most notably after the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. It is this history, and this fear, that causes Pakistan to hedge its bets. If we ever expect Pakistan to break decisively with the Taliban and other extremist groups, then we will have to provide firm assurance that we are not merely foul-weather friends.

On the security side, the bill places reasonable conditions on military aid. It asks the administration to certify that Pakistan's army and spy services have been partners in the struggle against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates; and also partners in the effort to solidify democratic governance and the rule of law in Pakistan.

As important as the economic and military components of our aid to Pakistan is how they fit together: An unequivocal commitment to the Pakistani people will enable us to calibrate our military assistance more effectively. For too long, the Pakistani military has felt we were bluffing when we threatened to cut funding for a particular weapons system or expensive piece of hardware—and up to now, they have been right. But if our economic aid is tripled, we will finally be able to make these choices on the basis of both of our national interests, rather than the institutional interests of the Pakistani security forces.

Even as we take bold steps, we should realize that our aid package to Pakistan is not a silver bullet. This bill aims to increase our leverage significantly, but we should be realistic about what we can accomplish: Americans can influence events in Pakistan, but we cannot and *should* not decide them. Ultimately, the true decision-makers are the people and leaders of Pakistan.

Ask a resident—not even an elderly one—of Lahore, or Karachi, or Peshawar what these places used to be like, and you'll hear reveries of a time that now seems a world away. We must help Pakistan once again become a nation of stability, security, and prosperity, enjoying peace at home and abroad—a nation, in short, that older Pakistanis remember from their childhoods.

It is this nation that most Pakistanis desperately wish to reclaim. I am eager to hear Ambassador Holbrooke's thoughts on how we can encourage the Pakistani people to choose a peaceful, stable future—and then offer them a helping hand in getting there.

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