

Testimony

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Thank you Chairman Tierney, Ranking Member Flake, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

When the Chairman took the first steps toward organizing this hearing it was quite clear that President Obama regarded Afghanistan as one of his top foreign policy challenges. Last Friday, President Obama presented the new Afghanistan strategy to the American public. Mr. Chairman, your call for a hearing on Afghanistan in its regional context was both prescient as the President's strategy emphasized a regional approach. In the words of Ambassador Holbrooke, "The strategic review contains a clear and unambiguous message. Afghanistan and Pakistan are integrally related and you cannot deal with Afghanistan if the situation within Pakistan is what it is today. "

Mr. Chairman, my colleagues on the panel are expert on Afghanistan's relationship with Iran and with its northern neighbors. I will focus my remarks today on the complex yet critical interplay of relations and interests between Afghanistan's two neighbors to its west -- Pakistan and India. I will endeavor to place these relationships in the context of the President's regional approach to Afghanistan.

INDIA –AFGHANISTAN

India values good ties with Afghanistan as a gateway to central Asia trade, particularly with an eye to accessing a rich natural gas source. Afghanistan is also important strategically to India to flank its adversary in Pakistan. Indian-Afghan relations are old. For many years, and much to Pakistan's consternation, India and the King of Afghanistan had long shared warm relations. The strong Indian presence in Afghanistan basically continued throughout the Soviet occupation. Under the extreme rule of Islamist Taliban, India found itself without a patron in Kabul. India joined with Iran and Russia in an anti-Taliban alliance to support the Northern Alliance of non-Pushtun ethnic groups in the long civil war throughout the 1990s. Pakistan hoped to permanently end Indian influence in Afghanistan and supported the Taliban.

With the fall of the Taliban in 2001, India was quick to re-establish good ties with government that emerged from the Bonn Talks. India supported the candidature of Hamid Karzai for President and opened consulates in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. India also pledged \$750 million in

reconstruction aid. Delhi reacted to the 2008 terrorist bombing of its embassy in Kabul, believed to be with Pakistani intelligence collusion, by increasing aid to \$1.2 billion.

India is now the second largest aid donor to Afghanistan. Its reconstruction assistance program is visible and effective. India feeds 1.3 million school children daily, provided over 500 well-marked buses for public transportation, built schools, roads, clinics, telecommunications facilities and helped build the new Afghan parliament building. India trained Afghan police, diplomats and civil servants. By 2006, there were about 4,000 Indian aid and security personnel in Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN'S VIEW OF INDIA IN AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan is deeply distressed by growing Indian influence in Afghanistan. In a very short period, India made deep inroads into Pakistan's western neighborhood. The growing Indian influence at the expense of Pakistan is perceived in Pakistan as a consequence of President Musharraf's policy of allying with the United States to oust the Taliban from power.

Pakistanis feel the Indian threat from several angles. They regard India's investment in the Iran port at Chadabar as an effort to cut into Pakistan's exclusive trade routes to its land-locked neighbor. And they were right. Pakistan does not permit Indian goods to pass through its ports on the way to Afghanistan (although it permits Afghan products to move to India). The Indians, therefore, are intentionally developing trade routes through Iran to assure the free passage of their goods. Undoubtedly the Indian-built highway to an Iranian port will compete with the new port in Gwadar, Pakistan built by the Chinese.

Pakistanis believe India uses its foreign assistance projects as cover to launch spying operations and channel support to anti-government extremists. The United States understands that a red line for Pakistan would be deployment of Indian combat troops in Afghanistan and has blocked troops. Still, India has offered security assistance and has provided training for the Afghan National Army. The arrival of a company of Indian paramilitary troops to protect Indian road workers close to Pakistan's border is deeply troubling to the Pakistani military. The Pakistan Army feels squeezed on both sides of the border. The Army believes its mission to defend its nation is compromised by the loss of special ties to Kabul.

Both Afghanistan and India believe the attack of the Indian Embassy in Kabul last summer was a warning shot from the ISI. The attack killed 40 people including the Indian military attaché. Following this incident, Pakistan replaced the Chief of ISI, some say partly to ease tensions with both India and Afghanistan. Others see the nomination of General Pasha as head of ISI as no more than Chief of Army Staff, General Kiyani's placement of a trusted ally in a critical position.

PAKISTAN –AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Chairman, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan are not uncommon where a national border splits an important ethnic group. Greater Pushtun nationalism and demands to create "Pushtunistan" cut from Pakistan has bedeviled relations between Kabul and Islamabad since the founding of Pakistan over 60 years ago. To this day, Afghanistan has not recognized the Durand Line as the border. Strained relations have been the norm. Earlier Afghan rulers supported Baluch separatists in Pakistan. Pakistan, in turn, meddled in the affairs of its smaller, landlocked neighbors. But to fully understand the troubled relations between the two neighbors, one must see it from the perspective of Pakistan-Indian hostilities. As long as Pakistan views the major threat to its existence emanating from India, it believes it must have a

friendly state on its western border. Pakistan Policy Working Group report prepared for the Council of Foreign Relations concluded that the “transformation of Pakistan Afghanistan ties can only take place in an overall context of improved Pakistani-Indian relations.”

Pakistan felt squeezed by a strong Indian presence on both borders. The routing of the Soviet regime in Kabul in the eighties presented an opportunity for Pakistan to develop a friendly regime at India’s expense.

Pakistan adopted the defensive doctrine known as “strategic depth” to compensate for its military and geographic vulnerability. Military strategists reasoned that as a narrow country, Pakistan would not be able to defend against an Indian land attack across its eastern border. Pakistan, therefore, sought the capability to pull back its troops and equipment across its western border into Afghanistan. Maintaining good terms with the government in Kabul is more than a diplomatic advantage. It is a defensive requirement.

As you recall, Mr. Chairman, during that 1980’s, Pakistan was a close ally of the United States in our efforts to drive the Soviets out of Kabul. The Pakistani Army, through its Inter-Service Intelligence branch (ISI), channeled American and Saudi funds to a network of Afghan mujahedeen fighters. Pakistan maintained contact with many of these same mujahedeen groups throughout the nineties. It also developed strong ties with the emergent Taliban regime that controlled Afghanistan in hopes of finding a government friendly to Pakistan and to the exclusion of its rival India.

When President Musharraf first agreed to abandon Pakistan’s support for the Taliban after September 11, he envisioned a stable Afghanistan, friendly to Pakistan. It was important to President Musharraf in those early days that the new Afghan leader be ethnically Pushtun. Again this was an expression of Pakistan’s fears that an Indian ally from the Northern Alliance would assume power. Now, seven years later, any hope that Pakistan may have had after 9/11 for a stable, friendly Afghanistan under the leadership of pro-Pakistan government has not realized.

It is not hard to understand that strategic depth is an irritant to Afghanistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai is openly critical of Pakistan Army interference in internal Afghan affairs. He has accused ISI Army intelligence of undermining his government. Indeed, some of the same mujahedeen leaders from the earlier anti-Soviet period such as Gulbudin Hekmatyar and Jalaaluddin Haqqani, today lead extremist groups that attack U.S., NATO and the legitimate forces in Afghanistan from safe havens inside Pakistan. Afghan’s also found it suspicious that the ISI is unable to locate and arrest Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar, who many say operates from the Pakistan border city of Quetta. Pakistan has denied that Mullah Omar is based in Quetta. It asserts, with merit, that hundreds of Pakistani troops have lost their lives defending the Afghan border region. Pakistan has suggested a number of initiatives to staunch extremist movement across the border including efforts to mine the area, build a fence, impose tighter border crossing controls, and launch aggressive combat activity in the tribal areas. Most of these measures were inconclusive, but not without criticism by the Afghan government and eliciting hostility from Pushtun clansmen on both sides of the border.

Based partly on its history of support for the Taliban and failure to staunch cross border raids, there are persistent media reports that the Pakistan Army today is “infiltrated” with Taliban sympathizers. I believe it far more complex. To be sure, the lower ranks of the Army reflect the anti-American sentiment of the

population as whole. Rather than an “infiltration” by extremists, more attention should be given to the Army’s reluctance to abandon the strategy of holding a Pushtun proxy force for the time when Pakistan may have to re-establish its influence.

Diplomatic ties between Kabul and Islamabad improved somewhat with the return of civilian government in Pakistan. Trilateral talks between the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan are now held on a regular basis and Ambassador Holbrooke has pledge to maintain them. He has further agreed to consult with India periodically on the progress of these talks. These consultations and a more concentrated effort at intelligence exchanges promised by Director Panetta on his recent trip to the region will do much to go allow sunlight into the murky regional rivalries. In the long term, regional stability will continue to be elusive as long as Pakistan fears it is surrounded by adversaries and continues its support to non-state groups in cross border operations.

PAKISTAN-INDIA

At the heart of the bitter Pakistan –Indian conflict is the unresolved issue of Kashmir left over from the time of partition that created the nation states of Pakistan and India.

For years, successive U.S. Administrations have avoided efforts to mediate the Kashmir conflict. It appears the Obama team is inclined to continue that tradition. Ambassador Holbrooke made clear that he was the Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan and explicitly, not India. Any effort at international involvement in Kashmir would very likely provoke a fierce negative Indian reaction and would certainly be counterproductive. At the same time, it must be understood that progress in Kashmir is both desirable and not beyond reach.

Regrettably, the Mumbai terrorist attack threatens to set back the recent progress made toward a trade agreement and progress on Kashmir. Indeed, dashing progress toward normalized relations could well have been the objective of those who perpetrated the Mumbai attack. We now know that the Mumbai terrorist operation was conducted by Lashkar-e-Taiba, one of the several Kashmir terrorist groups supported by the Pakistani ISI to violently disrupt Indian interests in Kashmir. Some Indian analysts believe elements of the Pakistani ISI may have been behind the attack in order to turn attention away from fighting fellow Muslims along the Afghan border. Instead, they would want to keep attention on what they believe is Pakistan’s existential threat, India. Undercutting this view is the fact that some terrorist groups have broken away from Army control in recent years. These groups have allied with the al Qaeda network along the Afghan border, and turned their violence on Pakistani officials, including the Army.

As progress is made in the future we can expect to again see desperate acts from spoilers. India reacted with admirable restraint in the aftermath of the Mumbai attack. We all hope India will not be tested again. But if and when it is, New Delhi must be encouraged to again exercise restraint. Not because we wish to protect the terrorists, but rather because it is the strongest response to desperate actions of those with weak and failing causes.

PRESIDENT OBAMA’S NEW STRATEGY – A REGIONAL APPROACH

The Administration’s strategy for Afghanistan represents a notable departure in U.S. policy. Ambassador Holbrooke addressed the difference, “The Bush administration had three separate policies-

for Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. We have integrated Afghanistan and Pakistan and consult India on these issues.”

The President’s regional Afghanistan-Pakistan policy was well received by both Afghan President Karzai and Pakistan’s President Zardari. That should come as no surprise. The policy builds on the more successful elements of the Bush Administration strategy, but goes beyond to attempt to address the fundamental needs and fears of each of the countries affected.

Afghanistan: To Karzai’s satisfaction the U.S. acknowledges insurgent attacks emanate from Pakistan. The administration also recognizes that the most urgent need of the population is personal security and protection. The Administration pledges to provide General McKiernan with most of the additional troops he requested both to train Afghan National Army and police forces and to provide an important margin of security while Afghan forces can be brought to strength. The plan also seeks to eliminate those funding-sources that enable the extremists, namely the opium trade, and corruption. Finally, Afghanistan is cheered by the prospect of a more focused approach to development.

Pakistan: The new strategy acknowledges that more can and should be done to create jobs, encourage trade and assure good governance for the Pakistani people. The civilian government of Pakistan is encouraged by the Administration’s support for the Kerry Lugar authorization legislation to triple aid to civilians and with the Reconstruction Zone bill to boost trade, economic development and jobs along the border region. The Pakistan Army can also take some comfort that the strategy acknowledges its grievance that Pakistani forces alone can not be held solely accountable for securing the porous mountainous border. Additional US and NATO troops, and eventually strengthened Afghan security forces will also be needed on the Afghan side.

India: New Delhi can be encouraged by the administration’s tougher line. India has been critical of the U.S. “soft approach to Islamabad” in the past and should be encouraged by the notion that the U.S. will think in terms of bench marks for Pakistani performance in counter terrorism efforts. India should appreciate the tougher line regarding Pakistan’s perceived tolerance for the Kashmir terrorist groups and greater pressure to cooperate on the Mumbai attack investigation. India has long argued that the terror inflicted by the Kashmir groups such as Jaish e Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba are no different from al Qaeda. The horror of the well organized Mumbai attack was graphic evidence of this position. Ambassador Holbrooke will continue the trilateral talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States and has pledged to consult with India on a more regular basis.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the interwoven interests and perceptions of the three regional powers leads to the same inextricable conclusion. India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and for that matter the United States, are fighting the same enemy.

It is a delicate balancing act. The challenge to U.S. policy makers is to avoid defining our objectives in terms of U.S. interests alone. Rather we must use our diplomacy to unite all regional actors around the common objective of denying terrorist the space to operate. Success requires cooperation.

The Pakistani government and Army must be persuaded that its priority should be to dismantle and destroy the Kashmiri, Taliban and al Qaeda terrorists groups on its soil because it is in their own interests.

Allying with others in pursuit of this goal should not be viewed as an affront to national sovereignty. Accepting the view that domestic extremist groups are a threat to Pakistan's democracy and vision of Pakistan as a moderate Islamic state will not come easy or quick.

Within Afghanistan, the objective should be to create sufficient positive momentum toward stability and economic prosperity that all groups find cooperation in their interests. No negotiation will persuade Taliban leaders to act against their interests. Nor is a decisive military defeat of the Taliban likely. Rather our eventual success will come after a long, hard, slow, slog toward creating a more secure and prosperous environment for people.

India would be wise to avoid provoking Pakistani suspicions by aggressive activities along its border in Afghanistan. If its intentions are straightforward, it must act transparently.

The U.S. must accept that it may take time and sensitive diplomacy to realign national perceptions after years of competition and confrontation. It will be a challenge for Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan to overcome patterns of distrust and to reach an understanding that cooperation and not confrontation is the best route to meeting objectives. The Administration's strategy shows every promise that the United States will not abandon the mission. Sustain, consistent, constant engagement will be the key to success.

Finally, the US does not and should not take sides in complex and historical regional conflicts. When we have tried to see absolute truths in complex diplomatic relations, we invariably do harm.

In this testimony, I have tried to present a sketch of the national views on regional relations. There is truth, deception and inadvertent misperceptions in each of the national views. What I hope has emerged is a strong case for encouraging all parties to work in transparent, cooperative manner as they face enormous national challenges.