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“From Strategy to Implementation: The Future of the U.S.-Pakistan Relationship”

U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172
May 5, 2009, 12:15 P.M.

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on the future of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, with much of the discussion focusing on the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement (PEACE) Act. Introduced by Foreign Affairs Chairman **Howard Berman** (D-CA), the PEACE Act is the House version of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act introduced by Senators **John Kerry** and **Richard Lugar**, which would triple non-military aid to Pakistan. The first portion of the hearing featured **Richard Holbrooke**, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second panel included **Lisa Curtis**, Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, **C. Christine Fair**, Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation, and **Daniel Markey**, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Chairman Berman expressed Congress’ concern about the “deteriorating security situation in Pakistan.” He said that the PEACE Act was aimed at strengthening Pakistan’s democratic institutions and civil society. He commented that the bill has been unfairly cast as imposing “rigid conditionality” on Pakistan, noting that it simply required the president to certify annually whether Pakistan has made progress, on balance, in fighting extremists. Ranking member **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) also said that America wants “a stable, prosperous, democratic Pakistan” that doesn’t harbor Al Qaeda or the Taliban. She called for expanded trade to strengthen Pakistani civil society. Vice Chair **Gary Ackerman** (D-NY) complained that, with opposition leader **Nawaz Sharif** and President **Asif Zardari** squabbling, the Pakistani government has failed to take action against terrorists threatening Pakistan’s own survival.

Ambassador **Holbrooke** endorsed the PEACE Act, while noting the State Department’s concern about finding an appropriate balance on aid conditionality so that U.S. demands on Pakistan are not unrealistic. He also spoke in favor of a bill by Rep. **Chris Van Hollen** (D-MD) that would allow Afghanistan and Pakistan to export some goods to the U.S. duty-free.

He commented that the news media have exaggerated Pakistan’s admittedly serious security challenges. “We do not think Pakistan is a failed state,” he said, although it faces “an extreme test” from Taliban militants. He also dismissed media reports that the U.S. is backing Sharif over Zardari. While the U.S. has maintained contacts with Sharif, this is common practice (he pointed out that the U.S. also maintains a relationship with U.K. Tory leader David Cameron) and pointed to Zardari’s meetings with Secretary **Clinton** and President **Obama** this week. “We must support and help stabilize a democratic Pakistan, headed by the democratically elected President Zardari.” He later mentioned that the U.S. government is strongly opposed to any restoration of military rule, and that the U.S. would not publicly declare a backup plan for a collapse of Pakistan’s government because to do so would undermine the government.

Asked by Ros-Lehtinen about Islamabad's commitment to fighting terrorists, Holbrooke said that the Pakistani military has been too focused on India and has not devoted sufficient resources or troops to fighting militants inside the country. (He said that the U.S. can counter this trend by providing military equipment to Pakistan that is primarily useful for counter-insurgency, although he also claimed that even F-16s can be used in counter-insurgency.) But he said the Pakistani government may now be more willing to fight the Taliban since the Taliban broke the Swat peace agreement and invaded Buner, pointing out that the government launched a major military offensive recently, pushing the militants out of Buner and sending troops to fight them in Swat.

Edward Royce (R-CA) asked Holbrooke what could be done about the jihadist radio broadcasts in Pakistan and about the corruption of the Afghan government. Holbrooke said the U.S. should help Pakistan jam those broadcasts and offer radio programs countering their message. On Afghanistan, he noted that only 10% of U.S. aid is channeled through the Afghan government, and that he would like to see that figure increased to at least 40% to build Kabul's capacity for offering services to its citizens.

Both Rep. Royce and Rep. **Michael McCaul** (R-TX) asked about deradicalizing Pakistan's education system. Holbrooke said that students in madrassas are "fodder for suicide bombing missions" and that the PEACE Act would fund alternative schools. He also said that enabling more girls to attend school was an important goal for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, but that American soldiers should not risk their lives to accomplish this goal, because it does not relate directly to U.S. security.

Rep. **Keith Ellison** (D-MN) wondered if aid conditionality would make Zardari look like a "tool of the West." Holbrooke said this was an important consideration, because Zardari is often accused of being too pro-American. **Berman** countered that giving unconditional aid to Pakistan has not yielded any benefit for the U.S.

In the second panel, **Lisa Curtis** began by claiming that, although the collapse of Pakistan is not imminent, the long-term goal of the insurgents is a national Islamic revolution. The Swat peace deal was a major victory for the Taliban, but the government's recent offensive may signal a new commitment to taking on militants. Curtis praised the PEACE Act for improving U.S. leverage with Pakistan and for providing support to Pakistanis fighting to consolidate democracy and the rule of law.

Christine Fair also generally approved of the PEACE Act but noted some concerns about it. She said the bill presumed cooperative Pakistani partners, but there may be resistance to some U.S. goals. A better approach, she suggested, would be to develop joint plans for how to use the aid with Pakistani partners. The bill's reliance on contractors could result in poor delivery of services, while failing to develop Pakistan's own capacity for raising revenue and providing services. The legislation does not provide support for the police, who are more important than militaries for defeating insurgencies, research shows. The bill also lacks quantifiable benchmarks to transparently measure Pakistan's progress in meeting U.S. reform conditions. Pakistan is unlikely to meet the bill's conditions as they now stand.

Daniel Markey said the "next generation" of terrorists would likely come from Pakistan. Meeting this challenge requires two long-term strategies. First, the U.S. must empower Pakistanis inside and outside the government who want to defeat extremism. Civilian aid is a good way to do this, but right now U.S. aid workers can't operate throughout Pakistan because of understaffing and security problems. Second, we must reshape the strategic environment in the region. In particular, we must make a long-

term diplomatic and military commitment to Afghanistan, to discourage Pakistan from hedging by supporting the Taliban. Markey opposes conditioning aid, saying that it would suggest to Pakistan that the U.S. is not a committed ally, and agreeing with Fair that Pakistan is unlikely to meet our conditions. Instead, the U.S. should commit our support to those in Pakistan who share our interests in fighting extremists.

Rep. **Ellison** suggested that it was not helpful to condemn all madrassas, and the panelists all agreed, arguing that most madrassas do not promote terrorism. Curtis and Markey argued that the U.S. should focus on eliminating those few madrassas that are linked to terrorists and operating as terrorism training camps. Fair also said that data show madrassas are not a haven for poor families with no other options – Pakistani families enroll their children in religious schools by choice. She also cited research suggesting that Muslims with more religious training are less likely to be successfully recruited by extremist groups. The U.S. should stop “harping on madrassas,” because doing so undermines reformists working to improve Islamic schools. Fair did call for the U.S. to foster competition in education, and Curtis said Pakistan should spend more on schools.