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Senate Committee on Foreign Relations “U.S. Strategy Toward Pakistan”

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The Senate Foreign Relations Committee heard the testimony of **Ambassador Richard Holbrooke** on a new strategy toward Pakistan. In light of the proposed “Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act” and the pending emergency supplemental bill, quite a few senators questioned the clarity of objectives and benchmarks in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. **Chairman Kerry** (D-MA) opened the proceedings by underscoring the need to strengthen the Pakistani government as “**ultimately, it will be Pakistani people, and not Americans, who must determine their nation's future.**” He emphasized that “we are not looking for perfection” but progress is absolutely critical and can only be achieved through cooperation between Congress, the Administration, and the Pakistanis. This sentiment was echoed by **Senator Lugar** (R-IN) and he explained that the Kerry-Lugar legislation is designed “to take advantage of the opportunity for revitalizing our relations through greater diplomatic engagement, as well as a commitment to economic and political development.”

Ambassador Holbrooke recalled last week's lunch meeting between the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Presidents **Zardari** and **Karzai**, arguing that it was an unprecedented meeting that “really moved policy.” As cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is known to be “notoriously bad” the meeting provided a unique setting that brought the two leaders together and forced them to address the tough issues. This trilateral process will improve the chances of reaching our objectives in the region, but only if it produces concrete steps on the ground. Holbrooke agreed with Senator Kerry's assessment that while the situation on the ground is very serious, **Pakistan is not a failed state nor is it about to be taken over by the Taliban.** He pointed to the new democratically-elected government which succeeded a military regime that was “excessively supported” by the United States as proof of an improving political environment. However, the ill-advised deal between the government and the Taliban in Swat is leading to a deteriorating situation that has produced approximately 900,000 refugees.

Senator Lugar questioned how this new plan for Pakistan would be implemented, pressing for specifics on allocation of funds and insurance that taxpayer dollars would be used for its intended purpose. Holbrooke pledged to submit in writing a detailed breakdown of the programs and funding levels. These programs will include strengthening healthcare, education, law enforcement, the agricultural sector and will incorporate microcredit to help alleviate poverty and provide greater access to employment. The ambassador also highlighted the importance of broadcasting for the counterinsurgency in the Northwest Frontier Province. Currently, the Taliban has sole ownership of the airwaves in a region with a high illiteracy rate and uses this medium to control and intimidate. Yet, neither the U.S. nor Pakistan has done much to jam the

frequencies or offer alternative programming, and Holbrooke argued that we cannot win the war if we cede the airwaves to the Taliban.

Both Senators **Corker** (R-TN) and **Menendez** (D-NJ) expressed concern over whether the mission in Pakistan and Afghanistan was clear enough to warrant immediate approval of increased funding. Holbrooke responded by explaining that while the situation is tough the administration has outlined a clear, comprehensive strategy defined by defeating al Qaeda, stabilizing Afghanistan, strengthening Pakistani democracy, and focusing military and civilian attention to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Menendez stressed that while he had always supported funding for the region in the past he has “no sense of reassurance” that the money will be used properly. Senator **Kaufman** (D-DE) disagreed with his colleagues on this point, arguing that a specific plan has been outlined and furthermore it is “quite clear there is a sea change” occurring in Pakistan. The government no longer has to be convinced that dealing with FATA is in the best interest of Pakistan. However, Kaufman did voice concern over the will of the military in fighting the Taliban in this region.