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“New Beginnings: Foreign Policy Priorities in the Obama Administration”

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172

April 22, 2009, 9:30 A.M.

Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton** appeared before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to discuss the foreign policy goals and strategies of the **Obama** administration. In his opening remarks, Chairman **Howard Berman** (D-CA) praised Secretary Clinton for reviewing and developing a plan to revamp the United States’ “under-funded” capacity for diplomacy and development assistance. He also observed that Pakistan’s deal with extremists in the Swat valley has emboldened the Taliban and other militants in the country. The U.S. can not allow militants to operate with impunity in Pakistan, he said, arguing that America must expand assistance to Pakistan’s government. Ranking Member **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) expressed concern that aid for NGOs in Gaza could find its way into Hamas’ hands, and criticized the administration’s proposal for continuing funds to the Palestinian Authority if Fatah and Hamas form a unit government. She also said that the U.S. must defend and advance freedom and democracy abroad.

Among the issues Secretary Clinton touched on in her opening statement, she mentioned that advancing U.S. interests and values requires promoting human rights abroad and said America benefits from “security, prosperity and democracy in the world.” In addition to focusing on human rights, Clinton said the Obama administration will work to strengthen civil society, good governance, and the rule of law around the world. Secretary Clinton said the U.S. would strengthen alliances with its long-time democratic partners around the world and work with emerging powers like Turkey and Brazil on democracy and other issues. In addition to building ties with governments, she said, the U.S. must also forge ties with foreign publics, NGOs, businesses, and universities. She also argued that America has “underinvested in diplomacy. That must end. ... If we don’t invest in diplomacy and development we end up paying a lot more for conflict.”

Palestine

Vice Chair **Gary Ackerman** (D-NY) asked Clinton directly what U.S. policy would be toward a Fatah-Hamas unity government. Clinton explained that while the president has sought authority from Congress to provide funds to a Palestinian unity government, such funding would be conditional on Hamas accepting the principles supported by the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative: Hamas must renounce violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and abide by previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Rep. **Eliot Engel** (D-NY) echoed Ros-Lehtinen’s concern about aid to Gaza going to Hamas, but Clinton noted that NGOs receiving aid in Gaza were required to certify that they were not involved with Hamas. Responding to Rep. **Shelley Berkley** (D-NV), who questioned whether the Palestinian Authority was ready to form an independent state, Clinton praised the political reforms

spearheaded by P.A. Prime Minister **Salam Fayyad**, and stated that there is no alternative to a two-state solution.

Civilian funding

Rep. **Lynn Woolsey** (D-CA) lamented that the Department of Defense is slated to receive 7-10 times as much money as the State Department, and Rep. **Jim Costa** (D-CA) said the military has taken on a lot of development projects that are more appropriate for State Department personnel. Rep. **Ron Paul** (R-TX) complained that the Defense budget was being increased by 9% and that the U.S. was over-committed militarily around the world. Clinton pointed to the withdrawal date Obama has set for U.S. troops in Iraq and said the U.S. must “use every tool in our toolbox,” including diplomacy and development, in addition to military force. She agreed that the State Department needs more civilian personnel and funding, pointing out that Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** has said the same thing. She pointed out that congressional appropriations committees have cut back on the administration’s requests in this area, however. Rep. **Sheila Jackson Lee** (D-TX) specifically said “We need to recapacitate and reprofessionalize USAID.” Clinton agreed, saying that USAID allows the U.S. to build “person-to-person” connections overseas and that its funding has been “decimated.” She also wants to find ways of making foreign aid more effective and to develop “outcome measures.” She noted that the one reason the military has taken on so many state-building duties is that it is less encumbered by bureaucratic restrictions than civilian agencies are. She agreed with Rep. Costa’s call for more public-private partnerships in foreign development aid.

Afghanistan

Rep. **John Tanner** (D-TN), who is president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, said maintaining support by our European allies for operations in Afghanistan will require significant progress in the country this year. Clinton said she was encouraged by the NATO countries’ commitments in Afghanistan and that there are sufficient forces in the country to oversee the critical upcoming national election. But it will also be essential to train the Afghan army and police, fight corruption, develop agriculture, etc. Asked by Rep. Woolsey about the administration’s goals in Afghanistan, Clinton said the prime U.S. security interest in Afghanistan was to prevent it becoming a terrorist safe haven, and prevent extremists from taking control.

Pakistan

Rep. Jackson Lee called for the administration to press Pakistan’s leading politicians to form a coalition government that can confront extremists in Swat. Clinton said that the U.S. can not impose any form of government on Pakistan, but also criticized Islamabad for “abdicating” to the Taliban and other extremists. Part of the problem, she said, was that the government’s inability to extend law and order and other services into the countryside has pushed many Pakistanis to support rule by extremist groups. Rep. **Michael McCaul** (R-TX) called for conditioning aid to Pakistan on its progress in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda. Clinton agreed that aid should be conditional and noted that the State Department is developing progress measures that it will share with Congress. And she expressed confidence that the Pakistani government shares the U.S.’s concerns about extremists.

Other regions

Clinton discussed the role of democracy and human rights in U.S. foreign policy toward a number of countries around the world. The Obama administration aims to promote democracy in Cuba and is discussing human rights concerns with China. There is no contradiction between standing up for our democratic principles and cooperating with authoritarian states on other issues, she asserted. “There is always and must be a moral dimension to our foreign policy,” she said and explained that President Obama is reasserting America’s moral authority, so that the U.S. can be taken seriously on human rights. Responding to Rep. **Ron Klein**’s (D-FL) concerns about the UN Human Rights Council focusing excessively on Israel, Clinton said the administration was seeking a seat on the council in order to bring attention to human rights abuses around the world that are currently ignored. Clinton agreed with Rep. **Robert Wexler**’s (D-FL) assessment that Indonesia is a model for the Islamic world, noting that it is a nation “where democracy, Islam, secularism, and women’s rights coexist,” and that the U.S. should continue to support its democratic and economic development.