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Clinton woos Pakistan on security, aid



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By [Andrew Quinn](#)

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pushed new economic partnerships on Sunday to buttress a shaky alliance with Pakistan that U.S. officials say is vital to victory in the escalating war in neighboring Afghanistan.

Her two-day visit includes talks with top military and civilian leaders as well as pledges of economic aid which Washington hopes will demonstrate to a skeptical public that the United States is a trustworthy partner in the struggle against the Taliban on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The Pakistan and Afghan commerce ministers signed a trade deal during her visit that the United States also hopes will help boost cooperation between the countries.

U.S. officials kept details of Clinton's trip secret prior to her arrival on Sunday following a wave of bombings and attacks in Pakistan, which is increasingly targeted by its own Islamist militants.

Security will be equally tight during her next stop in Afghanistan, where she will take part in an international conference Tuesday as the U.S.-led war runs into mounting doubts in the U.S. Congress.

The conference is aimed at fleshing out Afghan President Hamid Karzai's pledge to

assume more responsibility for both security and governance before U.S. President Barack Obama's July 2011 target date to begin withdrawing U.S. forces.

HISTORY OF MISTRUST

The Obama administration sees nuclear-armed Pakistan as a pivotal player in the struggle against militant Islamist groups in both countries, but the two sides are divided by a history of mistrust and sometimes diverging goals over a war that is increasingly unpopular.

Opinion polls have shown many Pakistanis doubtful about long-term U.S. intentions, citing examples of abandonment particularly after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan.

U.S. officials, meanwhile, are wary of the role that Pakistan is playing in Afghanistan and believe it needs to do more to fight its own homegrown Taliban militants, which Washington blames for the attempted bombing in New York's Times Square on May 1.

"There are still additional steps that we are asking and expecting the Pakistanis to take. But there is no doubt in anyone's mind that should an attack against the United States be traced to be Pakistani, it would (have) a very devastating impact on our relationship," Clinton told the BBC.

Richard Holbrooke, the Obama administration's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said there was a "dramatic acceleration" in cooperation between Washington and Islamabad, but conceded Pakistani public opinion was lagging.

"We only have small indications of improvement in the polls, but significant examples of improvements in the government," Holbrooke told reporters in Islamabad, adding Pakistan's own fragile political structure was also stabilizing.

"This change is of strategic importance because it's enabling us to move forward in our additional efforts on counter-terrorism," he said.

Clinton's meetings with Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and military chief General Ashfaq Kayani build on talks held in Washington in March aimed at speeding the flow of both security information and billions of dollars in U.S. aid.

U.S. officials hope shows of U.S. help on everything from water and power projects to women's rights will turn public opinion in Pakistan, where polls show fewer than one in five Pakistanis view the United States favorably despite a tripling of civilian aid to \$7.5 billion in the next five years.

Clinton has often expressed a deep personal affection for Pakistan and is expected to wield her own charisma in the effort to win support, appearing at several public engagements where she can pitch the U.S. case to local audiences who were widely hostile during her last visit in October.

(Editing by [Alison Williams](#))

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