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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
OCTOBER, 27, 2011

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on my recent trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan and to discuss the road ahead.

I want to start by recognizing the concerns that many of you have expressed. These are complex relationships and we face serious challenges. So you and the American people are right to ask questions.

But I also want to highlight what sometimes gets lost in the public debate: Our work in Afghanistan and Pakistan has yielded significant results.

Osama bin Laden and many of his top lieutenants are dead. The threat remains real and urgent – especially from al Qaeda’s affiliates. But the group’s senior leadership has been devastated and its ability to conduct operations is greatly diminished. Many of our successes against al Qaeda would not have been possible without close cooperation between the United States and Pakistan.

In Afghanistan we still face a difficult fight, but coalition and Afghan forces have reversed the Taliban’s momentum in key areas. Afghan security forces have a long way to go, but they are taking more responsibility every day. And while the country still faces enormous challenges from poverty and corruption, our development efforts have bolstered the economy and improved lives.

Ten years ago, for example, fewer than a million students were enrolled in Afghan schools, all of them boys. Now there are more than 7 million, and nearly 40 percent of them are girls. Afghans today are better prepared to chart their own future and ensure that their country never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists.

I offer these examples as a reminder that, as President Obama has said, we are meeting our commitments and making progress toward our goals. And we can’t let up. We should build on our momentum, not undercut our progress.

Working with our Afghan and Pakistani partners is not always easy, but these relationships are advancing America’s national security interests. And walking away would undermine those interests.

With that as the context, let me report to you that I have just completed a productive visit to both countries. In both Kabul and Islamabad, I emphasized our three-track strategy of fight, talk, build. We are pursuing all three tracks at once, as they are mutually reinforcing. And the chances of success for all three are greatly increased by strong cooperation from the Afghan and Pakistani governments.

Let me briefly discuss each track and explain where we are and where we need to go.

First, the fight. As I noted, coalition and Afghan forces have increased pressure on the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and other insurgents, including with a new operation in eastern Afghanistan launched in recent days.

But our commanders on the ground are increasingly concerned about the ability of insurgents to conduct attacks from safe havens across the border in Pakistan.

So in Islamabad last week, General Dempsey, Director Petraeus and I delivered a single, unified message. We urged Pakistan's civilian and military leadership to join us in squeezing the Haqqani Network from both sides of the border and in closing the safe havens.

We underscored to our Pakistani counterparts the urgency of the task at hand, and we had detailed and frank conversations about the concrete steps both sides need to take to advance what we believe are shared interests.

I explained that trying to distinguish between so-called good terrorists and bad terrorists is ultimately self-defeating and dangerous. No one who targets innocent civilians of any nationality should be tolerated or protected.

We're not suggesting that Pakistan sacrifice its own security. Quite the opposite. We respect the sacrifices Pakistan has already made. Over the past decade, more than five thousand Pakistani soldiers have been lost and tens of thousands of Pakistani citizens have been killed or injured. That is why we are pursuing a vision of shared security that will benefit us all.

The second track is the talking, and here too we are working with our partners to take concrete steps.

In both Kabul and Islamabad, I reaffirmed America's strong support for an inclusive Afghan-led peace process. We have been clear about the necessary outcomes of any negotiation: Insurgents must renounce violence, abandon al Qaeda, and abide by the constitution of Afghanistan, including its protections for women and minorities. If insurgents cannot meet those red-lines, they will face continued and unrelenting assault.

And I want to stress, as I did in Kabul, that the hard-won rights of women and all Afghans must not be rolled back. And the growth of civil society must not be quashed.

There is no doubt that the murder of former President Rabbani was a set-back, but reconciliation is still possible. Indeed, it represents the best hope for peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

Pakistan has a crucial role to play in this process and a big stake in its outcome. And we look to Pakistan to encourage the Taliban and other insurgents to participate in an Afghan peace process in good faith – both through unequivocal public statements and by closing off the safe havens.

We are also working with the Afghan Government to help them secure commitments from all of their neighbors to respect Afghan sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to support Afghan reconciliation. This will be a key focus when regional foreign ministers meet in Istanbul next week.

For our part, the United States is working with the Afghan government to conclude a new Strategic Partnership that will provide a framework for cooperation long after the transition is concluded in 2014. It will send a strong signal about our enduring commitment to the people of Afghanistan and the future of the region.

Finally, the third track is building – building capacity and opportunity in Afghanistan, Pakistan and across the region. This is part of a clear-eyed strategy rooted in a lesson we have learned over and over again, all over the world – lasting stability and security go hand in hand with economic opportunity. People need a realistic hope for a better life, a job and a chance to provide for their family. So it is critical to our broader effort that civilian assistance continues in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Obama administration is working hard to strengthen oversight and improve effectiveness of all our programs. Early next week, I will be sending you a comprehensive status update on our civilian assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and it will detail our plans to shift from short-term stabilization to long-term development programs.

As the transition proceeds and coalition combat forces leave Afghanistan, the Afghan economy will face new challenges and it will need new sources of growth. So we are working with our partners to support an achievable, Afghan-led economic strategy to improve agricultural productivity, develop Afghanistan's natural resources in a way that benefits the Afghan people, increase exports and strengthen the financial sector, among other steps.

In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, we share the goal of moving from aid to trade. So we want to work with you and your colleagues to move forward on Reconstruction Opportunity Zones, which would lower tariff rates on Pakistani and Afghan products, and on an Enterprise Fund for Pakistan.

We are also pursuing our economic work with an eye towards supporting a broader, long-term vision for regional economic integration that we call the New Silk Road. This is a plan for increasing cross-border trade and investment that will create jobs and opportunities across the region.

Since announcing the New Silk Road in India this summer, I have led an aggressive diplomatic campaign to get buy-in from all the countries in the region. We had a productive conference on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York last month. On this recent trip, leaders from government and civil society offered their ideas on how to move forward. The effort will continue at the conference in Istanbul next week and in Bonn on December 5.

Again, this is not just an economic plan – it is directly tied to our strategic goals of increasing stability and supporting reconciliation.

So those are our three tracks: fight, talk, build.

I will not sit here and tell you that we have all the answers. Or that there will not be hard days ahead. There will be. But we believe that this strategy offers the best way forward.

As we move ahead, your advice and counsel will be crucial. The administration looks to this Committee and to the Congress as a whole to be a full and active partner.

This strategy requires resources. I can't sugar coat that fact. But the future of this region is vital to the national security of the United States. And we will continue to have significant interests there long after our combat troops come home.

America paid a heavy price for disengaging after the Soviets left in 1989. We cannot afford to make that mistake again. We have to be smart and strategic. And we have to work together to protect our interests.

So thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to answering your questions.

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