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“2014 and Beyond: U.S. Policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, Part I”

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Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, and Committee members: thank you for the opportunity to testify on the strategy of the United States toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, both in the near term and in the years beyond 2014 -- when the Afghan government is scheduled to assume the lead for security operations nationwide.

In short, what happens in 2014 and beyond will depend on the success or failure of U.S. strategy between now and then, especially with regards to the following goals:

- Eliminating terrorist sanctuaries in the region;
- Catalyzing a strategic shift in Pakistani policy from supporting those who are fighting NATO and Afghan forces — the Taliban, the Haqqani network and others – to facilitating a political settlement in Afghanistan;
- Persuading the Afghan government to deal with governance issues such as corruption and the rule of law;
- Transferring security responsibilities to the Afghan government; and
- Pursuing a positive outlook for the region based on economic integration and the establishment of a New Silk Road that would benefit all countries.

If the US achieve these objectives, Afghanistan as well as the surrounding region will cross important thresholds toward self-sustaining stability. If the US falls short, the future will remain difficult and violent.

Success in achieving these objectives would allow the US to reduce its military footprint while maintaining its ability to support an internal Afghan settlement, provide over watch of the region, and prevent al Qaeda and other terrorist groups from reestablishing sanctuaries in the country.

Failure would create a dilemma for the US. Either the US would need to pursue an active policy of containment against Pakistan -- which would require a much larger U.S. presence in Afghanistan -- or accept significantly greater risks to US national security.

Three main factors will determine whether the United States can achieve the objectives necessary to stabilize the region.

(1) Pakistani Policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan: Will Islamabad continue to try to inflict a strategic defeat on the United States in Afghanistan, or will it change its policies?

So far Pakistan, the U.S., and Afghanistan have not been working together. Indeed, they have been mostly working at cross purposes. This puts the US and Afghan governments in a difficult position with few obvious options. The US may have been better-positioned had it dealt with the Pakistan problem five or six years ago, when threats to escalate pressure would have been viewed as much more credible. Now, the impression in the region is that the US seeks to disengage from the conflict.

Secretary Clinton's recent trip to Islamabad indicates that the Obama Administration appreciates the importance of addressing Pakistan's policies. But it is not clear that the administration's diplomacy, including Secretary Clinton's trip, has convinced Pakistan to make necessary changes. Militant groups continue to operate from Pakistani territory against the US and Afghanistan.

Changing Pakistani attitudes will not be easy. Many in Islamabad believe that the United States is on its way out of Afghanistan due to domestic political and economic circumstances. They also believe that the United States has been, and continues to be, insensitive to Pakistani concerns given Washington's ongoing efforts to strengthen ties with India.

To induce Pakistan to change its Afghan policy in a positive direction, the United States should be prepared to respect legitimate Pakistani concerns in Afghanistan. Afghanistan should not be a source of security problems for Pakistan. However, if Islamabad refuses to cooperate, Washington will need to consider several adjustments to induce a change in Pakistani behavior. The US should consider: dramatic reduction in military assistance; curtailment of support programs to Pakistan through international financial institutions like the IMF; and increased military operations against militant Taliban headquarters and related facilities on Pakistani territory.

(2) The Performance of the Afghan Government: Will the Afghan government implement far-reaching governance reforms?

Especially in recent years, the Afghan government has refused to deal seriously with key national issues such as corruption and the rule of law. This is causing a growing gap between the central government and the Afghan people.

The United States is in the final phase of negotiations with the Afghan government on a strategic partnership agreement. Although factions opposing the agreement are organizing with the support of hostile neighbors, most Afghans support the deal and regard it as important to their country's success.

If remaining issues are resolved and the agreement is signed, it will be important for the United States to follow up by pushing the Afghan government on governance issues such as fighting corruption and consolidating democracy and the rule of law. President Karzai has implied that he is not moving on governance issues due to a crisis of confidence with the US. He has indicated that he will undertake reforms once the future of U.S.-Afghan relations has been clarified. Whether pro-reform movements in Afghan society mobilize effectively will be an important factor in how Karzai and others in the Kabul proceed. Many traditional leaders, civic society groups, and Afghanistan's large youth cohort strongly desire an end to corruption and respect for the rule of law.

(3) Role of major powers and other neighbors: What kind of a role will the US and other major powers play in catalyzing progress?

Cementing a long-term U.S. and NATO military presence in Afghanistan will do a great deal to enable counterterrorism missions in the region and bolster the size and capacity of the Afghan National Security forces. As the U.S. and NATO reduce deployments to Afghanistan, part of the resulting savings should be shifted to supporting Afghan security forces until the regional situation stabilizes or until the Afghan economy can support those costs.

If necessary, the US should be prepared to assume the burdens of continuing counterterrorism operations and building up Afghanistan's security forces unilaterally. Sustained US involvement on these fronts is essential to prevent counterproductive hedging by Afghan political players and regional powers. If the United States is committed to Afghan security, potentially destabilizing actors will accommodate the reality of the US presence. If US commitment appears to be waning, internal spoilers and regional powers will refuse to cooperate and will maneuver for advantage in a post-American Afghanistan.

The United States can increase the likelihood of Pakistani cooperation by coordinating its approach with other stakeholders in regional stability. China, India, Russia, our European and Asian allies and a number of regional states have large interests in play. US leadership could galvanize multilateral support for a reasonable settlement.

Besides facilitating an Afghanistan-Pakistan settlement, the US should focus on promoting Afghan development. US efforts – preferably in conjunction with allies – should focus on three areas: strengthening Afghan institutions so that aid can be delivered reliably through the Afghan government; engaging the private sector in helping Afghanistan develop its agriculture sector and mineral wealth; and creating the New Silk Road to connect Central and South Asia. Currently the New Silk Road initiative is largely a slogan. Specific negotiations need to commence quickly to reduce barriers to trade and develop roads, rails, pipelines, and other necessary infrastructure projects.

The degree to which the US succeeds in achieving key objectives over the next three years will determine U.S. policy options beyond 2014. Rather than planning for a single-point prescription,

the US should conceive of a range of possible futures and a corresponding range of required responses.

At one end of the spectrum, the United States could succeed in achieving the objectives enumerated above. The U.S. role in this scenario could shift toward sustaining an internal Afghan settlement, providing a regional military over watch, and promoting regional economic integration. If Pakistan supports a regional settlement and the Afghan government moves on governance issues, the United States will be able to reduce its military presence in the country without assuming a significant increase in risk. Provided that the US negotiates a long-term strategic partnership with Afghanistan and leaves a sizable enough residual force after 2014, Afghan forces will be able to assume responsibility for most of the country's security problems such as the remaining al-Qaida sanctuaries in the country.

U.S. economic assistance at this point would need to focus on stimulating Afghanistan's economy to reduce the country's reliance on foreign aid. U.S. diplomacy could facilitate this goal by promoting regional economic integration through the New Silk Road initiative. Proactive U.S. engagement would also be necessary in ensuring the implementation of any reconciliation agreement and in pushing for progress on rule of law, human rights and related governance issues. Ongoing assistance also would be needed for Pakistan with the right balance of economic, political and military support.

At the other end of the spectrum, the United States could fail to achieve key intermediate objectives in the run up to 2014. If Pakistan continues to support the insurgency, the Afghan government remains on its path of denial regarding governance issues, and reconciliation efforts between the Taliban and the Afghan government falter, the United States would face greater challenges, riskier options, and a more protracted period of heavy engagement.

Proactive regional and major power diplomacy now will better position the US to win support from key players should a containment strategy become necessary. The U.S. should start supplementing its bilateral approach to securing a reasonable settlement with a broader diplomatic initiative to exert pressure on Pakistan.

A containment strategy against Pakistan would inevitably inform U.S. policies toward Afghanistan. The residual U.S. force would have to be larger and Afghan forces would need to be bolstered further to withstanding Pakistan's possible escalation of indirect or direct military pressure.

Proceeding with a major withdrawal of U.S. troops in this scenario, especially if other regional powers such as India do not compensate with greater engagement, would likely worsen the situation in Afghanistan. It could put an unbearable burden on Afghan security forces while encouraging key Afghan players to hedge in destabilizing ways.

In any scenario, the United States would be unwise to disengage from the region. The potential reemergence of a terrorist threat from al Qaeda and other groups, which inflicted such great harm on the US and the world ten years ago, must be taken seriously. The US must uphold its commitments to friends and partners in the region who joined our side after 9/11.

As in Europe and East Asia in the postwar period, consolidating U.S. security interests requires engagement for the long haul in Southwest Asia. While the US can calibrate what precise level of engagement is needed based on circumstances on the ground, there should be no ambiguity about the United States' commitment to success.

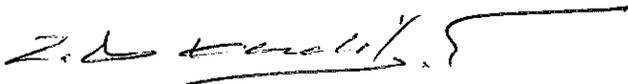
Despite the challenges, the overall U.S. economic and security role in the region provides it with important leverage in shaping events over the next three years. U.S. policy will play a critical role in determining the options that exist in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2014 and beyond.

Thank you and I'll be happy to take your questions.

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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4. Have you received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?	5. Have any of the organizations you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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