

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
DECEMBER 3, 2009

Chairman Skelton, Congressman McKeon, and members of the Committee, let me first convey Secretary Clinton's regrets that she could not be here with Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen in today's session. As you may know, Secretary Clinton is currently en route to Brussels where she will join the ongoing NATO Ministerial, which provides an important opportunity to consult with some of our closest allies on Afghanistan and Pakistan, maintaining the close cooperation which have marked the Administration's approach to this international effort.

Tuesday evening, President Obama presented the Administration's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I look forward to providing you with additional details on the civilian components of our revised strategy, to augment the presentations of Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen.

In testimony before other committees yesterday, Secretary Clinton noted that among a range of difficult choices, this revised military-civilian strategy “is the best way to protect our nation now and in the future. “ The extremists we are fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan have attacked us and our allies before. If we allow them access to the very same safe havens they used before 2001, they will have a greater capacity to regroup and attack again. Our civilian and military leaders in Afghanistan have reported that the situation is serious and worsening. We agree. We must not allow an entire region to be dragged into chaos.

THE MISSION

The case for action against al Qaeda and its allies has always been clear, but the United States’ course of action over the last eight years has not. The fog of another war obscured our focus. And while our attention was focused elsewhere, the Taliban gained momentum in Afghanistan. The extremist threat also grew in Pakistan – a country with 175 million people, a nuclear arsenal, and more than its share of challenges. These are challenges I have had the opportunity personally to understand, having made two visits there over the last eight months.

It was against the backdrop of these challenges that the President called for a careful, thorough review of our strategy. Just as in March,

Secretary Clinton, Special Representative Holbrooke and other senior State Department officials were involved in all stages of this review.

Our objectives are clear, as is the civilian component of these efforts:

- To work with the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to eliminate safe havens for those plotting attacks;
- To stabilize a region that is fundamental to our national security; and
- To develop a long-term, sustainable relationship with Afghanistan and Pakistan so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

While the duration of our military presence will be limited, our civilian commitment must continue long after our troops begin to come home. Accomplishing this mission and ensuring the safety of the American people will not be easy. It will mean sending more civilians, troops, and assistance to Afghanistan, and significantly expanding our civilian efforts in Pakistan.

The men and women carrying out this mission – civilians, as well as military -- are not numbers on a PowerPoint slide. We are asking them – and the American people who support them – to make extraordinary

sacrifices on behalf of our security. I want to assure the Committee that we will do everything we can to make sure their efforts make our nation safer.

THE METHODS

The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan is serious, but it is not as negative as frequently portrayed in public. The beginning of President Karzai's second term has opened a new window of opportunity. As Secretary Clinton has noted, we have real concerns about the influence of corrupt officials in the Afghan government, and we will continue to pursue them. But in his inauguration speech last month, President Karzai called for a new compact with his country. He pledged to combat corruption, improve governance, and deliver for the people of his country. His words must now be matched with action. The Afghan people, the United States, and the international community will hold the Afghan government accountable for making good on these commitments.

The State Department, USAID and other civilian agencies will help by working with our Afghan partners to strengthen institutions at every level of Afghan society so that these institutions are ready to take more responsibility at the point when our combat troops begin to depart.

The President has outlined a timeframe for that transition to Afghan responsibility. It will begin in the summer of 2011, when we expect Afghan security forces and the Afghan government will have the capacity to assume greater ownership for defending their country. As the President said, we will execute the transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground. This timeframe for transition provides a sense of urgency in working with the Afghan government. But it should be clear to everyone that -- unlike the past -- the United States and our allies and partners will have an enduring commitment to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region. Our resolve in this fight is reflected in the substantial commitment of troops since the President took office and in the significant civilian commitment that will continue long after our combat forces leave.

That civilian effort already is bearing fruit. Civilian experts and advisors are helping to craft policy inside government ministries, providing development assistance in the field, and working in scores of other roles. When our Marines went into Nawa this July, we had civilians on the ground with them to coordinate assistance the next day. When I traveled to Helmand in September, I met with our civilians and heard first-hand not only from local officials but from U.S. and allied military officials about how our civ-mil coordination is growing even stronger.

We are on track to triple the number of civilian positions in Afghanistan to 974 by early next year. On average, each of these civilians leverages 10 partners, ranging from locally employed staff to experts with U.S.-funded NGOs. As Secretary Clinton is fond of saying, it's clichéd to say that we have our best people in these jobs -- but it also happens to be true. When the Secretary was in Kabul a few weeks ago, she heard from an American colonel that while he had thousands of outstanding soldiers under his command, none of them had the 40 years of agricultural experience of the USDA civilian serving alongside his battalion, or the rule of law and governance expertise of their civilian experts from the State Department. He told her that he was happy to supply whatever support these valuable civilians need. And, he said we need more of them. The President's strategy will make that possible.

Not only do we have the right people to achieve our objectives, we also have a sound strategy. We will be delivering high-impact economic assistance and bolstering Afghanistan's agricultural sector – the traditional core of the Afghan economy. This will create jobs, reduce the funding that the Taliban receives from poppy cultivation, and draw insurgents off of the battlefield.

We will also support an Afghan-led effort to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and want to reintegrate into Afghan society. We understand that some of those who fight with the insurgency do so not out of conviction, but due to coercion or money. All Afghans should have the choice to pursue a better future if they do so peacefully, respect the basic human rights of their fellow citizens, and renounce al Qaeda.

Our regional diplomacy complements this political approach, by seeking to mitigate external interference in Afghanistan and working to shift the calculus of neighboring countries from competition for influence to cooperation and economic integration.

We also believe that a strong, stable, democratic Pakistan must be a key partner for the United States, and an ally in the fight against violent extremism. People in Pakistan are increasingly coming to the view that we share a common enemy. I heard this repeatedly during both of my visits there. Our relationship is anchored in our common goals of civilian rule; robust economic development; and the defeat of those who threaten Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the peace of the world.

We will significantly expand support intended to help develop the potential of Pakistan and its people. Our assistance will demonstrate the

United States' commitment to addressing problems that affect the everyday lives of Pakistanis and bring our people closer together. But it will also bolster Pakistan against the threat of extremism. A village where girls have had the opportunity to get an education will be more resistant to Al Qaeda and the Taliban. And a young man with a bright future in a growing economy is less likely to waste his potential in a suicide bombing.

We will not be facing these challenges alone. We share this responsibility with governments around the world. Our NATO allies have already made significant contributions of their own in Afghanistan, and the Secretary and Ambassador Holbrooke are working now to secure additional Alliance commitments of troops, trainers, and resources.

The international community also is expanding its support to Pakistan, and we are in close touch with partners to coordinate assistance. We are also looking beyond NATO to build the broadest possible global coalition to meet this challenge. Our objectives are shared by people and governments from Europe to Australia, from Russia to China to India, and across the Middle East.

The task we face is as complex as any national security challenge in our lifetimes. We will not succeed if people view this effort as the responsibility of a single party, a single agency within our government, or a single country. We owe it to the troops and civilians who will face these dangers to come together as Americans – and come together with our allies and international partners – to help them accomplish this mission.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.