

America's Undeclared War on Pakistan

Clinton's Paradoxistan: Too Good to Be True

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It was a relatively flawless performance. With Washington stuck in its Afghan review and Pakistan's cities under bombardment, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton touched down in a hostile Pakistan in October 2009 on a [self-proclaimed propaganda mission](#). Greeted with bombs from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and treated with hard questions on the freshly signed Kerry-Lugar bill, Clinton left a foul impression after deploying her grating ["do more" mantra](#) on al-Qaeda's leadership.

July 2010 would be different. No major explosions signaled her arrival, which Clinton attributed to Pakistan's military success in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Drones have lost their controversial potency and US aid, always a third rail, grows increasingly palatable to an economically struggling Pakistan. Clinton beamed throughout her photo-ops and Pakistani leadership reflected the shine. She even managed to accuse someone within the government of [knowing Osama bin Laden's location](#) without drawing attention, having landed in South Korea by the time her Fox News interview aired.

From Islamabad Clinton [triumphantly landed in Kabul](#) for what she hailed as a "turning point" in Afghanistan: a six hour international conference that pledged \$20 billion in aid and declared Afghan security forces would assume command of all provinces by 2014. The choreography went off as planned, which of course is the point when the show is too good to be true.

Like a bridge, errors in one part of the span expose other flaws and threaten to bring the entire structure down with it.

Though Clinton undoubtedly improved upon her last visit, charm can only beautify an ugly reality so much. Promises of aid were automatically linked to a military invasion of North Waziristan rather than Pakistan's current strategy of negotiating with its hosts, Sirajuddin and Jalaluddin Haqqani. Clinton explicitly ruled out a dialogue with them, tagging US aid as conditional.

Already fearful of military servitude, it doesn't help that US and foreign aid lacks the track record to inspire confidence among average Pakistanis. The Kerry-Lugar bill, President Barack Obama's celebrated achievement in civilian aid, stalled in Congress due to fears of misappropriated funds; a trade bill designed for the FATA [similarly gridlocked](#). Pakistan had to jump through hoops to receive [long-delayed reimbursement](#) from the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), [while the Friends of Pakistan](#) have delivered only \$725 million of \$5.6 billion pledged in April 2009.

[So when Clinton announced](#) "\$500 million in several new development programs," funded in

part by the Kerry-Lugar bill, the many strings attached cast ominous shadows over her smiles. [The attitude of Pakistan's press](#) was straightforward: "Given Pakistan's current plight, any assistance from the outside world has to be welcomed. The recognition by the US that policy cannot be focused only on security issues is also a step in the right direction."

Whatever the strings and grudges, Pakistan simply isn't in the position to turn down assistance.

But Islamabad's endgame is roughly the opposite of Washington's. While the White House believes its efficiency in delivering military and humanitarian aid determines success in Afghanistan, Pakistanis base success on the effectiveness of Pakistan's leaders. These aren't the same goals. America needs Pakistan to improve and thus assist in stabilizing Afghanistan so that it can remain in the region, but Pakistan wants to utilize US aid to regain sovereignty of the state and ultimately rid South Asia of America's military presence.

"The hugely positive tone adopted by the Secretary of State will of course have brought smiles to the faces of Pakistani leaders," wrote The News International. "But they must recognize that the relationship between Pakistan and the US is a complex one. Many believe it is in fact the root cause behind our militant problem and that this cannot be solved until the US withdraws from the region."

Clinton may have missed this not-so-subtle difference, but the chances of her merely ignoring it are higher. While admitting that Pakistani's negative perception of America "wouldn't change overnight," she raved about its new environment - "I could feel a change" - and Pakistani officials who, "really believe that the people are understanding that the United States wants to be a real partner to us and that it's not just killing terrorists."

Pew Research Center [listed Pakistani approval at 17%](#) in June 2010, up 1% from last year but down from 19% in 2008. [The News International](#) warned upon her exit, "There is a very real risk that the latest aid offer will be seen as a kind of bribe intended to ensure that the fighting continues. The effort to persuade people that the war against militancy is Pakistan's has so far been a faltering one."

[The Dawn analyzed](#) "Hillary's iron fist in a velvet glove," while a less generous [Nation concluded](#), "It is time we broke off from the present US stranglehold that is suffocating Pakistan to death."

But Clinton's most telltale contradiction: passing the blame off to George Bush. "Of course there is a legacy of suspicion that we inherited," she argues, when Pakistan is actually one of the Obama administration's favorite words - a "whole of government" problem. Anti-US sentiment has ran high for over 20 years and spans multiple presidencies, many staffed with the same officials that fill Obama's cabinet and National Security Council. Pew still has Bill Clinton clocked at 22% in 1999.

Pakistan's fate has always be decided by how the foreign chips fall, not how they stack up. America may uphold its obligations this time around, it just hasn't before, and Afghanistan repeats the same story. [The Huffington Post digs up](#) the old bones of past "international conferences" and "turning points."

Paradoxes in Kabul were equally numerous, for instance the massive quantity of foreign aid that may disappear. Karzai called for 50% to funnel through Afghanistan's ministries by

2012, up from 20%, while dutifully promising to clean up corruption for Western ears. However, the conference followed a report [from Integrity Watch Afghanistan](#) that found corruption had doubled between 2006 and 2009. This story never seems to change, whether before or after Karzai's controversial election victory in 2009, and the West's power to reform this gray area remains suspect.

Reintegration prospects are dwindling too. Reconciliation appears a non-starter in Washington despite its public support for reintegration, a stance that hinders reintegration. On top of UK reports that few Taliban are switching sides, the idea of transferring authority to Afghan forces by 2014 implies that the West still expects to be fighting the Taliban rather than reintegrating it. This tidal wave of uncertainty finally throws the 2014 deadline into upheaval.

When Karzai insisted, "Afghan national security forces will be responsible for all military and law enforcement operations throughout our country by 2014," he's asking for the same three years Iraq needed after its surge.

Given that most deadlines in Afghanistan evaporate, history and the present offer no reason to define 2014 as realistic as NATO did. Marjah and Kandahar's time-lines already protracted. Obama's 2011 transfer deadline, if not postponed outright, will amount to a symbolic transition of power, and [Vice President Joe Biden recently conceded](#) "a couple thousand troops" is the likeliest withdrawal option. Clinton desperately tried to counter the slippery slope by arguing, "the transition process may be able to begin by the end of this year."

Yet believing in 2014, let alone Clinton's new claim, makes no sense in a country where projects rarely start or finish on time.

The last few days in Afghanistan brought no surprises. The White House in particular is facing renewed criticism from the US Congress and media to clarify the war's objectives, and Clinton's tour was its answer. But instead of leveling with the US, Afghan, and Pakistani peoples and shunning unrealistic expectations, Washington rolled out more smoke and mirrors to conjure the image of success.

Being illusions, the deadlines are likely to vanish one by one and ultimately fail to break the West's cycle of mission drift in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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