

Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

“Oversight of U.S.-Pakistan Relations: From Ad Hoc and Transactional to Strategic and Enduring.”

As Prepared for Delivery

September 24, 2008

Good afternoon. This hearing continues our sustained oversight of U.S. national security interests in Pakistan and our strategic interests in the absolutely critical Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

Since 2007, our Subcommittee has held seven related hearings, and we have dispatched three separate Congressional delegations to the region.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to step back; to take a look at the big picture of U.S.-Pakistan relations seven years since 9/11; and, most importantly, to explore options and opportunities going forward.

The challenges the Pakistani people currently face are multifaceted and immense. Pakistanis are being hit by skyrocketing food and fuel prices; there have been runs on their stock market; their two main political parties remain in dispute over the reinstatement of judges; and militancy and extremism is continuing to hit home, most recently, with the brazen bombing of the Marriott hotel in Islamabad.

At the same time, U.S. national security interests in Pakistan are as acute as they have ever been, and the challenges will be hard to overcome. Many in the United States are understandably frustrated at the lack of progress in pacifying the terrorist safe havens in western Pakistan, which has led to increasing U.S. cross-border attacks, including, reportedly, raids by U.S. troops. Pakistan’s military and civilian leadership have reacted strongly stressing the imperative to protect their sovereignty.

Not all, however, is lost. In fact, our two countries stand at an ideal time to strengthen our relationship in a strategic and enduring manner.

For too long, our relationship has been characterized by ad hoc and short-term arrangements; we have too often treated Pakistan as a means-to-an-end rather than a partner.

My hope is that leaders from both our countries can work together to satisfy the long-term interests of both our countries, leading to real security and prosperity for both our peoples.

I am optimistic about the prospect for this sea change for three primary reasons.

First, both our countries have (or will soon have in the U.S.'s case) new leadership. Earlier this year, Pakistan held very promising elections and the new civilian leadership is now fully in place, most recently with Asif Ali Zardari being elected President.

The phenomenon of new leadership for both countries will hopefully lead to an interest and ability to reassess and strategically update our relationship without the baggage of either side not being able to admit past wrongs.

Second, there appears a general recognition by both countries on the need to implement a new, long-term, strategic plan. I am heartened, in particular, about recent statements made by our military and Defense Department. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently testified in Congress, and I quote:

I intend to commission a new, more comprehensive strategy for the region, one that covers both sides of the border. Absent a broader international and interagency approach to the problems there, it is my professional opinion that no amount of troops in no amount of time can even achieve all the objectives we seek. We can't kill our way to victory.

Secretary Gates added "We must continue to work with the Pakistani government to extend its authority in the tribal region and provide badly needed economic, medical, and educational assistance to Pakistani citizens there."

Third, I am hopeful that the recent tragedies inflicted on Pakistanis and the setbacks in Afghanistan will lend a seriousness and urgency of purpose.

The Pakistanis lost one of their most-beloved leaders late last year with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Just this weekend, they faced the horrific hotel bombing in Islamabad.

And recent setbacks in Afghanistan – including the deaths of many of our brave troops – have collectively refocused our country's attention back where it needs to be. Secretary Gates put it this way, and I quote: "The War on Terror started in this region. It must end there."

My hope is that out of tragedy and setbacks can arise the impetus, focus, and urgency to get this right, instead of just muddling along as we've been doing for far too long.

The U.S. Coalition Support Funds program is just one example of the need for a more strategic, effective, and enduring approach to Pakistan. What began as a temporary, ad hoc program to reimburse Pakistan for certain assistance in the lead-up to the invasion of Afghanistan, morphed into a \$6.3 billion behemoth that suffers from serious accountability, effectiveness, and diplomatic challenges.

In our year-long investigation of this program, I was struck by how this program seemed to continue based simply on inertia as opposed to satisfying any rigorous or strategic analysis, despite the fact that Coalition Support Funds have accounted for over half of the overall U.S. funding to Pakistan since 9/11.

The New York Times ran an editorial earlier this week on the situation in Pakistan with the header, "Running Out of Time."

My hope is that years from now, the people of Pakistan and the United States will look back at this time period not as a last gasp effort but rather when we began to turn the corner to a brighter future for both our countries and our peoples.

And I'm delighted that we have an esteemed panel of experts with us today to help chart the way forward. We appreciate all of your expertise and hard work, and I am eager to learn from your analysis and ideas.

Our panel has also traveled extensively in Pakistan and consults regularly with Pakistani leaders and their counterparts, for any strategic and enduring solutions must surely come from our two countries and peoples working together.

In an interview earlier this week, Pakistan President Zardari stressed, and I quote, "Let's sit together. Let's find a solution." I would add let's do so with the sense of urgency and seriousness that these times demand.