

Rothman Questions Holbrooke About Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Washington, DC – Representative Steve Rothman (NJ-9), a member of the House Appropriations State and Foreign Operations, and Defense Subcommittees, questioned Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Special Envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, at a hearing of the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee on July 28, 2010.

Exchange between Representative Rothman and Ambassador Holbrooke:

Representative Rothman: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, Dr. Shah.

Mr. Ambassador, you are the special -- first of all, thank you for an extraordinary career, your extraordinary career in public service and your continuing to take on matters of great difficulty and complexity and danger. You are the special representative of the president for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I know we're in a -- we're not in a classified setting, but many people believe that while there has been some progress made in addressing what's been called a double game by Pakistan's intelligence services and military in supporting both NATO and the U.S. efforts, but also supporting the Taliban -- many people believe that that is going to be an insurmountable obstacle to your work in producing civilian programs in Afghanistan, for example, that we hope will pacify the region and deny Al Qaida a place to train.

Can you comment on the -- the allegations of the Pakistani dual game? You've mentioned the positive aspect of the trade agreement between the Afghans and Pakistan. But what about the allegations that there's a dual game going on? And then I have other questions.

Ambassador Holbrooke: The relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan has been characterized in a book which is about to come out that traces the history of it as -- as three marriages, two divorces. And we inherited a really

unacceptable relationship with Pakistan, both in bilateral terms and in regional terms.

It was unsustainable. You are not going to succeed in Afghanistan unless Pakistan is part of the solution, not just Pakistan, however. Pakistan is part of a region that includes other major countries to the West of Afghanistan, a country we have another kind of problem with. To the North, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and beyond them, Russia -- China borders on Afghanistan with a serious vested interest. And beyond that is India.

So this is the most complicated region you could imagine. But at the core of it, Pakistan must be part of the solution.

President Obama directed early last year that we change the relationship with Pakistan, number one, and number two, we try to change the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to move in the direction that you -- that you have discussed.

Rep. Rothman: Have those efforts succeeded?

Amb. Holbrooke: I -- I believe we have made dramatic steps forward, and we're not there yet. It's a work in progress, but if I -- if I may just be specific, I would not dismiss the transit trade agreement as merely a trade agreement. It is the most significant agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan in at least 50 years. These countries have had a very troubled relationship going back to the day Pakistan was born.

Secondly ... on the U.S.-Pakistan front, with your support Secretary Clinton has attended and shared two strategic dialogues, one in March in Washington, one in Islamabad two weeks ago. We will chair a third here in Washington in October.

In those dialogues with 13 working groups from water and energy to law enforcement...

Rep. Rothman: And I have to interrupt you. Have you noticed a difference in receptivity...

Amb. Holbrooke: Dramatic.

Rep. Rothman: ... on the part of the Pakistanis?

Amb. Holbrooke: Dramatic. And those people who were with us on the trip -- Dr. Shah and I were sitting with Secretary Clinton -- Secretary Clinton herself, everybody commented on the change in tone over the last year. It is improving America's image in the public area.

Now, on the -- on the second tier, what you're really referring to, we are engaged in a very intense dialogue with the Pakistani military, with their intelligence services. I myself have met with General...

Rep. Rothman: Are we making progress in that regard?

Amb. Holbrooke: We are absolutely making progress.

Rep. Rothman: Then I must ask you my last...

Amb. Holbrooke: But -- but...

Rep. Rothman: Before my time is up, what is the Taliban's interests, Mr. Ambassador? This goes to the -- the long-term success of our hope -- of our hope for success in Afghanistan. What's the Taliban's interest in a society in Afghanistan where there's rule of law, women's rights and a non--poppy agriculture, where they're not getting a take, piece of the action?

Amb. Holbrooke: That's why...

Rep. Rothman: What's their interest?

Amb. Holbrooke: That's why they're opposed. That's why the -- that's why they keep fighting...

Rep. Rothman: So how do they ever get on board?

Amb. Holbrooke: Well, the -- we have this reintegration program, which has been funded by the international community, which is offering Taliban under the tremendous military pressure they're facing now a chance to renounce Al Qaida, lay down their arms, accept the constitution, reintegrate.

That program is finally launched, much -- much more slowly than I would've preferred. It is funded with \$200 million by the international community. The U.S. is not funding their program, but the Congress authorized \$100 million of CERP [Commander's Emergency Reconstruction Program] for General Petraeus to work with. That is -- I think if David Petraeus was with us today, he'd say that's the most important program he's working on that addresses specifically your point.

In other words 70 percent, Congressman -- 70 percent of the Taliban at least have no ideological commitment to Al Qaida Malomar (ph). They're fighting either because they don't know the real story in Afghanistan or because of a local grievance, and they need to be brought in.

Rep. Rothman: And it's not religious in terms of, for example, girls attending school and women having certain rights that they don't presently enjoy?

Amb. Holbrooke: Well, that's a huge issue, but it's not -- the Taliban are not fighting because of that issue. If you read Taliban propaganda, and we study very carefully, they never mention the issue of women, girls in school, because that was their most losing issue.

What they talk about is corruption, the reason we're here today. That's their number one recruiting tool. We took the other one away -- narcotic poppy destruction. And they talk about American and international forces defiling the people, and then they talk about women, but in a totally grotesque way that I won't even discuss here. And so their propaganda always eliminates this, because they know that was their biggest mistake.

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