

Testimony of Alice G. Wells
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Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittees for the Middle East and
North Africa, and Asia and the Pacific
Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Deutch, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of both subcommittees – thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the Administration’s strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan and the State Department and USAID’s FY 2018 request for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I’d also like to take this opportunity to update you on recent discussions we’ve had with these two countries, and how implementation of this strategy has progressed.

First, I want to recognize and thank the thousands of U.S. servicemen and women, diplomats, intelligence professionals, development specialists, and Afghan and international partners who are working every day in Afghanistan to enhance our collective security. I especially want to express my appreciation and deep condolences to the families, comrades, and loved ones of the U.S. service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice in pursuit of this vital and on-going mission.

The Secretary recently completed his inaugural trip to South Asia, which included discussions with the leadership of the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The focus of the trip was the implementation of the President’s South Asia strategy, rolled out by the President in August, and specifically what these countries can do to support it. Today, I want to focus my comments on the diplomatic aspects of the strategy.

The Region

First, I would emphasize that the Administration’s strategy is regional in nature. It recognizes that a sustainable and enduring solution to the conflict requires the collective efforts of Afghanistan’s neighbors and international community. An economically healthy and politically secure Afghanistan must be anchored in a region that respects territorial integrity and sovereignty, ensures security by degrading and eventually denying terrorist safe havens, promotes government stability, and works toward mutual economic prosperity. We are working closely with our allies and partners to continue strong international support for the Afghan government and its security forces to build Afghan capacity

to confront the challenges it faces. We are also engaging with regional countries to maintain the international consensus in support of the Afghan government.

Our strategy makes clear to the region, as well as to the Afghan public and the Taliban, that the United States is resolved to stay as long as it takes to enable a political settlement to end the war and achieve victory. This commitment, which the Secretary reaffirmed during his visit to the region, addresses one of the key drivers of hedging behavior among regional actors, many of whom have provided direct support for the Taliban due to growing doubts about our staying power in Afghanistan. We expect this hedging to diminish as regional countries gain confidence that we will not allow the Afghan government to be defeated.

The South Asia strategy also focuses on reducing tensions between Pakistan and India. The United States does not seek a role as a mediator between India and Pakistan, but encourages both countries to restart dialogue at the earliest opportunity. An improved relationship between these two countries is critical to regional security and stability. We are increasingly concerned about the threat to strategic stability in South Asia associated with the introduction of new nuclear capable ballistic or cruise missile systems in the region. In particular, the region and the world looks to both Pakistan and India to safeguard against a nuclear conflict in South Asia. In this context, the United States remains concerned about Pakistan's growing fissile material stockpiles and its expanding and diversifying military nuclear and missile programs.

With India, we value the role the country can play in global security and stability as part of our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. We also want to work with India to counter terrorist threats. And we see significant economic and business opportunities in both countries that we intend to explore for the benefit of all of our citizens.

Today, I will address our foreign policy for each country, but would note that we see the issues facing these countries as inextricably linked. A South Asia that is secure, stable, and prosperous requires cooperation and progress on a range of issues across the region. We will vigorously pursue international and regional efforts to build broad support among the region to increase pressure on the Taliban to come to the negotiating table.

Afghanistan

The strategy articulates a commitment to Afghanistan that is not time-bound and not constrained by artificial troop ceilings. For Afghan security forces, this commitment will boost their morale as they fight with the confidence that the United States will not abandon them. For the Taliban, it signals that they cannot wait us out, and that the only realistic prospect of achieving their objectives is by contesting their claims at the negotiating table.

For Afghan leaders, our commitment is boosting their motivation to make tough decisions as they tackle corruption and take steps to make their government more inclusive and more responsive. There is much that the Afghan government must do in support of our common objectives. For instance, we look to the Afghan government to play a critical role in setting conditions for a peace process and demonstrating it is a willing and stable partner for negotiations that represents all of Afghanistan's tribal, ethnic, and geographic diversity as a government of real national unity. Credible elections in 2018 and 2019 will play an essential role in demonstrating that Afghan governing institutions represent the will of the people, and we look to President Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah to implement reform commitments they have identified to improve governance.

In conjunction with our new strategy, and at the initiative of President Ghani, we have launched a new process with the Afghans to agree on and monitor priority reforms in four key sectors: governance, economic development, the peace process, and security. We call this set of understandings the Kabul Compact. The Afghan leadership has welcomed the President's recommitment and recognizes that the strategy cannot succeed unless the Afghan government does its part. The Executive Committee for the Kabul Compact process consists of President Ghani, CEO Dr. Abdullah, our Chief of Mission in Kabul, and the Commander of Resolute Support, and it officially launched the Compact on August 23, 2017.

The Afghan government has already made progress on some of the Compact's most important objectives. Notable actions in response to Compact benchmarks include the replacement of 150 ineffective or corrupt generals and steps to strengthen anti-corruption prosecutions—as demonstrated by legislative action to provide the Anti-Corruption Justice Center a dedicated funding stream, which supports its independence to pursue further prosecutions against high-ranking officials and influential public figures.

The measures proposed under the Compact are the Afghan government's responsibility. Fulfillment of these goals will improve Afghanistan's security, promote economic growth, and strengthen the foundation for a peace process to resolve the conflict with the Taliban. These goals make Afghanistan stronger and, in turn, make America safer. The President was clear that we are not nation-building in Afghanistan. We are in Afghanistan to make Americans safer. The Afghans recognize that they have a responsibility to build their own nation; as Chief Executive Abdullah tweeted in response to the President's speech: "Nation building is our job." We cannot do it for them, but we have an interest in encouraging reforms that will allow Afghanistan to be more self-sufficient and able to independently confront the challenges and threats it faces. We will work with Afghanistan as partners in pursuit of this goal.

Pakistan

Pakistan is important to the success of the strategy. The President and the Secretary have been very clear that the trajectory of our relationship with Pakistan, including U.S. security assistance, will depend on how Pakistan responds to our requests for support in implementing our strategy. During his visit, the Secretary laid out specific expectations of how Pakistan can help create the conditions that will help bring the Taliban to the table.

There is no doubt about Pakistan's significant sacrifices and contributions in fighting terrorism; Pakistan has fought against militants intent on undermining the Pakistani state at the cost of over 70,000 soldiers' and civilians' lives. It has been and continues to be an important partner in defeating al-Qa'ida and ISIS in South Asia.

Our new South Asia strategy presents Pakistan with an opportunity. As the Secretary said to Pakistan's Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff, "We have a long history of positive partnership with Pakistan. But Pakistan must do more to eradicate militants and terrorists operating within its country. The people of Pakistan have much to gain from a stable, peaceful Afghanistan, and a region that denies safe haven to terrorists." This fact has driven the President's approach, in which we ask Pakistan to take decisive action against all terrorists without discrimination, and not just selective actions against groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan. No partnership can survive a country's tolerance of militants and terrorists who are targeting U.S. service members and officials. Furthermore, Afghanistan reasonably asks that the Taliban insurgents be forced to fight on

Afghan soil, without recourse to safe haven or respite, and regeneration in neighboring states. We are prepared to work constructively with Pakistan to move against these terrorist groups, including the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, and Jaish-e Mohammed.

Pakistan has said it shares our goal for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and seeks a strong relationship with the United States. We look to Pakistan to create the conditions that will help bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. Towards this end, the Secretary stressed the importance of the government of Pakistan denying safe haven to the Taliban, including the Haqqani Network. Our approach to implementing the South Asia strategy will be informed by Pakistan's actions.

When the United States and Pakistan work in concert, we can achieve significant results. As the President noted, our militaries have cooperated closely and effectively against common enemies. Pakistan facilitates logistical support for NATO operations in Afghanistan. Additionally, the Pakistan Navy is second only to the United States in its longstanding participation in U.S.-led Combined Maritime Forces in the Arabian Sea, focused on maritime security and counter-piracy. Beyond security issues, with a population of over 200 million and a growing, entrepreneurial middle class, Pakistan presents promising opportunities for U.S. businesses.

But we remain concerned about the stability and security of the region, and of Pakistan itself. As long as certain terrorist organizations continue to operate and build their capabilities within Pakistan's borders, they pose a threat to Pakistan's own stability, as well as to the security of American citizens and service members in the region. It is in neither our interest nor Pakistan's that Pakistan be destabilized. And so we have a mutually shared interest in not just containing these organizations, but ultimately eliminating them.

We strongly encourage Pakistan to align its military and diplomatic efforts to disrupt the Taliban's operations and infrastructure, and to prioritize their constructive engagement in peace negotiations. Pakistan has much to gain by expanding their cooperation with us, and much to lose if they do not.

India

As Secretary Tillerson noted in his October 18 speech at CSIS, the United States and India are increasingly global partners, with growing strategic

convergence. We welcome the central role of India in the Indo-Pacific region and throughout the world. Our two democracies have a shared commitment to uphold the rule of law, freedom of navigation, universal values, and free trade. Secretary Tillerson also noted that we view India as a partner for peace in Afghanistan and welcome their economic and development assistance efforts.

Budget Priorities

For Afghanistan, this year we have requested \$782.8 million in civilian assistance. The FY 2018 Request reflects the critical role our assistance programs continue to play in our strategic partnership with Afghanistan, and as a complement to our military's ongoing operations in partnership with Afghan security forces to degrade and defeat al-Qa'ida and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K). The request upholds our 2016 pledge made to the Government of Afghanistan and international community at Brussels, while continuing a steady downward glide path as the Afghan government takes steps toward greater self-reliance. The President is clear that we must help the Afghan government spur private sector growth to absorb the 400,000 young Afghans entering the job market yearly.

To further that goal of self-reliance, our assistance to Afghanistan promotes a stable government and society able and willing to reject the influence of extremist and terrorist organizations. With our assistance Afghanistan now has more effective rule-of-law institutions, an active parliament, and more effective government ministries. Millions of Afghan children – girls and boys – are enrolled in school; millions of Afghans now have access to healthcare; and, Afghan women are making valuable contributions across the country. Under the South Asia strategy, U.S. assistance will continue to promote economic growth, invest in human capital, combat corruption and the narcotics trade, bolster civil society, empower women, and strengthen the Afghan government's capacity to deliver public services.

Our FY 2018 request of \$344.6 million for Pakistan includes \$241.1 million for civilian assistance and \$103.5 million for security assistance. Let me explain how that fits into the new strategy. The \$100 million FMF request is focused on enabling Pakistan to stabilize the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region and fight terrorism. However, part of the President's new strategy means that we are evaluating the full range of tools that could encourage changes in Pakistan's actions, including examining the nature and scope of our cooperation with Pakistan. We are conducting a review of our assistance, to ensure it is aligned with

the level of cooperation we achieve in disrupting the Taliban, including the Haqqani Network. For example, before we move forward with future Foreign Military Financing for Pakistan, the United States will take into account Pakistan's efforts to address these central concerns.

Our civilian assistance bolsters Pakistan's democratic civilian institutions to help them foster long-term stability and promote market-based economic growth. This includes working with the Government of Pakistan to support its efforts to stabilize territory and implement political and economic reforms in areas vulnerable to violent extremists, including along its border with Afghanistan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). We contribute to protecting our core national security interests in the long term by helping Pakistan strengthen its civilian institutions and capabilities, including law enforcement, address the root causes of instability.

Conclusion

The hard-won gains in Afghanistan – by the Afghans, the United States, NATO, and the international community – remain fragile but are worthy of defending. Under the strategy, our diplomatic, military, and assistance resources are aligned in support of a negotiated settlement to this long-running war. We have recommitted to helping the Afghan government and people navigate these challenges with a new approach that leverages additional support from allies, partners, and regional actors. Our commitment is not unlimited, and our support is not a blank check. But as long as the Afghan government continues to show real progress and make real reforms, we will continue to support them as our strategic partners in the fight against international terrorism. The Taliban cannot win on the battlefield. They must know that their only path to peace and political legitimacy is through a negotiated settlement with the Afghan government.

I look forward to today's discussion with your subcommittees on how Congress and the Administration can best support our South Asia strategy, including through foreign assistance resources. Together, we can advance our core U.S. interests in this vital but complicated region. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to working with you.