

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 6, 2008

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We write out of deep concern over the deteriorating situation in both Afghanistan and Pakistan: the negligent policies of the last half-decade have permitted al-Qaeda and the Taliban to regenerate, and to pose a greater threat to the national security of the United States than at any point since September 11, 2001. In order to protect our homeland from attacks which may well be developing in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan at this very moment, we urge you to refocus the U.S. counter-terrorism strategy and our national security resources on this region and implement a comprehensive new strategy to keep America safe.

For too long, this Administration has treated Southwest Asia as an afterthought, even as it committed more U.S. troops and treasure to the war in Iraq. The neglect of Afghanistan and Pakistan reflects a failure to recognize this region as the central battlefield in the war against al-Qaeda. This Administration's misguided priorities have deprived our military of the resources they need to win the fight against al-Qaeda: as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen put it in December, "in Afghanistan, we do what we can. In Iraq, we do what we must." The commander of American forces in the region, Admiral William Fallon, echoed the sentiment in January: "Back in 2001, early 2002, the Taliban were pretty much vanquished," he said, "but my sense looking back is that we moved focus to Iraq, which was the priority from 2003 on, and the attention and the resources focused on a different place."

Such neglect cannot continue indefinitely without endangering not only Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the safety of America as well. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently expressed concern that the shadow of Iraq was decreasing public support in NATO countries for the war effort in Afghanistan. A prominent nonpartisan report chaired by Marine General (Ret.) James L. Jones and former Undersecretary of State Thomas R. Pickering urged that the United States "decouple" the two conflicts— both in funding and in diplomacy. We urge you to take this advice, in order to prevent the war in Iraq from further impeding our vital struggle against our most dangerous enemies.

More than six years after the ouster of the Taliban, the promises made by this Administration for success in Afghanistan remain further than ever from being fulfilled. As the Jones-Pickering report notes, "The United States and the international community have tried to win the struggle in Afghanistan with too few military forces and insufficient economic aid, and without a clear and consistent comprehensive strategy." Security has been gravely degraded throughout much of the nation, with the Taliban making much of the country ungovernable and ravaging the capitol itself by frequent bombings and suicide attacks. According to testimony presented by Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell in late February, the central government of Afghanistan controls less than one-third of the country's territory. Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Michael Maples has said that al-Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan is "increasing to levels unseen since 2001-2002."

On this Administration's watch, Afghanistan has become a virtual narco-state supplying 93% of the world's opium and heroin, while drug-fuelled corruption and warlordism are recreating the chaos that enabled the Taliban to seize power in the 1990s. Your pledge of a reconstruction program on the scale of the Marshall Plan remains an unfulfilled promise, and the lack of adequate development has undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government and increased popular support for our enemies.


The situation in Pakistan is just as troubling. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda's top leadership remain at large, most likely in the sanctuary of Pakistani territory near the Afghan border—and a new generation of terrorists move and operate openly there, free to plot new attacks against our homeland. According to the declassified key judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate of July 2007 entitled *The Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland*, al-Qaeda has "protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including: a safehaven in the Pakistani Federal Administered Tribal Areas."

The recent election in Pakistan provides a rare opportunity to chart a new and more effective course in our two nations' counter-terrorism partnership. Much of the Pakistani population believes that this Administration has used, and is still using, the weight of the United States government to bolster President Pervez Musharraf rather than facilitate a democratic transition. We urge you to embark on a new relationship with Pakistan based on cooperation with institutions rather than individuals, and to support the will of the Pakistani people as expressed in the February 18 parliamentary elections. Promoting democracy and legitimate government is not only in line with our nation's core values, but also with our national security interests: Every day that the Pakistani government remains distracted by political uncertainty is a day when the intelligence, military, police and other resources of its government will be diverted from the fight against terrorists who threaten the lives of Pakistanis and Americans alike.

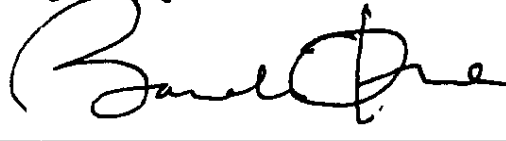
An al-Qaeda attack on the U.S. homeland would likely originate in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. We urge you to work with Congress on a comprehensive new strategy—to change course now, while time still remains. Clearly, a bold new plan is urgently needed. Our nation cannot afford to stand by while the danger to the region—and to America—grows stronger day by the day.

The dire threats facing Afghanistan and Pakistan are inextricably linked: there can be no successful policy in either country without a comprehensive strategy for both. Given the urgency of the threat, we look forward to your prompt response.


Sincerely,

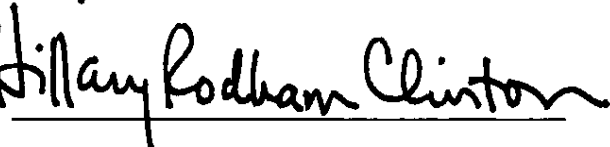
  
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