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Foreign Policy Insider Holbrooke Visits Pakistan

During his visit, Holbrooke and Pakistan's leaders were expected to discuss how to reconcile their differing priorities. The United States, which is engaged in building up a troop presence in neighboring Afghanistan to defeat a Taliban insurgency that has been waging a guerilla war against the central government since NATO troops removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, has a goal of eliminating the al-Qaeda terrorist network that the Taliban has harbored. It is believed that Osama bin Laden has taken refuge among an al-Qaeda network operating out of the rugged mountainous border between the two nations.



Forces sympathetic to the Taliban have also repeatedly hijacked supply trucks leaving Pakistan to travel through the Kyber Pass to Afghanistan. The United States seeks to motivate the Pakistanis to gain better control of its lawless northwest region. However, U.S. attacks by drone aircraft against suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda camps in the area have prompted criticism from the Pakistanis.

Reuters news reported that during the talks, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi warned that U.S. plans to increase its military strength in Afghanistan to over 60,000 troops will only work if it includes political engagement with Taliban moderates. Qureshi noted: "Obviously, there are some irreconcilable elements and no one wants to deal with them.... But there is a reconcilable element and we should not overlook their importance."

Qureshi also said that while Holbrooke's visit signaled a "new beginning" in relations with the United States, he issued a plea for mutual respect and a reassessment of the U.S. practice of using drone aircraft to eliminate militant targets in Pakistan. He stated at a news conference: "We also have to have red lines on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to the U.S., and what is acceptable and not acceptable to Pakistan."

Bloomberg News reported that although Pakistan repeatedly has demanded that the United States halt strikes against targets in Pakistan, which began during the Bush administration, Qureshi was very diplomatic in his choice of words to dissuade the Obama administration to change the policy. "We have to weigh both advantages and disadvantages," said Qureshi. "Our view is that these are counterproductive."

On the day before Holbrooke's visit, President Obama stated that his administration seeks "to make sure that Pakistan is a stalwart ally with us against this terrorist threat" in parts of Pakistan controlled by the Taliban and militants allied with al-Qaeda. The militants based in northwest Pakistan regularly attack U.S. and Afghan forces across the border. Holbrooke is expected to unveil a new strategy for Afghanistan at a NATO summit on April 2.

The U.S. envoy will also be visiting India. Tensions between Pakistan and India increased following an



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attack by Pakistani militants on the Indian city of Mumbai last November, resulting in the deaths of 179 people.

Bloomberg reported that Holbrooke's trip will help him shape the Obama administration's policies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the surrounding region, according to Daniel Markey, a South Asia specialist at the Council on Foreign Relations, who said: "The next real direction on Afghanistan is wide open."

The influence of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in any aspect of U.S. foreign policy cannot be underestimated. Nor can the heavyweight diplomatic credentials of Richard Holbrooke, who is a member of the CFR's board of directors. Holbrooke's assignment to the region underscores the high priority — and interventionist direction — this administration places on events there. He has a long history of State Department assignments, one of the best known being his brokering of a peace agreement among the warring factions in Bosnia that led to the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords — which coerced reluctant parties into an artificial settlement of the dispute. Following that deal, President Clinton announced the deployment of 20,000 U.S. troops to Bosnia to serve as an "Implementation Force" (IFOR) for the agreement.

A true internationalist and Wall Street insider, Holbrooke is a member of the Trilateral Commission as well as the CFR. From 1985 until 1993, he served as managing director of Lehman Brothers, and in 1999, he was sworn-in as the 22nd U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. In 2001, he served as Counselor at the Council on Foreign Relations and was chairman of its Terrorism Task Force.

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