



## Cutting Hillary Clinton some slack

By  
**Mosharraf Zaidi**

This is the fellow that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has to stand beside as she tries to squeeze more juice out of a Kerry-Lugar Bill that had its lifeblood squeezed out of it last year by the Pakistani establishment, when it first became US law. The frustration from that reaction still riles the Americans. So much so that Hillary Clinton, who is a role model and an inspiration, can't seem to let go. On every trip she reproduces a Osama Bin Laden outburst that is militarily and strategically irrelevant for the US, but that serves as an enduring cancerous tumor for America's public diplomacy goals in Pakistan.

Still, Mrs Clinton needs to be cut some slack. Her tireless advocacy for health care around the world, and her enduring compassion for South Asians -- Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Muslims, Hindus, men, children, and most of all, women -- is singularly unique among either Democrats or Republicans. The western media seems as fabulously smitten by Mrs Clinton as I am. The wires, the newspapers and the electronic media all reported Mrs Clinton's announcement of the allocation of \$500 million worth of projects as headline news, when really, it represents the fulfilment of only one-third of Kerry-Lugar-Berman's sacred covenant with the Pakistani people. One of the most telling things about that covenant? It was signed by the US House of Representatives and the US Senate. It was, in short, a covenant between the US government and the American people, with the US government acting as a proxy for the Pakistani people.

Perhaps now Pakistanis can better understand the frustration of the John Kerrys, the Hillary Clintons and the Richard Holbrookes of the earth. Top US policymakers have fought for over two years to win the Kerry-Lugar Bill. Since then, two things have kept that money from flowing into Pakistan. The first is Mr. Holbrooke's decision to dispense with the Clintonian (Bill, not Hill) model of US aid disbursement through large contracting firms that Americans often refer to as Beltway Bandits. That decision, while long overdue, was rushed and was made in the wrong country, at the wrong time. American development assistance, which is not routed solely through USAID, but often through half a dozen different US departments (or ministries), has been in desperate need of an overhaul for years. But to attempt to reform the instrument of aid delivery in Pakistan, at the climax of Obama's war in Afghanistan, has been a disastrous decision. The American international aid community is so removed and so distant from the mainstream of western assistance thinking (spearheaded by the OECD and captured in the Paris Declaration) that it doesn't quite know how to deal with large sums of money without the Beltway Bandits. This has meant that the Kerry-Lugar money has been parked in Washington DC, with a clear destination, but no vehicle to take it there.

The second thing that has kept the Kerry-Lugar money from being spent is the government of Pakistan itself. Pakistan has no clarity whatsoever about what its development priorities are. It required the intervention of the military chief back in March to summon the federal secretaries to begin to articulate a wishlist of pet projects this government would like to see come to fruition. Indecision and the absence of any coherent development strategy within Pakistan have meant that the US government has had to try to figure out what Pakistan wants, kind of on its own. This may seem like comedy noire, but it's really not funny at all.

The problem with Pakistani government today is that it doesn't enjoy the competent stability it once used to through the bureaucracy. Today's Pakistan's bureaucracy, while made up of individually brilliant officers, is a collection of inward-looking dinosaurs that cannot see beyond their GOR houses, their I-8 plots and their post-retirement benefits. Those officers, in years past, used to be the eyes and ears of oft-changing governments that would seek the guidance of senior bureaucrats in the federal ministries and at the provincial headquarters. While there's been no discernable change in the quality of governance that democratically elected politicians can render, there has been a severe nosedive in the quality of officers available to either the federal or provincial governments.

Part of the reason for the exodus of top-tier officers during the Musharraf era was the curtailment of powers of district managers, under decentralised local governments. But the decentralisation argument is a red-herring for a much more fundamental shift in Pakistani bureaucracy. While being a CSP or DMG officer was an instrument of social mobility in the 1970s or 1980s, it is now a barrier to the personal and professional growth of officers. Many of Pakistan's brightest officers can afford to be well-paid UN, World Bank and IMF staffers. Many others can do even better at Wall Street and on Madison Avenue. Still others can be brilliant academics. Across the board, since 1999 we have seen exactly this. An exodus of top-shelf talent that might have been able to deal with rents, with

incompetence, and with the heat, but not with the disrespect that the military and political class have for educated Pakistanis in the employ of the government of Pakistan.

So how does all this relate to Mrs Clinton's troubles in Pakistan? Simple. No matter how democratically legitimate, when the blind lead the blind, there is a problem of vision. Pakistani politicians are so disconnected from any kind of global narrative that it will be a generation before we produce a Chidambaram, a Krishna or a Mukherjee that can win elections without the help of their gaddi (see: Shah Mehmood Qureshi), or the kindness of the Arbab Ghulami Rahims of the world (see: Shaukat Aziz). The nauseating outburst of the foreign minister on Friday was a demonstration that winning an election does not enable you to win an argument. In short, Pakistan's current political class cannot muster politically legitimate actors that are also competent at statecraft.

Enter the advisory class. This is where the Husain Haqqanis, the Shaukat Tarins and the Dr Hafeez Shaikhs enter the fray. No fake degrees here. Only pedigree. Their problem is of an entirely different nature. They don't have any stake in Pakistani politics -- they enter as unknowns at the thaana kuthchehri and galli-mohalla level, and they leave as unknowns at the thaana kuthchehri and galli-mohalla level. They can talk about all the right kinds of reform, but they can't deliver. More worryingly, their reform-speak is often deluded, because it is devoid of any political rigour. "Let's clip military powers by marketing bold ideas in Washington DC, instead of Rawalpindi." Well. We've seen how that has turned out. "Let's raise taxes!" Sure. Because nobody else has ever thought of that! "Let's improve education." Sure. Because it takes genius to figure out that education is a problem. Advice that is anchored in Rubinomics and Bretton Woods theology has been failing Pakistan for the entire duration of Pakistan's lifetime. This should hardly be a surprise. It never works anywhere.

And that is why Shah Mehmood Qureshi is wrong, again. Perceptions won't change. \$500 million worth of pet projects is a supremely sweet gesture. But even \$500 billion worth of aid, delivered through Beltway Bandits, NGOs, budget support or otherwise can't change the lives of Pakistanis. Only organic reform can achieve such noble goals. When the strategic dialogue in October picks up where this one leaves, Pakistan will still have no CT strategy, no development strategy, an inflated defence budget, no civil service reform, and no hate-speech legislation. All the money in the world can't change that. And that's not Hillary Clinton's fault. That one's on us.

The writer advises governments, donors and NGOs on public policy. [www.mosharrafzaidi.com](http://www.mosharrafzaidi.com)

---

Mosharraf Zaidi, "Cutting Hillary Clinton some slack," *The News*. 21-07-2010.

**Keywords:** Economics, Economic policy, Economic crisis, Economy, Politics, Kerry Lugar Bill, Law, Bureaucracy, Mass media, International relation, World Bank, Gen Musharraf, Osama Bin Laden, Pakistan, IMF