

## Clinton: Pakistani Government 'Abdicating' to Extremist Forces

By Glenn Kessler  
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The Pakistani government "is basically abdicating to the Taliban and to the extremists," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told Congress yesterday in an unusually blunt statement that reflects the unease within the Obama administration about an agreement authorized by President Asif Ali Zardari last week.

The agreement would permit sharia, or Islamic law, in the Swat Valley -- just 100 miles west of the capital, Islamabad -- and was reached after the Pakistani military failed to rout Taliban fighters there.

Clinton, appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, tempered her remarks by saying that the Pakistani government needs to improve its delivery of justice and services -- precisely what leaders there aim to do with billions of dollars in new U.S. assistance.

"Look at why this is happening," Clinton said, referring to the Swat Valley agreement. "If you talk to people in Pakistan, especially in the ungoverned territories, which are increasing in number, they don't believe the state has a judiciary system that works. It's corrupt. It doesn't extend its power into the countryside."

Saying Taliban and extremist advances posed "an existential threat" to Pakistan, Clinton urged Pakistanis worldwide to speak out against the government's ceding of ground to insurgents who she said intended to overthrow the government of a nuclear-armed country.

Responding to Clinton's comments, Husain Haqqani, the Pakistani ambassador to the United States, told CNN: "Yes, we have a challenge. But no, we do not have a situation in which the government or the country of Pakistan is about to fall to the Taliban."

Clinton's testimony before the committee marked the former senator's first appearance on Capitol Hill since her confirmation hearings. She answered questions for four hours, charming even skeptical Republicans with offers to work together but brushing aside tough questions on abortion rights and interrogation practices with sharply worded answers.

At one point, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) cited former vice president Richard B. Cheney, who has claimed that the administration is suppressing documents that show a more positive picture of the effectiveness of interrogation techniques and also that the Bush administration tried to correct problems as they arose.

"It won't surprise you that I don't consider him a particularly reliable source of information," Clinton shot back.

Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) challenged Clinton on President Obama's handshake with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, noting that during the presidential primaries, she had knocked Obama for expressing a willingness to consider such meetings. "President Obama won the election. He beat me in a primary in which he put forth a different approach," she replied. "And he is now our president and we all want our president, no matter of which party, to succeed, especially in such a perilous time."

On Pakistan, the dilemma for the administration is that the more the Zardari government makes deals like the Swat agreement, the more difficult it becomes for Congress to do what the administration wants on Pakistan.

**Rep. Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.), the committee chairman, has introduced legislation authorizing \$7.5 billion in economic and development aid and \$3 billion in military assistance over the next five years -- exactly what the administration wants. But the bill includes a list of conditions and reporting benchmarks that both the administration and the Pakistanis consider onerous. The administration would prefer a Senate version that would contain fewer and vaguer conditions.**