

Session on
"The United States and the Future of Pakistan"
With
Ambassador Robert D. Blackwill
8 Dec 2011, The Park, Kolkata



Former U.S. Ambassador Robert D. Blackwill (Left) and Sunanda K. Datta-Ray (Right).

Pakistan may be in systemic decline. US-Pakistan relations are at a low point with no signs of fundamental improvement. At the same time, the United States is dependent on Pakistan to provide a crucial supply route for supply of US troops in Afghanistan, and concerned about the long-term safety and security of Pakistan's 100 plus nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, many Indians are critical of Washington's basic policy design toward Islamabad. In the period ahead, what should be the principal elements of US policy vis-a-vis Pakistan?

These were some of the questions and issues raised during an interactive session organized by Aspen Institute India in Kolkata on 8th December with Former Ambassador Robert Blackwill.

Robert Blackwill stated that the goal is to establish long term relation with Pakistan rather than occasional positive rhetoric. Yet he emphasized that "you cannot walk on both sides of the street in relation to terror". Pakistani army and US have incompatible objectives regarding war in Afghanistan, which in turn is destroying the repair of US-Pak relations. US seeks to leave behind a united, capable, stable independent Afghanistan in 2014, while Pakistan wants Afghanistan dependent on Pakistan – stable but dependent.

At the same time Pakistan is showing alarming signs of internal disintegration. It remains in near perpetual "economic trauma" despite historic international aid. "Its education system is broken," the former US Ambassador stated. He mentioned that in his opinion, there was a growing sentiment both among Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress that the country's military aid to Pakistan should be 'dramatically

decreased' unless it took steps against terrorist groups on its soil, including the ones that supported the Haqqani network and the killing of Americans in Afghanistan and the ones that targeted India.

At such times, paradigm shifts are needed within Pakistan. The Pakistan army needs to reduce its strategic preoccupation with India as “the threat” and deal with internal security issues. Also Pakistan civil society will need to defeat radical fundamentalist forces. Yet these paradigm shifts are hard to come by.

Stating that the United States’ influence on Pakistan is now less than what it was years back, former US ambassador to India, stated that his personal view was that his country lacked the leverage with Islamabad to ensure handing over of terrorists like Dawood Ibrahim to New Delhi. “The US has less influence on Pakistan today than it had many years ago. In fact, the relationship between the US and Pakistan is at an all-time low now... especially since 9/11, the relationship has been so bad”. He however mentioned that he did not foresee a Pakistan-US military conflict or a US military intervention in Pakistan in future. “I think both the countries will avoid a military confrontation,” emphasized Ambassador Blackwill.



Mr. Shekhar Datta(Left) asking a question and a glimpse of the audience.

US-India have overriding national interest vis-à-vis Pakistan as both have to worry about safety and security of Pakistani nuclear arsenal in the near future. Regarding safety of the nuclear arsenal in Pakistan, Blackwill said the Pakistan army should have a secure control over the nuclear weapons so that they do not fall in the hands of Talibans. "If you also take into account that Pakistan military doctrine seems to be evolving towards battlefield short-range use of nuclear weapons and if you look at the widespread chaos and violence inside Pakistan, I think both US and India will have to worry in the future about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear devices and the material associated with them," he said.

Ambassador Blackwill referred to the recommendations in the Aspen India -CFR report as steps to be taken in improving relations. This was one of the major reports titled “The United States and India : A Shared Strategic Future”, done jointly with the Council on Foreign Relations and co-chaired by Ambassador Naresh Chandra and Ambassador Robert D Blackwill. http://www.aspenindia.org/pdf/shared_Strategic.pdf

At the end Mr. Robert Blackwill stated that “The US does not have that kind of leverage on Pakistan... Washington does not have the pressure points to make it happen, much as we would like it to happen,” said Blackwill, now Henry A Kissinger Senior Fellow for US foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations.



The session was chaired by Mr. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, Author of "Waiting for America: India and the US in the New Millennium" and award-winning "Looking East to Look West: Lee Kuan Yew's Mission India". He was also former Editor of The Statesman.

This event was well attended by Corporates, Academicians, Consulates and also some senior retired Army and Naval personnel who engaged in a lively interactive session with the former Ambassador following his talk.

Watch the video here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TgwntnLC6k&feature=uploademail>