



At a New Standpoint in Time

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Islamabad, Pakistan – Change has come to America and change has come to the world. With the hope of turning a new chapter in the relations between the United States and Pakistan, Mrs. Clinton’s recent visit to the South Asian nation was filled with promise. Change, on the agenda of President Obama since well before coming to power, revealed itself in Secretary Clinton’s visit to Pakistan.

We gathered in the Town Hall of the Pakistan National Council of Arts, which held within its fold more than 300 women, all assembled to hear Secretary Clinton speak and provide answers to their many questions.

Upon entering, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was treated to loud applause as we welcomed her arrival on the podium. But tough questions soon followed, one after another. These ranged from typical ones such as, “When will the drone attacks end?” and “Do they account for terrorism in your eyes?” to tougher ones, “Don’t you think that there is a trust deficit between the two countries and a lack of understanding?” She also answered questions about the US assertion that the “Pakistani military knows where the Al-Qaeda men are hiding,” and the concern of Pakistanis that, “We are waging war for the U.S. on our soil.”

Mrs. Clinton took a positive stance, attempting to show that the Obama Administration’s call for change is not hollow and that the current administration wants to turn a new page in the relations between the two countries. She expressed the belief that “people to people contact” can smooth tough relations between the countries. As she answered the inquisitive women, she helped clear at least some doubts about the “trust deficit” that has recently plagued the two countries.

Secretary Clinton’s approach relies on “smart power,” a terminology she defined when she began her term as Secretary of State. She believes that the U.S. must use diplomacy and development to better relations and invest in developing countries of the world. She used diplomacy effectively that day.

At the meeting, Secretary Clinton emphasized that America desires to build a broad and deep partnership with Pakistan based on mutual trust and respect. It is in the interest of both the countries to combat violent extremists and strengthen Pakistan’s democratically elected government and civilian institutions. She did not downplay the importance of Pakistan army in combating terrorists, and appropriately honored the Pakistani police officers who protect civilians and suffer the brunt of terrorist attacks.

True, change is still distant, but that change holds promise. Secretary Clinton’s speech and answers gave us hope that this change could be transformational in defining the future relationship between Pakistan and America. One media colleague aptly said, “If Hillary Clinton did not make many friends that day, she opted not to make any foes, either.”