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New America Foundation

“Pakistan: Toward Democracy and Stability: A Conversation on Pakistan's Turbulent Political Environment”

1630 Connecticut Ave, NW 7th Floor

Tuesday, August 19, 2008 12:15pm

New America Foundation invited **Ambassador Husain Haqqani** and **Steve Coll** to discuss the future of Pakistan. Ambassador Husain Haqqani is the Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. and Steve Coll is President of the New America Foundation. The event was moderated by **Steve Clemons**, Director of the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation.

Amb. Husain Haqqani began the event arguing that the resignation of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is a key opportunity for Pakistan to **continue building a functioning democratic system**, the lack of which Haqqani claims underlies Pakistan's problems. “A democratic Pakistan will be a more certain Pakistan and eventually a more stable Pakistan.”

Haqqani noted that under Musharraf, Pakistan gave an illusion of stability, but never had certainty. “Certainty comes from a national consensus of nationhood, of how a government is to be formed and changed, and this is what was lacking in Pakistan.”

Haqqani was optimistic that with Musharraf's decision to step down, “Pakistan resolved a major issue” of democracy and the rule of law. **“For the first time Pakistani politicians are united in making Pakistan a functioning democracy.”** To this end, Haqqani advocated for letting “democracy to run its course” and adapt to Pakistan's needs overtime.

Steve Coll provided a **broader framework to view Pakistan's changing dynamics**. “What will the Office of the President become?” “How will civilian control over the military be exerted?” “Who will deliver on these civilian-military issues? Who will be the credible interlocutor?”

From the American perspective, Coll argued that **U.S. leverage “is at a low, in effectiveness and credibility,”** which is compounded by the fact that the Bush Presidency is almost over. He noted the bill proposed by Senators Joe Biden and Richard Lugar as an **attempt to rebalance the U.S. approach away from mostly military one to one that engages civil society.”**

When asked about civilian oversight of the military, Haqqani argued that “the first step in changing the relationship between a civilian and military government is always of a question of “will.” Is the military willing to change its position? Are civilians willing to concede professional space to the military?” Haqqani argued that the answer to this will not be drawn out in “a grand design” but rather will result from a give and take, back and forth experimentation.

When asked about whether the civilian government is as willing to cooperate with the U.S., Haqqani assured the audience that this “is another issue that **there is consensus**. It is only the terms of cooperation that will be negotiated.”