

A TALE OF TWO SENATORS: FEINSTEIN CALLS FOR APOLOGY TO PAKISTAN, PAUL ATTEMPTS TO DEFUND

You know that things are truly screwed up regarding US policy on Pakistan when the “best of Senators” is Dianne Feinstein, but it’s hardly surprising that Rand Paul would step up in the Senate to carry Dana Rohrabacher’s sentiments forward and attempt to cut all funding from Pakistan until Dr. Shakeel Afridi is released.

First, the good news from Feinstein. While many in Washington were getting overheated in response to a cost estimate finally being attached to the closure of NATO supply routes through Pakistan (\$100 million a month), Dianne Feinstein made the courageous observation that the US could likely move ahead through the current diplomatic standoff with Pakistan by issuing a simple apology over the Salala raid:

A senior US lawmaker said on Wednesday that apologising to Pakistan over the Salala incident would improve Washington’s relations with a key ally.

“National security of the US will be better served with a positive relationship with Pakistan,” Senator Dianne Feinstein told a Senate hearing on budget priorities for 2013.

The Senator, who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, observed that both sides made mistakes in handling the Nov 26 incident, which caused the death of 24 Pakistani soldiers in a US air raid.

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Senator Feinstein noted that the dispute over the supply lines could be solved “with some civilian acceptance of the mistakes” the US had made.

Such an acceptance could also lead to the reopening of Nato supply lines, she said, adding that “it would do well to apologise” for the mistakes made.

Pakistan’s ambassador to the US was very quick to respond to this overture:

“We appreciate Senator Feinstein for showing the way forward in normalising ties in a relationship that is important to both sides and critical for stabilising the region,” said Pakistan’s Ambassador Sherry Rehman while welcoming the gesture.

Rehman’s time in Washington this week has been difficult, as seen by Rand Paul’s attempt at “diplomacy”:

US Senator Paul Rand was blocked from attaching an amendment to the farm bill that would withhold US aid to Pakistan.

The amendment would have defunded US aid to Pakistan until the country frees an imprisoned doctor, who worked for CIA in hunt for al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Rehman was happy for the move to block Paul’s action, but it appears that her task is doomed:

Ambassador Sherry Rehman and her senior colleagues were seen thanking all those who assisted behind-the-scenes in getting this important amendment blocked.

A Senate staffer who had been working closely with the Embassy said it is important to note that after July, when the election campaign goes into full

gear, many more such amendments are expected, and will be practically impossible to block or defeat once they get tacked on to foreign assistance clauses.

Remarkably, Hamid Karzai appears to understand that with the US and Pakistan stuck in useless posturing, he now must take charge in setting the stage for security in Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal. Speaking to an international conference in Kabul, he called directly on Pakistan for assistance:

Karzai said the help of neighbouring countries and international powers was vital to economic growth and peace in his impoverished country.

He called on Pakistan directly to support nascent efforts to end the 10-year war in Afghanistan.

"Support from these global powers and our neighbours is very important to Afghanistan and to the continued progress of Afghanistan towards stability and economic development," Karzai told delegates.

"Cooperation of all of us countries in the region, the neighbours, and our allies and Nato that will bring stability not only to Afghanistan but the much-needed relief from terrorism and radicalism and violence."

The Afghan leader thanked Saudi Arabia for the help it has given in trying to find a political resolution to the war.

"We also very much hope that our brothers and sisters in Pakistan will do same," Karzai said. "We are already engaged in a serious, deep dialogue with our neighbors in Pakistan as well."

The Afghan president said that the head of the government-appointed peace

council will travel soon to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to seek the two nation's continued help in talking peace with the Taliban in hopes of ending the war.

Karzai said that successful peace discussions with the Taliban are also one of the most important elements in attaining harmony in the region.

It appears that Karzai realizes that the diplomacy that the US had been leading in trying to get the Taliban to the negotiating table is now a complete shambles with the Pakistan meltdown, so he now must achieve breakthroughs on his own.

Good luck with that...