FROM US-PAKISTAN MEETINGS: NO PAKISTAN ACTION IN NORTH WAZIRISTAN; PETRAEUS TO DELIVER EVIDENCE AGAINST ISI

[youtube]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaRKHVw4rUo[/youtube]

The high level meetings in Islamabad between US and Pakistani officials head into their second day today, after a marathon four hour session late yesterday. The line-ups of officials present for the two countries is remarkable and reflects the seriousness with which the two countries view the current situation.
 Pakistan's Express Tribune provides a partial list of those present at the meetings:

> Clinton was accompanied by US Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsy, Director Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) David Petraeus, US Special Envoy Marc Grossman and US Ambassador Cameron Munter, while Premier Gilani was assisted by Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, ISI chief Lt General Ahmed Shuja Pasha, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and other senior officials.

Despite the pomp surrounding the meetings and the seniority of those present, there seems to be little prospect that positions on the major issue will change. As I described yesterday, Clinton is delivering the "new" catchphrase for the US of "fight, talk, build", meaning that the US places the highest priority on fighting the Haqqani network, seen by the US as the biggest current threat and unlikely to participate in meaningful peace talks. By contrast, Pakistan's

Prime Minister has implored the US to “give peace a chance”. From the same Express Tribune article:

> A statement issued by the Prime Minister’s press office also confirmed that Pakistan has no plans to initiate a military operation in North Waziristan.
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> “Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani called upon US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to give peace a chance, as envisaged in the All Parties Conference’s resolution,” said the statement.

We learn from today’s Washington Post that Clinton is warning Pakistan that they will pay a price for this refusal to attack the Haqqani network in their safe havens:

> Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stepped up the rhetorical pressure on Pakistan Thursday, warning Pakistani officials that there would be a “very big price” if they do not take action against militant groups staging attacks in Afghanistan.

Dawn provides more details, revealing that Clinton expects action by Pakistan to occur quickly:

> “We look to Pakistan to take strong steps to deny Afghan insurgents safe havens and to encourage the Taliban to enter negotiations in good faith,” said Clinton after talks with Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar.
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> The United States was looking for operational action “over the next days and weeks, not months and years, but days and weeks because we have a lot of work to do to realise our shared goals,” emphasised Clinton.

In remarks today, Clinton responded to the “give peace a chance” challenge from Pakistan:

> In a joint press conference held with Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar in Islamabad, Clinton urged the Pakistani government to show greater cooperation with the US to corner militants.
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> “You can’t keep snakes in your back yard and expect them to only bite your neighbours,” Clinton said, making a clear reference to the Haqqani network that the US has accused Pakistan of maintaining links with.
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> She added that US and Afghan forces have “successfully” responded to Pakistan’s legitimate concern regarding terrorists working from the Afghan side of the border, and that Pakistan is expected to do the same.
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> “If we want to give peace a chance, we have some work to do,” said Secretary Clinton, urging Pakistan to do more to crackdown on extremists operating from Pakistani territory.

And there is the stand-off. Pakistan’s unchanging position is that now is the time for negotiations with the Haqqani network and the US maintains that it is necessary first to beat them into submission before they will negotiate “in good faith”.

A very important additional aspect of the ongoing meetings comes from the first Express Tribune story linked above, where we learn that new CIA chief David Petraeus will be sharing US intelligence linking Pakistan’s ISI spy agency with the Haqqani network:

> The addition of Petraeus could be especially significant, political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi told Reuters.
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> “America will produce evidence before the army chief, that you are involved

> (in supporting the violence in Afghanistan). With David Petraeus coming as well, they have definitely brought evidence," he said. "He will provide evidence that you are involved, ISI is involved," he added. "But nothing will come out in public."

It seems especially noteworthy that it is believed that Petraeus will share this intelligence with Ashfaq Kayani, who heads Pakistan's Army, rather than Ahmed Pasha, who heads the ISI. The article notes separately that Petraeus will meet with Pasha but separates that meeting from the discussion of Petraeus sharing the ISI-related intelligence with Kayani.

There is a very interesting side note relating to the timing of these high level meetings in Islamabad. Recall that Clinton's visits to Kabul and then Islamabad were not announced in advance. However, the arrival of the US delegation caused the leader of another country to reschedule a planned visit to Islamabad. From Iran's Mehr News:

> President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reportedly decided to defer his travel to Pakistan as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to arrived in Islamabad on Thursday.
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> A diplomat confirmed the postponement of the Iranian president's visit but said it had nothing to do with Clinton's visit and was only a matter of working out the schedule of the Iranian president, who would now visit Pakistan some other time in the near future, Pakistan Today said in a report on Monday.

It is worth noting that at the height of the US-Pakistan rhetorical battle, Pakistan had meetings with China. These meetings were viewed

by many as a signal to the US that Pakistan would consider seeking a closer relationship with China should US-Pakistan relations deteriorate further. Did the US suddenly decide to pre-empt Ahmadinejad's visit because they fear an Iran-Pakistan alliance much more than they fear a China-Pakistan alliance?

For those closely following Marcy's coverage of the Scary Iran Plot, note also that Mehr News is carrying an article accusing Pakistan of being a new "conduit" for smuggling drugs into the Persian Gulf region. The issue of illicit drugs seems to dance around the margins of Scary Iran Plot, so this accusation is worth noting while monitoring that evolving situation.