



August 20, 2009

U.S. Officials Get a Taste of Pakistanis' Anger at America

By [HELENE COOPER](#)

KARACHI, [Pakistan](#) — [Judith A. McHale](#) was expecting a contentious session with [Ansar Abbasi](#), a Pakistani journalist known for his harsh criticism of American foreign policy, when she sat down for a one-on-one meeting with him in a hotel conference room in Islamabad on Monday. She got that, and a little bit more.

After Ms. McHale, the Obama administration's new under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, gave her initial polite presentation about building bridges between America and the Muslim world, Mr. Abbasi thanked her politely for meeting with him. Then he told her that he hated her.

"'You should know that we hate all Americans,' " Ms. McHale said Mr. Abbasi told her. "'From the bottom of our souls, we hate you.' "

Beyond the continuation of the battle against militants along the Pakistani-Afghan border, a big part of [President Obama's](#) strategy for the region involves trying to broaden America's involvement in the country to include nonmilitary areas like infrastructure development, trade, energy, schools and jobs — all aimed at convincing the Pakistani people that the United States is their friend. But as Ms. McHale and other American officials discovered this week, during a visit by [Richard C. Holbrooke](#), the special representative to Pakistan and Afghanistan, making that case was not going to be easy.

"We have made a major turn with our relationship with Pakistan under President Obama," Mr. Holbrooke told reporters at a news conference in Karachi on Wednesday. Time and again, Mr. Holbrooke tried to delineate the differences between the Obama administration and the Bush era, painting the new administration as one that wants to see a better life and more business opportunities for Pakistanis.

He said his very presence in Karachi — Pakistan's largest city and its commercial capital — demonstrated that [drone attacks](#) and the hunt for [Al Qaeda](#) were not the only American foreign policy activities in the country.

To polite applause, Mr. Holbrooke told local officials at the Governor's House that the United States Consulate in Karachi would start granting business visas —100 a week — instead of making would-be business travelers to the United States go to Islamabad for the visas, as has been the case.

He stopped at a shantytown in the city to chat with schoolboys crowded into three classrooms, and even visited the home of a local resident, to get a feel for how people in Karachi live. On Tuesday, he met with opposition leaders in Islamabad, including Liaqat Baloch, the secretary general of the anti-American political party Jamaat-e-Islami, and Fazlur Rehman, the leader of another anti-American party, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, who is sometimes referred to as the spiritual founder of the [Taliban](#).

In Karachi on Wednesday, Mr. Holbrooke kept bringing up a trade bill that just passed the House, which would set up so-called reconstruction opportunity zones so that textiles and other goods made in Pakistan's tribal areas could get preferential access to the United States market. And Ms. McHale, whose job is, in part, to try to repair America's relations with the Muslim world, strayed from his side only when she ventured out on fence-mending missions of her own, meeting with 17 Pakistani journalists, 8 officials of nongovernmental organizations and members of several political parties, all in an effort to deliver one message: America cares about Pakistan.

But Mr. Abbasi's reaction — a response that, Ms. McHale acknowledged, apparently reflects the feelings of about 25 percent of the population, according to a recent poll — demonstrated just how tough the job is. For all of the administration's efforts to call attention to the nonmilitary ties that would bind the two countries, America is still being judged by many Pakistanis as an uncaring behemoth whose sole concern is finding [Osama bin Laden](#), no matter the cost in civilian Pakistani lives.

"He told me that we were no longer human beings because our goal was to eliminate other humans," Ms. McHale said Wednesday, recounting the conversation with Mr. Abbasi. "He spoke English very well, and he said that thousands of innocent people have been killed because we are trying to find Osama bin Laden."

Following Mr. Holbrooke's example when he received a similar lashing from Mr. Baloch, Ms. McHale said she argued her points with Mr. Abbasi, points that to many Americans would appear logical, but that often fail to impress over here: Al Qaeda and Mr. bin Laden attacked the United States on Sept. 11, 2001; the war in Afghanistan, unlike the war in Iraq, is blessed by the [United Nations](#) and is a multinational effort; America will always do whatever it takes to defend itself.

She said that even though she knew that she did not sway Mr. Abbasi, it was good to hear what he thought because she wanted to try to understand the source of much of the anti-Americanism in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in Karachi, Mr. Holbrooke continued to push an agenda of soft power, telling business leaders that the United States wanted to invest in energy projects in Pakistan. But he acknowledged that some of the projects that Karachi technocrats put before him, with their complex ownership structures, would never get approval in the Congress.

The trade bill, now before the Senate, has labor provisions that are unlikely to get past free-trade Republicans, whose support is needed for it to pass.

And on top of that, in a concession to the United States textile industry, the bill would not include imports of cotton tops and pants, items that are made in abundance in Pakistan.

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