

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD OLSON
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO PAKISTAN
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
July 31, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by President Obama's decision to nominate me as the U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and I deeply appreciate the confidence President Obama and Secretary Clinton have in me. I look forward, if confirmed by the Senate, to working closely with you to advance America's interests in Pakistan.

I have been privileged to serve in the Foreign Service since 1982. I worked for many of those years in the Muslim world, including most recently as Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, just before I went to Afghanistan as the Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs. Over the years and through these positions, I have worked closely with senior leadership of the State Department and other national security agencies, and look forward to continuing those relationships in promoting U.S. interests in, and ties with, Pakistan. I am grateful for the continuing support of my family, especially my wonderful daughters Ana and Isabella.

I don't have to tell you how important Pakistan is to the United States. The United States has a clear interest in supporting a stable, sovereign, and democratic Pakistan at peace with itself and its neighbors. Continued engagement with Pakistan is necessary to pursue the strategic defeat of al-Qaida. Engagement is necessary to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, to encourage regional stability, and to support political and economic stability in Pakistan. Instability in Pakistan would undermine our goals in the region.

Pakistan faces many challenges. It is located in a challenging region, continues to face economic stagnation, and is home to a burgeoning population of nearly 200 million people, the majority of whom are under 25. Pakistan has its own challenge in combating extremists that have killed almost 30,000 soldiers and Pakistani citizens. But Pakistan is also a country with great potential, vast natural resources, and talented, resilient people.

As you know, the last several years have been extremely difficult for U.S.-Pakistan relations. As Secretary Clinton has said, our relationship with Pakistan is not always an easy one, but it is important for both of our nations. Throughout the past

year – one that has been marked by events including the May 2 raid against Usama Bin Laden and the November 26 Salala cross-border incident that resulted in the deaths of 24 Pakistani troops and the subsequent closure of the Ground Lines of Communication – we have continued to engage the Pakistanis at the highest levels. We are committed to putting this relationship on more stable footing.

The re-opening of the NATO supply lines provides a renewed opportunity to increase cooperation on our many shared interests. If confirmed, I hope to build on this opportunity to identify and refine our shared interests with Pakistan, and find practical, effective ways to work together to achieve them.

Those shared interests are many.

We share an interest in combating the extremists that threaten both of our countries. Tragically, the Pakistani people have suffered greatly from the extremist violence in their country. They have lost more troops and civilians to acts of terror than any other nation. But there has been cooperation between our nations. As President Obama has noted, we have captured or removed from the battlefield more terrorists on Pakistani soil than anywhere else. We could not have done that without Pakistan's assistance.

We also share an interest in supporting political stability and security in Afghanistan. As President Obama said on May 2, we want Pakistan to be a full partner in supporting Afghan peace and stability in a way that respects Pakistan's sovereignty, interests, and democratic institutions. Pakistani officials have told us repeatedly that, more than any other nation, they have a vested interest in seeing a stable, secure, Afghanistan.

Even as the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship has faced challenges, we have been encouraged by the enhanced dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan on reconciliation. As Afghanistan and Pakistan intensify their bilateral dialogue, including through restarting the Joint Peace Commission, all parties need to focus on concrete steps to support Afghanistan. This includes squeezing insurgents – most notably the Haqqani Taliban Network – which threaten to spoil nascent Afghan reconciliation efforts, and which target Afghans, as well as U.S. personnel.

We will continue to encourage Afghanistan-Pakistan cooperation through the Core Group, which Secretary Clinton convened for the first time at the Ministerial level on the margins of the Tokyo Conference. At the July 8 Ministerial-level Core Group meeting in Tokyo, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the U.S. reiterated that the

surest way to lasting peace and security for Afghanistan and the broader region is through an Afghan political process of peace and reconciliation for Afghanistan. The three countries underscored that this process should be supported by Afghanistan's neighbors and by the international community. The meeting resulted in the first joint U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan call for the Taliban to enter a dialogue with the Afghan government, and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to respond to Afghan requests with concrete support that would advance peace efforts.

Promoting democratic and economic stability in Pakistan is also in our shared interests. Despite the current internal political turmoil, Pakistan's upcoming general election it will mark the country's first transition of power from one civilian government to another – the first in Pakistan's history.

We also share an interest in combating the use of improvised explosive devices, and we are engaged in discussion on this critical issue, including on ways to increase border controls to restrict the flow of IED precursors.

Unlocking Pakistan's economic potential by supporting private sector growth and expanding trade and economic cooperation across borders is central to creating jobs for Pakistan's dynamic people. Progress on normalizing trade relations between India and Pakistan will have a tremendous impact on increasing regional economic cooperation in line with Secretary Clinton's vision for a New Silk Road linking the economies of South and Central Asia. And our continuing civilian assistance, which is focused on five priority sectors – energy, economic growth, stabilization of the border areas, education, and health – also helps promote a secure, stable, democratic Pakistan, and stimulate economic growth, over time.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the enormously talented team at our Embassy in Islamabad and our three consulates in Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi, and our team in Washington. We will energetically work with members of the Pakistani government, business community, and civil society to promote security and prosperity in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and throughout the region, and to improve the image Pakistanis have of the United States and the American people.

I will also consult regularly with Congress, and in particular this Committee, which has played an important role over the years in supporting our goals in Pakistan, from the generosity of the Kerry-Lugar Berman civilian assistance authorization to numerous trips to Pakistan to help the Pakistani leadership and your counterparts understand the concerns – and also the empathy – the American people have about Pakistan and this complex and challenging region.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, please allow me to reiterate how deeply honored I am to have been nominated as the U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. I thank you for considering my nomination and would be pleased to answer your questions.