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Pierre Atlas

## It takes trust between nations

*Pierre Atlas*

I am in the nation's capital this week with five Marian University global studies students for our second annual Lugar Fellow spring break program. The purpose is to expose the students to Washington, from the policymaking perspective, particularly as it concerns international affairs.

We first met with Sen. Richard Lugar, engaging him in a wide-ranging conversation on the challenges America faces around the world. We received a briefing from Sen. Evan Bayh's liaison to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. We've met with several people who work on the Nunn-Lugar program including Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffers and the director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, which works to counter the threat posed by nuclear, biological and chemical weapons around the world. Later this week we will meet with international specialists at the CATO Institute and the Brookings Institution.

One of the highlights of the program was our visit to the embassy of Pakistan and our 90-minute conversation with Pakistan's ambassador, Husain Haqqani. America's relationship with Pakistan is complex and often tense. The two countries need each other and face common enemies in al-Qaida and the Taliban. More Pakistanis have been killed by radical Islamist groups than have Americans. But Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban often has been ambivalent, and Pakistanis fear that when America pulls out of Afghanistan they will be left to pick up the pieces. Given our track record in the region, those fears are not unfounded.

America and Pakistan were allies during the Cold War and worked closely together to support the Afghan mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet invaders. Ambassador Haqqani spoke nostalgically of those days. He knew and greatly admired Charlie Wilson, the late charismatic Texas congressman who spearheaded funding for the Afghan resistance. Once the Cold War ended, however, America quickly abandoned both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Deterioration in U.S.-Pakistani relations followed, spurred in part by Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons, Pervez Musharraf's military dictatorship, and the Taliban's growing presence in Pakistan. For their part, many Pakistanis see America as a country that orders others around but does not listen, and fails to take Pakistan's own concerns into account.

Haqqani told us that his role is "to bridge the misunderstandings, on both sides." After our cordial and engaging conversation, it became clear that he is the right person for the job. As some of my students commented afterward, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States knows more about America than many Americans do. A great admirer of American democracy who understands the nuances of American culture, he told us with great pride that he had read "The Federalist Papers" in their entirety by the age of 17. Haqqani was a professor of international relations at Boston University for six years before becoming ambassador. His wife, Farahnaz Ispahani, is a member of Pakistan's parliament.

The ambassador spoke with us frankly about Pakistan's internal turmoil and the challenges it faces from its own Islamist extremists. A longtime friend and adviser to the assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, he knows first hand the toll of terrorism. He said that, in the wake of numerous Taliban attacks, 73 percent of Pakistanis now view the Taliban as a threat to Pakistan's security. As more Pakistanis come to see the fight against the Taliban as being in their own interests, greater cooperation between our countries could result.

Haqqani lauded the Kerry-Lugar Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, which will triple U.S. nonmilitary aid to Pakistan, to \$1.5 billion annually for the next five years -- one-third of which will go to educating young people. The bill, signed into law by President Barack Obama in October, is intended to strengthen democracy and civil society in Pakistan. For Haqqani, one of the bill's key elements was its five-year focus: America was signaling its long-term commitment to Pakistan. "Trust-building is a process and it takes time," the ambassador said. "Our countries are much closer today than they were a few years ago" and, with Kerry-Lugar, "Pakistan feels that the U.S. is a partner."

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