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Editorial: Mrs. Clinton in Pakistan  
NEW YORK TIMES  
October 30, 2009

Hillary Rodham Clinton's first trip to Pakistan as secretary of state was never going to be easy. The day she arrived, extremists detonated a car bomb at a crowded market in Peshawar that killed at least 100 people. The Nation newspaper dismissed the visit as a mere "PR exercise, but who will buy what the US is selling is difficult to imagine, beyond the already compliant government."

Polls show that an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis dislike and mistrust the United States. They blame Washington for using and then abandoning them after the Soviets were driven from Afghanistan. And they resent Washington for pressing their government now to fight against extremists — and suspect that they will be abandoned again. The fact that many of the extremists are on Pakistan's territory and threatening Pakistan's government has not shifted that thinking or mitigated that resentment.

A good part of this, of course, is the failure of Pakistan's government, which has still not adequately explained that this is not just America's fight. But the United States is also to blame. For eight years the Bush administration coddled the Pakistani Army at the expense of the rest of society.

Mrs. Clinton challenged Pakistan's government to do more to shut down Al Qaeda, but she was, rightly, determined to use this visit to also broaden the relationship.

Instead of just courting President Asif Ali Zardari and the army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Mrs. Clinton also held talks with the top opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif; parried questions from an audience of deeply suspicious college students; met with civil society leaders, including women and Pashtun elders; gave interviews to Pakistani journalists; and visited religious and cultural sights.

She promised to refocus American aid on the "needs of the people" and announced targeted commitments, including \$85 million for microloans for poor women to start businesses and \$125 million for the first phase of an electricity project aimed at reducing blackouts and improving energy conservation.

Those grants are welcome but still small change when compared with a five-year, \$7.5 billion — nonmilitary — aid package approved by Congress and signed into law this year. That package was supposed to demonstrate to Pakistanis that, this time, the United States is in it for the long haul. Instead, it has become another focus of popular resentment. The Army and some Pakistani news media whipped that up with disingenuous complaints that the legislation (Islamabad was consulted beforehand) compromised Pakistan's sovereignty by conditioning disbursement on adequate civilian control of the military.

If Washington is ever to enlist Pakistan as a reliable ally, it is going to have to do a much better job of explaining itself. And it is going to have to insist that Pakistan's leaders start explaining the real stakes to their citizens and the real benefits of an alliance with the United States. Mrs. Clinton's trip was an important start — but only a start.