

## **Clinton says al-Qaeda sheltered in Pakistan**

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*Hillary Clinton, US secretary of state, on Thursday said she found it "hard to believe" that members of the Pakistani government did not know where al-Qaeda leaders were hiding and could not "get at them if they really wanted to".*

Mrs Clinton's blunt remarks, which infuriated officials in Pakistan, reflect Washington's belief that al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan in 2001-2002.

But her comments were in stark contrast to the stated purpose of her trip – to improve relations with Pakistan where the US is still deeply unpopular.

In the wake of this week's bombing in Peshawar that killed more than 100 people, her visit has been dominated by the battle against Islamist extremists, despite a flurry of aid announcements intended to bolster relations.

One Pakistani official called Mrs Clinton's comments "very ill advised". He said they undermined ties between the two countries and failed to appreciate "Pakistan's sacrifices to fight terrorists".

Last night Pakistan had not issued a formal response. But Pakistani officials say they have stepped up actions against extremists but do not know where the al-Qaeda leaders are.

But discussing al-Qaeda at a meeting with newspaper editors in Lahore, Mrs Clinton said the extremist group had had a safe haven in Pakistan since 2002.

"I find it hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where they are and couldn't get them if they really wanted to," she said, in remarks quoted by news agencies. "Maybe they are not 'get-at-able'. I don't know."

In a remark that appeared aimed at Pakistan's powerful ISI intelligence agency, she added: "If we are going to have a mature partnership where we work together ... there are issues that not just the US but others have with your government and with your military security establishment."

Mrs Clinton has made a series of unusually frank remarks since taking office, including her comments in February that issues such as human rights should not "interfere" with the US relationship with China and her claim in April that Pakistan was "abdicating" to the Taliban.

The Pakistani army subsequently began a series of offensives against the Pakistani Taliban, the latest and most ambitious of which is currently taking place in the border region of south Waziristan, leading the Obama administration to sound a much more positive note about Pakistan.

However, many analysts say there is little prospect of Pakistan mounting a similar assault against the Afghan Taliban – which is fighting against the government in Kabul, rather than Islamabad – or against al-Qaeda itself. The US remains deeply unpopular in Pakistan.

The aid announcements the US administration has co-ordinated with Mrs Clinton's trip encompass \$125m in aid to improve Pakistan's electricity system, \$85m to Pakistani women and families, \$45m for higher education and \$56m to Pakistanis displaced by current fighting against the Taliban.

They also include \$103.5m for law enforcement and border security, including funds for policing the turbulent north-west of the country and maintaining the ministry of interior's stock of helicopters.

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