

James F. Moriarty
Ambassador-Designate to Bangladesh
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is a great honor to appear before you as President Bush's nominee to serve as Ambassador to Bangladesh. I deeply appreciate the trust President Bush and Secretary Rice have shown in nominating me and, if confirmed, I will serve to the best of my abilities. I also wish to express my personal gratitude to my wife of 25 years, Lauren. In addition to being my soul-mate, she was the best Foreign Service Officer I ever met and her wise counsel has helped shape my career. She has made a heavy sacrifice in deciding to retire in order to accompany me to Bangladesh, if I am confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, I have served my country as a Foreign Service Officer for more than three decades in South Asia, Africa, the Near East, and East Asia. Most recently, I spent three exciting years as Chief of Mission in Nepal, as that country attempted to return to democracy. My tour in Nepal followed a stint as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council. If confirmed, I will rely on the experience gained throughout my career to advance U.S. interests in Bangladesh.

I look forward to what promises to be a challenging assignment. Bangladesh is a country in transition, in an area of the globe vital to U.S. interests. In Bangladesh, our interests revolve around three, inter-twined “d’s”: democracy, development, and denial of space to terrorism. The seventh-most populous country in the world, Bangladesh is overwhelmingly Muslim and has in the recent past been grindingly poor. If, under such conditions, it succeeds in building a tolerant, prosperous democracy, it will serve as a shining beacon for much of the world. If it fails in these tasks, it could become a nation of ungoverned space and a potential safehaven and crossroads for international terrorism.

Democracy

Since winning independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh has struggled to build a viable democracy. Its democratic performance has been mixed, and its brief history has included periods of military rule and civil disorder. On January 11, 2007, Bangladesh’s President declared a State of Emergency in the face of an opposition boycott of scheduled national elections and widespread political violence. In accordance with Bangladesh’s constitution, the President appointed a Caretaker Government, comprised of 11 non-partisan advisers; that Caretaker Government in turn embarked upon an ambitious agenda to rid the country of endemic corruption, reform institutions necessary for a sustainable democracy, and hold free, fair and transparent elections. In a country that Transparency International described in recent years as “perceived to be the most corrupt in the world,” the anti-corruption campaign quickly led to the arrests of a number of

prominent individuals – politicians and businessmen alike. At present, two of Bangladesh's former Prime Ministers are in prison facing corruption charges.

Bangladesh's State of Emergency continues today, more than a year after the current Caretaker Government assumed power. Under the State of Emergency, the Bangladesh Government placed on freedom of expression and the right to engage in political activity. In August 2007, the Caretaker Government received a jarring wake-up call when the country erupted in violent protests. The Government, with the strong support of the military, quickly restored order by imposing a curfew in the areas hit by rioting. But the demonstrations showed what can happen when legitimate means of expressing grievances are unavailable.

Before and after the protests, the United States has consistently urged Bangladesh's Caretaker Government to lift the restrictions on basic rights, and on September 9, 2007, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed announced a partial relaxation of the ban on political activity. The United States has welcomed this announcement and urged the Caretaker Government to move as quickly as possible to take additional steps to restore civic freedoms and democracy. In particular, the United States has called upon Bangladesh's Caretaker Government to adhere to the electoral roadmap it announced in July 2007. That roadmap promises national elections by the end of 2008.

I am heartened by indications that the electoral roadmap remains on track. In an address to the nation on the anniversary of January 11, the Chief Adviser reiterated his commitment to hold elections that will restore, not replace, Bangladesh's democracy. Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff has underscored that the military supports the Caretaker Government and that he does not personally seek political office. Bangladesh's efforts to register 90 million voters remain on track despite disruptions from Cyclone Sidr that left much of the southern part of the country in ruins last November. There are encouraging signs that the Caretaker Government is cracking down on human rights abuses. Meanwhile, though, the United States continues to insist the Bangladesh government investigate allegations of extrajudicial actions by the security forces, mistreatment of members of ethnic and religious minorities, or wrongful detention of individuals. The anti-corruption campaign remains popular, although the government must carefully follow due process.

Meanwhile, reformers within Bangladesh's major political parties are pushing to democratize the parties. The Caretaker Government has also responded positively to the parties' call for dialogue. While these are ultimately matters for the Bangladeshi people to decide, the United States is actively following these developments. We also continue to monitor the court cases brought against those detained during the State of Emergency, including the two former Prime Ministers. The United States – along with like minded

partners - has advised Bangladesh's Caretaker government that it must meet international standards for due process, transparency and respect for human rights in all cases.

Development

With respect to the U.S. goal of fostering development, Bangladesh has enjoyed several years of strong economic growth, despite perennial struggles against flooding, overpopulation, and poverty. Bangladesh needs sustained growth, if it is to escape from the jaws of debilitating and destabilizing poverty. The Caretaker Government has attempted to take some positive economic steps. Encouragingly, the Bangladesh government has worked to expand power generation and to improve infrastructure. For example, the government has streamlined operations of Bangladesh's largest port, cutting transit times through the port from 9 or 10 days to 3 or 4 days, and reducing cargo handling costs by at least 40 percent. In the near-term, the Caretaker Government faces the daunting task of reducing inflation: prices have soared due to high international commodity prices, devastating monsoonal floods and widespread crop damage from Cyclone Sidr. Recent surveys and anecdotal evidence show that the people of Bangladesh worry more about feeding themselves than about political reforms.

This is one reason why foreign assistance plays such a vital part of U.S. Government efforts to promote stability and development in Bangladesh. We have provided roughly \$5 billion in assistance to Bangladesh since its independence. That assistance has, among other accomplishments, contributed to a fifty percent drop in Bangladesh's population

growth, provided electricity to scores of millions of villagers, helped save the lives of hundreds of thousands during the most recent severe cyclone, and helped establish the conditions for three consecutive free and fair national elections. It has also built for the United States a degree of goodwill among the populace virtually unmatched in any other Muslim-majority country.

Currently, the U.S. Agency for International Development manages a large food aid program that targets the poorest of the poor, especially in the countryside where the effects of floods and other disasters are most severe. USAID also manages a broad-based program focusing on democracy and governance, public health, education for the country's poor, and expanded economic opportunity and competitiveness. These programs help provide a basic social safety net and a way out of poverty for their beneficiaries.

Late last year, the U.S. Government provided emergency relief to the millions of people whose livelihoods Cyclone Sidr destroyed. USAID immediately provided \$19.5 million in aid and the U.S. military immediately provided desperately needed airlift to deliver food, water and clothing to remote areas during Operation Sea Angel II. The U.S. response to the crisis received widespread and exceedingly favorable media coverage in Bangladesh. This has helped cement the friendly ties between our two countries.

The damage from Cyclone Sidr has been estimated at billions of dollars, and the Bangladesh Government has asked donors to help rebuild agriculture and aquaculture industries, to reconstruct rural electrification networks and to mitigate future disasters. Bangladesh also needs help from donors to ensure that the most vulnerable of its citizens have adequate food security. The nation's grain stockpiles could be dangerously low by spring as Bangladesh struggles to meet the needs of its cyclone victims.

Denial of Space to Terrorists

Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn now to the U.S. interest in denying terrorists the use of Bangladesh's territory. Despite a long and admirable history of religious tolerance, Bangladesh has become a target of extremists in recent years. Poverty and political turmoil have provided some space for terrorists. Home-grown terrorists called the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) simultaneously exploded over 400 small bombs throughout Bangladesh in August 2005; shortly thereafter, the JMB embarked on a terror campaign of suicide attacks against judges, other prominent figures, and crowded markets. The subsequent execution of six JMB leaders appears to have left the terrorist organization on the run.

A number of press reports also indicate, however, that Pakistan-based militant groups are using Bangladesh as a staging area and transit point to facilitate attacks directed at targets in India, and at least one of these groups, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT), has been able to tap into resources provided by local militant groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami, Bangladesh (HUJI-B) to support their operations. Indian press reports allege that

Bangladeshi HUJI-B members and individuals affiliated with the LT are involved in an active terrorist network, operating from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Press reports also suggest that this particular network is responsible for a string of attacks in India, including the October 2005, May 2007, and August 2007 bombings in Hyderabad and probably the October 2007 bombing of a shrine in Ajmer, Rajasthan as well.

That said, Bangladesh is committed to partnership with the United States in the Global War on Terror, and the vast majority of Bangladesh's citizens appear to have little sympathy for the terrorists. The Caretaker Government has identified counterterrorism as a top priority and has actively pursued extremists. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to work with Bangladesh to help it counter the internal terrorist threat, while strengthening control of its borders and various ports of entry.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, in closing let me say that I look forward very much to the challenges I will face if confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh. Over the years, the people of Bangladesh have overcome many daunting obstacles in their search for better lives. I feel strongly that it is in the U.S. national interest to work with them to help build a Bangladesh where democracy flourishes, where no child goes to bed hungry, and where no terrorist can find safehaven. If confirmed, I will work closely with Congress in pursuit of these goals.

Let me also assure you that, if confirmed, I will zealously protect the welfare and safety of American citizens and American interests in Bangladesh.

Thank you again for the opportunity of addressing you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.