

Committee Statement: House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on "Democracy, Authoritarianism, and Terrorism in Contemporary Pakistan."

November 7, 2007

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding today's hearing on this very important issue. Unfortunately, we are holding this hearing at a time when the nation of Pakistan is embroiled in political chaos and its president, General Pervez Musharraf, is becoming increasingly isolated from even his own political party and military generals. This scenario does not bode well for the Pakistani people and American interests in the region.

The United States and its coalition allies are currently engaged in a battle against Islamic extremism and the heart of the Taliban along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. These same forces that have terrorized the security and stability of Afghanistan and its ruling government, have also sought to assassinate General Musharraf and destabilize his grip on power. This confluence of events has created a terrible dilemma for the United States, which considers Pakistan a crucial ally in the Global War on Terror.

Since September 11, 2001, Pakistan's role in America's foreign policy has been defined by its strategic geo-political location and demographic make-up. It is true, without Pakistan standing alongside the United States, America is without a critical partner in the Global War on Terror and risks losing a largely Muslim nuclear power to the extremists who wish to annihilate the United States and its allies.

Pakistan has been the recipient of billions of dollars in aid as it has continued to display courage in the face of radical Islam by arresting more Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters than any other country, not-to-mention General Musharraf's deploying of tens of thousands of troops in the frontier regions bordering Afghanistan.

I commend President Musharraf for his unwavering support of eradicating these insidious radicals, while facing multiple attempts on his own life. However, I too am concerned about the actions Musharraf took this past Saturday when he suspended Pakistan's constitution and imposed emergency rule.

Moreover, it seems General Musharraf was more motivated to undertake such extreme measures, not for the preservation of the nation of Pakistan as he has claimed, but rather the preservation of his own dual role as the President of Pakistan and Commander of the Pakistan Army.

The Supreme Court, which was deposed by Musharraf on Saturday, was prepared to rule against the General's efforts to hold on to power.

These actions are particularly troubling for the United States, not just because Pakistan is a recipient of billions of dollars in U.S. aid, but also because it has a critical interest in ensuring that Pakistan is not lost to Islamic extremism and does not play any greater role in destabilizing the region.

While we can understand the reasoning behind General Musharraf's urgency to rid Pakistan of terrorists, we cannot in good conscience allow the demise of democracy in Pakistan.

The February 2004 public exposure of an illicit global nuclear proliferation network overseen by Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan, known as the founder of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and a national hero, led to an apparent and urgent tightening of security for Pakistan's strategic arsenal. Yet General Musharraf, citing Khan's contributions to his nation, issued a blanket pardon.

Neither the United States nor international investigators have been given access to Khan, and no one in Pakistan has faced criminal charges for involvement in his network, which some reports indicate may continue to be active in Pakistan and elsewhere. Meanwhile, some reports indicate that Pakistan is in the midst of building two new heavy water reactors which, when operating, could dramatically increase the country's stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium.

We must demand that Pakistan is committed not only to democratic principles, but also to partnering with the United States in implementing global non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The best and most prudent path forward for Pakistan is for the restoration of constitutional democracy, for General Musharraf to agree to resign as leader of the armed forces, and for free and fair elections to go ahead as scheduled.

Our role in this is to use every tool available to help Pakistan achieve these goals. Failure could result in disaster for Pakistan, its people, the surrounding region and the foreign policy and security interests of the United States.