



Remarks to the Press in Islamabad, Pakistan

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State
Islamabad, Pakistan
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MODERATOR: It's a great pleasure this morning to introduce our Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, who has been here a couple of days, as you know. And he will speak at the beginning, give an introductory statement, and then open it up for questions. And we ask that the questions please be one per person and succinct, please.

Ambassador Negroponte.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Good morning, thank you, Elizabeth. I'd like to make a brief statement.

During this brief trip to Islamabad, I had meetings with President Musharraf and other senior Pakistani Government officials, including National Security Advisor Aziz, Vice Chief of Army Staff General Kiyani, former Foreign Minister Kasuri and Inter-Services Intelligence Director General Taj. I also spoke by phone with Pakistani Peoples Party Leader Benazir Bhutto.

In my meeting with President Musharraf, he reiterated his vision for a moderate, prosperous and democratic Pakistan. Under his leadership, Pakistan has made great progress towards that vision. Over the past few years, the Pakistani people have witnessed expanded and freer media, unprecedented economic growth and development, and the moderation of gender-based laws and school curricula. President Musharraf has been and continues to be a strong voice against extremism. We value our partnership with the Government of Pakistan under the leadership of President Musharraf.

We welcome President Musharraf's announcement that elections will take place in January, a commitment he repeated to me yesterday in categorical terms. He also repeated his commitment to retire from his army post before commencing his second presidential term. And we urge him to do so as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the recent political actions against protestors, suppression of the media, and the arrests of political and human rights leaders runs directly counter to the reforms that have been undertaken in recent years. Their continuation undermines the progress that Pakistan has made. I urged the Government of Pakistan to stop such actions, to lift the state of emergency, and release all political detainees. Emergency rule is not compatible with free, fair and credible elections, which require the active participation of political parties, civil society, and the media. The people of Pakistan deserve an opportunity to choose their leaders free from the restrictions that exist under a state of emergency.

Looking to the future, the United States believes that the best way for any country to counter violent extremism is to develop and nurture a moderate political center. We believe this is true for Pakistan as well. And in my talks, I encouraged reconciliation between political moderates as the most constructive way forward.

A democratic Pakistan that continues the fight against terror is vital to the interests of both the United States and Pakistan. In the current circumstances, engagement and dialogue, not brinkmanship and confrontation, should be the order of the day for all parties. The United States supports the Pakistani people in their efforts to develop a prosperous and democratic nation.

That ends my prepared comments, and I'd be pleased to try and answer a few of your questions before departing for Washington.

QUESTION: My name is David Savik (ph). I represent Daily (inaudible). You had your meeting with the President, and following that meeting the press reports came that General Pervez Musharraf has refused to give any time frame to lift emergency. Will you term your meeting with President Musharraf on this count as a failure?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I don't think that it would be right in such a short time frame -- after all, this meeting that I've had with the President took place only yesterday -- to talk in terms of success or failure. I think it was an opportunity to communicate the concerns we had to President Musharraf, to raise the points that I mentioned in my prepared statement. In diplomacy, as you know, we don't get instant replies when we have these kinds of dialogue. I'm sure that the President is seriously considering the exchange we had yesterday, just as we are taking very seriously the comments that he had to make to us.

QUESTION: Sir, Stephanie Sy from ABC News. I just wonder if President Musharraf is indeed cracking down on extremists, why haven't they been able to penetrate settled areas such as the Sawat Valley?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: We share with the Government of Pakistan a concern about combating violent extremism in this country, in the border areas and also, of course, in the country of Afghanistan. This is a matter of high priority and concern for both of our governments. It's an area we have cooperated in the past and expect to continue cooperating in the future.

It is true that the government faces some challenges in that part of Pakistan, which I take as an example of the determined efforts of extremist elements that exist here. And it's yet another reason to be concerned about the situation in Pakistan, but I also have no doubt about the commitment of the Pakistani Government, the Pakistani army and the Pakistani security forces to deal with that situation. It's one of the subjects that I discussed with the President and in somewhat more detail with General Kiyani when I met with him. And as you know, we have a number of programs designed to assist the Government of Pakistan in dealing with that situation.

QUESTION: This is Hanif Halli (ph) representing Daily (inaudible). My question is that certain TV channels has been closed in Pakistan. Your comments, please?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, as I said in my remarks, we don't think that these kinds of emergency measures are compatible with the kind of environment that is needed to conduct free and fair elections. And this is one of the principal issues which I discussed with the President yesterday and we urged that, as I said, that these kinds of actions be stopped, that the state of emergency be lifted, and that all political detainees be released. And we think it is those kinds of steps that will help ensure that the forthcoming elections are as fair and free as possible.

QUESTION: Erin Baker (ph), Time Magazine. Given the situation in Sawat, would you be willing to accept an agreement along the lines of the Waziristan accords of last year?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Look, I don't want to get into the details of what kind of arrangements might be satisfactory or acceptable to the Government of Pakistan in dealing with that situation. I think I'd rather limit myself to saying that the situation in Sawat is a reminder of the fact that there are issues to deal with regarding violent extremism in this country. The Government of Pakistan is undertaking a major effort at the moment to deal with the situation in Sawat, and I suspect that it will be

doing so for a while to come. And we are certainly supportive of the Government of Pakistan's efforts to combat violent extremism in the Sawat, region.

QUESTION: Parhan Mufai (ph), Financial Times. Sir, did you explain to the President the implications for future U.S. economic and military aid if he does not resolve the political challenges that he faces in Pakistan and your concerns about Pakistan's internal situation? And what was his response to it?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Our discussion was in the context of two friendly countries, two friendly governments that share common interests and are facing some common challenges, including efforts against violent extremism. As a friend of Pakistan and as a country that provides substantial assistance to this country, we spoke -- I spoke to the President in terms of the kinds of steps we felt were necessary in order to ensure a democratic evolution of Pakistan and how to get the political process back on track.

What the President told me was that he'd taken some of the steps, or intended to take some of the steps that have been talked about, such as holding early elections, such as taking off the uniform, but that there remain several other issues that are yet to be considered or yet to be undertaken.

And I think I would leave it at saying that we urge President Musharraf and his government to consider as rapidly as possible taking these other remaining steps so that the elections can go forward on a satisfactory basis.

QUESTION: Thank you. Zain Verjee, CNN. What specifically, Ambassador, will be the consequences if Musharraf does not lift the state of emergency prior to elections? And did you communicate to him what those consequences --

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, yes, I think you're going to a question similar to the one that was just asked, and I think that I'd rather confine my reply to what I just said, which is that we believe that the best way to go forward is to lift the state of emergency and take these other steps that I discussed. And if those steps aren't taken, it will certainly undermine the government's ability to conduct satisfactory elections. And I think that I can safely say that our two governments share a common commitment to carrying these elections out in a satisfactory way, so that I would hope to see the government take steps to make this possible as quickly as they can.

QUESTION: This is Shokat Praja (ph) from (inaudible) TV. You talked about the moderate forces coming together. How far you were able to bridge the differences between Benazir Bhutto and President Musharraf because you spoke both of them? Thank you.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, of course, I was only here for a very short period of time. But as I mentioned and has been reported in the media, I did have a chance to speak with Ms. Bhutto by phone two evenings ago.

I think what I would say here, and as I mentioned in my statement, we believe that the path of political moderation is the best way forward for Pakistan, and that to the extent that that is true, reconciliation between the moderate political forces is a very desirable thing and could help set the conditions for a successful election.

And now in recent days and weeks, the situation appears to have polarized somewhat and that, of course, has had the effect of throwing the political process off track. But if steps were taken by both sides to move back towards the kinds of reconciliation discussions that they had been having previously, we think that that would be very positive and could help improve the political environment and pull the political actors back from the atmosphere of brinkmanship and confrontation that appears to have existed in recent weeks.

I'll take two more questions.

QUESTION: Yeah, Mr. Negroponte, Damien Kramaskus (ph) from BBC TV. I'd just like to ask, you have not called for the release and reinstatement of the Chief Justice and the other judges. Why not? Because I know that is a question that many Pakistanis care very deeply about and would like to hear an answer from.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: We have urged the government to stop the suppression of the media and the arrest of political and human rights leaders. And as I said, we believe those actions run directly counter to the reforms that have been undertaken in recent years and we believe that their continuation undermines the progress that Pakistan has made. What I did do was to urge the government to stop such actions, to lift the state of emergency, and to release all political detainees.

QUESTION: My name is Babel (ph) from ATV. Do you believe that without Musharraf regime in Pakistan war on terror is not good handling in the region?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I didn't quite understand the last part of the question.

QUESTION: Do you believe that without Musharraf regime in Pakistan war on terror is not good handling in the region?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Right, yeah. Look, this is a hypothetical question. I mean, we are working with the government and people of Pakistan to fight violent extremism and we think that one of the best ways to do that is to move forward with the democratic political process. And at this point in time, we are working with President Musharraf and his government to achieve that. We believe his government shares those same goals and we think it's a question of taking the steps necessary to accomplish this constructive, this positive political evolution. So that's our focus at this particular time. And I sincerely hope that we can move things forward in a constructive and a positive way.

Thank you very much.

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