

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to propose to you today that citizen empowerment is the best antidote to Pakistan's rising extremism.

It has very often been reported in the west that Pakistan faces an existential threat from extremism. A few weeks ago President Obama commented on the weakness of the Pakistani state. Weak states have historically been conducive to rogue groups posing challenges to the state's authority. Yet Pakistan, in spite of the fact that it has exhibited weakness in the face of the militant threat, can defy the odds and pull through provided internal corrective measures coupled with international support help Pakistan from falling further into the hands of extremists whom we have all come to know as the Taliban.

It is important to understand who the Taliban are in this context. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, is essentially a multiethnic conglomerate involved in active insurgency in Pakistan's FATA and NWFP and in terrorist activities in the rest of Pakistan. In Pashtun areas, the leadership and cadres of the TTP are ethnic Pashtun along with a strong presence of Arab, Uzbek, Chechen and Punjabi militants. While many of them have fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets as well as US and NATO forces, others have trained within Pakistan only. As their power and influence has grown, they have also been joined by local criminal networks who have assisted in targeted killings and kidnappings, especially of law enforcement personnel.

How these groups have come to wield the influence that they have is the result of a number of factors which I think are important to point out. In the first instance, one must remember that when the **Soviet** Union invaded Afghanistan in the late seventies, the United States was actively involved in collecting Muslim men from a number of countries, training them militarily and ideologically indoctrinating these groups of jihadis to fight off the godless communist enemy. With Saudi money, many madrassas were set up in Pakistan for the specific purpose of this indoctrination all through the eighties. At the same time, Pakistan was used as both a conduit for arms and a place to house the millions of Afghan refugees who fled their homeland. All through that time, the Pakistani military, under General Zia ul Haq, also actively indoctrinated its rank and file with a jihadist ideology.

After the Soviets were defeated, the US abruptly left the region, leaving war-torn Afghanistan to sort out its own stability issues and leaving war-damaged Pakistan to deal with the aftermath of the crisis on its own. By now, the Pakistani army had become quite permeated with jihadi ideology and there were strong feelings within Pakistan's security establishment that instead of disbanding the jihadi groups they can be used as assets in Pakistan's historic rivalry against India. Ever since the two nations had gone nuclear and stopped engaging in conventional warfare, both supported cross-border terrorism in each other's territory. Pakistan therefore had legitimate security concerns vis a vis India, but in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan and jihadi elements within Pakistan and in Kashmir, it used a very dangerous approach in attempting to offset those concerns.

But apart from the military perspective, there were also many other factors that helped in both creating and sustaining the extremists within Pakistan. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas is a part of Pakistan that has never fully been integrated with the rest of the country. As a result, the area had poor law enforcement, failing infrastructure, and antiquated and discriminatory laws governing it that had been inherited from the British Raj and never updated. Laws like the Frontier Crimes Regulation allowed the political agent appointed by the federal government to have sweeping powers over the population in such areas, allowing him to punish the entire tribe in response to the crime of an individual. The people of FATA had no protection in regular Pakistani courts. The area has historically been off limits to journalists, NGOs, human rights organizations, and even

Pakistani political parties could not operate there. This allowed those speaking in the name of religion a monopoly of influence in the area.

Added to the political marginalization was also economic marginalization with widespread poverty and lack of opportunities that lent itself easily to both brainwashing of disaffected youths and also appeal in the idea that if you had a gun, people would listen to you and you would have influence in society.

After 9/11 another twist was added to this potent mix, and that was the rampant anti-Americanism that permeated society as a result of the US occupation of Afghanistan and the drone attacks within Pakistan. Any group who was seen as opposing the US therefore had a degree of immediate appeal and capacity to influence public at large.

I would like to take a minute here to just point out that much is often made about the people's desire to be governed by Islamic law or Sharia and hence an appeal of the fundamentalist groups. In reality, there is no truth to this. If one looks at how the people of the NWFP and the rest of Pakistan voted in the 2008 election, they voted for secular parties. Had they wanted Sharia they could have easily voted in Islamic parties, who make Sharia a key electoral promise. What is important to the people however is justice and opportunity, electricity and running water and a chance to send their children to school. Whether this is delivered through secular law or Sharia is not of primary concern to most people within Pakistan, including those in the Frontier Province.

The problem is that the state under successive governments has failed to deliver these basic amenities to its people. Instead, there is increasing disparity between rich and poor, which is being looked upon with less and less tolerance as the days go by. I remember the older generation always commented upon how complacent Pakistan's disadvantaged classes were. This is no longer the case today. Many people are just angry and look upon corrupt government officials with absolute disdain. And this is the tricky part—because sometimes, this disdain and resentment results in at best ambivalence towards the Taliban and at worst tacit support. I see this especially in conversations I have with people outside the Frontier Province, and particularly in Punjab, where economically challenged classes often question how much worse could the Taliban be? Our government officials are already so corrupt, how much worse can these Taliban be? But the people of the NWFP have learned the hard way how much worse things can be. The fear of beheadings, kidnappings, burning of girls' schools, torture undertaken by the Taliban was far worse than the most barbaric Pakistani feudal traditions had to offer.

The freedom of expression that Pakistanis have become so accustomed to whether it is in regards to the civilian government or the military is unthinkable when it comes to the Taliban, as prominent Pashtun journalists will attest. The Taliban have run a very systematic and potent propaganda campaign circulating videos of the brutalities they have committed and thereby silencing opposition through brute fear. As a result, whatever sympathy or ambivalence there may have been for them in the population has very quickly disappeared, most particularly in the areas that have fallen to their forces and are currently the subject of a military operation.

One more thing to remember here is that just as the Taliban have little to do with Islam, often being too uneducated to even grasp the intricacies of Sharia, so too they have nothing to do with Pashtun nationalism or Pashtun culture. This is actually the cultural result of militarized madrassas and refugee camps where Pashtun children were forced to grow up during and after the Soviet-Afghan war in the eighties. Many of these people have never really been true citizens of Pakistan or Afghanistan and nor have they ever really experienced traditional Pashtun tribal society.

In fact, the Taliban ideology has mounted a revolt in many ways within the social hierarchy of the traditional tribal structure. And therefore, if not checked, it could easily spread to other parts of Pakistan especially to the underprivileged and underdeveloped areas where poverty, injustice, lack of education and an obscurantist form of religion preached by pro-jihadi madrassas could result in influencing the vulnerable, and we unfortunately have reports of such seeds being sown in south Punjab, for example.

Given where we stand today with respect to this growing and dangerously militarized tide of extremism, a two-pronged approach is necessary. In the first instance, we need a commitment on the part of the military to defeat these armed groups and in future distance itself from the idea that jihadists are assets. At the same time, there must be a commitment on the part of the state to provide opportunity, education and basic amenities to its people.

If we look first to the role of the military, I would like to submit that it appears that under General Kiyani the military may just have turned the corner that it needed to and although the media and public at large should continue to monitor the army's performance on this, pressuring it to minimize collateral damage and to battle the insurgents with dedication, there are a number of encouraging indicators.

The biggest difference between the leadership of General Musharraf and that of General Kiyani is the fact that General Kiyani can concentrate on his job as army chief and not be distracted by competing concerns such as maintaining popularity as a politician. During Musharraf's time, it was a considered strategy and one that some retired army generals have confessed to on television that by encouraging the Islamic threat at some level, it would be easy to convince the west that Musharraf should remain in power as a bulwark against it. This obsession with convincing the west of his indispensability vis a vis the Islamists led Musharraf to both not eradicate extremism altogether because then his indispensability would be questioned and also battle secular opponents like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif at the expense of entering into dubious alliances with political forces who would provide space to extremist ideology.

The best example of this was the 2002 election, in which Musharraf encouraged the intelligence agencies to bring together a disparate group of Islamic political parties such that they would contest elections collectively under the initials MMA. He also made a deal with the MMA that if they succeeded in winning a certain number of seats, they would support him in passing the controversial Seventeenth Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution which would greatly enhance Musharraf's powers as President. In order to orchestrate the MMA victory in the NWFP, Musharraf took some measures. For instance, he first ordered that you must have a bachelor's degree to contest elections. In a country with such low levels of literacy, this requirement made little sense, and managed to disqualify many veteran politicians. But what is even more disconcerting is that he equated a degree from religious seminaries (with very little technical skills) to a bachelor's thereby allowing many MMA candidates opportunities that they could have only dreamed of previously. After their electoral win, the MMA not only passed legislation that was discriminatory towards women and gave space to extremist ideology, but also there are troubling reports that during the 2002-2003 period, MMA provincial ministers who had fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan and had sympathy for them, were housing certain militants in safe houses in Peshawar.

On the other hand, when it came to secular opponents, not just in the case of well-established ones like Benazir Bhutto or Nawaz Sharif, who were both in exile during most of Musharraf's time in power, but also when it came to ordinary activists, Musharraf's regime dealt harshly with secular opposition. We saw this clearly during the very courageous lawyers' movement

that took place between 2007 and earlier this year. Musharraf not only sacked the Chief Justice and put him under house arrest along with his family but also arrested several other judges, lawyers, human rights activists and civil society members who had come out to rally behind the very secular and democratic cause of rule of law, an independent judiciary and supremacy of the constitution. While these activists were dealt with very harshly by law enforcement, the extremists were often allowed to go free in half-baked peace deals.

But under General Kiyani, although the military still may not be the people's army that we would like it to be, there are several changes that have taken place. First of all, it has been confirmed by many sources that General Kiyani ordered the intelligence agencies not to interfere in the 2008 election. And thus, even though there had been considerable pre-poll rigging, election day was free of interference from the intelligence agencies and as a result the election was accepted as fair by all major political players. And thus we saw the routing of the Islamic parties in that election. Moreover, General Kiyani departed from the stance that Musharraf had taken against the lawyers' movement and thus this helped resolve the crisis in a peaceful manner and one in which the citizenry of Pakistan felt empowered.

In addition, Musharraf had appointed several serving and retired military men to important civilian positions during the course of his tenure. There was widespread resentment against this along with the military's exaggerated economic interests as well as interventions in Pakistan's political space, and in attempting to reverse this resentment, General Kiyani ordered many of these military men to abdicate those positions in favour of civilians as soon as he took over as army chief. He also halted plans for a very expensive and controversial new GHQ facility for the military and declared 2008 the Year of the Soldier and followed through by increasing the pay of the demoralized soldier---demoralized because of the increasing economic gap within the military between high and low ranking officials and also because of the damage done to the image of the military in the eyes of the Pakistani public during Musharraf's time even though many soldiers had lost their lives in battles against the Taliban. Not only has Kiyani increased the pay of the foot soldier but he has also increased compensation amounts for the family members of the Frontier Constabulary in the event that they lose their lives in battle, making them equivalent to those of other army soldiers.

According to trusted sources, the military is also continuing to purge itself of the jihadi elements that had been infused into its ranks during the Zia era. Although to be fair to Musharraf, this policy started during his time, but General Kiyani appears to be continuing with it. In the most recent effort to repair the tarnished image, General Kiyani also announced that all military personnel would contribute a day's salary for the relief of the internally displaced persons as a result of the military operation in Swat. During the 2005 earthquake, many organizations made such announcements but this time the military was the first one to do so.

Therefore, although the crisis of the IDPs is a massive one and Pakistan needs all the help it can get in dealing with the temporary lodging and subsequent rehabilitation of these people who have fled the affected areas, it is also becoming clear that this Swat operation, unlike many carried out during Musharraf's time, is a committed one in which the ruling coalition as well as the military are on the same page. Pakistan has finally taken ownership of this war and public opinion is also backing the operation and a realization, although it has come late, has finally dawned that Pakistan needs to eradicate the Taliban elements for its own sake, and those still referring to it as "America's war" are now a minority.

But the military operation, although required, is only part of the solution and extremism cannot be eradicated unless a holistic approach is taken and one that tackles many of the root causes that allowed the Taliban to become as influential and powerful as they did.

Where I see a ray of hope in this regard is that, in spite of the failures of the state, Pakistan is developing a vibrant civil society, an increasingly larger and engaged middle class, and an energetic, savvy and very concerned youth who are acting as a catalyst for mass mobilization. The best example of this was of course the lawyers' movement, which I must refer to again. When Musharraf removed the Chief Justice because he was seen as challenging the executive and vested interests, he was removed. But, what was encouraging was that in the first time in Pakistan's history, 60 other judges also took a stand, and so many ordinary citizens collectively defied a military dictator.

Although political parties joined in the movement and added to it, it was middle class professional lawyers who took the lead and engaged a broad citizenry with their cause. Previously unknown men and women, names like Munir Malik and Ali Kurd, became household names and respected public figures. They had courted arrest and suffered physically, not for the sake of personal gain but for the sake of a higher cause. It was a movement that transcended gender, ethnicity and religion. Justice Rana Bhagwandas, a Hindu, was hailed as much as a hero as his Muslim counterparts. Lawyers from Karachi to Peshawar unified as one. The idea that the system is so rotten that no change can be brought about was very effectively banished when after a two year long battle the CJ was finally restored to his rightful position.

This people's victory has been inspirational in more ways than one. And since then a number of groups have sprung up and are trying to make a difference in various ways. They are organizing under names like People's Resistance and the Concerned Citizens of Pakistan, to name just a couple. One example that was recently brought to my attention involved a simple cleaning exercise that was undertaken by a group of young Pakistanis who were as they put it tired of their parents' generation's complaining about things but not taking matters into their own hands. So they grabbed some shovels, wore gloves and masks and went to the centre of town in Lahore to clean up garbage. It is not the type of thing that children from elite private schools have done in the past but stories like these are the beginnings of a new ray of hope for Pakistan.

And although the state is still failing abjectly at providing basics like health care and education to its people, many NGOs and charities are working hard to fill the gap. Groups like the Layton Rahmatullah Benevolent Trust run a fantastic state of the art facility, running 16 purpose built hospitals and 40 primary outreach clinics in all 4 of Pakistan's provinces, providing free eye care, including operations. Their motto is that no Pakistani should go blind because he or she cannot afford treatment. There are groups like Developments in Literacy, that fundraise through expatriate Pakistanis and have 10,000 children under education in rural Pakistan where education is most difficult to come by. And of course many of us may have heard of the Edhi Foundation whose vast network of emergency care led him to be cited in the Guinness Book of World Records. Whenever there is a disaster in any part of Pakistan, an Edhi ambulance is not far. This of course is no substitute for a well-functioning state structure. But, it is an indication of a country with a large number of people who do care about their fellow citizens.

And unlike the older generation, where caring was more or less limited to supporting charities, the new generation is translating this desire to make a difference into political activism and organizing. So there is a generational difference here as well that must be pointed out. Using Facebook and Twitter, this group of Pakistani teenagers is able to organize and engage globally and yield effective results very quickly. In fact, as soon as the IDP crisis happened with the operation in Swat, some students that I know at some elite universities in the US had already set up a fundraising group with a website and partnered with two local groups to whom the money would be transferred so they could provide survival packages to the families who had been displaced. This was done within a week of the crisis unfolding.

Adding to the efforts of our dynamic youth, is a large community of writers, poets, artists and actors who are also increasingly involving themselves with social issues. And of course the media is by and large doing a good job of highlighting these efforts as well as the failings of society so that efforts can be improved and channelled in effective ways.

So what we see in Pakistan today essentially are two competing trends. On the one hand, failures of the state, despondency and fear created by militarized groups have led to certain areas falling prey to extremism. But on the other hand, there is a mushrooming of citizen's groups galvanizing and asking for enhanced rights, asking for the state to take notice of its failures, and a willingness on the part of many to give back to the country both knowledge and resources. Which side wins out will determine the future course for Pakistan. Whether the state wakes up to this reality and takes notice on its own or it is coerced to take notice as in the case of the lawyers' movement remains to be seen. But one thing is certain: those political parties who engage with these public groups are bound to see their political power grow.

By the same token, if these trends continue, they will also serve to enhance existing weak democratic structures and result in the emergence of a new class of political leadership that is more in touch with its electorate and its needs. Analysts who talk about Pakistan, particularly in the west, and one report from the Sunday Times last year particularly comes to mind. It claimed that "there is no rising star on Pakistan's political firmament" Well, such reports are proven wrong by men like Aitzaz Ahsan, who achieved remarkable success against all odds in just a matter of two years by leading the lawyers' movement.

More recently, there have been other examples, men like Afzal Khan Lala, the 78 year old Member of National Assembly from Swat, who at great personal cost and unlike other members of his political party, remained by his constituents in the wake of the Taliban threat, who had murdered two of his grandsons, but he continued to lead from the front and defy the writ of the Taliban.

There are also people like Usman Tarakai, another politician who distinguished himself as a man of the people by offering his large estate to house 6000 IDPs and providing them with food and medical care from his own pocket. Usman Tarakai is a wealthy businessman and new to politics but he defeated Asfandyar Wali in a national assembly seat in 2008. So those people who will tell you that democracy cannot bring out good people in politics are wrong. It can happen and it will happen, but it will happen more quickly if more people are engaged and politically active.

It should also be said that political parties who value this class of politicians who are connected and respected among the people and give them their rightful place within their party structures will gain political ground in the future. Those who stick to outdated and ineffective dynastic structures, on the other hand, will find that their appeal among the people will diminish and they will face resentment as opposed to love from the masses.

Finally, in addition to the internal corrective measures that I have spoken about, there is also the need of the international community to help Pakistan out of this crisis. Some of Hillary Clinton's recent acknowledgments on US culpability in relations with Pakistan in the past are welcome, but this needs to be translated into action which shows that this time it is different. If the US in particular and western powers in general are serious about shunning their imperial image in Pakistan and also serious about supporting democratic ideals that they so often talk about, then they must help build institutions and support popular movements in Pakistan as opposed to relying on individuals who are seen as safeguarding western interests at the expense of nation building.

Pakistan is going through a very difficult period and though the international community cannot be faulted for stressing that Pakistan must wipe out extremism from its borders in a committed fashion, in order to do that, Pakistan must be helped in the

enormous humanitarian crisis that it is now confronted with. And thus when aid is sanctioned to Pakistan, it must not be done with a laundry list of conditions as is the case with the recent Biden-Lugar Bill in which the US Congress is attempting to link everything from improving relations with India, to giving the US access to Pakistani nuclear scientists. No Pakistani government will be able to accept aid that is so conditioned and survive politically. Instead, what the US and the international community need to insist upon are accountability and transparency in the disbursement of funds, a commitment to maintaining democracy and a sincere effort to eradicate terrorism.

In order to help Pakistan out of its corrupt state and reduce the influence of the extremists, the west needs to be more understanding and less imperialist and aggressive in its stance. And at the same time, efforts must also be made to address the security concerns of the Pakistani state. And this means resolving the Kashmir Issue and ensuring that once the NATO-Isaf forces leave, Afghanistan is a neutral state, and not one that is used by any of its neighbours to advance their own competing objectives—and this includes, Pakistan, India, Iran, as well as the Central Asian republics that have influence there. If these internal and external corrective measures are taken or at least there are steps taken in the right direction, there will be enormous benefits to be reaped in the way of regional and international peace.

Thank you.

