

When Rice came calling

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CONDOLEEEZZA RICE, the second black American and the second female secretary of state of the United States of America came to South Asia — or at least to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan — as part of a larger Asian tour. It was billed as, and turned out to be, a visit to acquaint her with the region and to enable her to lay out with greater clarity and precision than her predecessor the policies that the Bush administration intended to pursue during the next four years.

The visit was also designed to address the concern expressed by many foreign policy analysts in the United States that her predecessor did not travel often enough and did not, therefore, get a first hand impression of developments in important regions of the world. It was not, at least in the South Asian segment, an occasion for new initiatives or even substantive steps to consolidate old relationships.

In his inaugural address starting his second term, Bush had issued a clarion call for the advancement of freedom. "There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.

"We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends

Pakistan, stating that "we look forward to the evolution of a democratic path toward elections in 2007 for Pakistan."

Time and again in her interviews before the visit and then in South Asia Ms Rice offered a rationale for the American support for President Musharraf's continuance in office and, implicitly, in uniform. It was perhaps best articulated in the interview referred to, and in which she said, "It's awfully important, though, to look at what has happened in Pakistan in three-plus years. This was a state that was well on its way to extremism having a very deep foothold in Pakistan, and not just not an ally in the war on terror but, in fact, when you look at the links to Al Qaeda and you look at the links to the Taliban, a state that was really on the verge of being a strong supporter of extremism, a state where the question of

and all of the parties, both India and Pakistan as well as the Kashmiris, believe that they have (not only) a future that can be secure and peaceful and free of terrorism and violence, but also a democratic future."

The call for greater interaction between the people and the reference to "eventual" resolution were both reiterations of long held American view — justified as pragmatic — on how the dialogue between Pakistan and India should proceed.

In announcing the visit, the state department had succinctly outlined the objectives of the South Asian part of the visit as being to "highlight positive momentum in the region, including our transformed relationship with India, our continuing commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction and our long-term engagement with Pakistan." What form would this long term engagement take?

Foreign Minister Kasuri talked of many things that could be part of an expanded and sustainable long term partnership with Pakistan to which Secretary Rice had told him the United States was committed. Ms Rice, however, was less expansive.

Beyond the common interest in the war on terrorism she identified the elements of the relationship as being American interest in promoting education and economic reform in Pakistan, supporting the US-Pakistan trade relationship and the economic and security assistance package of \$3 billion. The positive note she struck outside Pakistan's borders was with regard to Afghanistan where she said the increasingly productive relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Currently, policymakers in the Bush administration clearly believe that President Musharraf's commitment, following the fateful events of 9/11, to eliminating extremism from Pakistan's body politic as much as his cooperation in fighting terrorist elements on the Pakistan-Afghan border makes him an important ally. This has persuaded them to allow him to determine the pace of democratization and endorse the timetable for elections that he has outlined. The confirmation of this during Ms Rice's visit was undoubtedly a welcome news for the president.

our survival or liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world"...

"So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world

"We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains, or that women welcome humiliation and servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies," he said.

Some had entertained the hope — notably the opposition in Pakistan and the Kashmiri opponents of Indian rule in Kashmir — that this would signal a change of policy on the issue of the president's retention of his uniform in Pakistan and the continued repression in Kashmir. These expectations were belied, even before Rice embarked on her tour. Taxed by a persistent questioner, the state department spokesman at the press briefing on March 11, refused to confirm even that the subject of the uniform would come up in Ms Rice's discussions in Pakistan and went on to reiterate the view that in the United States' perception of the political situation in Pakistan, "the general direction is towards democratic change and shaping Pakistani institutions to reflect that tendency."

Secretary Rice herself when pressed in an interview on the same day said, "The democratic process has to continue in Pakistan. Now, we've said that there are going to be a lot of different paths and a lot of different ways on that democratic road, but the need for democracy, the need for free elections, the need for parliamentary elections, those are all discussions that we've had with President Musharraf in the past and we'll have with him again."

In her opening statement at the joint press conference with Foreign Minister Kasuri, she finally dashed any hopes that the United States would press for early elections in

whether Pakistan could be both modern and extreme seemed to be saying, yes, it could be."

"Now you have a president in President Musharraf who said it cannot be both modern and extreme. And if you look at what is being done in the educational system to try to deal with the madressahs, if you look at what is being done in terms of the way that Musharraf has been dealing even with his parliament, if you look at the way in that they have been fighting not just the war on terror vis-a-vis Al Qaeda, but improving relations with India, which is changing the environment considerably in South Asia, you have to say that they've achieved a lot over the last three years."

As regards Kashmir there was nary a public mention of the issue of human rights violations in Kashmir while Ms Rice was in India, but in Pakistan she did address a question on human rights violations in the course of her joint press conference with Mr Kasuri and said that, "it is obviously the view of the United States that there should be no long-suffering people anywhere in the world who are denied the liberty that we all enjoy here, that we as Americans enjoy. The fact is that we do a human rights report; it speaks for itself. We've also talked about the need to end violence and terrorism in this area. And so there are a number of issues that need to be dealt with by all the parties and I think we've been very clear to Pakistan, to India, as to what we consider their responsibilities to be".

In other words, America attaches as much importance to ending terrorism as it does to violence by the organs of state in occupied Kashmir.

On Pakistan-India relations the positive developments — including the prospects for cricket diplomacy — were welcomed but it was also made clear as in the past that America would only encourage the process and not be a mediator. Significantly, she called not only for the continuation of the talks but for the removal of barriers to interaction between the peoples of the two countries and opined that "it is important that all issues be on the table for eventual resolution

ductive relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan could anchor the entire region in trade and economic development.

Briefly put, Secretary Rice made it clear that the American interest in Pakistan is linked in its both external and internal dimensions to the war against terrorism and extremism. Currently, policymakers in the Bush administration clearly believe that President Musharraf's commitment, following the fateful events of September 11, 2001, to eliminating extremism from Pakistan's body politic as much as his cooperation in fighting terrorist elements on the Pakistan-Afghan border makes him an important ally. This has persuaded them to allow him to determine the pace of democratization and to endorse the timetable for elections that he has outlined. The confirmation of this during Ms Rice's visit was undoubtedly a welcome news for the president.

There is no doubt in my mind, however, that Ms Rice would also have pressed in private conversations for giving the mainstream moderate political parties more freedom of action. In the American perception, as the Bush speech pointed out in theory and as the virtual ultimatum to Egypt's President Mubarak has shown in practice, it is only a genuinely multi-party system that can help to create and sustain the institutions that allow democracy to flourish and help curb extremism.

In the American view it is only an alliance between the army and the moderate political parties commanding a popular following that can put an end to the continuing sectarian strife and the sort of crises that has now arisen in Balochistan and which threatens the economic progress that Pakistan has made in recent years.

Much attention has focused on the remarks Ms Rice made with regard to the American view of the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. This, to my mind, is a storm in a teacup, a point I shall seek to establish in my next article in which I will also try and analyze how the current crisis with regard to Iran's nuclear programme is likely to be resolved.

The writer is a former foreign secretary.