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Rwandan Progress Is Remarkable, White House Official Says

But National Security Council spokesman voices concerns as well

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Rwanda's progress since the genocide of 1994 has been remarkable and is a testament to the people in facing and overcoming staggering challenges, a senior White House official says. But despite such progress and the recent re-election of President Paul Kagame, the United States remains concerned over recent events in Rwanda, Mike Hammer, a spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, said in a White House statement August 13.

The August 13 statement congratulated the Rwandan people for their national election on August 9, which boasted a 97 percent voter turnout. President Kagame won re-election with approximately 93 percent of the vote, according to the National Electoral Commission in Kigali.

Hammer said the United States remains concerned about a series of events before the election, including the suspension of two newspapers, the expulsion of a human rights researcher, the barring of two opposition parties from taking part in the election and the arrest of journalists.

"No one should underestimate the enormous challenges born of the genocide in 1994. Rwanda's progress in the face of these challenges has been remarkable, and is a testament to the people of Rwanda," Hammer said. "Rwanda's stability and growing prosperity, however, will be difficult to sustain in the absence of broad political debate and open political participation."

"Democracy is about more than holding elections," Hammer said. "A democracy reflects the will of the people, where minority voices are heard and respected, where opposition candidates run on the issues without threat or intimidation, where freedom of expression and freedom of the press are protected."

Hammer said the United States has expressed concerns to the Rwandan government. He expressed hope that the leadership will take steps toward greater democratic governance, increased respect for minority and opposition views and continued peace.

More than 500,000 Rwandans, mostly ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were killed in Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

At an August 9 State Department briefing, department

spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters "We are encouraged that the elections appear to have come through peacefully and in an orderly fashion. We have expressed concerns in the run-up to these elections regarding what appear to be attempts by the government of Rwanda to limit freedom of expression."

Catherine Ashton, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, told reporters in Brussels that while the election was successful, there are lingering concerns about some pre-election incidents. A further opening of public debate and greater political participation, she said, would strengthen the accomplishments achieved by the Rwandan people.

Commander of Allied Forces Cites Progress in Afghanistan

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Progress in Afghanistan is being made, but it will take much more progress to achieve success, and that is a long-term proposition, U.S. Army General David Petraeus says in describing his mission as the new commander of allied forces in that nation.

"I didn't come out here to carry out a graceful exit or something like that," Petraeus said in an August 15 interview on NBC television's Meet the Press. "I came out here committed to achieving our objectives, and doing everything that we can to [do] that."

Petraeus spoke at length about his mission as the newest commander of allied forces in Afghanistan on Meet the Press and in published interviews with the Washington Post and the New York Times. He assumed duties in Afghanistan following the retirement of General Stanley McChrystal with the understanding that some U.S. combat forces now in Afghanistan could begin returning home beginning in mid-2011.

Previously, Petraeus was commander of the U.S. Central Command, which is responsible for military operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

"The security progress ... is the foundation for everything else — for governance progress, the economic progress, rule of law progress," he said on Meet the Press. Petraeus said there are areas of progress that need to be linked together, extended and then built on.

Improved security can reinforce progress and a lack of security can undermine progress, Petraeus said. The goal is to get each component moving forward, reinforcing the other elements.

Regarding the potential drawdown of some U.S. forces

beginning next year, Petraeus said that it will be driven by continual assessments that will be reported to President Obama.

“What the president very much wants from me, and what we talked about in the Oval Office, is the responsibility of a military commander on the ground to provide his best professional military advice,” Petraeus said. “The situation on the ground drives it. That’s what he wants. That’s what he told me to provide, and that’s what I will provide.”

Petraeus said that July 2011 “is a date when the process begins that is conditions-based. And as the conditions permit, we transition tasks to our Afghan counterparts and the security forces in various governmental institutions, and that enables a responsible drawdown of our forces.”

It was clear in talks with President Obama, the general said, that progress has to be shown and that progress can be achieved — a message that was made clear in the president’s speech at West Point on the way forward in Afghanistan.

One of the security efforts Petraeus described is the creation of ever-expanding peaceful, or secure, areas. In some of the provinces where hostilities with insurgents have been difficult, the secure areas have to be built in stages and then pushed outward and connected with other secure areas, he said. “So what you’re trying to do is to always extend that.”

Last spring’s operations in central Helmand province have improved conditions for the people, Petraeus said, but are part of an up-and-down process with the Taliban insurgents fighting “very hard as we took away very important sanctuaries” from them. Now the tough fight is in Kandahar province, he said, as security is expanding there.

Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven that transnational extremist groups like al-Qaida can use as a base for planning, training and launching future attacks remains an essential part of the primary mission, Petraeus said.

Petraeus said he and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry and Ambassador Mark Sedwill, NATO’s senior civilian representative, have created a “very good civil-military unity of effort.” He added that the national security team is also working well with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Petraeus is expected to testify before Congress in December about progress in Afghanistan.

Pakistani Flood Victims Need More Money and Relief Supplies

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson said Pakistani flood victims need “mostly money and relief supplies” from the international community, and both U.S. and U.N. officials warned about the possible spread of waterborne diseases in the country as the Indus River Valley continues to overflow due to torrential monsoons.

Patterson told National Public Radio August 16 that more countries are joining the United States in providing cash to local Pakistani disaster authorities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations. So far, the United States has given \$76 million in financial and humanitarian assistance, as well as provided military helicopters to help evacuate flood victims and deliver aid supplies.

According to press reports, Pakistani officials are saying that about 20 million people, or one-tenth of the population, have been affected by the flooding, and one-fifth of the country remains flooded.

“It’s a disaster of really broad proportions. ... Unlike some of the other disasters here, it’s affected most of the economic base of the country, with the exception of Karachi,” Patterson said. “One of the truly striking elements of this is going to be the long-term economic impact of this disaster.”

“Crops have been ruined, gas fields are shut in, power plants are flooded. So the long-term reconstruction cost is going to be very substantial,” she said.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said August 16 that four U.S. Marine Corps CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters had arrived in the country, bringing the number of U.S. military and civilian aircraft in Pakistan to 18. The helicopters were requested by the Pakistani government.

“We expect an additional eight helicopters to arrive in the next few days,” he said. In addition, C-130 aircraft are delivering international aid throughout the country. He said two of the planes were expected to transport an estimated 52,000 pounds (23,600 kilos) of relief supplies August 16.

Since U.S. helicopters first arrived August 5, they have evacuated 4,613 people and delivered 515,113 pounds (233,650 kilos) of relief supplies, according to an August 16 State Department fact sheet.

The fact sheet says the Obama administration so far has

provided a month's ration of food to more than 307,000 people through the World Food Programme. Among the U.S.-funded food rations, 440,928 halal meals were delivered to civilian and military officials in Pakistan within 36 hours of the initial flooding.

The United States has also provided 12 prefabricated steel bridges as temporary replacements for those that have washed out, 18 Zodiac rescue boats, six water filtration units that each can produce enough clean water for 10,000 people per day, a 25-kilowatt electric generator, 10 water storage bladders and 30 concrete-cutting saws, according to the fact sheet.

U.S. officials have been urging American citizens to join the relief effort. By texting "SWAT" to the number 50555, U.S.-based callers can make a \$10 contribution that will help the United Nations provide tents, clothing, food, drinking water and medicine to Pakistani people displaced by the flooding. People can find more information and lists of organizations operating in Pakistan through the State Department website.

CHOLERA MAY BE UNAVOIDABLE, BUT CONTROLLABLE

Mark Ward, the acting director of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), told the Reuters news agency August 14 that some of the U.S. helicopters may need to be used to transport people to treatment centers for waterborne illnesses.

Ward said a disease early-warning system set up by the World Health Organization can quickly detect cases of cholera and pinpoint where to direct clean water or other health resources.

Radio and text-messaging networks have been set up in the country to broadcast information on the importance of good hygiene and washing hands, he said.

One case of cholera was confirmed August 13 and several more are suspected, Ward said. "When you are dealing with this much water and that many people, it is almost unavoidable," he told Reuters, but "I think we can control this."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited flood-affected areas of Pakistan on August 15. He told reporters in Islamabad that the scale of the disaster was the worst he has ever seen. "I have visited the scenes of many natural disasters around the world, but nothing like this," he said.

He thanked the many governments, organizations and individuals who have given their support to the relief

efforts, but said more is needed from the international community to help the U.N. meet its goal of providing emergency health care to 14 million people, with special programs for children and pregnant women. The U.N. launched a flash appeal August 11 for \$460 million for humanitarian assistance, rescue and relief.

"These unprecedented floods demand unprecedented assistance. The flood waves must be matched with waves of global support," Ban said. He announced that he has allocated an additional \$10 million to the U.N.'s Central Emergency Response Fund, bringing the total to \$27 million since the beginning of the crisis.

"We are all deeply concerned about the spread of diarrhea and other waterborne diseases. All our combined medical capacity will be needed to provide the right drugs and care. The United Nations will also distribute clean water for at least 6 million people. We have planned food assistance for a similar number," Ban said.

The secretary-general said he would be submitting a report to the U.N. General Assembly August 19 on the scale of the disaster and further assistance that is needed. Looking ahead to the country's eventual transition toward rehabilitation and reconstruction, Ban said he will convene a high-level ministerial meeting in Belgium on October 15 to discuss Pakistan's longer-term needs, and is also discussing the possibility of having a high-level meeting on the margins of the Millennium Development Goals summit meeting in September at the United Nations.

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