



April 4, 2007

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to you with respect to Bangladesh. We recently visited Bangladesh for a series of high-level meetings, and our principal conclusion is that Bangladesh should be a very high priority for United States foreign and national security policy.

The principal purpose of our visit was to develop the framework for a major conference on homeland security issues to be held in Bangladesh, and electronically linked to the United States, later this year. We took advantage of the visit to also meet with senior officials and leaders in the government, the military and the private business sector, as well as at the US Embassy in Dhaka. Based on those discussions, we offer the following observations and recommendations for developing the most effective US policies regarding Bangladesh:

- Given our nation's global struggle against Islamic extremism, Bangladesh is a country of very great importance to the US and, indeed, to the West in general.
- Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim majority nation in the world. Of significance is the reality that the Bangladeshi form of Islam is generally moderate and tolerant and has co-existed comfortably with a secular government since its independence.
- As a Moslem nation bordering India and Burma, close to Pakistan and also to Thailand, Bangladesh is geographically strategic.
- Bangladesh has thus far played a positive international role. For example, Dhaka provided forces for the 1991 Gulf War coalition and at present participates in more international peacekeeping operations than any other nation.
- Having said this, there are extremist Islamic forces that are seeking to impose a fundamentalist ideology hostile to the US and that seek to make Bangladesh an active ally of extremist Islamic forces elsewhere.
- Given the economic underdevelopment in that nation, along with political instability in recent years, Bangladesh is vulnerable to extremist efforts to impose a violently anti-US regime on that nation.

- Bangladesh can be a strong member of a moderate Islamic coalition that rejects fanaticism and terrorism. Bangladesh's positive role and potential makes it all the more important that the US take a pro-active role in assisting Bangladesh to improve its political and economic situation so that Bangladesh will not provide fertile ground for extremist fanaticism.
- Bangladesh is a country where the US has a real opportunity to make a difference and to do so before conditions deteriorate, rather than after the fact. If the US focuses sufficiently on Bangladesh, now, we can avoid a situation where the US is in a reactive mode after extremist forces have already gained significant disruptive influences.

Bangladesh is in a period of political and economic transition. Key leaders are seeking to strengthen and deepen the nation's democratic political system and also to crack down on the corruption which unfortunately has been endemic in that nation. This is truly an historic moment in Bangladesh. A successful outcome is crucial to the future stability and political orientation of that nation.

Given the importance of the present moment for the future, we believe that the US should strengthen further its support for Bangladesh by making every effort to support those far-sighted leaders who are working towards a genuine and corruption-free democracy that is aligned with the West in its struggle against Islamic extremism. In our own meetings with senior Bangladeshi civilian and military leaders, we urged them to establish a public roadmap for a return to full democracy and elections, and to do so as expeditiously as possible.

We know that there are already many US programs and activities regarding Bangladesh in place, and that there are dedicated public servants working to support these efforts. Nonetheless, we urge that more be done to assist Bangladesh at this special time. Specifically, we suggest the following:

Make Bangladesh a very high US policy priority: Bangladesh is potentially a crucial player in the struggle against Islamic extremism, and this is a crucial period for that country. The US has a rare opportunity now to help shape the future of an important nation. By making Bangladesh a priority, the US can help ensure a democratic and pro-Western nation, and prevent the emergence of another highly unstable Islamic nation vulnerable to extremism. We suggest, for example, that a series of visits to Dhaka by senior US officials from various departments and agencies be developed and coordinated over the near term.

Allocate More Resources for Bangladesh: While some US resources are undoubtedly being devoted to Bangladesh, we urge that more US resources be allocated to that nation. By allocating additional resources now, we can make it much less likely that we will have to expend substantially more resources later to address serious security problems.

Expand Support for Democracy: The US should, directly and through private groups, provide all possible assistance and support to those Bangladeshis in the government and otherwise who are working to reform that nation's political system and also to end rampant corruption. For example, visits from US legal experts, perhaps organized by the American Bar

Association's Standing Committee on World Order Under Law, could be very helpful. Conferences on democracy-building, the rule of law and anti-corruption tactics would be very helpful as well.

Strengthen Exchange/Study Activities: The US needs to bring many more moderate Moslems to the US. They will learn about the US and establish long-term friendships with Americans. This is also a way for Americans to learn more about the Islamic world, which is also very important.

Engage the Intellectual Community: The fight against Islamic extremism is fundamentally a battle of ideas within the Islamic world. Given especially that Bangladeshi Islam has historically been moderate and tolerant, the US should make special efforts to engage Bangladeshi thinkers in a coalition of moderate Moslems worldwide, and to find ways to assist them in discussing and debating their perspectives within the Islamic community.

Enhance Government-to-Military Cooperation: The Bangladeshi military plays a key role in that nation. The military leadership is at this time assuming a low-profile and positive role in encouraging needed changes in the Bangladeshi political system, and also is supporting actively efforts to end rampant corruption there. The US should reinforce and in effect reward the Bangladeshi military for their role and restraint. Enhanced military-to-military and as appropriate, civilian-to-military programs and visits are very much in the US national interest.

Encourage Regional Stability: The US has a strong interest in regional stability in South Asia. As a starting point, the US should seek to help minimize tensions between Bangladesh and its close neighbor India. The US has already played a similar role in, for example, northeast Asia, where it has acted as an honest broker between Japan and South Korea. Thus, for example, the US could organize three-way track-two meetings including Bangladeshis, Indians and Americans to discuss security or other issues of concern.

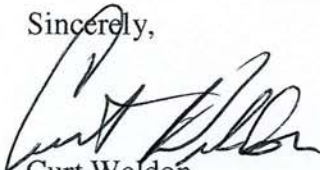
Assist and Foster Economic Development: Economic development is an essential requirement for a stable and pro-Western Bangladesh over the longer-term. Numerous assistance programs from various nations and organizations are already in place. Priorities for the US should include: 1) port infrastructure; 2) urban and international transportation; and 3) most importantly, enhanced access to the US market for Bangladesh's primary export – textile products.

Increase Homeland Security Cooperation: Bangladesh can be a strong ally in the struggle against international terrorism. The US should increase as much as possible the flow of people and capabilities between the US and Bangladesh.

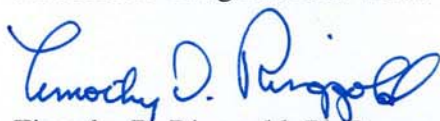
Bangladesh tends to be overlooked for a variety of reasons. Of course, China, India and Pakistan are major regional actors and as such, must receive significant US attention. At the same time, Bangladesh is a nation where a relatively modest allocation of resources and attention can yield high returns, and make a major differences in terms of US interests in the region and globally.

We, therefore, strongly urge that the US make Bangladesh a very high priority and implement approaches such as those suggested above. By doing so, the US will ensure that Bangladesh strengthens its democratic system and increases its role as a moderate and democratic Islamic ally in the global struggles we face in the twenty-first century.

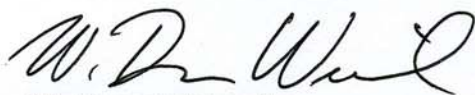
Sincerely,



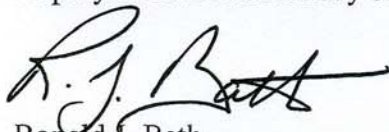
Curt Weldon
Member of Congress 1987-2007



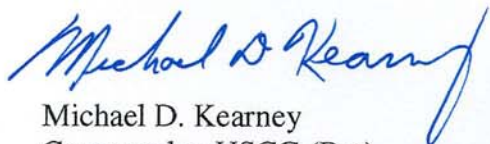
Timothy D. Ringgold, Ph.D.
Colonel, US Army (Ret)



W. Bruce Weinrod
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (1989 – 1993)



Ronald J. Bath
Maj. Gen. (ret), USAF



Michael D. Kearney
Commander, USCG (Ret)