

A senior US government official suggests that generals resigning from the military to run in the election may be a positive step.

WASHINGTON — Speaking at a daily press briefing on Tuesday, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, P J Crowley, suggested that if Burmese general resigned from the military to contest the upcoming election, this could be seen as a positive step.

Responding to a question regarding US reactions to Burmese generals resigning their commissions in advance of the election, Crowley said: “Let me make a broader statement, not just on Burma, that to the extent that figures want to take off their uniform and pursue politics and government as civilians, that can be a constructive step, particularly in a society that has been ruled by a military junta.

“That said, it’s less about the identities of the individuals, depending on what uniform they wear. It’s more about what they do on behalf of their country and whether, in becoming civilians, they are willing to serve the interests of the entire society—in this case, Burma, as opposed to the narrow constituency of and narrow interest of the junta.

“So that step by itself may be seen as a possible positive step, but we’ll be guided by the actions that Burma takes, whether this represents just wolves changing to sheep’s clothing or how that works.

“I mean, what Burma needs to do is to open up real, genuine political space, not just for ex-generals but also for all people who want to participate constructively in Burmese society. That’s what they need to do, and that’s what they have been reluctant to do,” he said.

Crowley repeated the US government's disappointment with Burma's election law, saying it fell short of international standards.

“Burma has to open up political space,” he said. “It has to have a meaningful dialogue with all of its ethnic groups within Burma. If these individuals transforming themselves from generals to civilians can open up that space, then that we truly see as a positive step.”

Replying to a question about whether Kurt Campbell, US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, will travel next week, Crowley said: “Kurt is still here. He will be traveling soon. His specific itinerary is being still worked. When he leaves Washington, we’ll let you know and we’ll let you know where he’s going.”