

American

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Secretary Clinton Pledges Long-Term U.S. Commitment to Afghanistan

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – The Obama administration recognizes that the futures of the United States and Afghanistan are shared and pledges a long-term commitment to the Afghan people that will endure long after U.S. forces have left the country, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said at the opening of high-level bilateral discussions in Washington.

Speaking at the State Department May 11, Clinton said that as the government of President Hamid Karzai assumes greater responsibility for the country's security beginning in 2011, the United States will continue to provide it with support, including "a sustained focus on economic, social and political development, as well as continued training of Afghan security forces."

The secretary acknowledged that before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the United States and other countries did not pay enough attention to the situation inside Afghanistan, which was suffering under the rule of the Taliban and providing a safe haven to al-Qaida.

"We have learned the lessons of the past," Clinton said. "President Obama has made it clear that we will not allow that kind of detachment and oversight again. That is why his comprehensive review of our Afghan policy resulted in a substantial increase in our commitment to Afghanistan, not only military, but civilian as well." The U.S. civilian commitment "will remain long into the future."

Clinton cited "fragile" progress in the country in recent years, with advances in free media outlets, communications, health care and education, including for 2 million girls. At the same time, she said, Afghanistan still faces threats from extremist violence and narcotics trafficking.

"Security cannot be divorced from development," she said. Since the Obama administration took office, it has tripled the number of U.S. civilians in Afghanistan. They are working with Afghan and international partners to strengthen government institutions and expand economic opportunities.

President Karzai said Afghanistan will continue to be a partner against terrorism while also working to "build its institutions, to preserve its progress and to walk toward the future with steady, strong steps."

He said his government has a broad strategy for development and institution building, as well as a vision of the future that he and his delegation of ministers and senior officials will present to U.S. officials during their meetings in Washington.

Their strategy "would give Afghanistan long-term institutional, economic and security stability so Afghanistan can, in a few years' time, not be any more a burden on your shoulders, so that Afghanistan can stand on its own feet, so Afghanistan can defend its country, so Afghanistan can feed its people with its own income, so we can pay for ... our life from our own pockets," he said.

Karzai said he envisions Afghanistan's economy eventually profiting from the country's mineral resources, and Afghanistan serving as a transportation hub for central, south and west Asia.

"Afghanistan will remain a strong and good and economically viable partner with the United States and our other allies," he said.

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke told reporters May 10 that the bilateral discussions in Washington will cover "the whole panoply of issues." He mentioned agriculture, security, rule of law, national and local governance, and economic issues, including the development of Afghan mineral resources.

The Obama administration has entered "a period of close strategic partnership" with the Afghan government, he said. Between President Obama's January 2009 inauguration and the beginning of President Karzai's second term in November 2009, Afghanistan's presidential election "hung over us like a ... very dark, complicated cloud."

"That period is long since gone," Holbrooke said.

The Obama administration is trying to strengthen the Afghan government by channeling more U.S. assistance through Afghan authorities. Holbrooke said that while the level of U.S. assistance sent through the Afghan government has risen from less than 9 percent of aid in January 2009 to 14 percent today, the goal is for that figure to rise to 50 percent.

Due to U.S. congressional requirements for accountability, "we have to be sure that we certify ministries to receive the aid directly," he said.

"There are only something like three ministries that are fully certified, but we're moving, and that will be one of the topics of the next few days," Holbrooke said.

Showing Solidarity with Journalists Under Fire in Iran

Writers protest jailing of dozens of reporters in information crackdown

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — Reporter Fershteh Ghazi offers two pictures of what life is like for Iranians in her profession.

“For years, we have become accustomed to thinking of journalism in Iran as similar to walking in a minefield,” Ghazi told an audience of about 200 assembled for a night of solidarity with imprisoned Iranian journalists May 8 in Washington.

“But last night when I was speaking to my colleagues in Tehran, they had a very interesting interpretation. They said, ‘Actually, it’s like our house is sitting on quicksand. The sand is like dry sand that’s moving constantly; it’s never clear where it’s going to be. When we go to bed at night, we don’t know where we’re going to wake up tomorrow.’ ... There’s no personal stability. There’s no occupational stability. There’s no physical stability or safety. There’s no safety for our jobs.”

Iran’s constitution guarantees freedom of the press “except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public.” Yet the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent, nonprofit organization, says Iran is the world’s worst offender in jailing journalists. “Iran is now imprisoning more journalists than any other country ever has since Turkey did in the late 1990s,” said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, the New York-based group’s program coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa.

Thirty-five journalists are in jail, Dayem said, and 18 are on furlough. “The numbers, as bad as they are, actually understate the situation,” he added, noting that more than 200 journalists have been arrested since the disputed election in June 2009.

“The goal of the Iranian government, as far as we can tell by our research ... is to institute a media blackout,” Dayem said.

Messages of support delivered at the May 8 meeting, organized by the Solidarity Committee to Protect the Iranian People’s Will, came from writers’ groups as well as individual journalists.

“For almost a year, independent journalists in Iran have been subjected to a campaign of harassment, intimidation and violence following last year’s disputed presidential election in the country,” said a letter from the International Federation of Journalists. The group said it

had decided to focus its World Press Freedom Day activities “on raising awareness of the situation of media in Iran and support for the IFJ campaign to free Iranian journalists.”

A letter from Article 19–Azad Tribune, a platform for bloggers, journalists and activists, said: “Dozens of journalists — who worked for reformist publications or are perceived to be close to reformists, or who were critical of the authorities, or who reported on human rights violations — have been arbitrarily detained.”

The PEN American Center and English PEN, independent groups that represent writers in the United States and Great Britain, also sent support.

Ghazi, now a writer for the RoozOnline website, has worked over the years for a long list of newspapers, 18 of which have been banned. Her résumé includes a stint in jail, with beatings that broke her nose.

Speaking through an interpreter, Ghazi said the government’s attitude toward journalism has been generally negative since shortly after the Islamic revolution 31 years ago and a speech in which the Ayatollah Rohallah Khomeini said, “Let’s break all the poison pens.” A period of relative openness ended with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, she said, and repression has only grown stronger since the disputed election of June 2009.

The Islamic Republic is afraid of journalists because it is unwilling to allow other voices to dispute its version of the truth, Ghazi said. “That fear is reflected in the heavy sentences that have been handed down to journalists as opposed to political activists and other activists. That’s because this regime is extremely frightened of information dissemination among the people and of people being aware of what is going on. And for this reason, the regime is extremely ardent about controlling the flow of information, even droplets of information, general information among the public — because it believes that this information [undermines] its power. And for that reason, we journalists are extremely dangerous people in Iran.”

“The war in Iran is a war on information dissemination,” Ghazi said.

Jacki Lyden, an American who began covering Iran in the mid-1990s for National Public Radio, recalled the relative openness of the Iranian media then, with small newspapers and magazines springing into existence. “I think we have come full circle,” she said. “If I talk about all the intellectuals and writers and people that I met back in the ‘90s, I think nearly all of them are now in exile, and many of them have been in prison. ... I think what’s

important now is you can't bottle up that message. You may be able to exile the messengers, but you can't bottle up the message."

Iran Davar Ardalan, an Iranian-American colleague of Lyden's, agreed with her. "That creativity that Iranians have in them, that they have had for centuries, cannot be imprisoned," she said. "The burst of news that's coming through social media – this is all because for centuries Iranians have in their veins the ideas of justice and moderation, the ideas of uncovering hypocrisy that our poets Hafez and Ferdowsi and Rumi have taught us. And so I think that what we see today is that Iranians will find their own creative ways to continue telling their story."

Ardalan recalled the work of her great-grandfather Ali Akbar Davar, who founded the *Mard-e azad* (A Free Man) newspaper in 1923 and served as minister of justice in the late 1920s and early 1930s. "He believed that a society needs to have journalists who take politicians and the elite to task," she said. "Iranians from the time of Cyrus the Great to the time of Ferdowsi to the time of Ali Akbar Davar to the time of Akbar Ganji have been vocal and wanted to express themselves, and I think this is just something that, with patience and with creativity, we're going to eventually see some results in terms of our desires for civil society and freedom of expression."

Ganji is an Iranian journalist who was imprisoned for six years in Tehran after writing a series of articles in 1999 on the murders of five dissident intellectuals, tying the killings to senior clerics and other government officials.

Ganji said the government crackdown has affected what journalists are willing to do. "Working in journalism in Iran faces two primary issues," he said through an interpreter. "One is censorship by the regime, and the other one is self-censorship by publications themselves, whether it is directors of publications or journalists themselves, for fear of losing their jobs or having their publications shut down or being imprisoned."

Ganji lamented the weakening of journalism as a result. "One of the roles that journalism plays is by exposing corruption in government," he said. "This is also the role that journalism plays even in democracies. Even in democracies, we view political leaders as liars and thieves."

Iran also prevents reporters from looking at people's private lives, Ganji said – even those of public officials, which he said is part of the press's legitimate role. If you are a politician, "there is no private arena for you," Ganji said. "Whatever you do as a person in a position of authority is fair game. ... Your personal life disappears, and a journalist has the duty to expose what seem to be your personal shortcomings."

The Iranian government, he said, is "using every single news outlet to its full force and effect. One is the Friday prayers ... radio and television, every single newspaper. And Internet has just been added. The regime, in order to put its own ideology to regular use by the public, is using every one of these tools."

Ghazi said many journalists are carrying on with their work despite the obstacles. "Even though we seem to be facing one of the darkest eras in Iran's political history and perhaps journalistic history, I have to say that this is the most respectable era that we have for journalism in Iran because my friends and my colleagues refuse to sell their pen. They refuse to sell their dignity," she said.

"Some of my colleagues in Iran have given me a message to give to you about the conditions of their work," Ghazi said. "Many of them have been jailed; many of them have been jailed and released on bail. But those who haven't been arrested and are working, they have a bag prepared for when [police] come to take them. That's how ready they are. They do their work even though they know that at any moment, any car that comes down the street, anyone who rings the doorbell, could be the guy who comes to take them to prison. And they're ready."

Better Nutrition to Improve Lives in the Developing World

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – The United States is trying to make global nutrition the intersection of economic development efforts to strengthen health systems of partner countries and to improve agricultural programs from farms to markets, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

"Nutrition is a universal need, and people of all ages and circumstances deserve access to nutritious foods," Clinton said in a May 11 speech at CARE's 2010 National Conference in Washington. CARE is a leading humanitarian organization that fights global poverty.

"We can save lives, we can help children start life on a better path, and we can bolster economic development and learning down the road," she added.

Clinton announced during her first days in office that development would be one of the three pillars of President Obama's foreign policy and national security programs.

"Our goal is to help our partners – partner countries, partner organizations, partner individuals – build their own capacity to provide citizens with the essentials like food, water, health care, education, economic

opportunity, jobs, credit, responsive and accountable public institutions,” Clinton told the CARE conference.

Different communities face different challenges — in some it’s a lack of affordable protein-rich foods, and in others it’s chronic digestive disease caused by unsafe drinking water, she said. To succeed in addressing nutritional needs, economic development efforts must be focused on partner countries’ specific needs.

The United States is attempting to reduce child undernutrition by 30 percent in its partner countries, employing the efforts of two key initiatives, Clinton said. President Obama has launched the Global Health Initiative, a six-year, \$63 billion program to strengthen health systems in partner countries, and the Feed the Future program, a three-year, \$3.5 billion initiative aimed at improving agricultural systems from farms to markets.

“We’re trying to make nutrition the intersection of two major new policy initiatives,” Clinton said. “So as our partner countries devise national strategies to fight undernutrition, we will help carry them out.”

Part of this approach involves education about nutrition for farmers and parents, so that they understand the nutritional value of a diverse diet and mothers will understand the benefits of good feeding practices during their child’s first two years, she said.

Nutrition plays a critical role in a person’s life during a narrow period of time — the first 1,000 days, which begin at the start of a pregnancy and continue through the second year of life. Clinton said nutrition during those first 1,000 days can help determine whether a mother and child will survive pregnancy and whether a child will contract common childhood diseases and experience normal brain development to be able to attend school and eventually hold a job as an adult.

Another aspect of this program is to increase the amount and diversity of food grown, improve markets so that people have access to the food, and increase income levels so consumers can buy more and better-quality food, Clinton said.

Other measures include providing pregnant women iron supplements to prevent anemia and giving children oral rehydration salts to manage digestive illness, she said.

“For want of these basic treatments, millions of people die every year. These deaths are intolerable because they are preventable,” Clinton said.

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