

American

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Vice President Biden, Egypt's President Mubarak Discuss New Approaches to Gaza

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden said the United States is consulting with Egypt and other countries on new ways to address the situation in Gaza, and he urged progress in the proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians as a step toward peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict through a two-state solution.

In a June 7 statement released in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, after his meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Biden said the United States “recognizes and appreciates Egypt’s leadership” in support of a comprehensive peace in the region.

“The status quo is unsustainable for all sides,” Biden said. “It is vital to make progress in the proximity talks between Israelis and Palestinians to enable the parties to move to direct negotiations as soon as possible.”

The vice president said the United States is “consulting closely with Egypt, as well as our other partners, on new ways to address the humanitarian, economic, security and political aspects of the situation in Gaza.”

Biden also said the Obama administration will continue its dialogue with Egypt concerning the country’s ongoing political and economic reform efforts.

“Elements such as respect for human rights and the need to continue working for a vibrant civil society and more open political competition are vital for Egypt to remain strong and serve as a model to the region,” he said.

Egypt was recently elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council and was reviewed under the council’s Universal Periodic Review mechanism, which periodically reviews the human rights record of all 192 U.N. member states.

Biden said President Mubarak’s administration had made commitments as part of the review, including accepting some of the council’s recommendations.

“These commitments are important, and I encourage Egypt to move ahead swiftly to implement fully those commitments and build upon that agenda,” he said.

The vice president said he and Mubarak also discussed their concerns over Iran’s nuclear program and Iran’s continued noncompliance with the U.N. Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as its unwillingness to seriously engage with the five

permanent Security Council members and Germany, collectively known as the P5+1.

“The United States remains committed to a diplomatic resolution to these serious issues, but we will continue to hold Iran accountable for its continued violations of its international responsibilities, in accordance with our dual-track policy,” Biden said. He said he expects to see U.N. Security Council activity over the issue “very soon.” He added that the United States is also concerned about Iran’s support for Hezbollah and Hamas, which have both been designated by the State Department as terrorist organizations.

Shangri-La Conference Highlights Asia-Pacific Security Concerns

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Pursuing common interests in the Asia-Pacific region has increased common security even as the region contends with new and evolving challenges, says U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore June 5, Gates said the region faces challenges from rising powers and failing states, the proliferation of ballistic missiles, extremist violence and cyberthreats against the trade and commerce on which Asia’s economic stability depends.

“Confronting these threats is not the task of any one nation acting alone. My government’s overriding obligation to allies, partners and the region is to reaffirm America’s security commitments in this region,” Gates said.

The region’s unprecedented economic growth and political development since the end of World War II was not a foregone conclusion. Rather, Gates said, it was enabled by clear choices and commitments to peace and stability. The region, he said, made commitments to open commerce; to a just international order and the rule of law; to open access to the sea, air, space and cyberspace; and to resolve conflict without force.

The United States, after considerable assessment by the Obama administration of the costs and risks in its national security strategy, is increasing its deterrent capabilities in a number of ways in the Asia-Pacific region. The first is developing missile defenses that are flexible and deployable to counter a growing ballistic missile threat, Gates said. The severest threat has come from efforts by North Korea to develop nuclear weapons and the long-range missiles to deliver them.

Gates said the United States is renewing its commitment to “a strong and effective deterrence” for the U.S. homeland and the defense of allies and partners across the region. While President Obama has pledged to work toward a world free of nuclear weapons, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear arsenal as long as these weapons exist.

Gates said that, as the United States has demonstrated for more than 60 years, the strength of the U.S. commitment and deterrent power in the Asia-Pacific region is expressed by the continued presence of substantial U.S. forces in the region.

The U.S. defense posture in Asia is shifting to one that is more geographically distributed, operationally resilient and politically sustainable, Gates said. This comes, he acknowledged, with a major build-up on Guam and with the agreement recently reached on basing with Japan. In particular Gates was referring to an agreement to relocate a Marine air station near Futenma to a less-populous area on Okinawa.

“It is important to note that we should not measure U.S. presence, and the associated impact and influence, solely in terms of conventional military bases,” Gates told delegates to the ninth annual Asian security conference. “Rather, we must think more about U.S. presence in the broader sense of what we achieve in the region – the connections made, the results accomplished.”

Gates elaborated on the concept of U.S. presence to include everything from visiting military medical teams and civil engineering personnel to partner militaries training together to enhance capabilities for contributing to international security efforts.

“These kinds of activities reflect a priority of the overall United States security strategy: to prevent and deter conflict by better deploying and integrating all elements of our national power and international cooperation,” Gates said. Deterring conflict includes sustained diplomatic, economic and cultural ties to maintain stability and improve relationships, he said.

U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

Gates said that last year President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao made a commitment to “sustained and reliable military-to-military relations” between the two nations. But the relationship has been repeatedly interrupted by “the vagaries of political weather.”

“Regrettably, we have not been able to make progress on this relationship in recent months,” Gates said. The Pentagon wants improved military-to-military relations with Chinese military officials at all levels to reduce

miscommunication, misunderstanding and miscalculation, he added.

Gates said that as regional partners develop new capabilities, they have a responsibility to take a greater role in providing regional and global security. The nations of Asia have been making significant contributions in the Gulf of Aden against high-seas piracy, and in securing peace for Iraq and for Afghanistan, he said.

But North Korea has provided another reality, one that continues to undermine the peace and stability of East Asia, Gates said. The March 26 unprovoked attack on the South Korean ship Cheonan, in which 46 sailors were killed, is not an isolated event, he added.

“This sinking is far more than a single, isolated incident. It is, rather, part of a larger pattern of provocative and reckless behavior,” Gates said.

The annual Shangri-La Dialogue is a regional security conference sponsored by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, and is held regularly at the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore. The conference is attended by defense and military leaders from across Asia and the Pacific.

Economic Growth, Financial Reform Are Focus of G20 Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – The Group of 20 leading economies (G20) is trying to make sure it has a strong, common strategy for economic growth and for financial reforms, U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner says.

“Last year, the G20 acted to restore growth to a world in crisis. Because we acted together, the global economy is expanding again,” Geithner said June 5 at a meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Busan, South Korea. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast global growth to exceed 4 percent this year and in 2011.

The finance ministers and central bankers met June 4–5 to prepare for the G20 Summit in Toronto June 26–27. A second G20 summit is scheduled for Seoul, South Korea, November 11–12.

The economic talks focused on two core priorities: economic growth and financial reform, Geithner said. The ministers reaffirmed support for the current recovery in private demand across the G20 economies, and also agreed on the need for reforms that would support short-

term demand and boost longer-term growth.

“We discussed how the ongoing shift toward higher saving in the United States would need to be complemented by stronger domestic demand growth in Japan and in the European [trade] surplus countries,” Geithner said, “and sustained growth in private demand, together with a more flexible exchange rate policy, in China.”

Geithner said the ministers agreed that withdrawing monetary stimulus plans for national economies must proceed as the private sector recovers, but not faster than that.

In an effort to balance the global economic system, the G20 agreed at two previous summits in London and Pittsburgh in 2009 that member nations with sustained, significant deficits should support private savings while keeping open markets and strengthening exports. Those G20 nations with sustained and significant surpluses pledged to strengthen domestic sources of growth by increasing investment, reducing market distortions, boosting productivity, improving the social safety net for their citizens and lifting constraints imposed on growth.

The G20 was formed in 1999 and includes 19 of the world’s largest national economies and the European Union. G20 countries represent about 90 percent of the global gross domestic product and nearly 80 percent of world trade. They also have two-thirds of the world’s population.

G20 countries also agreed to phase out fossil fuel subsidies, which now total nearly \$300 billion globally.

Geithner told the finance ministers that the United States is moving forward with reforms of its health care, education and financial systems that are coupled with substantial investments in innovation, basic science and research, and infrastructure. “These initiatives are designed to provide a stronger foundation for future economic growth,” he said.

Both chambers of the U.S. Congress have passed legislation that supports the core principles for financial reform proposed by the G20. Geithner said financial reforms seek stronger capital and liquidity requirements for commercial banks, regulation of derivatives trading and constraints on leverage to ensure that financial institutions are better able to withstand future financial and economic shocks.

But still to be determined is how best to keep taxpayers from having to support the financial costs of economic crises. The Obama administration has proposed a bank tax over 10 years to pay for future crises. The European

Union and the IMF support some type of bank tax levy, but not all of the G20 nations support such a move.

“The value of the G20 is to help each of us individually recognize the importance of economic policies that are in our broad collective interest,” Geithner said. “To make sure we are working together, not at cross purposes. The United States is moving aggressively to fix things we got wrong and to strengthen our economic fundamentals.”

Climate Change Media Partnership Trains, Connects Journalists

By Amanda Spake
Special Correspondent

Mass communications media in the developed world have covered scientific and political debates over the impact of global climate change for nearly two decades. But journalists in developing countries did not have the budgets, the training, or the opportunities to do the same. “There was very little information about climate change reaching the public in the countries that are most vulnerable to its impacts,” says Mike Shanahan, press officer for the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a research and advocacy organization.

The problem became apparent at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007. Just 11 percent of the 1,600 journalists accredited to the conference were from news outlets in developing countries. Yet, these annual U.N. conventions are a key venue where nations assess their progress, negotiate greenhouse gases targets, commit to funding priorities, and more.

The IIED was concerned about the dearth of news on climate change in the developing world. So was Panos, a global network that fosters public debate about development, and Internews, a nonprofit committed to empowering local media. “We all realized that journalists from developing countries could very rarely afford to travel to report on the international climate change negotiations, and that this was creating a democratic deficit,” says Shanahan. So, together, the three groups formed the Climate Change Media Partnership, with the aim of boosting both the quality and the quantity of climate change media coverage worldwide.

The Partnership raises funds to bring about 40 developing country journalists to the annual Conference of Parties of the U.N.’s Framework Convention on Climate Change. There, the group provides its journalist Fellows a two-week program that includes media training, connections to sources for stories, and high-level briefings where the

journalists meet and interview senior negotiators, top scientists, and other newsmakers.

“Something important here is that we enable journalists to tell stories that are directly relevant to their audiences at home,” says Shanahan. At last year’s Copenhagen summit, for example, many met and interviewed their heads of state.

The program benefits do not end there. Fellows share ideas, contacts, and reporting tips through their own e-mail network. Some have organized media workshops for other journalists in their regions. Others have created the first climate change series for their radio stations or newspapers.

So far, journalists from 42 countries have participated; last year, there were nearly 600 applicants. The Partnership expects as many this year, as the staff gears up to take 40 journalists to the December climate change summit in Cancun, Mexico. Each fellowship includes travel to the conference, food, lodging, field trips, and program administrative fees. The cost is about \$10,000 per journalist.

The investment has paid major dividends. Over the past three years, roughly 120 fellowship recipients have produced nearly 1,600 stories on climate change for media outlets in their home countries.

“But I am most proud of the fact that we are helping to form a long-term network of the future leaders of climate change journalism.” says Shanahan. “Their passion, determination and enthusiasm for finding and sharing great stories about climate change are critical for keeping millions of people around the world informed.”

Amanda Spake is a Washington, D.C.-based writer whose articles on health, science, education, and the environment have appeared in U.S. News and World Report, The Nation, and the Washington Post, among other publications.

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