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Outgoing Envoy Says Iraqis Capable of Handling Security Issues

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Iraq's security situation will continue to improve as its security forces increase their capabilities and expertise, the outgoing U.S. ambassador to Iraq says. He adds that he leaves his post with a sense of optimism for the country's future when assessing the overall progress it has made during his 16-month tenure.

Speaking August 18 in Washington at the U.S. Institute of Peace, Christopher Hill said Iraq's security forces have "stepped up" as U.S. forces have gradually limited their activities in the country in preparation for meeting President Obama's pledge that all U.S. combat operations in the country would end by August 31.

"It's not like anything big is really going to happen on the 31st," Hill said, because Iraqi forces have already assumed much of the security responsibility. Even though the security situation is still not "at a completely satisfactory level," it will continue to improve, he said.

U.S. officials, including President Obama, have pointed out that the number of violent incidents in Iraq has remained at the lowest levels since the beginning of the conflict through much of 2010.

"The Iraqi forces are capable of handling the security problems," Hill said. "They will have problems. There will be mistakes. We have made mistakes, too, in how we've handled it. They will learn from their mistakes as we learn from our mistakes. And I think you will see a continued improvement in the security situation."

Similarly, even as Iraq faces a difficult process in trying to form a coalition government after close parliamentary elections in March, Hill said a government will be formed, and it will include members of all three of the country's main population groups — Kurds, Sunnis and Shias — regardless of which political coalition assumes power.

"No serious observer of the situation in Iraq is suggesting that somehow you can run Iraq except through the full participation of these ... three components of Iraq's polity," he said. As long as the three groups know how to work together and cooperate, "this is not something that we need to fear."

But at the same time, Hill said, as Iraqi civil society continues to develop, the current political identities based on sectarianism will change.

"The tendency is to have more secular than sectarian

tendencies," he said. Political differences are already occurring within each community, and the importance of geographic identities also could increase.

Hill said the notion of partitioning Iraq "has been raised and resolved," and is not supported due to the "horrendous violence" that would result. Among the Iraqi people, the "concept of being Iraqi is also very strong," he said.

The ambassador said he has returned from Iraq "with a real sense of optimism about its future." The Iraqi people have absorbed human rights concepts such as the freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and "overall, the trend lines in Iraq's human rights are improving." Iraq will also see increasing economic success, he said.

In remarks at the State Department August 17, Hill said major international oil companies are now beginning to drill in Iraq. He expressed his belief that the country will "emerge as one of the major oil producers of the world."

The drilling has begun despite a stalemate in the Iraqi parliament over a hydrocarbons law that would codify how revenue from oil would be shared among the regions of the country.

Iraqi politicians decided instead to move ahead with oil-service contracts, which Hill described as "a very practical approach" that has stimulated investment in Iraq's economy, and an agreement with the Kurdish Regional Government on a 17 percent revenue-sharing figure.

Hill said an oil law is still needed to provide an overall framework for investors, but oil "is no longer an impediment" to the country's reconciliation.

"I think you will see Iraqi oil production in the next five, 10 years becoming very significant. It's around 2 million barrels, and if things go well in seven, 10 years, we'll be looking at 8 million barrels, maybe higher than that," he said.

Along with increased investment, national unity could also be strengthened through the adoption of joint political committees, such as a political committee for national security, he said, which could produce a national consensus on how to handle tough security issues.

But despite horrific terrorist attacks, such as the August 17 attack against Iraqis lining up outside an army recruiting station in Baghdad, Hill said the trend toward less violence in the cities has continued.

"When you go out outside of the Green Zone [in Baghdad] and you see a plate glass window being installed in Iraqi shops, you realize it's because ... the

sense of insecurity that prevailed there a couple of years ago has been changed," he said.

He credited the improvement to U.S. and Iraqi military operations, including those against al-Qaida forces in the country.

Hill said there is "no local support" for al-Qaida, as evidenced by Sunni participation in the March elections, and "a sort of general revulsion at their behavior," as innocent Iraqis continue to be killed in attacks.

Where al-Qaida once held much influence in the country, the organization now "is not able to hold on to ... a single building or city block," he said.

U.S., International Aid Helps Fight Disease in Pakistan Floods

Total U.S. commitment to Pakistan flood relief is now about \$90 million

By Cheryl Pellerin

Science Writer

Washington — Waterborne and other infectious diseases threaten more than 15 million people in Pakistan, where the July-September monsoon season has already produced floodwaters that have killed at least 1,500 people, left an estimated 20 million homeless and now cover a fifth of the country.

The United States, whose donations to Pakistan so far total about \$90 million, is a prime donor to the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other U.N. partners. They, along with international organizations, companies and individuals around the world, are contributing to desperate efforts to make sure populations have water and food and stay free of disease.

"The United States has a history of working with the government of Pakistan to respond to natural disasters," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said August 4 from Washington, describing the U.S. response to that country's natural disaster.

"We've been working hard over the past year to build a partnership with the people of Pakistan," she added, "and this is an essential element of that partnership; reaching out and helping each other in times of need."

At the briefing, Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), outlined the work of his agency to help national disaster authorities and provide food and water for Pakistan's flood assistance.

"We believe the establishment of a disease early warning

system to track and make sure that we do not have subsequent public health diseases that spread in this critical time period is important as part of an effort to protect the Pakistani people," Shah added.

HEALTH IN ACTION

In flood-affected communities, the leading causes of illness are skin infections, watery diarrhea and respiratory infections. Between July 29, when the floods began, and August 12, WHO and mobile and stationary medical centers partnering with the organization reported treating 143,870 skin infections, 115,922 cases of acute diarrhea and 113,981 respiratory tract infections.

Through WHO, essential medicines and supplies were distributed to Pakistan's Ministry of Health and WHO partners to cover the health needs of 1.8 million people. Supplies included 179 emergency health kits, 700 vials of anti-snake venom, 1.8 million water purification tablets and 152 cholera-treatment kits.

Cholera is a diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the waterborne bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. The infection is often mild or without symptoms but it can be severe, with profuse watery diarrhea, vomiting and leg cramps. The disease can spread through contact with feces. Rapid loss of body fluids leads to dehydration and shock.

"We urgently need to scale up the distribution of water," Martin Mogwanja, UNICEF's representative in Pakistan, said in an August 17 statement. "If we are not able to do so because of lack of funding, water-borne diseases such as cholera, diarrhea and dysentery will spread and begin killing affected populations, especially children, already weak and vulnerable to disease and malnutrition."

He said UNICEF was providing enough clean water to an estimated 1.3 million people every day, but millions more remained in need. USAID has also provided shelter materials, emergency food supplies and preventive medical care to curb potential disease outbreaks.

Polio and measles are also threats to children's health in Pakistan, according to UNICEF, which is working with WHO and the government to carry out vaccinations against the diseases in relief centers. UNICEF is supplying oral rehydration salts, a home-based diarrhea treatment, but funding constraints mean that supplies are limited.

MONITORING AND TREATMENT

Through the USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, the United States has provided \$3 million to WHO to expand Pakistan's Disease Early Warning System, called DEWS nationwide, and to establish the

first 15 treatment centers for waterborne illness, located in high-risk flood-affected areas.

"The centers," Ambassador Anne Patterson said August 13, "will diagnose and treat illness and will be staffed with trained international and local health workers."

Monitoring for waterborne diseases after a flood is the task of Pakistan's disease early warning system, a network of health care providers to which the United States has been contributing since 2008.

On August 9, 56 of 62 flood-affected districts in four provinces provided daily disease surveillance data to DEWS, allowing health workers to monitor reports of illness. To help curb the spread of illness, the United States is distributing hand soap and has provided mobile water-treatment units that can provide clean drinking water for 10,000 people a day.

The United States also is working with the humanitarian community to promote health and hygiene messages in some of the most affected areas. The messages, which include advice on preventing waterborne diseases through proper hand-washing, are being broadcast on radio stations and reinforced by hygiene workers who are going door to door in affected areas.

WHO and its international partners are responding to multiple health threats, including waterborne diseases such as cholera and vector-borne diseases such as malaria, and delivering health care and medicines after floods destroyed more than 200 hospitals and clinics throughout Pakistan.

More than 30 international humanitarian health organizations participate in these activities, including Care International, Medical Emergency Relief International (MERLIN), Save the Children, the Pakistan Red Crescent Society and Médecins du Monde-France.

National Park System Tackles Climate Change from Ground Up

Park visitors learn how their behavior affects natural treasures
By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — A few years ago, Zion National Park sold more than 60,000 plastic bottles of water annually to thirsty visitors. Most emptied bottles landed in trash bins and some littered trails in the pristine park. Today, thirsty visitors must bring their own bottles or buy reusable steel bottles at the visitor center and fill them up at one of six water filling stations in the park.

Rather than fighting over limited parking at the Zion

visitor center, most tourists have also learned that it's easier to take a free shuttle bus into the park. In 2009, 63 percent of visitors boarded a shuttle from a nearby town rather than drive into the park — a 229-square-mile (593-square-kilometer) treasure of deep canyons and towering red rocks in the Southwestern state of Utah.

Zion is one of 35 Climate Friendly Parks, an initiative to lower greenhouse gas emissions from the U.S. national park system and to teach visitors how to limit their own impact on the environment. Each park that qualified for the program has conducted a greenhouse gas inventory and drawn up a plan that spells out goals for reducing emissions and energy use, and for conducting public outreach. The program is expected to swell to 65 participants by the end of 2010 as more parks complete their plans.

"Last year, we had 270 million visitors to our parks," said Shawn Norton, the U.S. National Park Service's chief of sustainable operations and climate change. "This started with the idea that national parks have an incredible opportunity to talk about climate change."

Climate Friendly Parks also has an online tool known as CLIP that can be exported for free to other countries that want to measure their parks' impact on the climate, Norton said.

And how do park visitors feel about not having access to conveniences such as bottled water?

"People come to the national park to be in a natural setting and to get away from the sounds of the city. They want to be inspired by things they've never seen before," said Jim Gale, chief of interpretation at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Pacific island of Hawaii. "The public wants parks to be a legacy for their children and their children's children."

He said visitors are impressed by initiatives such as water filling stations that filter rainwater through sand and pump it to the tap using electricity generated by solar panels. When asked, Gale said, everybody supports the goal of conserving water and using renewable energy.

PARK CARBON FOOTPRINTS SMALL AND GETTING SMALLER

Zion's goal is to lower its greenhouse gas emissions by 28 percent by 2020, using 2004 as a baseline. The park vehicle fleet is gradually being converted to hybrid or electric, and the recycling program diverted 61,000 pounds of waste during the first seven months of the year. The park is also planning to make all of its operations energy-neutral. Just the removal of a water cooler from the visitor center, for example, has reduced energy consumption in

that building by 10 percent. "We're making progress," said Ron Terry, the park's chief of interpretation and visitor services.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park has committed to reducing transportation emissions 12.5 percent below 2006 levels by 2012. Two hydrogen-fueled shuttle buses have been purchased and are being tested for the park's challenging terrain, which includes 6,000-foot elevation gains from sea level to the top of the park's active volcanoes.

Meanwhile, park employees are transitioning to a central motor pool instead of each having a vehicle. Employees are also being encouraged to bike to work and work from home or at two satellite offices whenever practical. "We're really trying to change behavior and we try to get our employees to walk the talk," Gale said.

While such goals are laudable, parks and their staff have a relatively small impact on the environment considering that most parks are wilderness areas. Together, the nation's 392 parks and their 20,000 employees produce carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to just 19,000 households, Norton said. The footprint swells considerably if you factor in the millions of cars, buses, cruise ships and planes that transport visitors, he added.

The next step for Climate Friendly Parks is to develop regional transportation plans that will assess how to get visitors to the park gate in a more environmentally friendly way. The first plans will be developed in 2010 for parks in the northeastern United States, Norton said.

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