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President Obama, Secretary Clinton Welcome Sarah Shourd's Release from Iran

Urge Iran to release other detained or missing Americans

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton welcomed the release of American Sarah Shourd by the Iranian government and urged Iranian authorities to release other American prisoners, including Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal, who were detained with Shourd in July 2009 while hiking in northern Iraq near the Iranian border.

"I am very pleased that Sarah Shourd has been released by the Iranian government, and will soon be united with her family," President Obama said in a September 14 statement. "We are grateful to the Swiss, the Sultanate of Oman, and other friends and allies around the world who have worked tirelessly and admirably over the past several months to bring about this joyous reunion."

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran and has asked Switzerland to be its protecting power in the country. The United States has also asked Oman, as well as other countries, to be an interlocutor with the Iranian government on its behalf.

Obama said Shourd's fellow hikers, Bauer and Fattal, "have committed no crime" and are still imprisoned in Iran. "We remain hopeful that Iran will demonstrate renewed compassion by ensuring the return of Shane, Josh and all the other missing or detained Americans in Iran," he said.

Secretary Clinton also expressed appreciation to the governments of Switzerland and Oman, as well as other world leaders who have worked for Shourd's release and raised her case and the cases of other missing or detained Americans with the Iranian government.

"We urge Iranian authorities to extend the same consideration to them by resolving their cases without delay and allowing them to immediately return to their families," she said in a September 14 statement.

The trio was detained along the Iran-Iraq border on July 31, 2009, and accused of illegally crossing into Iran, as well as committing espionage. Those charges have been repeatedly denied by their families, as well as U.S. officials, who have said the three hikers had mistakenly wandered close to or across the border.

"I want to be perfectly clear: Sarah, Shane and Josh have never worked for the United States government," President Obama said in a July 30 statement. "They are

simply open-minded and adventurous young people who represent the best of America and of the human spirit. They are teachers, artists, and advocates for social and environmental justice. They have never had any quarrel with the government of Iran, and have great respect for the Iranian people."

Shourd, 32, had been working in Syria to provide educational opportunities and teach English to Iraqi refugees at the time of her detention.

P.J. Crowley, the State Department's assistant secretary for public affairs, said September 14 that Shourd's release "demonstrates that Iranian authorities have the ability to resolve these cases if they choose."

Noting that the facts behind Shourd's, Bauer's and Fattal's cases "are identical," Crowley said the Obama administration hopes that Iranian leaders "will make the same decision regarding Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer as soon as possible."

Crowley said the United States did not pay any money to Iran for Shourd's release and said he is unaware as to what actions were taken that caused Iran to set her free.

"The government of Iran ... through their judicial process had ... specific requirements for her release, and arrangements were made that satisfied those requirements," he said, citing efforts by Switzerland, Oman and other countries that had been working for Shourd's release.

U.S. Diplomat Bosworth in East Asia for Talks on North Korea

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Special Representative Stephen Bosworth, who is traveling to South Korea, Japan and China for talks on North Korea, stressed to reporters that any further negotiations with North Korean officials over North Korea's nuclear weapons program must produce meaningful results.

"We will continue to pursue the basic strategy we have been pursuing for the last several months: one of being open to dialogue and negotiation with the North Koreans, but at the same time maintaining the sanctions which have been put in place by the U.N. Security Council and by the United States and other governments," Bosworth told reporters September 13 at the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Seoul.

"We have reaffirmed our fundamental goal, which remains denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

But Bosworth, who is the U.S. special representative for North Korea policy, also pointed out that the United States was not setting timetables for negotiations, indicating that negotiators would move as expeditiously as possible depending on conditions. He added that the United States "is not interested in talking just for the sake of talking."

The so-called Six-Party Talks began in 2003 to convince the North Korean regime to abandon its nuclear weapons development program in return for an array of political and economic benefits. Talks have been held sporadically since then, but broke down in December 2008 and have not resumed. The North Korean regime last tested a nuclear device May 25, 2009, and the U.N. Security Council imposed new sanctions on June 12, 2009.

The Six-Party Talks involve China, which serves as chairman of the talks, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia and the United States.

"We want negotiations that produce a meaningful result," Bosworth told reporters. "So we will be looking for [an] indication that North Korea shares that desire and that determination."

Bosworth said consultations with the other partners in the joint talks will continue because the United States remains committed to diplomacy as the means for resolving these issues, which are potentially destabilizing to the Korean Peninsula and to the Northeast Asian region.

On September 14, Bosworth was in Tokyo to meet with Japanese diplomat Akitaka Saiki. Bosworth arrived there from South Korea as part of his brief East Asia tour.

Diplomats, Bosworth said while in Seoul, look for North Korea to show its intentions through actions and not simply through its talk.

"We believe that dialogue and negotiation is in the best interest of all countries concerned, and that is the course we are going to continue to follow," he said. "At the same time, we are going to continue to implement the sanctions that have been put into place by the international community."

North Korea promised in a September 2005 joint statement that it would give up its nuclear weapons and long-range missile development program in exchange for energy assistance, security guarantees and broader diplomatic recognition. Negotiators pledged that North Korea could have a nuclear energy program for civil electricity generation by meeting strict internationally sanctioned safeguards. Twice since then, the North has tested modest nuclear devices and conducted a number of unsuccessful long-range missile tests.

ADDITIONAL SANCTIONS IMPOSED

The United States broadened financial sanctions against North Korea on August 30 to block the U.S. assets of individuals and businesses that trade in conventional arms or luxury goods, counterfeit currency or engage in money laundering, drug smuggling or other "illicit economic activities" that enrich the highest levels of the regime of Kim Jong-Il, his government and friends, the U.S. Treasury said.

Treasury Under Secretary Stuart Levey said the action, which imposes new sanctions against four North Korean citizens and eight companies, was taken by President Obama in a new executive order.

"The president decided that North Korea's continued provocative actions – such as its unprovoked attack on the South Korean naval ship Cheonan in March of this year, which resulted in the ship's sinking and the deaths of 46 sailors, its test of a nuclear device and missile launches in 2009, its violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions ... and its illicit and deceptive practices in international markets – justify additional sanctions," Levey told reporters on August 30.

"The destructive course that the North Korean government is charting is facilitated by a lifeline of cash generated through a range of illicit activities," he added. "North Korea's government helps maintain its authority by placating privileged elites with money and perks, such as luxury goods like jewelry, luxury cars and yachts."

Levey said that North Korea receives millions of dollars annually from arms sales outlawed by the United Nations, and from illicit criminal activities. One of the businesses targeted by these new sanctions is a shadowy network known as Office 39, which is reportedly a branch of the Korean Workers' Party. The network raises hard currency to pay for luxury items like liquor, exotic food and expensive cars for friends of Kim Jong-Il, he said.

Direct Israeli-Palestinian Talks Resume in Egypt

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held serious discussions September 14 on the core issues that need to be resolved for a Middle East peace settlement, and were joined at the talks in Egypt by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell told reporters September 14 that both Netanyahu and Abbas "reiterated their intent to approach these negotiations in

good faith and with a seriousness of purpose," with the goal of achieving "a just, lasting and secure peace."

The discussions follow the resumption of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Washington September 1-2, after face-to-face discussions had been on hold since December 2008. Both leaders agreed in Washington that they would hold further talks September 14-15 in the Middle East and to continue to meet every two weeks thereafter.

"President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu continued to agree that these negotiations, whose goal is to resolve all core issues, can be completed within one year," Mitchell said. "The parties have agreed to begin first on working to achieve a framework agreement for permanent status. That work is now well under way," he said.

Core issues to be resolved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process include determining the final borders of a Palestinian state, the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements in occupied areas, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, water rights and future relations between the two states that include assurances of Israeli security.

Secretary Clinton spoke with reporters en route to Egypt September 13, and said Israelis and Palestinians face a simple choice between either having negotiations or not being able to achieve security needs or an independent Palestinian state.

"There is no prospect for success in the absence of direct negotiations; there is absolutely no way that the legitimate needs of Israel can be satisfied for the long term, nor that the aspirations of the Palestinians can be achieved," the secretary said.

Clinton echoed President Obama's view that Israel's moratorium on building settlements in the occupied West Bank "should be extended" and that the talks are meant to reach an agreement on the borders between Israel and a Palestinian state. An agreement on those borders "would ... eliminate the debate about settlements because some areas would be inside Israel and some areas would not be inside Israel," she said. Both sides have an obligation to "ensure that these negotiations continue," she added.

Both Netanyahu and Abbas "recognize that time is not on either of their sides," Clinton said.

"For both of these men, this is a moment of great opportunity as well as challenge, and what we are attempting to do is to encourage them to pursue this chance for peace this year, because neither of them can predict the consequences if this effort does not continue

forward," she said.

Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley said September 14 that the Obama administration will continue to play a "key facilitator" role in the talks, and "we are prepared to offer our ideas as needed as the process goes forward."

He urged both sides to "move off of public-stated positions and reach compromises on firmly held and emotional ... issues" and said the two leaders will need to build mutual trust and understanding through their discussions in order to find ways to resolve and satisfy each other's political challenges as difficult decisions need to be made.

"This cannot be a situation where, you know, one side wins and the other side loses," Crowley said. "You have to find solutions where both sides get what they need to reach an agreement, recognizing that neither side will get everything that it wants."

Clinton will join both leaders for further discussions in Jerusalem September 15 and will meet with Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian officials before returning to Washington September 16.

Crowley said Special Envoy Mitchell will remain in the region after the secretary has left, with plans to visit both Syria and Lebanon.

Science and Technology Grants Promote Pakistan's Development

U.S.-Pakistan partnership supports work on health, food and technology

By Carrie Loewenthal Massey
Special Correspondent

New York — When Dr. Zeba Rasmussen returned to Gilgit-Baltistan in northeast Pakistan two years ago, a man approached her in a bank.

"Don't you remember the boy you treated for dysentery as an infant? Well, he's recovering and in college now," the man said to Rasmussen.

The boy was part of a group of children that Rasmussen treated, as part of her medical fellowship in infectious disease, for diarrhea and pneumonia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when both diseases were among the major causes of death for Pakistani children under age 5. "We saw dramatic changes just as a result of basic interventions," Rasmussen, now a research fellow with the Fogarty International Center at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), said in an interview with *America.gov*.

Rasmussen, who was born in Karachi and moved to Washington at age 5, now has the opportunity to return to the region where she worked. She is part of an NIH project, "Water, Sanitation, Health and Hygiene Interventions in a Northern Pakistani Village," that earned one of 27 grants announced in early September by the Pakistan-U.S. Science and Technology Cooperation Program.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as Pakistan's Ministry of Science and Technology and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, the program has awarded funds to collaborative ventures between Pakistani and American institutions that support Pakistan's development goals in areas including health, water, agriculture and energy, and expand Pakistani universities' capacities for science and technology research and education.

The Science and Technology Cooperation Program has awarded three previous rounds of funding, supporting 11 projects in 2005, 16 in 2006 and 19 in 2008. With a total of 73 funded projects, the program is an element in the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue and is a key focus for that partnership's science and technology working group.

Potential grantees' projects undergo a transparent peer-review process, with final award decisions made by a consensus of the two Pakistani and two U.S. funding agencies.

The newly funded projects include a range of focuses and topics, from ways to improve drinking water and to better manage wastewater and sewage infrastructures to establishing centers for research on food and for safer construction methods. Also included are programs in education and training and crop research and improvements in agriculture and livestock management. Research on medicinal plants, improved solar water heating systems and public health issues such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and tuberculosis are also among the grant projects. A full list of the 27 grant projects is available on the National Academies website.

HELPING PAKISTANIS ADVOCATE FOR BETTER HEALTH

Rasmussen and her team at NIH will use their grant in partnership with Karakoram International University in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Aga Khan University in Karachi, and the University of Punjab in Lahore. They will study the change in the incidence of diarrhea and pneumonia in young children since the interventions put in place 20 years ago and examine water quality and use of newer latrines. With the project, residents will better understand contamination levels in food and water supplies and the

rates of diarrhea and pneumonia among their children, Rasmussen said.

"They can advocate for and adopt better interventions to improve health," she said. "They will know if previous interventions have worked."

Rasmussen can also check up on her previous subjects, the peers of the boy she heard about from the man at the bank. The project includes assessment of the mortality, growth and educational status of the children treated for diarrhea and pneumonia in 1989 and onwards. This data will help determine the long-term health impact of early childhood diarrhea and pneumonia on growth and educational development, according to Rasmussen.

"For me, [the project] is a dream come true," she said. "It's unusual to have a set of kids followed for such a long period of time that you can follow up with 20 years later."

ADVANCING NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Another project among the 2010 grantees focuses on increasing Pakistan's capacity to reduce the risk of damage from potential natural disasters, including developing an early warning system for floods. A collaboration between the University of Oklahoma and Pakistan's National University of Science and Technology, the project includes training Pakistani university academics in disaster management techniques.

Yang Hong, associate professor at the University of Oklahoma, explained in an e-mail interview that building disaster preparedness knowledge at the university level will help Pakistan develop and support its own governmental initiatives to manage disasters.

Monsoon flooding that began in late July has now affected 20 million people in Pakistan, leaving one-fifth of the country under water and prompting intense and sustained relief assistance from the United States and other international donors.

"[Currently, the] flood risk assessment and management system in Pakistan basically deals with rescue and relief After each flood disaster episode the government incurs considerable expenditure directed at rescue, relief and rehabilitation," he said.

The early warning system will help map flood zones, determine the potential economic impact of flooding and reduce the risk of damage and fatalities in vulnerable communities, he added.

CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR PAKISTAN'S
DEVELOPMENT

All the newly awarded grant projects will build on the nearly 5,000 Pakistani lives touched by Science and Technology Cooperation Program funding to date, according to a program fact sheet.

Past projects have facilitated the installation of solar-powered energy and water systems in remote villages and established a nationwide network of health care facilities to train health care providers to treat infectious diseases without using unnecessary antibiotics. Other initiatives have helped Pakistani universities and research institutes enhance their technical and research capacities.

To promote the program's emphasis on collaboration among American and Pakistani partners, grantees will meet at a joint conference in spring 2011, where they will share their research findings.

Also in the spring, program officials expect to issue a new call for proposals for the next round of funding.

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