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President Obama Directive Makes Development “Core Pillar” of U.S. Strategy

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – President Obama says the United States is “changing the way we do business” in its approach to promoting development around the world, unveiling a new U.S. global development policy that seeks broad-based economic growth, democratic governance and the use of new technology and sustainability to offer countries around the world “a path out of poverty.”

Speaking at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Summit at United Nations headquarters in New York September 22, Obama said after the MDGs were established in 2000 with the aim of reducing global poverty by 2015, advances have been made in improving access to education, providing clean drinking water and reducing diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, but “progress towards other goals that were set [has] not come nearly fast enough.”

“With 10 years down and just five years before our development targets come due, we must do better,” the president said.

Obama called for a new international approach to development that recognizes that no country or people want to be dependent upon another and that seeks to unleash transformational change allowing more people to “take control of their own destiny.”

“The United States will do our part,” he said. “My national security strategy recognizes development not only as a moral imperative, but a strategic and economic imperative,” he said, adding that the United States “will be a global leader in international development in the 21st century.”

Earlier September 22, Obama signed the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, which recognizes development as being vital to U.S. national security and a “strategic, economic, and moral imperative for the United States,” according to a September 22 fact sheet released by the White House.

The directive calls for development to be a “core pillar of American power” and integrates it with diplomacy and defense so that all three “mutually reinforce and complement one another.”

“Through the Presidential Policy Directive, President Obama has made clear that sustainable development is a long-term proposition, and progress depends importantly on the choices of political leaders and the quality of

institutions in developing countries,” the fact sheet said. “Where leaders govern responsibly, set in place good policies, and make investments conducive to development, sustainable outcomes can be achieved. Where those conditions are absent, it is difficult to engineer sustained progress, no matter how good our intentions or the extent of our engagement.”

The directive is the first development policy to be issued by a U.S. president and highlights the Obama administration’s increased attention to development as outlined in the president’s May 2010 national security strategy.

Under the new U.S. approach, Obama said, success will be measured by actual progress made by developing nations in moving from poverty to prosperity, rather than the amount of aid money spent or food and medical assistance that has been delivered.

“We need to harness all the tools at our disposal – from our diplomacy to our trade policy to our investment policy,” he said.

The United States recognizes that the purpose of development is to create “the conditions where assistance is no longer needed,” and it will be seeking partners who want to build their own capacity to care for themselves and who have proven their commitment to development.

Instead of simply treating diseases, the United States is researching ways of preventing infections from occurring in the first place and using its Global Health Initiative to help countries build stronger health systems, he said. It is helping countries to develop their agriculture sectors, improve crop yields and get products to market, rather than merely delivering food aid. The president also said his administration will help developing countries embrace clean energy technologies that they will need to adapt to climate change while also pursuing economic growth through low-carbon energy sources.

Broad-based economic growth encouraged by entrepreneurship, infrastructure investment and expanded trade and investment opportunities will help unleash the transformational change needed to end the cycle of dependence, the president said.

But “over the long run, democracy and economic growth go hand in hand,” he said, and the United States is leading global efforts to combat corruption, advance the rule of law and government transparency and encourage countries to respect human rights, empower women and build strong civil societies.

“Let’s honor our respective commitments. Let’s resolve to put an end to hollow promises that are not kept,” the

president told leaders of wealthy nations, urging a focus on results rather than the amount of resources that is expended.

Addressing developing countries, Obama said their prosperity is in the world's interest as well as their own, and the United States wants to help them realize their aspirations. But they also have responsibilities to make tough choices and sustainable investments that will unleash dynamism and improve the well-being of their people.

"We can be partners, but ultimately you have to take the lead," Obama said.

"Together, we can realize the future that none of us can achieve alone" and deliver "historic leaps in development," he said. "But only if we move forward with the seriousness and sense of common purpose that this moment demands."

Secretary Clinton Calls for Greater Cooperation Between NATO and Russia

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for expanded cooperation between the 28-member NATO alliance and Russia in areas such as a European missile defense system, military strategy and doctrine, narcotics control and conventional arms limits in Europe.

But Clinton also told a NATO-Russia Council foreign ministers meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York September 22 that a proposal by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for a new European security architecture is not necessary.

"We believe that the best way to achieve this is by reinforcing the pillars that have supported European security for decades, not by negotiating new treaties, as Russia has suggested," Clinton said. She added that NATO and Russia should work toward a combined missile-defense architecture.

NATO foreign ministers and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attended the hourlong meeting.

The 2010 NATO Summit is being held in Lisbon, Portugal, November 19–20. It will be followed by the U.S.-European Union Summit on November 20, also in Lisbon. NATO has invited Medvedev to attend the summit along with the leaders of the 28 NATO nations.

"This summit offers an opportunity for us to take a fresh look at the security challenges that all our countries face, reflect on what our cooperation has already achieved, and

begin to chart a common course of action for the next decade," Clinton said.

Clinton also told the ministers that it is important for both sides to restore and modernize the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty — a 1990 accord that established limits on certain categories of conventional military equipment and mandated destruction of excessive weaponry — which has been suspended for three years. She said the treaty should be restored this year and modernized next year.

In addition to the CFE regime, Clinton said relations would be strengthened by greater transparency in military strategy and force structure.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the November summit will show a strengthened strategic partnership between former Cold War rivals and will also result in greater cooperation.

"Relations between NATO and Russia have undergone a unique transformation. We have launched a joint review of common security threats; we have engaged in concrete cooperation in numerous areas, including Afghanistan, disarmament, the struggle against terrorism and the prevention of proliferation of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities," Rasmussen said.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder told reporters September 21 that the council is a place where the two sides can work together to resolve common challenges, and also "where we can continue to have a dialogue about those issues on which we disagree. The NATO-Russia Council is a place where we can do business," he said.

The NATO-Russia Council was created May 28, 2002, to coordinate security and joint projects.

Secretary Clinton Tells Sudanese Official U.S. Expectations for Referenda

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — In her meetings with Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton conveyed what the United States expects of Sudan in preparation for the January 2011 referenda in Southern Sudan and Abyei and reaffirmed the Obama administration's commitment to the full implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip J. Crowley told reporters in New York September 21 that Clinton had specifically discussed the need to support the Electoral Commission, which is in charge of the two

referenda that will determine whether the two Sudanese regions will gain their independence. There is a need to ensure that ballots are available and voter registration is moving forward, and that other “key ingredients to have a credible referendum” are in place, Crowley said.

Clinton also “affirmed the U.S. commitment to full implementation of the CPA and reiterated that we need to see decisive action to ensure ... peaceful, on-time referenda ... in support of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” he said.

According to Crowley, Taha reiterated the Sudanese government’s commitment to the CPA, and “there was an agreement that there’s no time to waste; there’s a lot to be done.”

Crowley said the Obama administration expects Sudanese from both the northern and southern regions to “take very specific steps [and] cooperate” in the remaining days before the January 9, 2011, vote.

The secretary “made clear” to Taha that “the door to improved relations” between Sudan and the United States “will open depending on Khartoum’s cooperation and full implementation of the CPA.”

U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Scott Gration recently visited both the southern city of Juba and Khartoum and outlined potential incentives to the Sudanese government in return for its full implementation of the CPA, as well as a pathway that could lead to the normalization of relations between the United States and Sudan.

Crowley noted that “Sudan is among the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world already.”

“I think that our focus right now is to demonstrate to Khartoum if you do what is expected of you under the CPA, and then depending on the choices made by the people of Abyei and the people of South Sudan, if you work constructively in the post-referendum period, then there are clear opportunities available to you,” he said.

“By the same token, if they do not do what we expect them to do – and we’re setting an appropriately high bar in terms of what Khartoum and Juba need to do – then there will be consequences, and those include a mix of carrots and sticks,” Crowley said.

He also said Clinton and Taha discussed the situation in Darfur “and what needs to be done to resolve the conflict there.”

According to a September 21 statement issued by Clinton, U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague and Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, letters were sent on

September 17 to both Taha and his southern Sudanese counterpart, Salva Kiir, that welcomed “recent progress” on the vote preparations but urged “swift action to ensure that peaceful referenda take place on time, in a manner consistent with the will of the people of Southern Sudan and Abyei.”

With much remaining to be done before the referenda, work “must be accelerated to make up for lost time,” the three foreign ministers said.

“We have highlighted to the parties that it is their responsibility to ensure that the [Electoral] Commission moves quickly to take critical decisions on further preparations, including most immediately: finalizing an operational plan and budget; agreeing on voter registration criteria and procedures; and hiring and training of registration workers, among other things,” the three said in the statement.

On September 24, President Obama will take part in a meeting on Sudan at the United Nations and will “send a very forceful message at a critical, make-or-break time” for the country in his remarks, according to Samantha Power, who is director of multilateral relations at the National Security Council.

Power told reporters September 20 that Obama will be delivering “his own personal message to the parties” to the CPA, “and these will be quite substantial remarks on his vision for how to go forward” in Sudan.

United States Aids Climate Change Mitigation in Southeast Asia

By Nancy L. Pontius
Special Correspondent

Littleton, Colorado – During the past four years, the Coca-Cola Company and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) – a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization – have studied how to help ecosystems in the Mekong Delta respond to sea-level rise and other challenges predicted by climate change models, Dekila Chungyalpa, WWF Mekong Program managing director, told America.gov.

The study examined how Tram Chim National Park adapts to higher levels of sea water, a problem to which local organizations typically responded by building barriers, such as walls and dikes, to keep the salt water out. However, “what we discovered [for the park] was counterintuitive,” Chungyalpa said. The study found that the ecosystem adapted much better when barriers intended to protect and enclose the area were removed and ecosystem flows and hydrological flows were restored. Also, the fish populations grew when the barriers were removed, she said, because it allowed fish to freely migrate, move and spawn.

According to the study, a wetland is one of the perfect buffers for rivers, she said, because a wetland “regulates water flow, provides nutrients, and helps eliminate significant pollution from river systems.”

The WWF and the Coca-Cola Company are reaching out to large industries interested in the Mekong Delta, such as those in the garment industry, to encourage them to join a corporate task force that will research ways to respond to climate change, Chungyalpa said.

In a separate project, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Wildlife Research Center is installing monitoring stations in the Mekong Delta to examine how mangrove forests respond to a rise in sea level by measuring land-level changes relative to local sea level. The first monitoring stations were installed in July, and additional stations will be constructed during the next 12 months. Monitoring will be conducted for the next several decades.

According to Charlie Demas, director of the USGS Louisiana Water Science Center, climate change models predict sea levels will rise one to two meters over the next 100 years. That rise or related changes in water flow could cause rice crops to decline, triggering a tremendous food-security concern in a region that contains the world’s top rice producers, Tim Hamlin, research associate at the U.S. nonprofit Stimson Center, told America.gov.

This situation will be worse if dams are constructed on the Mekong, Hamlin said, because dams would reduce the silt flow down the river that is deposited in the delta, building up the coastland, and providing the key source of nutrients for rice production. The problem is compounded by heavy annual rainfall that causes flooding in this low-lying area that is eroding, he said.

In some scenarios, floods and droughts might increase, Hamlin added, and more salt water might spread into agricultural land, making the land no longer farmable. Perhaps 8 million to 10 million people ultimately could be displaced, Chungyalpa said, adding she also worries about threats to wildlife and biodiversity.

SISTER-RIVER PARTNERSHIP

Through the sister-river partnership between the Mekong River Commission and the U.S. Mississippi River Commission, members of the partnership will consider climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Currently, researchers at Can Tho University in Vietnam are collecting data and working with USGS to develop the Forecast Mekong modeling software that will be available via the Internet. That software is being developed to show the impact of climate change and other challenges to the

river basin. For example, if temperatures rise or dams are constructed, the model will show the anticipated results on the river, Tanya Rogers, U.S. State Department desk officer for the Lower Mekong Initiative, told America.gov.

In July, the State Department sponsored a three-week tour in the United States for professionals from Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia that focused on watershed management, but also covered topics on gaining a better understanding of climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and investigating ways to respond and adapt effectively.

In the future, the State Department hopes to bring government officials from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam to the United States to share information about climate change management, Rogers said.

CAPTURING METHANE GAS

In an effort to mitigate climate change, the Methane-to-Markets Partnership initiative led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is looking to capture methane because this gas is 23 times as effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere as is carbon dioxide, and methane gas escaping into the atmosphere may contribute to climate change.

Initially, EPA and partner organizations began working in Thailand and Vietnam to determine the potential for using anaerobic digesters to treat livestock waste as a strategy for reducing methane emissions, Ashley King, co-director of the Methane-to-Markets Partnership’s administrative support group, told America.gov. To date, 11 demonstration projects in Thailand and three projects in Vietnam have been installed using anaerobic digesters to capture methane released from swine farms and use the gas for heat and cooking fuel.

In the future, EPA and other groups will use education and government policy efforts to encourage widespread use of anaerobic digesters, King said, and to investigate various funding options. For example, EPA is providing technical support for Chiang Mai University in Bangkok to explore financing options for small-scale anaerobic digesters, including bundling a number of small projects together to more easily access potential financing.

EPA also hopes to see other Southeast Asian industries consider capturing methane gas from more waste sources, including during processing palm oil, cassava and tapioca, as well as from slaughterhouses, she said.

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