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Aviation Continues to Be Terrorist Target, U.S. Official Says

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United Nations aviation body says a ban on passengers carrying liquids on international flights may be lifted as soon as 2012, but U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano says it's too early to tell.

Napolitano said the announcement may be premature because the technology needed to ease restrictions on liquids is not yet ready. The U.S. security chief spoke September 28 in response to remarks from International Civil Aviation Organization Secretary-General Raymond Benjamin, who said the security equipment put in most airports should allow the ban to be lifted soon.

Napolitano spoke in Montreal, where she is participating in the ICAO assembly on global aviation standards. Meetings began September 28 and are set to last through October 8. More than 190 member countries sent delegations to the talks, which focus on aviation safety and security standards.

The United States is urging nations to sign a joint declaration to strengthen worldwide aviation security measures against terrorist threats. During the past nine months, similar declarations have been negotiated at regional security meetings in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere.

The push to improve aviation safety standards follows a terrorist plot in 2006 in which alleged terrorists were planning to use liquid explosives to attack trans-Atlantic flights. A ban was placed on passengers boarding flights with liquids and gels. The European Union, though, has announced that it will phase out the liquids restrictions beginning in 2013.

What has also triggered additional aviation security measures was a threat from a powdered bomb after a failed plot to bomb a U.S. airliner on December 25, 2009. Federal authorities say Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab tried to detonate a bomb hidden in his underwear during a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit.

Napolitano said enhanced security will better protect global aviation from such "evolving terrorist threats." She is urging countries to use body scanners and other technology to detect both metallic and nonmetallic explosives, such as plastic and powdered bombs.

The United States has begun checking passenger names against flight watch lists, adding to air carriers' checks. Napolitano said this is one of many measures recently

adopted in the United States to increase flight safety.

She offered support for the ICAO's strategy to establish future global aviation security standards.

High-Level U.S. Delegation Attending Nigeria's 50th Celebration

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama is sending a high-level delegation to attend Nigeria's 50th anniversary independence celebration October 1, reflecting the high level of importance the United States places on the U.S.-Nigeria bilateral relationship.

Looking ahead, the United States sees Nigeria's 2011 presidential election as an event of major importance that could reflect an enormous "paradigm shift," reaffirming Nigeria's long-term commitment to democracy.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson made those points during a September 29 telephone press briefing with Nigerian reporters based in Lagos and Abuja. Carson spoke from his office at the State Department in Washington, just prior to leaving for Nigeria.

Asked about the 50th anniversary celebration, Carson told the reporters that the U.S. delegation, of which he will be a member, will be headed by Rajiv Shah, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and will also include Walter C. Jones, the U.S. executive director to the African Development Bank, and James P. McAnulty, the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. diplomatic mission to Nigeria.

"We are undertaking this presidential mission to Nigeria to reflect the importance the United States attaches to its relationship to Nigeria," Carson told his audience. "The United States regards Nigeria as one of the two or three most important countries on the continent. It is important in and of itself as the most populous state in Africa and one of the largest Muslim states in the world. It is also important to the region as the largest economy and the most dynamic business and commercial center in West Africa."

Additionally, Carson said Nigeria is important to the global community and West Africa because of the enormous effort that it puts into providing regional stability by supplying peacekeepers who participate in U.N. operations. Nigeria's "efforts in support of stability in West Africa are widely known and widely praised because of what it did in both Sierra Leone and Liberia and what it is doing today as part of the peacekeeping operations in Darfur," he said.

Nigeria is also important to the United States because it is one of the global community's major producers of oil and the fourth-largest supplier of petroleum to the United States, he added. "We value the important relationship with Nigeria and, as a reflection of that, I point out that President Goodluck Jonathan was in New York last week and had an opportunity meet with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton."

Over the past months as well, Carson explained, President Jonathan has had the opportunity to hold talks with President Obama. "We regard this as an important relationship with the United States and we believe that it is important for us to be at this 50th anniversary to celebrate what we hope will be 50 years of looking forward to building on the country's democratic transformation."

Asked about the upcoming presidential elections in Nigeria, Carson said they are "extremely important" for the people of Nigeria. "It is an opportunity for people to cast their votes for candidates of their choosing, but it is also an opportunity for Nigeria to solidify its commitment to democracy. It is extremely important that the elections to be held next year be substantially better than the presidential and national elections that were held in 2007 and better than the elections that were held in 2003," he said.

There is no doubt, he said, that there was a "great deal of disappointment with the way that the last presidential elections were held in 2007." The United States, he told the reporters, applauds the electoral reforms that have taken place and the appointment of a new elections commissioner who shows "great integrity ... professionalism and independence."

Carson explained that the United States hopes the forthcoming elections are "free, fair, transparent and reflect the aspirations and the will of the people. It is important that that Nigerians have an opportunity to vote," as citizens of Africa's largest democracy, he added.

"The success of the 2011 elections could be an enormous paradigm shift for the country," he said. "It could, in effect, signal to all of the world that Nigeria is firmly committed to a democratic path, that its democratic institutions are growing stronger and its commitment to democracy is growing deeper." It is through the mechanisms of democracy, he said, that Nigeria will be able to realize its enormous economic and social potential.

Asked how the United States plans to further strengthen its bilateral relationship with Nigeria, Carson said immediately following Secretary Clinton's very successful visit to Abuja in 2009 the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission was established.

"We are pleased to say today that under the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan and the current foreign minister that we have not only established the ... commission this year, but we are also actively working in the four subcommittees and working groups that have been established," he said. Carson reminded his audience that the United States has only three U.S. strategic binational commissions in Africa and does not intend to establish any more in the foreseeable future. "The three are with countries that we think are extraordinarily important for different reasons: Nigeria; South Africa and Angola," he said.

The establishment of the binational commission with Nigeria and other factors that have already been detailed, he told his audience, "signal the value that we place on this relationship. This is a valued and important relationship and is valued and important because it is based on democratic principles, shared values and shared attitudes."

Carson said he hopes the commission will be the source of a "growing and more vibrant dialogue," open up even greater economic and commercial opportunities between both countries and further strengthen the political bilateral relationship as well.

Iranian Human Rights Abusers Slapped With U.S. Sanctions

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – For the first time, the United States is sanctioning individuals inside Iran for human rights abuses, using a recently enacted law to seize U.S. assets and deny visas to individuals who are responsible for or complicit in serious human rights violations against the Iranian people during or after the country's disputed June 2009 presidential election.

In a September 29 statement, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said the Obama administration "will always stand with those in Iran who aspire to have their voices heard," following President Obama's signing of an executive order that designates eight senior officials in the Iranian government for financial and travel sanctions.

"As the president noted in his recent address to the United Nations General Assembly, human rights are a matter of moral and pragmatic necessity for the United States," Gibbs said. "We will be a voice for those aspirations that are universal, and we continue to call upon the Iranian government to respect the rights of its people."

According to a September 29 White House fact sheet, the eight individuals are Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander

of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); Sadeq Mahsouli, current minister of welfare and security and former minister of the interior; Qolam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, current prosecutor-general of Iran and former minister of intelligence; Saeed Mortazavi, former prosecutor-general of Tehran; Heydar Moslehi, minister of intelligence; Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, current minister of the interior and former deputy commander of the Armed Forces for law enforcement; Ahmad-Reza Radan, deputy chief of Iran's National Police; and Hossein Taeb, current deputy IRGC commander for intelligence and former commander of the IRGC's Basij forces.

The executive order freezes any U.S. assets that those eight individuals may have, makes them ineligible to obtain a U.S. visa and prohibits American individuals and entities from doing business with them.

Gibbs said the list of names in the executive order "is not exhaustive and will continue to grow based on events in Iran, and as additional information and evidence becomes available."

According to the State Department's 2009 Human Rights Report on Iran, released in March, the Iranian government's already poor human rights record "degenerated" following the country's disputed June 12, 2009, presidential election, with a rise in politically motivated violence by security forces against civilian protesters.

"Security forces were implicated in custodial deaths and the killings of election protesters and committed other acts of politically motivated violence, including torture, beatings, and rape," the report stated. There were also arbitrary arrests of individuals who were often held incommunicado, executions that followed unfair trials, and severe officially sanctioned punishments, "including death by stoning, amputation, and flogging," among other abuses, the report said.

"The official death count was 37, but opposition groups reported approximately 70 individuals died, and human rights organizations suggested as many as 200. In August the judiciary estimated that authorities detained approximately 4,000 persons," according to the report.

Speaking to reporters September 29, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said it is "the first time the United States has imposed sanctions against Iran based on human rights abuses," and the action is authorized under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010.

"We now have at our disposal a new tool that allows us to designate individual Iranians, officials responsible for or

complicit in serious human rights violations, and do so in a way that does not in any way impact on the well-being of the Iranian people themselves," she said.

By doing so, "we declare our solidarity with their victims and with all Iranians who wish for a government that respects their human rights and their dignity and their freedom," as well as strong U.S. support for the rule of law and for those who are "unable to speak for themselves because they are jailed or frightened or fear retribution against themselves or their families," Clinton said.

Clinton said the Iranian regime has thus far "been impervious" to U.S. and international pleas against the wave of repression that followed the election, and that Iran's actions contradict claims in President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's September 23 address to the United Nations General Assembly in which he said Iranians enjoy the right of free expression and are not imprisoned for political reasons.

By imposing financial and travel restrictions against Iranian human rights abusers, President Obama is sending a message that "the United States stands up for the universal rights of all people" and will hold individuals and governments accountable for their actions, Clinton said.

Speaking with Clinton, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said that the Obama administration has found that "when we single out individuals and expose their conduct, banks, businesses, and governments around the world respond by cutting off their economic and financial dealings" with them.

The strategy has led "a growing number of companies and financial institutions in countries around the world [to] cut or substantially curtail their financial ties with Iran" after deciding that the risks of continuing to do business with those individuals or entities "are too great," he said.

In designating specific Iranian targets, "our goal is not to hurt the Iranian people," Geithner said. "Our goal is to enact strong, effective measures that will pressure the leadership of Iran to abandon their dangerous course."

Improving U.S. Development Assistance Seen as Moral Imperative

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama has made development one of the three pillars of U.S. foreign affairs along with diplomacy and defense because development has become a moral imperative as well as a strategic and economic

imperative, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Obama announced the new U.S. Global Development Policy during remarks at the United Nations September 22 at the Millennium Development Goals Summit. The president said his approach reflects the need for transformational change and allows more people to assume control of their own destiny.

"It's rooted in America's enduring commitment to the dignity and potential of every human being," Obama said. Development is helping nations move from poverty to prosperity and not by aid alone. If the international community continues to do the same things the same way, some modest progress may be made, but the opportunity to reach development goals will be missed, Obama said.

"We are making sure that development is an integral part of America's national security policy, and it is part of an integrated approach that includes development, diplomacy and defense," Clinton said. "We truly are elevating development to the highest levels of the United States government."

In Iraq and in Afghanistan it became clear that to be successful beyond assuring security, it was essential to improve development, governance and the rule of law, she said.

The United States wants to make investments in development on a basis of partnership, not patronage, she said. "We want to make sure that we look to country-led and country-owned strategies so that we are not just chasing the idea of development without seeing it become sustainable," Clinton said September 28 at the annual U.S. Global Leadership Coalition Conference in Washington.

At the conference, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said economic growth in a nation matters because without it no country will have the resources to educate children or ensure access to health care.

"But of course it's not just enough to be for growth," Geithner said. "Unless you're making sure countries are investing their resources, scarce resources, in educating women, girls, in basic health care, you're not going to have sustainable economic growth."

Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the conference that there are both short-term and long-term objectives to the development policy. Without sustainable development, Gates said, for example, there will not be success in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"What we've discovered as we went along and we sort of

came to it, I think, way late, was that the civilian side of the government in the arena of development was significantly under-resourced," Gates said. "Development creates stability. It contributes to better governance."

"In the fights that we're in, the civilian component is absolutely critical to success," Gates said.

In the longer term, Gates said, development aid that helps prevent conflict reduces the need to use military power. Development aid can contribute to stability and good governance. "If you are able to do those things ... in a focused and sustainable way, then it may be unnecessary for us to send soldiers," Gates said.

USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah told the conference that the new Global Development Policy is a type of road map for how to rebuild U.S. development and his agency.

"There's a way to do [development] in a way that is smart, is results oriented, is focused on knowing how to spend resources and cooperate and design policies and build governance in environments where you get real results," Shah said.

USAID, he added, has had real experience to draw from in its global operations. "This policy is a license to take that knowledge and use that evidence and make some real shifts in how we actually allocate resources, design programs," he said.

A major part of the new approach for USAID, Shah said, will be in greater coordination across the U.S. government and applying resources in specific focus areas — which include basic food and agriculture, global health, sustainable economic growth and democratic governance.

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