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State's Blake Examines U.S. Relations in South Asia

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A shift has been occurring in U.S. foreign policy, from being heavily focused on Europe to being focused on Asia, and three South Asian nations — India, Pakistan and Afghanistan — have become among the highest strategic priorities of the current administration, says Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake.

“President Obama has called India our indispensable partner for the 21st century,” Blake said in a speech at the San Diego World Affairs Council September 30. He was in California to address the emerging role of U.S. foreign policy in South Asia. Blake is the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs.

But even though India, Pakistan and Afghanistan receive much of the focus from the news media and foreign policy analysts, Blake said, they should not overshadow recent developments in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan that have positive ramifications for the region.

Blake said that in the case of India, the United States recognizes that no other country has the thriving democracy, economic promise, human capital and growing record of cooperation that India does. “For over a decade, our relationship with India has been moving on a rapidly advancing trajectory, based on our converging values and interests,” he said.

India and Pakistan are of such importance, the United States has developed a strategic dialogue with each. These dialogues are among only about a half-dozen such relationships the United States has with other nations.

A strategic dialogue covers a range of issues from common security interests and defense cooperation to nuclear nonproliferation, education, health care, women’s empowerment, and climate change and energy security. The dialogue is not limited to consultations between the two governments, but includes the private sector and academia.

President Obama is scheduled to travel to India in November for consultations, and the next meeting of the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue will be held in the first half of 2011. The strategic dialogue last met in Washington in June.

Bangladesh’s recent economic growth and social advances have helped millions of people to emerge from poverty, Blake said. And he cited the recent end to devastating civil wars in Sri Lanka and Nepal that have ushered in

new eras of peace, reconciliation and prosperity.

The peaceful democratic transitions in Maldives and Bhutan serve as regional models of cooperation and stability, he added.

During the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly, Bangladesh and Nepal were among the six nations cited for outstanding achievement in meeting Millennium Development Goal targets, Blake said. “Bangladesh has reduced child mortality by more than two-thirds, and is on track to meet their 2015 target well ahead of schedule,” he said.

“They have also been particularly successful at reducing the number of chronically food-insecure — from 40 [million] to 27 million — and at reducing gender inequality in schools and in the labor force,” Blake said. The United States has invested \$5 billion in Bangladesh over the past four decades through programs supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Steady economic growth over the last two decades has been another factor in lifting millions of Bangladeshis out of poverty.

Sri Lanka achieved a milestone, Blake said, when the government was successful in defeating the terrorist organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May 2009 after nearly three decades of conflict that cost thousands of lives. “I have returned to Sri Lanka several times since the end of the war and observed a renewed sense of purpose among its people,” he said. Blake was the U.S. ambassador to Sri Lanka from 2006 to 2009.

In the past 15 months, Sri Lanka’s stock market has risen “an astounding 150 percent” to become the highest performing stock market in Asia. But at the same time, healing the wounds of war and securing a lasting peace and prosperity for Sri Lanka means that a range of humanitarian, political and other measures must be taken to ensure that the Tamils have a future of hope, opportunity and dignity, Blake said.

Blake said Bhutan, under the leadership of its fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, emphasized balanced, sustainable development, modern education, decentralization of government, the development of hydroelectricity and high-end, low-impact tourism that helps preserve its traditional culture.

“Bhutan has recently stated that they view the tragic and devastating floods in Pakistan as indicative of the cost of climate change adaption — particularly worrisome for mountainous countries — and as a result will host a Mountain Country Summit for the eastern Himalaya

countries," Blake said. "We welcome this type of leadership by Bhutan."

Blake also cited the success of Bhutan's first open parliamentary elections held in 2007 and in 2008 and the ratification of a new constitution in July 2008.

U.S. Trade Policy Extremely Open, World Trade Organization Finds

By Bridget Hunter
Staff Writer

Washington — "The U.S. trade and investment regimes are among the most open in the world," the World Trade Organization (WTO) Secretariat reported September 29 in its 10th review of the trade policies and practices of the United States.

"Like most other WTO Members, the United States very largely resisted pressures to respond to the global economic recession by tightening restrictions on imports," the Secretariat reported in its executive summary. "The restraint shown by the United States helped forestall a worldwide slide into protectionism."

Because surveillance of national trade policies is fundamentally important to the work of the WTO, the organization has established a trade policy review mechanism under which all WTO members are examined periodically. The frequency of each country's review varies according to its share of world trade. The previous review of U.S. trade policies took place in 2008.

Deputy U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Michael Punke, introducing the report at a WTO meeting in Geneva, thanked the Secretariat for its efforts and its diligent fulfillment of "its role as objective observer and its duty to seek consistency" in trade reviews.

Punke, who serves as U.S. ambassador to the WTO, said the United States had answered more than 1,200 questions submitted by WTO members in preparation for the review, a response consistent with the United States' commitment to openness.

"U.S. trade policy and the U.S. government's trade policy priorities are no secret to this body or to the world," he said. "The United States has been reporting U.S. trade policy priorities and activities to the American people for the past 55 years. ... The Obama administration is committed to greater transparency in trade policy and we are using 21st-century technology to fulfill this commitment."

The ambassador outlined some advantages U.S. trade policy brings to Americans, including the more than 10 million U.S. jobs — one-quarter of those in the

manufacturing sector — supported by exports and the fact that exports account for \$1 in every \$10 of U.S. income. But he emphasized that those advantages are shared with, rather than achieved at the expense of, U.S. trading partners.

"As we all understand, trade need not be a zero-sum game, he said. "If we all open our markets and play by the rules, trade gains to one country come not at the expense of others, but in conjunction with the gains of others."

IMPORTANCE OF OPENNESS, BALANCE

Punke recapped the key themes of U.S. trade policy:

- Openness. "The World Bank confirms that the United States is one of the most open economies in the world. IMF [International Monetary Fund] data also show that 76 countries have the United States as their first-, second- or third-largest export market."
- Balance. "Sustainable economic growth implies a more balanced distribution of global demand than existed before the crisis. ... Going forward, it is unlikely that the U.S. will resume its outsized share of world demand, which will require concomitant adjustment from the large current account surplus countries."
- Commitment to a rules-based trading system. "The United States continues to regard the Doha negotiations [the current round of WTO negotiations, which began in November 2001] as a unique opportunity not only to solidify the foundations of our multilateral system, but to lay the basis for future prosperity around the world by expanding market access in a way that will benefit all countries — developed and developing alike."
- Sound, comprehensive bilateral and regional agreements. "Last year, we pledged to seek paths forward on approving and putting into effect three pending FTAs [free-trade agreements], and to build on important existing agreements to better achieve our goals of creating more jobs and higher growth."

President Obama has announced his intent to resolve outstanding issues with the United States-Korea FTA and submit it to Congress as soon as possible, Punke reminded his audience. He added that the president also is determined to move forward with the Colombia and Panama trade-promotion agreements as soon as possible.

"With regard to new initiatives, the United States has begun negotiations of a regional Asia-Pacific trade agreement, known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, with Australia, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam," Punke said. "With this initial group of like-minded countries, the United States is negotiating a high-standard, 21st-century regional agreement."

The Trans-Pacific Partnership, created in 2006 by Singapore, New Zealand and Chile, aims to promote regionwide economic cooperation. Officials from the eight current TPP member economies are seeking to revise and refine the TPP to reflect 21st-century trade standards, which include ensuring worker rights and protecting the environment.

EXPANDING TRADE OPPORTUNITIES FOR POORER COUNTRIES

Another important element of U.S. trade policy highlighted by Punke is a commitment to expand trade opportunities to stimulate market-led growth in the world's poorer countries and lift their national income levels.

The United States' \$1.05 billion contribution to the WTO Global Trust Fund, announced by USTR Ron Kirk in July, is "only one part of our much larger commitment to trade capacity building assistance, to which the United States has contributed \$12 billion since 1999," Punke said, citing four U.S. preference programs – the Generalized System of Preferences, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the Andean Trade Preference Act.

These programs allow eligible products from 131 beneficiary developing countries to enter the United States duty-free.

"Open markets promote growth, raise living standards and help individuals at all levels in all societies to realize dreams for themselves and for their families," Punke concluded. "If we lose sight of this truth, if we settle for less, if we fail to respond to our individual and collective responsibilities as members of this institution – we will do ourselves and future generations a significant disservice."

Asian American Named Obama's Top Aide

By Bridget Hunter
Staff Writer

Washington – An Asian American is President Obama's choice to fill – at least temporarily – a post that has been described as the second most powerful job in U.S. government.

The president announced October 1 that longtime counselor Pete Rouse will serve as interim chief of staff following the departure of Rahm Emanuel, whom Obama laughingly described as "leaving his post today to explore other opportunities." Media outlets across the country have reported Emanuel will be a mayoral candidate in the city of Chicago in 2011.

"As difficult as it is to leave, I do so with the great comfort of knowing that Pete Rouse will be there to lead the operation forward," Emanuel said. "From the moment I arrived, and the moment he arrived, Pete has been a good friend with great judgment. He commands the respect of everyone in this building and brings decades of experience to this assignment."

The White House chief of staff, an office established in 1952, serves as the U.S. president's senior aide. The chief of staff typically is involved in the president's major decisions and frequently represents the president during negotiations with congressional leaders. Within the White House, the chief of staff manages the staff, sets the tone for the office operations and coordinates the work of the many offices within the Executive Office of the President.

The position, which is filled at the discretion of the president, was first established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and, for a time, Jimmy Carter opted not to have a chief of staff, but every president since then has filled the post.

Rouse served as Obama's chief of staff in the U.S. Senate, an adviser on the Obama presidential campaign and a White House staff member throughout the Obama administration. He also had been chief of staff to South Dakota Senator Tom Daschle, who had been Senate majority leader until his defeat in the 2004 election. He is the grandson of Japanese immigrants.

Goro (George) and Mine Mikami came to the United States in 1911 and arrived in Seward, Alaska, in 1915, according to a September 30 article in the *Anchorage Daily News*. In 1918, they moved to Anchorage, where their daughter, Mary, entered school speaking only Japanese. She went on to become valedictorian at Anchorage High School and then to graduate in 1934 with honors from the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines in Fairbanks (later the University of Alaska). She earned a doctorate at Yale University, and while there met Irving Rouse, her future husband. They became parents of two sons, Peter and David.

The boys' maternal grandparents, who had retired and moved to Los Angeles just before World War II, were sent to a Japanese internment camp in Arizona during the war, two among nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans removed from their homes and held in internment camps in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1983, the U.S. government acknowledged the injustice of internment with limited payments to Japanese Americans of that era who were still living.

Although Rouse will be the first Asian-American chief of staff, his predecessors include members of other

minorities. John Sununu, chief of staff to President George H.W. Bush, was of Lebanese descent on his father's side, making him the first Arab American in the post. Kenneth Duberstein, who served as chief for President Ronald Reagan, was the first Jewish chief of staff. Joshua Bolten, who served under President George W. Bush, was the second and departing Obama chief. Rahm Emanuel was the third.

U.S. Providing \$831 Million for Pakistani Development

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – U.S. Coordinator for Economic and Development Assistance Robin Raphael signed a partnership agreement allocating the first \$831 million of more than \$1 billion in development funds for Pakistan, part of the 2009 Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act.

According to a September 30 statement by the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, the funds will be provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and will be used for programs in Pakistan's health, education, agriculture and energy sectors as the country continues to recover from devastating flooding.

An additional \$204 million is expected to follow in the coming days, Raphael said in remarks at the September 30 signing of the partnership agreement in Islamabad.

"We will implement our assistance in the most open, transparent and accountable manner, so the people of Pakistan and of the United States know where the money is going," Raphael said.

"In light of last month's devastating floods, we believe it is even more important that we consult closely to ensure our priorities remain aligned as we move from recovery to reconstruction," she said, adding that the Obama administration is working closely with Pakistani officials in that endeavor.

To maximize the impact of the U.S. assistance, the United States will work with both Pakistani governmental and nongovernmental institutions that are delivering key services to the Pakistani people, she said.

According to a September 30 fact sheet on the partnership agreement that was released by the U.S. embassy, the U.S. funding is designed to improve the Pakistani government's capacities to address the country's most critical infrastructure needs, provide improved economic opportunities in areas vulnerable to extremism, and strengthen Pakistan's capacity to pursue economic and political reforms that reinforce stability.

Of the \$831.335 million total, \$98.9 million has been allocated for democracy and governance; \$130.4 million for health; \$179.45 million for education; \$144 million for improving economic opportunity; \$56.5 million for agriculture; \$44.8 million for energy; \$111.3 million to fund stabilization and humanitarian assistance in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); and \$65.97 million for stabilization and humanitarian assistance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

On September 20, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke said the U.S. House of Representatives had authorized the Obama administration to redirect funding from \$7.5 billion in civilian assistance funds that were authorized by the 2009 Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act to assist Pakistan flood relief efforts..

"We had a very careful plan for Kerry-Lugar-Berman money," such as infrastructure projects to improve the country's water and energy sectors, Holbrooke said. But "with one-fifth of the country under water and an emergency, it's self-evident that some of that money should be redirected into other areas."

As flood relief and recovery efforts continue, the United States has thus far provided approximately \$362 million in assistance, including \$312 million to support immediate relief efforts. The additional \$50 million is being used to help rebuild communities affected by the floods, according to a September 29 fact sheet provided by the U.S. embassy.

Another \$67 million in U.S. civilian and military in-kind assistance has been provided in the form of halal meals, infrastructure support and air support. The fact sheet says there are currently 26 U.S. military helicopters inside Pakistan supporting relief efforts, and an average of four to six C-130 and C-17 aircraft delivering aid daily.

"These aircraft have evacuated more than 20,000 people and delivered more than 13 million pounds of relief supplies," the fact sheet said.

U.S.-based callers can help with relief efforts by texting "FLOOD" to the number 27722, which will make a \$10 donation to the State Department's Pakistan Relief Fund. In addition, by texting "SWAT" to the number 50555, U.S.-based callers can make a \$10 contribution that will help the United Nations provide the Pakistani people with tents, clothing, food, drinking water and medicine. In Pakistan, callers may text FLOODS to 7111, Pakistan's active Humari Awaz ("Our Voice") mobile phone network, to share information or receive flood updates.

U.S. Lawmakers, Officials Focus on Human Trafficking

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Participants in a U.S. House of Representatives committee hearing say progress is being made in the fight against human trafficking, a global problem known as modern-day slavery that affects an estimated 12 million people worldwide.

However, committee members and government officials also emphasize there is much more work to be done.

“Human trafficking is an affront to human dignity that links communities across the world in a web of money, exploitation and victimization,” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman said September 30 at a hearing by his panel on combating the global problem.

In October, U.S. lawmakers will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which seeks to end human trafficking. The law increased protection for victims and established stronger punishments for convicted traffickers. It also helped lead the way for 115 other nations to write laws banning human trafficking.

Together, these laws have resulted in a global increase in the number of victims rescued and perpetrators brought to justice, according to Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, who heads the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

Berman said that in September U.S. authorities dismantled the nation’s largest human trafficking ring and indicted six recruiters for their actions in bringing 400 Thai laborers to the United States. The workers were lured with promises of high-paying jobs. Berman said their passports were confiscated on their arrival to the United States and they were forced to work under “slave-like conditions” — without electricity, sanitation or running water.

Traffickers threatened them with deportation and took their wages, telling laborers they could not be free until they paid off their recruitment fee, Berman said. Known as bondage labor, this is one of the most common, and least well-known, types of trafficking worldwide, U.S. officials said.

CdeBaca told the committee that the fight against human trafficking is difficult because the problem is widespread and appears in many different forms.

“People are held in involuntary servitude in factories,

farms and homes; bought and sold in prostitution; and captured to serve as child soldiers. It is a crime that is not limited to one gender, faith or geographic area but impacts individuals and societies across the globe,” CdeBaca said.

Human trafficking is a \$32 billion criminal enterprise, second only to the illegal drug trade in the profits it generates for perpetrators, Berman said. It affects millions of men, women and children each year.

Berman, CdeBaca and others highlighted the importance of continued international cooperation to combat the problem, praising a new global consensus on the criminalization of human trafficking and all of its components.

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