

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

October 13, 2010

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President Obama: Kyrgyz Elections Offer Democratic Hope for Central Asia

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the people of Kyrgyzstan have demonstrated their commitment to democracy by participating in peaceful parliamentary elections only months after ethnic violence broke out in the southern part of their country.

Despite some reported flaws and irregularities, Obama said the October 10 vote “demonstrated important and positive attributes of a genuine democracy,” and congratulated both Kyrgyz officials and voters who have shown that “they are committed to selecting their government through peaceful, democratic means,” according to an October 11 White House statement.

Obama said the campaign period, which began September 10, was “competitive and lively,” and that both domestic and international observers “freely monitored the voting process on election day.”

The United States gave \$5 million in support of the elections, in which 29 political parties competed for 120 seats in the new Kyrgyz parliament.

The Obama administration has retargeted and then doubled its humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan in the wake of violence in April that led to the creation of an interim government and June violence that largely targeted the country’s ethnic Uzbek population in the southern part of the country. According to the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, as of September 24 approximately \$111 million in U.S. assistance is providing help to victims of violence, community-level economic support, aid to address food shortages, support for democratic processes and institutions, and programs to begin the process of reconciliation.

For the “next phase in Kyrgyzstan’s democratic restoration,” Obama urged Kyrgyz political parties to work together to form a coalition government that would govern their country effectively and peacefully.

“Given recent tragic events in Kyrgyzstan, there are serious challenges ahead. Yet yesterday’s vote should give supporters of democracy in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia and around the world hope, and renews our conviction to help the courageous people of Kyrgyzstan consolidate their democracy, jump-start their economy, and maintain peace and security,” Obama said.

In an October 10 interview with the BBC World Service, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian

Affairs Robert Blake said the vote marked the first free parliamentary elections in Central Asia.

The country’s campaign season was largely free of violence. Blake said, “That shows that the people and the parties themselves really see that this is an opportunity for them, they have a stake in this process, and they believe that the outcome will be consequential.”

He also said that because this will be Kyrgyzstan’s first experience in building a governing coalition, its new government may take some time to form, but he expressed hope that it will “give a voice to the ethnic Uzbeks and to other people in Kyrgyzstan.”

Kyrgyzstan’s peaceful transfer of power through democratic means offers “a real potential model” for the rest of Central Asia, Blake said.

“Longer term, we really see Central Asia as a potential linchpin in a new ‘Silk Road’ that would link up the markets of Russia and Europe with the energy supplies of Central Asia and the growing markets of South Asia, countries like India and Bangladesh and Pakistan,” he said.

In an October 11 statement, election observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) praised the elections, saying the vote “constituted a further consolidation of the democratic process and brought the country closer to meeting its international commitments on democratic elections.”

According to the observers’ preliminary report, Kyrgyzstan still has “an urgent need for a profound reform of the electoral legislation,” but Morten Høglund, who headed the observer mission, said he was impressed by “the political pluralism, the civic responsibility and the spirit of the people of this country.”

Along with the wide field of political parties that offered voters “a genuine choice,” the observers praised the campaign as being highly competitive and taking place in “a peaceful atmosphere despite underlying tensions following the June violence.”

Political parties were able to campaign freely, and Kyrgyz state media provided free airtime and print space to all of the contestants, the observers said. They also reported that the central election commission was allowed to operate independently and that voting largely proceeded in “a calm, orderly and transparent manner.”

Secretary Clinton Urges Bosnia-Herzegovina to Seek European Integration

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urged Bosnia-Herzegovina to strengthen democratic institutions, deepen peace with neighbors, and create conditions for long-term progress.

Clinton expressed concern that without reforms Bosnia could risk falling behind the rest of the region. She spoke October 12 to several hundred students at the historic National Theater in Sarajevo.

The United States is encouraging Bosnia-Herzegovina to seek European Union integration and to make constitutional reforms the EU has set as requirements for entry.

“These reforms are needed for their own sake, but they are also needed if your country is to fulfill the goal of becoming part of the European Union and NATO,” Clinton told the students.

Earlier, the secretary met with Bosnian leaders at the office of the presidency, a position shared by a Serb, a Croat and a Muslim. Clinton said she urged leaders of the country’s three main ethnic groups to come together for the sake of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s prosperity.

Her visit follows elections earlier this month in which Bosnian Serbs voted in support of leaders who want to break their part of the country away from the rest of Bosnia.

“Bosnia-Herzegovina together is much stronger, more able and more likely to move toward an integrated European future than if it is coming apart,” Clinton said. “So we do not support and do not believe anyone should support any talk of separation.”

THREE-NATION VISIT

Sarajevo was the first stop on Clinton’s three-nation swing through the Balkans, a trip aimed at showing continuing U.S. support as the Balkan countries work to build democratic and prosperous nations and integrate into the European Union.

Clinton will also travel to Serbia and Kosovo before making a final stop in Brussels, Belgium. In Brussels, Clinton will be joined by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to attend a NATO foreign and defense ministers’ meeting on October 14. They are expected to discuss the new long-term strategy for NATO in the 21st century and an update on the NATO-supported mission in Afghanistan.

Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon said Clinton will hold consultations with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton. These meetings are part of the preparations for the November U.S.-European Union summit in Lisbon, Portugal. Clinton also will meet with European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek.

President Obama will attend the NATO summit and the U.S.-EU summit, both in Lisbon, November 19-20.

At an October 8 press briefing, Gordon highlighted the U.S. commitment to seeing the Balkan states achieve full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic communities.

“We have seen in other parts of Europe that the incentive of EU membership has encouraged countries to reform, to combat corruption, to reform their economies, to make peace with their neighbors,” he said. “That dynamic will be important in this case as well.”

Gordon, who is the assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, said Europeans agree that the future of the Balkans is in the European Union. The issue will be part of Clinton’s discussions with EU leaders in Brussels, he said.

“In the Balkans, the secretary will meet with a range of government officials, civil society representatives, and she will attend events with citizens of these countries,” Gordon told reporters in a conference call. “She will take stock of progress in the region, exchange ideas and engage with these groups on a range of issues.”

In Belgrade, the secretary was scheduled to meet with Serbian President Boris Tadić, Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić and Defense Minister Dragan Šutanova.

And in Kosovo, the secretary will meet privately with acting President Jakup Krasniqi, who is chairman of the Kosovo Assembly, Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi and Foreign Minister Skënder Hyseni, Gordon said.

During her travel in Kosovo, the secretary will visit Gračanici, a Serb-majority municipality near Pristina, where she will meet with municipal leaders in the Kosovo Serb community. When she returns to Pristina, Clinton will meet with women’s leaders, other civil society leaders and youth from all ethnic groups.

At ASEAN Meeting, U.S. Defense Secretary Calls for Greater Trust

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Through regular talks and cooperation, the nations of Southeast Asia and the Pacific can build greater trust in each other, which is essential for enhancing common security, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates says.

Gates was in Hanoi, Vietnam, October 12 for the inaugural defense ministers' forum of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that also included representatives from eight other Asia-Pacific nations.

"Over the past few decades, this region has made tremendous progress in overcoming past animosities and establishing new partnerships," Gates told the ministers. "What is now essential is that these bilateral relationships be supplemented by strong multilateral institutions."

"The nature of the challenges we face today requires a renewed commitment to strong bilateral and multilateral defense and security relationships," he said.

Multilateral institutions help build regular habits of cooperation to address shared interests, but also offer the means to conduct open talks in areas where there may be disagreement, Gates said. Improvements in nations' military capabilities must be discussed together to ensure that the capabilities are not directed against others in the region and that they will be used to achieve common security ends, he said.

TERRITORIAL CLAIMS

Territorial disputes and the appropriate use of the maritime domain appear to be growing challenges to regional stability and prosperity in East Asia, Gates told defense ministers.

"The United States does not take sides on competing territorial claims, such as those in the South China Sea," he said. "Competing claims should be settled peacefully, without force or coercion, through collaborative diplomatic processes, and in keeping with customary international law."

At issue are the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos that straddle busy shipping lanes in the South China Sea and are claimed by China as well as by Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines, either in whole or in part.

Gates told defense ministers the United States is encouraged to see that nations with claims in the region

are taking steps to discuss the development of a full code of conduct that is in line with the 2002 ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties.

"We applaud this multilateral approach and we stand ready to help facilitate such initiatives," Gates told ministers. "The U.S. position on maritime security remains clear: We have a national interest in freedom of navigation, in unimpeded economic development and commerce, and in respect for international law."

Gates told the defense ministers that the United States will continue to exercise its rights and support the rights of others to transit through and operate in international waters. He said these activities are a routine and critical component of demonstrating the U.S. commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the region and promoting freedom of navigation.

ASEAN is a political and economic organization consisting of Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The first-ever defense talks in Hanoi also included ministers from Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the United States.

NATO Ministers to Consider New Strategic Concept

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — When NATO foreign and defense ministers meet together for the first time in decades October 14 in Brussels, Belgium, they will discuss the future vision of the trans-Atlantic alliance, re-evaluate its command structure, assess reform efforts to keep it affordable and decide if NATO should build a missile defense for Europe, says a senior Defense Department official.

At the center of the discussions will be the new NATO Strategic Concept — which is developed approximately every 10 years to make certain the 28-member alliance is prepared to take on new threats and responsibilities, Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary Jim Townsend said October 12 at a Washington Foreign Press Center briefing. The last NATO Strategic Concept was introduced in 1999 when the summit was held in Washington and marked the 50th anniversary of the North Atlantic Alliance.

The 2010 NATO summit is being held in Lisbon, Portugal, November 19–20, and will be followed by the U.S.-European Union summit on November 20 also in Lisbon.

"As we gather next month for another 10-year look, we'll see how things change ... to what we think might be coming at us in terms of new threats or in terms of new responsibilities that the alliance will take on and the

missions that it will do," Townsend told reporters. He is the deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy.

At a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council foreign ministers in New York at the opening of the U.N. General Assembly September 22, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for expanded cooperation between NATO and Russia in areas such as a limited European missile defense system, military strategy and doctrine, narcotics control and conventional arms limits in Europe.

"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 told the foreign ministers.

NATO has invited Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to attend the Lisbon summit.

Townsend also said that developing the new NATO strategy partly is based on the need to take a comprehensive approach to conflict where the alliance tries to meld civilian and military capabilities into a single strategy to resolve conflict based on lessons learned over the past decade.

"My experience has been that you have to be ready for many contingencies," Townsend said. "You have to have what we call a full range of capabilities."

MISSILE DEFENSE

In addition, Townsend said that a NATO missile defense capability that goes beyond protecting deployed forces "makes sense for the alliance to have," and will be on the ministers' agenda when they meet October 14. It will be the last formal meeting before the summit in November.

Missile defense has been discussed by the United States over the past year individually with other NATO member countries and at NATO, and it has been suggested that the alliance develop this capability, Townsend said. The proposed system is not a territorial missile defense, but of a smaller scale, he told reporters.

NATO has discussed a limited European theater missile defense capability with Russia, and how it can be done through the NATO-Russia Council, he added.

The United States has proposed implementing a limited, phased and adaptive approach to missile defense in Europe that is designed to protect allies from potential rogue states that have developed nuclear capabilities with medium- to long-range missile systems.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in an editorial column in the *International Herald Tribune* October 12 that NATO should develop a cost-effective and practical missile defense capability to protect Europe.

"We need to protect our populations and territories from the threat posed by the proliferation of missiles," Rasmussen said. "NATO can do it, and at an affordable cost."

"The Lisbon summit should be the occasion for NATO to make the decision to expand the capability to protect our populations and territories — and, at the same time, reach out to Russia to cooperate with us and share the benefits," he added.

International Aid Helping Pakistan Avoid Cholera Epidemic

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. officials say that even though the flooding disaster in Pakistan, which has affected 20 million people, is the largest humanitarian crisis the international community has ever confronted, the combined efforts of Pakistan, the United States and other international donors have helped the country avoid a cholera epidemic as efforts continue to provide food and shelter assistance.

"We have made a difference," said Mark Ward, director of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), speaking to reporters at the State Department October 12.

"Our success to date is remarkable given the size and the fact that we've kept a public health outbreak from occurring. So I think that we have to stay realistic about the size of this disaster. The demand on the world community surpassed anything we've had to do before."

He praised the Pakistani public health system, but said it has required help from the international community to avoid a cholera epidemic.

"We've opened 50 additional clinics. We're adding mobile clinics now as people go home in the Punjab because we know that some of their health clinics were damaged by the floods. So the international community has been there," he said.

According to Daniel Feldman, the State Department's deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States has committed more than \$450 million to relief and recovery efforts since the flooding began in late July. He said \$333 million of that total has been devoted to the relief effort and \$50 million to the

country's longer-term recovery. There also has been additional in-kind assistance such as the provision of halal meals and U.S. military and civilian helicopters, which have evacuated more than 21,000 people and delivered roughly 15 million pounds (6.8 million kilos) of relief supplies.

The supply of clean water continues to remain a U.S. priority. Ward said the Obama administration has provided water-filtration units and purification tablets among its aid supplies, as well as buying "every bar of soap manufactured in Pakistan and getting it to those people" to boost public hygiene and prevent communicable diseases.

Ward said he was encouraged during a recent visit to flood-affected areas to see that people who have started returning to their homes are not drinking the water from their old wells, having received the message from Pakistani officials that the wells may be contaminated. Instead, people are using water that has been trucked in by organizations like the United Nations Children's Fund.

"As people go home, we don't want them to fall back into old habits and just start drinking the water from the well, or whatever source they used before, because chances are it has been contaminated. We can fix that. We can take care of it. But we need to tell communities, 'Hold on, use these water purification tablets or use these other sources for a while until we can get your well repaired,'" he said.

Along with working to prevent a health epidemic, the Obama administration has also focused on providing shelter materials such as tarps, plastic sheeting and tents, and providing food. Ward said the World Food Programme estimates it will be able to deliver food to 7.5 million people in October thanks to increased access to more parts of the country as flood waters recede. The United States has provided more than \$137 million to the World Food Programme and nongovernmental organizations for emergency food assistance, according to an October 7 State Department fact sheet.

As people return home, Ward said, recovery efforts will continue to focus on clean drinking water, as well as preparing the population for winter by providing building materials such as windows, doors and roofing material for those rebuilding their homes, and giving seeds and fertilizers to small farmers for vegetables and the winter wheat crop.

Feldman said 65 other countries have pledged a combined total of between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion to flood relief efforts, of which \$668 million has now been funded. He also said that 80 companies in the U.S. private sector are providing more than \$10.5 million, and Pakistani Americans have raised at least \$21 million and organized

more than 45 relief trips of doctors, nurses and support personnel to Pakistan.

However, Feldman said, the total amount of money that will be needed for Pakistan's recovery will be "tens of billions of dollars," and that no single nation or group of nations "can be or should be expected to be able to meet that."

"For it to truly be met, the government of Pakistan will need to engage in some fundamental reforms, and in particular tax reform. And this is an ongoing discussion that we've been having with them," he said.

Feldman said the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank will be presenting a first preview of a damage and needs assessment ahead of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan meeting that will be held in Brussels, Belgium, October 15.

The damage and needs assessment "will not yet be fully finalized yet," he said, but the preview will give participating countries a chance to review potential projects and long-term needs before they commit to funding them at the Pakistan Development Forum that will be held in Islamabad in November.

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