

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama's India Visit Showcased New Partnership

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama's visit to India can be seen as the beginning of a new relationship between the United States and India as global strategic partners, working together in areas such as development, food security, nuclear energy and the environment in ways that can benefit other areas of the world, U.S. officials said November 16.

Speaking at the Washington Foreign Press Center, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake said there is "very important value" in having two of the world's largest democracies and largest market-based economies working in partnership. He said the collaboration "will grow over time because of these shared interests and shared values."

President Obama's November 6-9 visit to Mumbai and New Delhi and his meetings with Indian leaders helped expand and strengthen the strategic partnership and affirmed that it is "indispensable ... for the 21st century," Blake said.

"People will look back, I think, on this visit and will say that ... this visit really marked the concrete beginning of this global cooperation," he said.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Rajiv Shah said a basic theme of Obama's visit was to recognize that India has emerged as a global power and "has responsibilities and opportunities to tackle tough global problems around the world."

"This is now a partnership with two countries standing together as peers capable of addressing the challenges that the world faces these days," Shah said.

Shah said the United States and India are exploring ways to cooperate on technology to create solutions that "apply all around the world."

For example, Indian innovators adapted a U.S.-made solar panel to create solar-powered micro-irrigation systems that can be used to boost agriculture throughout rural India.

"Now we're working with those partners to take those systems to Africa as well, where food security remains a tremendous concern, and this could be ... the big part of the solution. So the first thing is this shift to real technical cooperation and, instead of thinking of it as a traditional

development partnership, looking at how we can work together to solve global problems," Shah said.

The Partnership for an Evergreen Revolution that Obama and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced November 8 marks "a major new step forward in our relationship" that Shah said could benefit "tens of millions of farm households." Under the partnership, the United States and India will collaborate to improve weather forecasting to help manage the risks of weather-related crop losses, improve food processing and ways to get farm products to markets, reduce barriers to agricultural trade and investment, and work together to improve food security in Africa.

"We're going to showcase this new way of working where we bring so much of the innovation that exists in so many different parts of India to other parts of the world that could benefit from having that kind of greater Indian engagement," Shah said. "That's why the president and the prime minister both made significant reference to this effort, because it really embodies a new way of working together."

Statement by Vice President Biden on New START Treaty

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
November 16, 2010

Statement from the Vice President on the New START Treaty

Failure to pass the New START Treaty this year would endanger our national security. Without ratification of this Treaty, we will have no Americans on the ground to inspect Russia's nuclear activities, no verification regime to track Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal, less cooperation between the two nations that account for 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, and no verified nuclear reductions. The New START treaty is a fundamental part of our relationship with Russia, which has been critical to our ability to supply our troops in Afghanistan and to impose and enforce strong sanctions on the Iranian government.

President Obama has made an extraordinary commitment to ensure the modernization of our nuclear infrastructure, which had been neglected for several years before he took office. We have made clear our plans to invest \$80 billion on modernization over the next decade, and, based on our consultations with Senator Kyl, we plan to request an additional \$4.1 billion for modernization over the next five years.

The new START Treaty enjoys broad, bipartisan support.

The Senate has held 18 hearings on the Treaty. It was approved by the Foreign Relations Committee with bipartisan support. It has been endorsed by prominent former officials from both parties, including former Secretaries of State George Shultz, James Baker, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, and Warren Christopher, former Defense Secretaries James Schlesinger, William Cohen, William Perry, Frank Carlucci, and Harold Brown, and former National Security Advisors Brent Scowcroft, Stephen Hadley, and Sandy Berger. It is consistent with previous Strategic Nuclear Arms Treaties, each of which passed with over 85 votes in the Senate.

Given new START's bipartisan support and enormous importance to our national security, the time to act is now and we will continue to seek its approval by the Senate before the end of the year.

United States, NATO to Announce Afghan Power Transfer Plan

By MacKenzie Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and its NATO partners are preparing to announce plans to transfer security control of Afghanistan's 34 provinces to the Afghans by the end of 2014, according to senior U.S. officials.

President Obama's special assistant for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Doug Lute, said during a White House briefing November 16 that the military transfer will begin early in 2011 with plans for completion by the end of 2014. Lute said the transition was possible "based on conditions on the ground and as a result of the surge in international resources."

He added that the transfer will be a steady, progressive process that will be carefully monitored.

The official announcement will be made during the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, November 19-20. Following that summit, leaders from the European Union and the United States will meet for the U.S.-EU Summit, also in Lisbon.

Lute called the summit a "strategic milestone" for the mission in Afghanistan and said NATO is expected to endorse an enduring partnership with Afghanistan that includes sustained support for the development of Afghan national security forces.

"As Afghanistan becomes increasingly self-reliant, it won't have to do so immediately on its own, but rather it will be reassured by way of this enduring commitment," he said.

Lute commended a recent Canadian decision to commit 750 trainers and 200 support troops to Afghanistan to assist in the transition. He spoke along with other top U.S. officials ahead of the NATO Summit.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder said that in addition to Afghanistan, another key issue of the summit will be the adoption of a new 21st-century Strategic Concept. The last Strategic Concept was adopted at the 1999 NATO Summit in Washington. Normally the Strategic Concept is developed about every 10 years.

He said the document "will lay out what the role of NATO is in this 21st century, how we will defend the allies and ourselves against new threats, as well as how we work with other countries and partners around the world."

Daalder added that the vision statement will include plans to beef up cyberdefenses and to embrace missile defenses to protect Europe against "the growing threat of ballistic missiles."

He said the summit will also include a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council — the first to be attended by both President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

"We see this as an opportunity to move to a new stage in the relationship, moving from focusing on our differences and talking about them ... to practical cooperation on a whole host of issues," Daalder said.

He said topics to be discussed range from piracy and terrorism to counternarcotics cooperation and weapons proliferation.

Daalder said NATO and Russia are expected to enhance cooperation in Afghanistan, including joining counternarcotics efforts. Russia is also expected to sign a new transit agreement to allow more goods to be shipped through its territories to Afghanistan, particularly by rail.

Future Foreign Legislative Leaders Forge Ties with U.S. Lawmakers

By Carlos Aranaga
Staff Writer

Washington — Young legislators and activists from around the world came to the United States this fall to learn about the U.S. government, to see the U.S. midterm election and to engage in monthlong practicums hosted by lawmakers in Washington and around the United States. The 114 participants from 17 countries met in Washington for a final conference November 8-9 to conclude the five-week Legislative Fellows Program, a professional exchange of the State Department's Bureau

of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Designed for legislative professionals age 35 and younger, the Legislative Fellows Program began in 2005 as a bilateral exchange with Russia. The program since has broadened to include participants from around the globe. The fall 2010 session included fellows from Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Kuwait, Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Africa, Oman, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Bhutan.

The program is conducted twice a year. In addition, fellows host reciprocal visits by young U.S. political counterparts.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a recorded message to open the Legislative Fellows Congress held at the Department of State, said, "I hope that this exchange will spur new ideas about ways to address challenges in your communities — how to bring more women into government, how to advocate effectively and govern responsibly, how to harness energy at the grass-roots level and involve youth in government."

Ekaterina Lebedeva, a city council member from St. Petersburg, Russia, a city of 8 million, traveled to Bismarck, North Dakota, a city of 106,000, where she saw the work of the city council and the November 2 election. One of 14 from Russia, Lebedeva was elected to office in 2009. "I hope more young elected officials can come from my country and from your country to mine. There is much we can learn," she said.

Giorgi Ivaniadze, for 12 years a village representative to the Vani district council near the Black Sea in western Georgia, lauded the civic participation he saw in the 4,800-person town of Prosser, on the Yakima River in Washington state. Ivaniadze was impressed by the number of people who attended local hearings and voiced their views. "My interest is to learn how to strengthen local self-government," said Ivaniadze. "I also hope to forge a sister-city link with Prosser." Ivaniadze, one of seven Georgian fellows, is a lawyer at the Vani Educational Resource Center and chairs the local Georgian Republican Party.

Julia Movchan, a consultant to the Ukrainian Rada Legislation Institute in Kyiv, worked at the California Office of Legislative Counsel in Sacramento, where she learned about systems and processes for drafting laws for submission to California's legislature. "It was a perfect fit for my interests," said Movchan.

"My visit exceeded expectations. I created four draft laws, I had meetings with legislators, and had hands-on work with many things that we can use in Ukraine," said Movchan, one of six Ukrainian participants. "It was a very

practical experience. You can hear of many things, but you can't learn it unless it is practiced."

Also important were cultural aspects of the visits, like meeting participants from other countries and living with host families. Akjoltoi Bazarov, a legal aid lawyer in Kochkor district, Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan, spoke not just of his wide professional experiences in Des Moines, Iowa, but also of visiting Amish country, of celebrating Halloween and of similarities between Iowa fields of corn and those of his native region.

The Washington meeting discussed civic leadership, women in politics, transparency and accountability, influence and advocacy, and grass-roots youth involvement. Smaller group sessions were chaired by speakers that included former U.S. Representatives Thomas Downey and Barbara Kennelly and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs James H. Dykstra, now a staff member on Capitol Hill.

The program allowed the fellows to share ideas with U.S. counterparts and fellows from other countries.

Colombian labor lawyer and activist for the homeless Johana Certuche Diaz, who worked during her fellowship month with Houston Councilman Ed Gonzalez, observed at the conference that the high cost of political campaigns could be an obstacle to political participation by young people. She offered Colombia's experience of reimbursing the campaign expenses of winners and top finishers as a possible elections best practice.

Kirill Onishchenko, a nongovernmental organization leader in Kingisepp in northwest Russia, was impressed by American civic volunteerism and by the air of "total opportunity" in U.S. society. Yet he cited lingering U.S. mistrust about Russia: "Do you really believe our countries can be friends?" a student from Langley, Virginia, asked him.

Yury Nabutovskiy, a Moscow activist, said that differences between governments need not obstruct ties between people. One thing he'll take home with him is a friendship he made with a counterpart from Georgia while working in South Dakota. "We were extremely busy," he said, but in the little free time he had, his new friend cooked for them both and on the one free day they had, they shared a car to go sightseeing.

Interfaith Dialogue Strengthens Faith and Tolerance

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Learning more about other religious faiths helps strengthen one's own, say a minister, a rabbi and an imam.

"It limits the experience of the sacred to only put God in a 'box' that comes around one's own tradition only," says the Reverend David Gray, pastor of the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church in Maryland. "So many people in other parts of the world have been struggling, thinking, praying, experiencing God and the sacred in a variety of ways. And so I become more creative, I think, about my own faith by seeing how others have experienced the sacred."

Greater knowledge about religions, according to Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer of the Bethesda Jewish Congregation in Maryland, "can also lead us to a new level of honesty about our own faith."

"I understand very clearly, of course, the Jewish message, and I am able to explain that to someone else," the rabbi said. "But we also have to face as we go into this deeper dialogue of our own tradition, the darker chapters. And we all have them." He said all people must acknowledge the dark passages of their individual traditions as a first step toward committing to overcome errors of the past.

According to Imam Abu Nahidian of the Idara-e-Jaferia Mosque in Burtonsville, Maryland, "Ignorance is the biggest problem" causing interfaith friction.

Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are the descendents of Abraham, making the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam "cousins," he said. "The law of Moses is the same as the law of Jesus is the same as the law of Muhammad," Nahidian said. "All of them said the same thing: Don't fight each other; don't bicker with each other; don't say 'I,' 'me,' 'myself' — say 'us,' 'we,' 'Him, the creator of the whole universe.'"

The minister, rabbi and imam came together November 14 — as they have each year for the last five years — to celebrate a joint interfaith service of thanksgiving. This year, the service, followed by a luncheon and discussion, drew at least 200 people from the three congregations. The Islamic component of the annual interfaith service is relatively new, having been born from the desire to reach out to American Muslims in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. But the relationship between the more than 600 members of the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church and the 400 members of the Bethesda Jewish Congregation (BJC) goes back to 1967, making it one of the longest-lived partnerships of its type in the United States, according to Schnitzer.

The relationship started as a landlord-tenant arrangement, with the BJC renting space from the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church. But it grew into a true partnership, with both sides raising funds to build a jointly used building known as Covenant Hall for a variety of activities. Ten years ago, both congregations

signed a covenant, pledging, among other things, "to offer a prophetic vision of interfaith partnership in a pluralistic world."

"May this union of spirit and space spark a flame of respect and understanding throughout the world," the covenant says. But keeping that flame alive requires constant work — at both the grass-roots and leadership levels, Gray and Schnitzer said.

"We are not going to solve problems by singing 'Kumbaya' around the campfire," Schnitzer said. "Politics and world events are going to challenge us in these kinds of dialogues."

Terrorist attacks and rising anti-Semitism, especially in Europe, are "very disappointing, and we can't control them," the rabbi said. "But we can control our reaction to them. So we need to learn new ways to react, and it's a long process. It will take a generation or two, but I believe it is inevitable as the world grows smaller and smaller."

Gray emphasized the need to deal with fear.

"The fears that come from misunderstanding breed stereotyping between peoples of all religious backgrounds, and that is to our detriment," Gray said. In an effort to combat the "Islamophobia" that arose in the United States after the terrorist attacks, the congregations arranged a well-attended conference discussing the effect of fear on American life that received considerable media attention, Gray said.

Both Gray and Schnitzer said that interfaith activities such as those of their congregations are not unusual in communities across the United States.

Echoing the commonality among the three great faiths expressed by the imam, Schnitzer said: "By finding our commonality, that's how we're able not just to survive together, but really thrive together."

Statement on Harassment and Detention of Lawyers in Iran

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
November 16, 2010

STATEMENT BY PHILIP J. CROWLEY

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Iran: Harassment and Detention of Lawyers

The United States remains gravely concerned about Iran's

continued harassment, detention, and imprisonment of human rights defenders. For example, we understand that the trial of human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh is reportedly underway, but it is proceeding without the transparency and due process guaranteed under Iranian law.

Iran's leaders should know that their efforts to silence those Iranians who stand up for the rights of their fellow citizens do not go unnoticed. We once again join the international community in calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including those imprisoned for defending detainees or speaking out against human rights abuses, and urge Iran to afford its citizens those rights that are universal to all people.

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