

American

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Vice President Biden on What America Must Do for Iraq

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OP-ED BY VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN IN THE NEW YORK TIMES: "WHAT WE MUST DO FOR IRAQ NOW"

The following op-ed, written by Vice President Joe Biden, was published in the New York Times on November 21:

What We Must Do for Iraq Now

By Joseph R. Biden Jr.

Eight days ago, Iraqi political leaders agreed on a framework for a new government to guide their country through the crucial coming years. Since the elections there in March, our administration has said that the Iraqi people deserve a government that reflects the results of those elections, that includes all the major blocs representing Iraq's various communities and that does not exclude or marginalize anyone. That is what they will now have.

While President Obama and I – and an outstanding team of American officials in Washington and Baghdad – played an active role in supporting this effort, the most important steps were taken in Iraq, by the leaders of Iraq's largest political parties. Their accomplishment is the latest and strongest evidence of a key development in Iraq: over the past two years, politics has emerged as the dominant means for settling differences and advancing interests.

Time and time again in recent months, Iraqi leaders have painstakingly worked through thorny issues – including disputes over who is eligible to run for office or serve in government, challenges to the election results and power-sharing arrangements – without resorting to violence. It hasn't always been pretty, but politics rarely is, in Iraq, in America or anywhere else. By agreeing to form a national partnership government, however, Iraqi leaders have sent an unmistakable message to their fellow citizens, their region and the world: after more than seven years of war and decades of dictatorship, Iraqis seek a nation where the rights of all citizens are recognized and the talents of all are harnessed to unlock the country's full potential.

In a country that still faces enormous challenges on the road to security and prosperity, that goal has never been more essential. The next step is for the leaders of Iraq's new government to honor their landmark commitment to share power – a pledge embodied in the new National Council for Higher Policies, whose responsibilities and authority are still being determined but will eventually be

enshrined into law.

The United States must also continue to do its part to reinforce Iraq's progress. That is why we are not disengaging from Iraq – rather, the nature of our engagement is changing from a military to a civilian lead.

Since taking office, the Obama administration has withdrawn nearly 100,000 troops from Iraq and ended our combat operations. The 50,000 troops who will remain until the end of 2011 have a new mission: to advise and assist their Iraqi counterparts, protect our personnel and property and participate in counterterrorist operations. Meanwhile, we are establishing a diplomatic presence throughout the country and, under the terms of our Strategic Framework Agreement, building a dynamic partnership across a range of government sectors, including education, energy, trade, health, culture, information technology, law enforcement and the judiciary.

In a country where extremists remain bent on sowing chaos, and where innocent civilians still suffer unspeakable hardship, the transition to a safer society depends on the continued development of Iraq's security forces, now more than 650,000 strong.

Over the six visits I have made to Iraq since January 2009, I have seen the remarkable progress its police and soldiers have made. Iraq today is far safer and more stable than at any time since the outbreak of war in 2003. More than a year ago, Iraqi forces took charge of security in major cities, and last August, when the American combat mission ended, they assumed primary responsibility nationwide. In recent months, using their own intelligence, Iraqi forces have killed or captured dozens of senior leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist groups. The weekly tally of violent incidents throughout Iraq has dropped to about 160, from nearly 1,600 in 2007.

Nevertheless, Iraq's security forces are not yet ready to operate fully on their own, and we must continue to support them. We must also help Iraq's leaders with a range of challenges that lie ahead: conducting a census; further integrating Kurdish security forces into the Iraqi security forces; maintaining commitments to the Sons of Iraq, the Sunni groups that banded together against insurgents; resolving disputed internal boundaries and the future of the northern city of Kirkuk, which is claimed by both Arabs and Kurds; passing a hydrocarbon law that would distribute oil revenues and maximize the benefit to all Iraqis; stabilizing the economy through foreign investment, private sector development and new sources of revenue beyond oil; passing a fiscally responsible budget; and bringing to a close its post-Gulf war obligations to the United Nations.

While the day will come when Iraq's vast natural wealth can fully finance its security and investment needs, and when its civilian institutions no longer require such intensive support, it has not yet arrived. Iraq has increased its own spending in these areas, and with sustained American engagement, it will emerge from generations of trauma to become a stable and self-reliant nation.

That is why, even at this difficult economic time, we are asking Congress to fulfill our budget requests to support America's continued engagement, including our broader diplomatic presence, a modernization plan for the Iraqi security forces and financing for a police development program. The drawdown of American troops will save \$15 billion in the coming fiscal year — we seek to direct less than one-third of that amount to provide needed assistance to Iraq's security forces and to our State Department's civilian-led efforts.

The Iraq war has cost our nation dearly, with the greatest price of all paid by the 4,430 heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Now it is in America's fundamental interest to help preserve the gains Iraq has made, prevent the re-emergence of violent extremists and encourage Iraq to become a pivotal American ally in a strategically critical region, and a responsible regional actor in its own right.

(Joseph R. Biden Jr. is the vice president of the United States.)

North Korean Enrichment Would Violate Commitments, U.S. Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — If true, North Korea's claim to have centrifuges for the production of enriched uranium would violate that country's claims that it is committed to eliminating nuclear weapons and would reinforce longstanding international concerns over its nuclear activities, U.S. officials say.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said November 22 that North Korea needs to "be serious about living up to their obligations" to the international community, and its continued failure to do so has resulted in the strongest sanctions the country has ever faced under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1874 and has "greatly increased the price of their noncompliance."

According to press reports, U.S. scientist Siegfried Hecker says North Korean officials recently showed him a small, industrial-scale uranium-enrichment facility, which could allow the country an alternative means of making nuclear weapons besides its plutonium-based program.

"Obviously, their claims, if true, contradict the pledges and commitments that they have made repeatedly to the international community," Gibbs said. U.S. officials, including Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth, "are traveling in the region right now to brief our partners and our allies in coordinating a policy response to their actions," he said.

The Obama administration believes the six-party process, which includes North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, China and the United States, "can play an important role" in resolving continued international concern over Pyongyang's nuclear activities "if and when the North Koreans take that six-party process to move toward denuclearization seriously," Gibbs said.

"We do not wish to talk simply for the sake of talking. The North Koreans have to be serious about living up to their obligations," he said.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley echoed Bosworth's November 22 statement in South Korea that although North Korea's new claims of a uranium-enrichment program are disappointing and provocative, they are not surprising.

"This obviously is an issue of concern, not a crisis. We are going to consult with our partners and coordinate a unified response to North Korea's actions," Crowley said, adding that Bosworth will meet with Chinese officials in Beijing November 23.

"What we've seen over the past couple of years is a series of significant provocations by North Korea," including ballistic missile tests, nuclear tests, and the March attack upon the South Korean ship Cheonan.

"Our position is clear: North Korea has to take affirmative steps to denuclearize. It has to be willing to credibly show that it's prepared to meet its international obligations" and take "complete, verifiable and irreversible ... steps towards denuclearization," as it committed to do in September 2005, Crowley said.

Indonesia, United States Partner to Fight Bird Flu, Other Viruses

By Nancy L. Pontius
Special Correspondent

Lakewood, Colorado — The new Indonesian National Laboratory for Infectious Diseases Research — a sophisticated research facility at Badan Litbangkes in Jakarta built by the Indonesian National Institute of Health and Research Development (NIHRD) — is seeking to better understand and control the avian influenza (bird flu) virus and other dangerous diseases facing Indonesia.

“Avian influenza started in Hong Kong and then spread globally,” Frank Mahoney, head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) office in Indonesia, told America.gov. The disease is “a real challenge and there has been a great deal of concern that there could be a pandemic,” Mahoney said.

Such a widespread outbreak, or pandemic, of bird flu – the H5N1 flu virus – could cause serious illnesses and spread quickly around the world. Statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) show Indonesia has had the largest number of bird flu cases and related deaths worldwide.

According to Tjandra Yoga Aditama, director-general of the Indonesian Center for Infectious Diseases and Environmental Health, the virus begins in wild birds, can spread to poultry and occasionally spreads to people who raise poultry. So far, people who became sick or died from the illness have had direct contact with infected birds, but experts are concerned that the virus could mutate into a form that could spread from person to person.

NIHRD’s new laboratory was designed to study lethal pathogens – such as bird flu viruses – that require a high level of safety and security, known as biosafety level 3 (BSL3). The head of the BSL3 lab – Pretty Sasono – completed a fellowship in 2010 on influenza at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Laboratory of Retrovirus Research in the Division of Viral Products at the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

“CDC is providing technical assistance to NIHRD on their research plans to collect critical human influenza surveillance data rapidly and to track how these viruses are changing,” Thomas Rowe, associate service fellow with the CDC Influenza Division, told America.gov. “This will provide valuable information for public health responses in Indonesia and vaccine development worldwide.”

In October, Rowe visited the BSL3 lab at NIHRD’s request to help improve laboratory management practices and contribute to strategic planning for bird flu. NIHRD also requested assistance in influenza virus isolation, serological assays, lab administration and help with preparing staff for work with highly pathogenic bird flu viruses.

In coming months, CDC personnel will continue follow-up visits and assist NIHRD in developing and streamlining its influenza research programs, Rowe said, as well as fostering science and technology exchanges with CDC and international organizations.

MONITORING THE VIRUS’ SPREAD

CDC has cooperative agreements with the Indonesian Ministry of Health to assist in monitoring bird flu and tracking how people are infected from contact with the poultry raised there. The strategy involves teaming with the NIHRD and the Indonesian Center for Infectious Disease and Environmental Health to develop methods to monitor virus transmission among poultry and working with hospital-based providers to evaluate potentially infected humans.

To help the Indonesian government prioritize surveillance and control strategies for bird flu, CDC, WHO, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) organized workshops for countries with endemic disease to share lessons learned.

Experts from China, Egypt, Vietnam, Thailand and Bangladesh shared information on best practices for monitoring and controlling the disease. Indonesia is using these data to fine-tune its national control strategies.

Indonesia also is partnering with WHO and USAID to control this virus of worldwide concern. The Indonesian minister of health, Dr. Endang R. Sedyaningsih, has discussed having Indonesia become a new WHO Collaborating Center for Influenza to study the human and animal interface leading to infection by the bird flu virus, Mahoney said. The United States supports this long-term goal as a significant investment for Indonesia.

Indonesian organizations are working with U.S. government agencies to prevent and control other diseases, including:

- CDC and Indonesian private organizations and government agencies are implementing a strategy to control dengue fever in Yogyakarta.
- Indonesian organizations are collaborating with the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) in developing a network of the leading academic and Ministry of Health hospitals to conduct clinical trials to monitor emerging infectious diseases.
- USAID, Indonesian organizations and CDC are investigating how to reduce tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria.
- To control rabies in Bali, CDC provides technical assistance to the Indonesian government’s mass vaccination campaigns of dogs.
- CDC provides technical assistance to the field epidemiology training programs at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta and Gadjah Mada University.

In addition, the NIH National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease supported a treatment trial for bird flu

and other forms of influenza through the Southeast Asia Influenza Clinical Research Network, a partnership of hospitals and institutions in Indonesia, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Vietnam. Three Indonesian hospitals participated in the study through the partnership of Persahabatan Hospital, Hasan Sadikin Hospital and Professor Dr. Sulianti Saroso Hospital for Infectious Diseases.

Manipulated Crops Can Meet Global Food Needs, Experts Say

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Advances in genetically manipulated crops could help avert a food crisis of massive proportions, agriculture experts say.

A changing climate is adding pressure to the already-stressed agricultural sector. At the same time, more food must be produced to sustain a rapidly growing population — and to alleviate chronic hunger or undernourishment in nearly 2 billion people today.

Between now and 2050, food production must increase 70 percent to adequately feed a population reaching 9 billion by midcentury, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. This will require a dramatic overhaul of farming practices along with a new generation of superefficient and "climate-ready" crops, according to a growing chorus of international experts.

Adding to the challenge is a projected decline in crop yields that scientists say will hit some regions harder than others. A recent study by the International Food Policy Research Institute showed that rice production in South Asia, for example, could drop 14 percent and wheat production by nearly 50 percent by 2050 as rainfall patterns change and higher temperatures stress the crops.

"We need multifaceted innovation on every front," David Jhirad, director of the Energy, Resources and Environment program at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, said in a Washington panel discussion on climate change and global agriculture November 18.

"We need massive investment in [research and development]. We need collaboration of the public and private sectors. We need the philanthropic sector deeply engaged," he said. "This is an urgent global problem [and] we need to utilize absolutely every instrument at our disposal."

Clayton Yeutter, a former U.S. secretary of agriculture and U.S. trade representative, said much hinges on biotechnology advances keeping pace with demand for

more food. "We're in midst of a biotech revolution here today," he said, adding that policy decisions by, for example, the European Union to ban certain genetically modified crops, undermine efforts to meet growing food demands.

"We just can't be that risk-averse if we're to respond to the challenges of hunger," Yeutter said.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is among organizations working to boost yields of climate change-resistant crops in some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable nations. The organization, funded by donors such as the United States, supports research centers worldwide that focus on bringing enhanced crops to market.

The centers have had a number of successes in recent years, developing, among other things, drought-tolerant corn for Africa and a new variety of rice that can tolerate episodes of flooding. CGIAR announced a \$600-million scientific research effort this month to discover new rice genes that will help scientists develop ever-more productive and resilient types of crops.

By manipulating crops, the agriculture sector can meet yet another challenge, Josette Lewis, director of agricultural development at Arcadia Biosciences, told the Washington conference.

California-based Arcadia recently developed a rice variety that will give the same yields but use 65 percent less nitrogen fertilizers, which contribute to climate change.

Nitrous oxide released from fertilizers on the ground make the agriculture sector the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions after the energy sector, according to a 2007 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. With countries such as China and India looking to boost crops to feed their growing populations, the use of fertilizers is expected to increase dramatically in the coming decade.

So Arcadia is trying to improve crops' ability to absorb nitrogen by changing their biological makeup, Lewis said.

"Traditionally, they only use 50 percent of the nitrogen applied in fertilizers," she said. "The rest is lost as nitrous oxide or as nitrogen seeping into water supplies, another environmental concern."

The genetically modified Arcadia rice caught the attention of a Chinese research institute that bought a license to bring the rice to market, she said. The company is now working with the Chinese government to reward farmers who plant the rice with carbon credits that they can sell for cash.

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