

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## **President Obama: New Iraqi Government Advances National Unity**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The Iraqi Parliament's approval of a new government led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is "a significant moment in Iraq's history and a major step forward in advancing national unity," President Obama says.

"Yet again, the Iraqi people and their elected representatives have demonstrated their commitment to working through a democratic process to resolve their differences and shape Iraq's future," Obama said in a White House statement December 21.

The Council of Representatives swore in a new Iraqi government December 21 in Baghdad after approximately nine months of debate. The parliament approved approximately 30 of the 42 government ministers, including al-Maliki. The remaining posts are filled by acting ministers who will be replaced by permanent ministers at a later date.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton praised the government's formation, saying that Iraq's political leaders have formed a new, inclusive government that respects the will of the Iraqi people, reflects the nation's diversity, and demonstrates a commitment to democratic ideals. "This government is a testament to the desire of Iraqis to settle their differences through free debate and an open exchange of ideas," she said in a December 21 statement.

The new government was sworn in immediately after being approved by the parliament. Al-Maliki told reporters before the vote that it is difficult to form a national unity government where there is a diversity of ethnic, sectarian and political backgrounds.

Obama said that while Iraq continues to face significant political, economic and security challenges, the United States will continue to strengthen its long-term relationship with the Iraqi people and its leaders.

The new government constitutes "a resounding rejection of the extremists who sought to derail the democratic process and sow discord among Iraqis," Clinton said at the State Department. "Iraq is a great nation with a promising future, and we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the new government to help our Iraqi friends build on what they have already achieved."

The Iraqi elections March 7 did not give any political bloc a clear majority in the 325-member parliament. While the

unity vote December 21 is significant, there are still many issues to be resolved.

"Iraq faces important challenges, but the Iraqi people can also seize a future of opportunity," Obama said.

Vice President Biden, in a separate statement, praised al-Maliki, Iraqiyya leader Ayad Allawi and Kurdistan Regional Government President Massoud Barzani for their work and leadership that brought together the national unity government.

"Iraq's political leaders delivered what Iraq's people deserved and expected: an inclusive, national partnership government that reflects the results of Iraq's elections," Biden said.

## **U.S., Pakistan Working Together to Rebuild, Advance Services**

By Jeff Baron  
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and Pakistan are working together on several new projects to help rebuild and improve agriculture, health, transportation and other services in Pakistan as that country continues to recover from devastating floods.

In eight hard-hit districts of Sindh province, a \$15 million U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) project begun December 13 will help farmers cultivate sunflowers as a cash crop, according to a U.S. Embassy Islamabad press release. The farmers usually plant wheat, but standing water prevented most of the planting this year and the farmers were at risk of losing the growing season. The program will allow Pakistani agencies to provide farmers with training, seed, fertilizer and help in preparing the soil, as well as help in reaching buyers who will purchase the seeds and process them into sunflower oil. Sarah Parvez, a USAID economic growth officer quoted in the press release, said the sunflower project "will jump-start the local economy by creating direct and indirect employment and increasing farmers' incomes."

In another project, announced December 20 in Islamabad by the U.S. Embassy, more than 1,500 of Pakistan's lady health workers in the badly flooded areas of Punjab and Sindh provinces are receiving basic equipment kits for their work in providing essential health care in their communities. The kits, which the embassy said are "part of the United States' continuing support for Pakistan's flood relief and recovery efforts," include blood pressure monitors, scales, thermometers, blankets, tents and basic furniture so that the workers can set up small clinics called health houses. The kits will be delivered by USAID's Family Advancement for Life and Health, or FALAH, program, which provides educational materials

and services to encourage early prenatal care, birth spacing and proper postnatal care for mothers and newborns.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the U.S. government is providing help for transportation with prefabricated material to build eight bridges. The bridges, though lightweight and easily transportable, can support heavy truck traffic, and they will replace bridges destroyed by the floods. Pakistan's National Disaster Management Agency, which will put the bridges in place, received 12 of the prefabricated bridges from the U.S. government earlier in the crisis.

In 11 districts in Southern Punjab, the U.S. and Pakistani governments have launched a five-year program to improve municipal services for residents, including access to clean water, better roads and improved health facilities. Under the program, USAID has pledged \$10 million over five years and will provide technical assistance as well. Many of the districts targeted in this program were severely affected by the floods and are identified as among the most underserved in the province, the embassy said in a December 19 press release. The program is funded with monies allocated by the U.S. Congress under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman act.

"USAID's partnership with Punjab will help improve basic service delivery in a transparent way," said USAID Pakistan Mission Director Andrew Sisson. "The program will help the government become more responsive to community priorities, and give people a chance to be a real part of the decisionmaking process."

The flooding, which began in late July, caused 1,800 deaths and affected 21 million people, making it a greater disaster than the 2010 Haiti earthquake, 2005 Pakistan earthquake and 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami combined, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has said. At the height of the disaster, one-fifth of Pakistan was under water and thousands of hectares of cropland were destroyed. The United States has committed more than \$500 million to flood recovery and relief efforts in addition to humanitarian airlifts and rescue missions by the U.S. military.

Earlier in December, U.S. and Pakistani officials marked the end of the U.S. military's humanitarian operations after four months of assisting in flood rescue and relief efforts. Relief flights began July 31 when Pakistan's government requested U.S. assistance; by the final flight on November 30, U.S. helicopters and aircraft had delivered almost 12 million kilograms (26.5 million pounds) of relief supplies and 436,000 halal meals and had rescued 40,000 people from the floods, an embassy press release said.

At a ceremony December 2 at Ghazi Aviation Base, Pakistani and U.S. officials thanked the Pakistani and American pilots and crews that ran the operation. "Here, we stand in the presence of true heroes," said U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Cameron P. Munter. "I salute the Pakistani and United States military forces who have worked tirelessly, shoulder to shoulder, under extreme adverse conditions to help millions of Pakistanis."

U.S. Army Brigadier General Michael Nagata, deputy commander of the office that represents the U.S. military in Pakistan, called the operation "a matter of life and death for countless people." And Pakistani army Lieutenant General Asif Yasin Malik said, "This was not the beginning and it was not the end; this is a continuation of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship."

### **Smart Grid Initiatives Generate U.S.-Russian Cooperation**

By Sally R. Rountree  
Staff Writer

Washington – Making energy use more efficient, reliable, affordable, secure and consumer-driven through the application of smart grid technology was the topic of a series of recent meetings between Russian and American energy experts in Washington and Texas. It was the first such exchange under a multiyear partnership made possible by the Energy Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC).

"The purpose of this trip is to develop a common understanding among the Russian and American colleagues on smart grid technologies, enabling legislation and regulatory frameworks, and change management within the electric utilities," said Will Polen, a program manager at the U.S. Energy Association, which organized the visit with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

This peer-to-peer collaboration on energy is indicative of the true partnership that exists between the two countries and demonstrates the great opportunity to advance in key areas when the United States and Russia share their knowledge and expertise and work together, according to U.S. officials

"Smart grid" describes streamlined delivery of energy from suppliers to consumers with the help of two-way communication systems that monitor consumers' appliances. It is a technology that seeks to achieve the most effective delivery patterns that conserve energy and lower utility costs while reducing adverse environmental effects. It can be as simple as a digital meter to turn on a washing machine during nonpeak hours, to save both energy and consumer expense, or as sophisticated as changing house heating temperatures based on sensors

that read weather conditions.

During the visit, Russian experts learned about U.S. smart grid technology and how U.S. companies and regulators interact. Russia has great expertise in long-distance, high-voltage transmission that could benefit clean-energy companies in the United States as they seek systems to transmit renewable energy, such as wind power in the Midwest, to other regions of the country.

The delegation's weeklong trip began with visits to two Texas cities, Austin and Houston. They met with the Texas Public Service Commission and stopped at municipal- and investor-owned utility companies and rural electrical cooperatives. "In each of those market segments and ownership structures, we learned how the company developed its smart grid strategy, what steps it had taken already, what the costs were, what the technology was, what the value proposition was to the utility and to the consumer," Polen said.

Nelly Segisova, chief of the Department of Strategic Cooperation at the Russian Energy Agency, told *America.gov* about the importance of the visit to the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative in Texas.

"Here we saw a very small, rural utility company – not as a pilot project, but as a living modernization – which successfully implemented the smart grid, intellectualized the grid, and they're seeing the profit coming into the company. I really wanted to understand, will it work or it will not, and it works."

The trip included a two-day workshop in Washington attended by representatives from USAID, the Russian Ministry of Energy, the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Energy Association, corporations such as Echelon, Honeywell and General Electric, and energy research and development organizations.

Smart grid technology is one of the top priorities of the BPC Energy Working Group and offers "enormous" opportunities to collaborate with Russia, according to Robert Ichord, chief of energy and infrastructure in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau at USAID.

Meetings and exchanges such as these are seen by both sides as the practical implementation of the BPC agreement. "For us, it is most important to modernize our grid sector, and [we] hope to find the best practices that ensure good solutions in the United States that can be introduced in Russia," Alexey Slepkov told *America.gov*. He is the deputy director of the Department for State Energy Policy and Energy Efficiency at the Russian Ministry of Energy.

The partnerships orchestrated through the BPC promote

further working contacts and cooperation between energy industries in both countries. "The first step was to make bridges between politicians," said Victor Melnikov, adviser to the prefect of the Zelenograd district of Moscow. "Now it's a new stage to make cooperation between cities, between firms, between associations to make concrete business achievements." One such achievement is a \$40 million deal recently signed by Ener1, a U.S. alternative energy company, and the Russian Federal Grid Corporation.

The Washington workshop ended with a draft plan for a smart grid utility exchange activity developed with Kalugaenergo, a company that engages in transfer and distribution of electricity and heat in the Upper Volga region of Russia. American utility company managers and experts will make a series of visits to Kalugaenergo "probably in the early spring, 2011," to share experiences on utility modernization and introduction of smart grid technologies, according to Polen. Collaboration in the design of a pilot project is envisioned.

Cities are also being targeted for smart grid implementation through the BPC Energy Working Group's city-to-city initiative. According to Lana Ekimoff, director of the Office of Russian and Eurasian Affairs at U.S. Department of Energy, the Russians chose the city of Belgorod for a smart grid demonstration project, while the Americans recommended San Diego. Approval by the San Diego city government is pending. The goal, says Ekimoff, is to have "governments, utilities and companies working together to find out ways of implementing new technologies and to discuss challenges that each city faces."

"Both sides are serious. They want to be involved, and want to have cooperation," Ekimoff said. "The government is just here to facilitate it, but it's the companies that have to implement this, and learn from each other."

President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev created the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission in July 2009 to improve coordination between the two nations, identify areas of cooperation and pursue joint projects that strengthen strategic stability, international security, economic well-being and the development of ties between the Russian and American people.

### **Fighting World Hunger Remains Critical U.S. Goal**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington – Providing food aid after emergencies like floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters is one part of U.S. humanitarian assistance, but helping nations

produce more food, produce higher-quality food and get the right food to the very young and to pregnant women is equally important, says Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Fighting world hunger is at the heart of USAID's Feed the Future global initiative, which was implemented in May to further a pledge made by President Obama at the 2009 G8 Summit. The U.S. commitment puts \$3.5 billion toward agricultural development and food security in response to rising world food prices and food riots.

Innovative USAID programs like Farmer to Farmer and Feed the Future are working to lift people out of poverty through agriculture-led development. Recently USAID created a new Bureau for Food Security, which oversees the Feed the Future initiative.

USAID's Farmer to Farmer program also benefits U.S. taxpayers because it helps development aid dollars stretch further. American volunteers fulfilled 522 assignments worldwide in 2010, providing direct formal training to 16,853 farm beneficiaries — one-third of them women, according to USAID.

It remains a significant struggle to provide food assistance to the hungry across the world, and also to provide the right kind of nutrition to combat malnutrition, Shah said. Over the last decade the United States has learned a great deal about how to address these problems.

"Our new approach has been to continue to recognize that we need to be the world's largest, fastest, most effective food aid provider in emergencies," Shah said in a December 19 interview with ABC News. "But this is not just about emergencies. This is about helping the nearly billion people who go to bed every night hungry."

The Feed the Future program is designed to help countries produce more local foods, produce higher-quality foods and improve targeting of children under the age of 2 and pregnant women so that they receive better micronutrients and proteins in their daily diets, Shah said. It is not just about how the United States provides food aid; it's also about creating the conditions that allow countries to take care of their own populations so food aid is not needed in the long run.

Shah told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee earlier this year that food security in developing nations is integral to U.S. national security interests, because hunger and poverty perpetuate instability, and food shortages become acutely destabilizing.

"Food security facilitates stable lives and sturdy, resilient nations," Shah said. In 2007 and 2008 riots struck nearly 50 nations because of food shortages caused by droughts,

poor delivery systems and inadequate food production, which underscores the impact food shortages can have on security and national stability, according to the World Bank.

The United States has become the largest provider of resources for locally procured foods, Shah said. "We've gone from zero in our spending in that area to \$250 million so that we can buy foods locally, buy the right foods, save money, and just as importantly, create the incentives for small farmers ... to improve their own agricultural production and really build a vibrant agricultural economy that helps move themselves out of poverty."

"We're working in partnership with private companies around the world and local companies in Senegal and Pakistan and Kenya and in Guatemala to make sure we're using locally produced foods as much as possible," Shah said.

The United States is also improving the nutrient quality of food assistance, Shah said. A significant part of the global food initiative is to target young children under the age of 2 with clean water and hygiene interventions, making sure that pregnant women receive micronutrient supplements like Vitamin A and zinc and iron.

Shah cited improvement in helping to reduce the impact of stunting on young children, which is caused by malnutrition, in Guatemala. In the past two years there has been a 28 percent reduction in stunting, especially in the western highlands where 73 percent of the population is poor. He noted that 67 percent of the children in that part of Guatemala exhibit signs of stunting.

This is a solvable problem, Shah said, adding that the United States is transforming the way it conducts development to make certain that women who manage small farms can be part of the solution.

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