

American

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President Obama, France's Sarkozy Discuss Global Economic Recovery

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy agreed January 10 to work closely together in preparing for upcoming economic summits that will address the continuing recovery from the recent recession.

"Too many people are still out of work. Too many businesses are still having problems getting financing," Obama said after a meeting of the two leaders in the Oval Office at the White House January 10. "There's still too many imbalances in the world economy that are inhibiting the prospects of growth."

France is hosting the Group of Eight (G8) major industrialized economies summit and the Group of 20 (G20) summit of advanced and emerging major economies later this year, and in its capacity as host and chair, it sets the meeting agendas.

"We discussed how we can coordinate our agendas to make sure that we are as productive as possible in delivering the kinds of reforms and follow-through that will result in prosperity for peoples around the globe," Obama said. Financial reform and regulatory coordination are among the significant issues discussed and resolved at the regular summit meetings.

"Although we are in the process of healing and recovery from the disastrous recession that we went through, we're not yet where we want to be," Obama said.

Sarkozy told reporters that France and the United States will work closely and in coordination on economic recovery issues.

"With Barack Obama, we are determined to propose new ideas to get things moving, both within the framework of the G8 and G20," he said.

Sarkozy said work includes developing common positions on currency imbalances and commodity prices that often add stresses to fragile national economies.

"I know how important a role the U.S. plays in the world, how important the U.S. dollar is as the world's Number 1 currency," Sarkozy said.

Economic issues, though, were not the only items on the agenda between the two world leaders.

Obama told reporters that the two also discussed the

challenges posed by terrorism, and geopolitical issues from the Middle East to Iran to Afghanistan. Following their meeting in the Oval Office, Obama and Sarkozy met over a private lunch and discussed current operations in Afghanistan.

Sarkozy said France and the United States are "determined to stand firm as allies on this issue of terrorism. We have no choice but to go after these terrorists wherever they may be."

France participates in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan along with U.S. forces.

The two leaders also discussed the way ahead in convincing the Iranian regime to forgo efforts to build nuclear weapons, and whether the imposition of economic and political sanctions on Iran is working, Obama said.

"We will be building on our shared resolve to assure that we're not seeing nuclear weapons in Iran," Obama said.

President Obama Urges Peaceful Sudanese Referendum Vote

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama praised the timely start of the referendum on self-determination for southern Sudan and urged all sides to refrain from intimidation, coercion or violence and to allow voters to freely and peaceably express their will.

"The world will be watching in the coming days," Obama said in a January 9 statement. He said the United States is fully committed to helping all Sudanese solve post-referendum issues such as borders, refugees and the sharing of oil revenues "regardless of the outcome of the vote."

The referendum is "an historic step" toward fully implementing the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended decades of civil war between northern and southern Sudanese, Obama said. The international community is "united and determined" to ensure that all of the parties in Sudan live up to their obligations under the agreement.

Voting began January 9 and continues through January 15. Final results are not expected until February 15, according to press reports, and a 60 percent turnout of registered voters is required to have a valid result. A simple majority (50 percent of votes plus 1) will determine the outcome.

Obama warned that some Sudanese may try to disrupt the process, and said voters "must be allowed access to polling stations, and must be able to cast their ballots free from intimidation and coercion."

"All sides should refrain from inflammatory rhetoric or provocative actions that could raise tensions or prevent voters from expressing their will," he said, adding that violence in the Abyei region, where 36 people reportedly have been killed since the start of the vote, "should cease."

The president said a successful vote "will be cause for celebration," but that "an enormous amount of work remains to ensure the people of Sudan can live with security and dignity."

In a January 8 op-ed published in the *New York Times*, Obama called for compromise over border disputes and the status of Abyei, and said the safety and citizenship of all Sudanese, including southerners living in the north and northerners living in the south, must be protected.

"Arrangements must be made for the transparent distribution of oil revenues, which can contribute to development. The return of refugees needs to be managed with extraordinary care to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe," Obama said.

The president also said that lasting peace in Sudan will require peace in the western region of Darfur.

"Here, too, the world is watching. The government of Sudan must live up to its international obligations. Attacks on civilians must stop. United Nations peacekeepers and aid workers must be free to reach those in need." The United States will continue to insist on accountability for crimes committed there, including genocide, he said.

But the president repeated his offer to Sudanese leaders, saying, "If you fulfill your obligations and choose peace, there is a path to normal relations with the United States, including the lifting of economic sanctions and beginning the process, in accordance with United States law, of removing Sudan from the list of states that sponsor terrorism."

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said January 10 that the voting "is off to a very, very good start," reporting that all of the referendum sites had opened on time for the first day of voting and were equipped with the necessary voting materials, trained staff, and "a robust observer presence."

"Notwithstanding some instances of violence, the atmosphere of polling was orderly and peaceful,"

Crowley said.

U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Scott Gration and Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee John Kerry are in Sudan to witness the referendum.

Speaking to reporters January 9, Senator Kerry said the voting "sends an important message about the ability to solve problems in ways other than in choosing violence."

The referendum also offers the potential not only for southern Sudanese self-determination, but also for the government in Khartoum to seize an opportunity for improved relations with the United States and to revitalize its economy, Kerry said.

"Frankly, we would like to see that happen, because a stable North is in the interests of the South. A stable South is in the interests of the North, and both are in the interests of the world," Kerry said.

Vice President Biden in Afghanistan to Assess Operations, Training

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden is in Afghanistan to assess current operations and Afghan army and police training programs and to hold talks with President Hamid Karzai on political and economic progress, a senior U.S. administration official says.

Shortly after arriving in Kabul January 10, Biden met with U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and U.S. Army General David Petraeus for an "update from them on the situation on the ground" before his planned meetings with senior Afghan officials, the administration official told reporters.

The meeting with Karzai will include a private luncheon as well as broader meetings with Karzai's advisers and Eikenberry and Petraeus, he added. Some of the briefings will also focus on counterterrorism efforts and counterinsurgency training, he said.

"We've moved from the surge last year to the transition to Afghan lead that will be starting this year and concluding ultimately in 2014," the administration official said during a background briefing for reporters. "So I think what [Biden] wants to do in the first instance is to assess the progress we're making toward transition."

The senior administration official said that everyone — NATO, the International Security Assistance Force, allies, the Afghan government and the United States — agrees that 2011 marks the beginning of the transition to Afghan lead.

"By 2014, the Afghans will be in the lead throughout the country, as President Karzai suggested," he added.

President Obama boosted U.S. forces in Afghanistan to more than 100,000 personnel after adding a surge of about 30,000 forces in late 2009 and 2010 to further strengthen counterinsurgency operations to halt attempts by the former Taliban regime to regain control of sections of the nation. The surge was also part of a greater plan to eventually transition responsibility for the country's security to Afghan army and police forces.

The senior administration official told reporters that the main objective and goal is to have Afghan forces in the lead by 2014 throughout the country.

"President Obama was very clear during the review," the administration official said, referring to the December White House review of the administration's Afghanistan and Pakistan policies. "We're not here to govern Afghanistan. We're not here to nation-build. Those are responsibilities that belong to the Afghans."

The senior administration official said that by July 2011, the plan is still on track for the United States to begin drawing down some forces, but it is conditions-based at that time.

Secretary Clinton: Iran Sanctions Working, Need to Be Maintained

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said economic sanctions are slowing down Iran's ability to acquire nuclear weapons, and she urged Iran's neighbors to maintain pressure on the country.

Speaking January 10 to university students in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Clinton said, "The most recent analysis is that sanctions have been working" and they "have made it much more difficult for Iran to pursue its nuclear ambitions."

She said technological problems have also forced Iran to "slow down its timetable."

In remarks January 9 while en route to the United Arab Emirates, Clinton was asked about an Israeli intelligence assessment that said Iran may not have a nuclear weapons capability before 2015. She said the analysis should not detract from the serious concerns the international community has over Iran's nuclear activities.

"The timeline is not so important as the international effort to try to ensure that, whatever the timeline, Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons," Clinton said.

"I don't know that it gives much comfort to somebody who is in the Gulf or is in a country that Iran has vowed to destroy that it's a one-year or three-year time frame," she added.

The United States has consistently told its friends and partners in the Middle East that "there is no part of the world that has more at stake in trying to deter Iran from becoming the creator and possessor of nuclear weapons than you," the secretary said.

The regional and international focus should remain on the sanctions, which Clinton said "have had a very significant impact," and she urged the international community to "keep that pressure on."

Iran's nuclear activities are "a serious concern," she said. "We expect all of our partners who share that concern, as these countries certainly do, to stay as focused as they can and to do everything within reason that will help to implement these sanctions."

U.S., China Defense Leaders Hold Critical Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and China are working to improve relations between their militaries to manage common security problems, and also to avoid the chances of miscommunication and misunderstanding, Defense Secretary Robert Gates says.

"In order to reduce the chances of miscommunication, misunderstanding or miscalculation, it is important that our military-to-military ties are solid, consistent and not subject to shifting political winds," Gates said January 10 at a joint press conference in Beijing with General Liang Guanglie.

"Both President Obama and President Hu [Jintao] have stressed that building a sustained and reliable relationship between our two militaries is an indispensable part of strengthening our two nations' broader relationship," Gates said. The defense secretary is scheduled to meet with the Chinese leader during his visit to Beijing.

Gates is in Beijing for security talks until January 12, and then travels to Tokyo to meet with senior Japanese officials January 13-14. He will also make a brief stop in Seoul for talks with South Korean leaders on January 14 before returning to Washington. The defense talks underscore the United States' commitment to improved Northeast Asian security in the aftermath of recent provocations by North Korea.

In October 2010, Gates met with Liang, who is China's

national defense minister, while in Hanoi, Vietnam, to attend the first Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Defense Ministers Meeting Plus. Gates accepted Liang's invitation to visit China this year.

The United States and China have agreed to pursue a number of priority areas of cooperation, which were originally agreed to in October 2009, Gates told reporters. These areas include improving maritime security, which includes search and rescue; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; counterpiracy; counterterrorism; maintaining peace and security on the Korean Peninsula; preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon; and addressing the spread of nuclear, space, cyber and missile technology.

North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the long-range missiles to deliver them continues to be a central security issue facing the region and beyond. China is one of the members of the Six-Party Talks working to convince North Korean officials to forego nuclear weapons development. Joining China, which chairs the talks, are South Korea, Japan, Russia and the United States.

Gates said a working group to improve military-to-military ties has been established. The group will begin meeting and present a framework to foster relations during the 2011 Defense Consultative Talks, Gates said.

"We also agreed to hold working group meetings under the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement to discuss future operational safety and to build cooperation in the maritime domain," he said. "I was pleased that General Liang noted and said that the Chinese side would consider and study the beginning of a strategic security dialogue, as part of a broader Strategic and Economic Dialogue, that covers nuclear, missile defense, space and cyber issues."

President Obama welcomes Chinese President Hu to Washington for an official state visit January 19. Gates' four-day trip to Beijing is part of a week of activities that includes speeches by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner in Washington on U.S.-China economic relations January 12, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke on January 13 on U.S.-China business relations, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on January 14 on the broader scope of U.S.-China relations.

Liang said at the joint press conference that at the invitation of Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Chen Bingde, a member of the Central Military Commission and chief of the People's Liberation Army General Staff, will visit the United States later this year.

"We affirmed that planned exchanges will be conducted

in such areas as high-level visits, institutionalized exchange programs and military education," Liang told reporters. The two militaries are working together in nontraditional security areas including counterterrorism, peacekeeping, counterpiracy, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, Liang added.

Liang said he and Gates talked in-depth on the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

U.S. Government Provides Additional \$1.5 million for Victims of Cyclone Giri

Rangoon - The U.S. government and the American people are pleased to announce an additional \$1.5 million in food assistance to victims of Cyclone Giri which struck Burma's Rakhine State in October 2010. This follows an initial U.S. donation of \$300,000 for emergency relief supplies, including water/sanitation and shelter materials.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will award the \$1.5 million to the U.N. World Food Program to purchase food for the affected populations.

Cyclone Giri hit the western coast of Burma on October 22, killing dozens, rendering many thousands homeless, destroying infrastructure, and severely damaging arable land. Residents of Rakhine State continue to suffer, and more than 200,000 people remain in need of food assistance.

This latest U.S. humanitarian assistance to Burma follows on the more than \$83 million the U.S. provided Burmese victims of 2008's Cyclone Nargis. It accents yet again the U.S. desire to assist Burmese populations who have suffered from natural disasters.

For more information, please contact the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon at (95-1) 536-509 or visit the Embassy's website at burma.usembassy.gov.

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