

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Says Peaceful Transition in Egypt “Must Begin Now”

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – President Obama says a peaceful, meaningful and orderly political transition in Egypt “must begin now” and must include a broad spectrum of Egyptian voices, including the government’s political opposition.

In remarks at the White House February 1, Obama said he had spoken with President Hosni Mubarak shortly after the Egyptian leader announced that he would not seek a sixth term as president.

Egypt is scheduled to hold presidential elections in September. However, press reports have indicated that many of the protesters who have gathered throughout Egypt over the past eight days are insisting that the Egyptian leader immediately step down.

Obama said “it is not the role of any other country to determine Egypt's leaders. Only the Egyptian people can do that.” But he said he told Mubarak that an orderly political transition in Egypt “must be meaningful, it must be peaceful and it must begin now.”

Mubarak recognizes that “the status quo is not sustainable and that a change must take place,” Obama said.

“We've borne witness to the beginning of a new chapter in the history of a great country and a longtime partner of the United States,” the president said.

Throughout the unrest, the United States has called on all sides to refrain from violence. Obama commended Egypt’s military forces for showing restraint and urged them to continue efforts to ensure that there will be peaceful change.

The United States stands for the universal human rights values allowing free assembly, free speech and the right to access information, he said, and it will continue to stand up for democratic values in Egypt and elsewhere around the world.

Obama said the passion and the dignity of the Egyptian people have inspired Americans and others around the world, and that the United States hears their voices.

Addressing the Egyptian people, he said, “I have an unyielding belief that you will determine your own destiny, and seize the promise of a better future for your children and your grandchildren,” and he affirmed his

own commitment to the partnership between the United States and Egypt.

He cited the “sense of community” among Egyptians and between the protesters and the military, as well as those who surrounded Egypt’s renowned National Museum in Cairo to protect it from looters.

A new generation of Egyptians is protecting the country’s national treasures, representing “a human chain connecting a great and ancient civilization to the promise of a new day,” he said.

The president said the United States stands ready to “provide any assistance that is necessary to help the Egyptian people as they manage the aftermath of these protests.”

U.S. Congressional Leaders Support Democratic Reforms in Egypt

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington – U.S. congressional leaders are echoing President Obama’s call for a peaceful transition to democratic, economic and social reforms in Egypt.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, a Democrat from Massachusetts, urged the Egyptian government and security forces “to exercise restraint in dealing with protesters and to respect the human rights of its citizens to seek greater participation in their own government.”

In a January 28 statement, Kerry also said the time has come for Egypt “to urgently improve governance and transparency, open the field to true opposition and new political identities, create real avenues for listening to and considering the wants and needs of their citizens, and demonstrate to younger generations that they will have better opportunities tomorrow than they do today.”

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican from Florida, said in a statement January 28 that she is “deeply concerned about the Egyptian government’s heavy-handed response” to protesters and said it is “imperative that all parties involved avoid violence.”

“For far too long the democratic hopes of the Egyptian people have been suppressed,” she added.

Protests in Egypt’s major cities – Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and others – have now continued for eight days and stem from political unrest for democratic and economic reforms, protest against rising food prices and cutbacks in subsidies, and perceptions of a lack of representative

government.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who has held his position since 1981, has accepted the resignations of his Cabinet and appointed his chief of intelligence, Omar Suleiman, vice president. It marks the first time in more than 30 years that the nation has had a vice president.

The country is set to hold presidential elections in September, and the Obama administration has called for the vote to be free, fair and credible.

U.S. House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican from Ohio, said during an appearance January 30 on *Fox News Sunday* that the United States has a "responsibility to respond" to any country "where people are calling out for freedom and democracy."

"Clearly, reforms need to occur in Egypt," Boehner said, adding that the Egyptian people have expressed "legitimate grievances ... that need to be addressed."

California Representative Howard Berman, the senior Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement January 31 that Egypt "has long needed a more inclusive government, responsive to the desires of its citizens." He also called for the United States to remain committed to assistance programs for Egypt, both military and civilian.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, said January 30 on NBC's *Meet the Press* that Egypt is an "indispensable ally" and it is "up to the Egyptians to determine what their leadership is."

Obama spoke with Mubarak by phone January 28, and said in remarks that day that the United States will "continue to stand up for the rights of the Egyptian people and work with their government in pursuit of a future that is more just, more free and more hopeful."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton praised the U.S.-Egypt partnership in comments January 30, and emphasized the United States stands ready to offer any assistance requested in speeding democratic reforms.

Senior U.S. Leaders in Iraq Outline the Way Ahead

By Merle David Kellerhals, Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The two top American officials in Iraq told a Senate committee February 1 that the U.S. transition from a military mission to a civilian mission in Iraq is progressing on schedule and with the full cooperation of the Iraqi government and security forces.

In joint remarks prepared for the hearing, U.S.

Ambassador James Jeffrey and Army General Lloyd Austin told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that this year will be both critical and challenging — "one that sets the conditions for Iraq's continued progress."

"Security trends are good but the environment is complex," they added. "Iraq still faces dangerous and determined enemies, each with their own objectives and tactics."

President Obama and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of Iraq have committed to the total withdrawal of U.S. forces by the end of December.

"For the United States to achieve its goals, the government of Iraq must provide for Iraq's internal security, develop external defense capabilities, and lead and manage its institutions," the two leaders' joint statement said.

One of the major concerns of Congress during this period of transition is the ability of Iraqi security forces to provide sufficient and continuing security for the huge U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and its smaller consulates in Basra, Erbil, Kirkuk and Mosul.

Jeffrey and Austin told senators that Iraq's security environment will be relatively stable in January 2012 after the last of the U.S. military forces have been withdrawn from the country. They based their assessment on a number of factors that include the assumption that al-Qaida in Iraq will remain capable of some attacks, but will lack public support. This lack of support would effectively and substantially weaken the terrorist threat.

They also added that the Sunni insurgency will continue to present a low-level threat and that Shiite extremists will continue to be funded, trained and equipped by neighboring Iran.

"Violence will be masked by criminality, illicit smuggling, and extortion — a blend of extremism and crime," the leaders said. While the Iraqi security forces increasingly will be capable of providing internal security, they will still be developing the capability of providing for external defense, they said.

Jeffrey and Austin told senators that as the military draws down, civilians — diplomats, aid workers and advisers — are moving into a more prominent role to support Iraq in achieving its political, economic, security and diplomatic goals.

"The Department of State is ready to take the lead. But we need the support and resources to finish the job," Jeffrey told the Senate committee.

Jeffrey and Austin said that the United States faces a historic opportunity and a critical window to help Iraq emerge as a strategic partner and a force for stability and moderation in what has often been a troubled region.

“We cannot afford to let the gains we have sacrificed so much for slip away before they are cemented,” they said.

State Department on Denial of Human Rights in Iran

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
January 31, 2011

STATEMENT BY PHILIP J. CROWLEY, ASSISTANT
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Concern for the Denial of Human Rights in Iran

The United States is deeply concerned that Iran continues to deny its citizens their human rights. Judicial cases, trials, and sentences continue to proceed without transparency and the due process rights enshrined in Iran’s own constitution.

We are particularly troubled by the recent execution of Dutch-Iranian national Zahra Bahrami, who was denied access to Dutch consular officials. Her execution is one of dozens carried out in recent weeks amid serious questions about the motives of the Iranian government and whether these prisoners were granted their rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United States urges the Iranian government to halt these executions and to guarantee the rights of its citizens in accordance with its international obligations.