

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama's Statement on Egypt

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement of President Barack Obama on Egypt

The Egyptian people have been told that there was a transition of authority, but it is not yet clear that this transition is immediate, meaningful or sufficient. Too many Egyptians remain unconvinced that the government is serious about a genuine transition to democracy, and it is the responsibility of the government to speak clearly to the Egyptian people and the world. The Egyptian government must put forward a credible, concrete and unequivocal path toward genuine democracy, and they have not yet seized that opportunity.

As we have said from the beginning of this unrest, the future of Egypt will be determined by the Egyptian people. But the United States has also been clear that we stand for a set of core principles. We believe that the universal rights of the Egyptian people must be respected, and their aspirations must be met. We believe that this transition must immediately demonstrate irreversible political change, and a negotiated path to democracy. To that end, we believe that the emergency law should be lifted. We believe that meaningful negotiations with the broad opposition and Egyptian civil society should address the key questions confronting Egypt's future: protecting the fundamental rights of all citizens; revising the Constitution and other laws to demonstrate irreversible change; and jointly developing a clear roadmap to elections that are free and fair.

We therefore urge the Egyptian government to move swiftly to explain the changes that have been made, and to spell out in clear and unambiguous language the step by step process that will lead to democracy and the representative government that the Egyptian people seek. Going forward, it will be essential that the universal rights of the Egyptian people be respected. There must be restraint by all parties. Violence must be forsaken. It is imperative that the government not respond to the aspirations of their people with repression or brutality. The voices of the Egyptian people must be heard.

The Egyptian people have made it clear that there is no going back to the way things were: Egypt has changed, and its future is in the hands of the people. Those who have exercised their right to peaceful assembly represent the greatness of the Egyptian people, and are broadly representative of Egyptian society. We have seen young and old, rich and poor, Muslim and Christian join

together, and earn the respect of the world through their non-violent calls for change. In that effort, young people have been at the forefront, and a new generation has emerged. They have made it clear that Egypt must reflect their hopes, fulfill their highest aspirations, and tap their boundless potential. In these difficult times, I know that the Egyptian people will persevere, and they must know that they will continue to have a friend in the United States of America.

President Obama Readies South Korean Trade Deal for Congress

Washington — In the next few weeks, the Obama administration will send the free trade agreement with South Korea to Congress for approval, according to the administration's top trade official.

U.S. Trade Representatives Ron Kirk told a congressional committee February 9 he hopes Congress can vote on the deal in the spring. South Korea is the United States' seventh largest trading partner and has the 15th largest economy in the world.

The free trade agreement (FTA) is expected to boost bilateral trade by billions of dollars and help create tens of thousands of jobs in both countries. It was negotiated and signed by the George W. Bush administration, but it has never been submitted to Congress, where legislative action was uncertain. Last year, the Obama administration re-negotiated the deal, gaining more access to the South Korean auto market for U.S. companies.

The timing of bringing to Congress two other concluded FTAs is less clear. Kirk said the president asked him to "immediately intensify our engagement" with Colombia and Panama over stalled FTAs with the two countries that were signed in 2006 and 2007, respectively. He said he expected renewed efforts, including a visit by a delegation from his office to Colombia next week, to produce results in 2011.

The Republican chairman of the House of Representative's Ways and Means Committee, Representative Dave Camp, who called the hearing, criticized what he called administration stalling tactics on the agreements.

Kirk said "serious issues" must be resolved before the administration can submit the two FTAs for congressional consideration. In the case of Colombia, those issues include workers rights and violence against labor union organizers. In the case of Panama, the major stumbling block is the country's designation as a tax haven by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the related lack of a tax-information

exchange agreement.

Kirk said both countries have begun to take important steps to address the administration's concerns. "But more remains to be done," he said.

Nevertheless, Kirk said, with new presidents in both countries — since 2010 in Colombia and since 2009 in Panama — "there is a new sense of urgency" on trade in Washington and their respective capitals.

Republicans in Congress and U.S. business leaders have expressed concern that the United States is losing a trade edge, and political advantages, by refraining from new FTAs while the European Union, Canada and other major countries expand the number of bilateral and regional trade deals.

Kirk said the Colombia and Panama FTAs as well as any future trade deals must reflect what the administration views as core values, primarily workers' rights.

"We aren't creating incentives to just move [U.S.] production to another country that may not respect the rights of those workers," he said.

The administration is negotiating a major expansion of an existing free trade accord known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The United States, Australia, Malaysia, Peru and Vietnam are engaged in talks to join the current TPP members — Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore.

Terrorism Still Top U.S. Security Threat

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The top U.S. intelligence officer says that terrorism remains the greatest threat to the nation, although the primary threat from the al-Qaida terrorist group has been weakened.

"We've apprehended numerous dangerous actors throughout the world and weakened much of al-Qaida's core capabilities, including its operations, training and its propaganda," Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said at a February 10 congressional hearing.

But Clapper also testified that al-Qaida's main objective of attacking the West has not changed, despite the group's operational degradation.

Halting terrorist attacks by al-Qaida and degrading threats from others has required deep engagement with the intelligence and law enforcement agencies of numerous other nations in the years since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Clapper said. His testimony was part

of a hearing held by the House of Representatives' Intelligence Committee to review the U.S. intelligence community's annual threat assessment.

"Counterterrorism is central to our overseas operations, notably in Afghanistan," Clapper testified. "And while progress in our efforts to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaida is often hard won, we have seen and we will continue to see success in governance, security and economic development that will erode the willingness of the Afghan people to support the Taliban and their al-Qaida allies."

House Intelligence Chairman Mike Rogers said that in its role of oversight of the nation's intelligence community, the committee recognizes that the intelligence community is vital to helping protect the nation against an array of worldwide threats. "Our job here in Congress is to make sure that our intelligence agencies have the tools and authorities they need," Rogers added.

The U.S. intelligence community includes numerous civilian and military intelligence agencies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that are charged with gathering information and carrying out missions to thwart threats and protect the U.S. homeland and American citizens.

In addition to threats posed by terrorism in the United States and across the world, another major concern is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Clapper told the House committee. "The proliferation threat environment is a fluid, borderless arena that reflects the broader global reality of an increasingly free movement of people, goods and information," he said.

Clapper testified that Iran is a key challenge because of what he described as an unusual confluence of events — an increasingly rigid, autocratic, coercive government that is defiant toward the West while it continues to pursue development of a nuclear weapons capability.

"North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs also pose a serious threat, both regionally and beyond," Clapper testified.

Clapper said the United States is living in an interconnected, interdependent world where instability among nations can arise and spread quickly beyond borders, as is being witnessed in parts of the Middle East and North Africa — specifically, in Tunisia and in Egypt. It remains a challenge for the U.S. intelligence community to be able to track and report on these types of events, he said.

Other areas of concern for the intelligence community that Clapper cited include cyberthreats, intellectual

property thefts, economically generated civil unrest, international organized crime, energy security, drug trafficking and emerging diseases.

U.S. Supports Reform in the Middle East

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — It's more important than ever that the United States works with Middle Eastern countries to "democratize and open up political systems, economies and societies," says Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg.

Steinberg testified on recent developments in the region to the House Foreign Affairs Committee February 10, as countries across the Middle East continued to cope with widespread political unrest.

He said the region is confronting a "potent combination" of demographic and technological changes, rampant unemployment and, too often, the denial of universal rights and freedoms.

"In recent weeks, this dynamic has given rise to demonstrations across the region and changes in Tunisia, Jordan and Yemen — and, of course, sparked the dramatic developments in Egypt" and in Lebanon, Steinberg said in testimony.

He said the United States will continue to support broad democratic and human rights reforms.

"Change will emerge differently in response to different circumstances across the region, but our policies and our partnerships are guided by a few consistent principles: we stand for universal values, including freedom of association, assembly and speech; we oppose violence as a tool for political coercion; and we have spoken out on the need for meaningful change in response to the demands of the people," Steinberg said.

He said recent events have "reinforced the fact that absent freedom and democratic progress, the public support needed to sustain progress ... cannot be achieved."

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said transitioning governments in the region need "clear standards for participation in elections and institutions," which must be "both articulated and implemented to ensure that destructive actors are not afforded the opportunity to hijack an incipient democratic process."

In the case of Egypt, she warned against "basing the next round of elections on existing Egyptian law and regulations without clear standards for participation and

a democratic institutional framework," instead of encouraging reforms to create a more democratic elections process.

Committee ranking member Howard Berman said the Egyptian political transition "needs substance."

He said "any number of tangible actions would serve that purpose," whether they be ending emergency law, a move to bring credible opposition members into a transition government, or broadening press freedom to allow "all parties and all voices to be heard" during the election campaigns.

Steinberg said Egypt is going through a "remarkable transition," for which the "stakes are high." He said the United States has partnered with the international community to support peaceful political transitions.

"We are working wherever we can to ensure that political transitions are deliberate, inclusive and transparent," Steinberg said.

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