

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## Vice President Biden, Russian Prime Minister Praise Improved U.S.-Russian Ties

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin welcome the improved relationship between Russia and the United States following the 2009 “reset” in relations, and both express hope that closer ties will continue to develop.

Speaking with Putin in Moscow March 10, Biden said he and President Obama “agree 100 percent on the need to continue to establish a closer and closer relationship.”

It is “in our self-interest and I hope in the self-interest of Russia to have our relationship grow,” the vice president said. Both countries have an opportunity to build upon their newfound cooperation on arms control, Afghanistan, counternarcotics and other areas, and “now is the time to focus on the economy,” he said.

On March 9, Biden said the United States “strongly supports” Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization. The Obama administration is also trying to develop closer economic relations by freeing Russia from the provisions of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1974. The amendment put limits on trade with countries that restricted emigration rights, as the Soviet Union did at the time.

Putin said the United States and Russia “have turned over a very substantial part of our history during this stage and we have started to have everything new.” He urged Americans and Russians to “break all the outdated stereotypes” concerning each others’ countries.

The prime minister said it is “especially pleasing” to see increased investments in the United States by Russian corporations, such as in the area of nuclear energy.

Putin urged the Obama administration to work to end the need for Russians and Americans to have visas to visit each others’ countries.

“This will be an important step in development of the Russia-U.S. relationship if we work first to introduce this visa-free regime of exchange between U.S.-Russia rather than European Union and Russia,” he said.

Before meeting the prime minister, Biden met with Russian civil society activists at the U.S. ambassador’s residence in Moscow. The activists included human rights and religious leaders, as well as journalists.

## U.S. Wants Active Arab, African Participation in Libya Response

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration wants to see active regional participation in any potential military response to the political violence in Libya, and also says it has been in direct contact with a variety of opposition groups that have de facto control over much of the eastern part of the country.

National Security Advisor Tom Donilon told reporters in a March 10 conference call that any military action by NATO, such as the enforcement of a no-fly zone, “would need to respond to a demonstrable need and have a sound legal basis.”

Many nations besides the United States have interests in what is occurring in Libya, he said, and it is important for there to be international support behind the decisions that will be made going forward.

“We’re going to be seeking actual support by those nations of the Arab League, the [Gulf Cooperation Council] and the African nations to participate in any of these efforts,” Donilon said. “Not just rhetorical support but actual participation, which we think is absolutely critical for a variety of reasons,” he added.

Donilon said the Obama administration has been in direct contact with Libyan opposition groups “through a variety of channels, in an intensive way.” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will be meeting with opposition representatives during her March 15-17 visit to the region, he added.

“We’re coordinating directly with them to provide assistance and determine the best ways we can support their aspirations and understand their leadership structures right and their intention. We want to hear from them about the situation on the ground, what their plans are, what their recommendations are,” Donilon said, adding that the United States is also prepared to send diplomats to Benghazi to engage the Libyan opposition.

Donilon said the Obama administration is suspending Libya’s embassy in the United States and is no longer accepting diplomats representing Colonel Muammar Qadhafi in Washington. He also said that \$32 billion in Qadhafi regime assets have been seized as a result of U.S. unilateral sanctions imposed February 25, and the funds are being held in escrow for Libya’s future.

“As a new government, a more representative government, emerges in Libya, ultimately, this ought to be a very important corpus of assets to give the new

Libyan leadership a leg up on its path forward," he said.

Donilon said the United States and the international community will also ensure that members of the Qadhafi regime are held accountable for the violence they have inflicted on their own people, pointing out that U.N. Security Council Resolution 1970, which was passed February 26, refers regime members to the International Criminal Court for probes of human rights violations. The United States has been using its intelligence assets to monitor Libyan activities, and it intends to expand its list of regime officials who could face sanctions or criminal charges, he said.

"Those individuals around Qadhafi who are taking orders from Qadhafi and executing his plans need to think very carefully about this. They need to think about what they're doing to their fellow citizens, and they need to think about what the consequences are. Walking away now versus participating is the difference between the international community pursuing them to justice, and all the way, and a different future," Donilon said.

#### MORE U.S. HUMANITARIAN AID ANNOUNCED

The State Department announced that the Obama administration is giving an additional \$17 million to fund humanitarian assistance for "conflict victims, vulnerable migrants, and others displaced by the increasing civil unrest in Libya," bringing the total amount of U.S. assistance to \$47 million.

According to a March 10 fact sheet, the new funds include a \$10 million contribution to the U.N. World Food Programme's emergency food operations, \$2 million to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in response to a U.N. regional flash appeal and \$5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

U.S. military aircraft have also flown nearly 800 Egyptian nationals who had left Libya from Tunisia to Egypt, and have delivered emergency relief commodities to the Tunisian Red Crescent, the fact sheet said.

In his comments, Donilon said the U.S. Agency for International Development also has deployed a disaster assistance response team to eastern Libya to assess the humanitarian situation there, identify what assistance is most urgently needed and help coordinate the international response.

"This is focused on providing the kind of assessment you need to ensure that the most effective humanitarian assistance that could be provided by the United States and by the international community is being delivered," he said.

#### NATO INCREASING NAVAL PRESENCE IN MEDITERRANEAN

Following the meeting of defense ministers from NATO countries in Brussels March 10, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced the alliance is ready to support international efforts on Libya and is increasing its naval presence in the central Mediterranean Sea.

"These ships will improve NATO's situational awareness, which is vital in the current circumstances, and they will contribute to our surveillance and monitoring capability, including with regard to the arms embargo established by the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1970," Rasmussen said in a news conference.

The defense ministers, including U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, also discussed the possibility of a no-fly zone and agreed that further planning would be required if NATO receives a clear mandate from the United Nations to implement one.

Rasmussen said all alliance members "have agreed to three principles, which will act as a guide for any future considerations or actions regarding Libya: demonstrable need, a clear legal mandate and solid support from the region."

Regional support is "crucial" and is needed to ensure that any NATO actions "are seen as helping the situation and the democratic movement that is sweeping the region," he said.

#### U.S., Brazil Cooperate on Regional, Global Challenges

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama's visit to Latin America comes as Brazil and the United States are cooperating closely on regional issues and global challenges that run the gamut from security and economic prosperity to food security, clean energy and global inequality.

At a recent joint press conference, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described the kind of partnership that the United States and Brazil are trying to achieve — one that spans not only the Western Hemisphere, but the globe.

"Brazil and the United States seek to promote open and accountable government, civil rights, a vibrant civil society and social inclusion," Clinton said after meeting with Brazilian Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota February 23. "And we will explore even additional ways to pursue our common interests and our common values."

The diplomats met at the State Department to complete final preparations for President Obama's upcoming visit to Latin America. Obama will visit Brazil, Chile and El Salvador March 19-23.

Following up on Clinton's remarks, Patriota said that this relationship, which he characterized as "a very solid relationship," has grown over the years in a number of critical areas through economic trade, investment and contacts between civil societies. In addition, Brazil and the United States have established new partnerships to end racial discrimination and promote gender equality, he noted.

"Our intention is to build on this solid foundation and to look at some new strategic areas for cooperation," Patriota said. "In particular, we've had a very useful discussion on science and technology — how to enhance our cooperation in this area, innovation — in addition to looking at business opportunities."

For Brazil, cooperative political dialogue is becoming increasingly important with key actors in today's expanding multipolar world, Patriota said. During his visit to Washington, Patriota also met with National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

Brazil's economy has grown to be the eighth largest in the world, and Brazil has successfully extended its influence to the region and the world's stage. Brazil has a gross national income in excess of \$1.6 trillion, which makes it the largest economy in Latin America.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said during a visit to Sao Paulo in February that the ties between the two nations have been expanding as two-way trade has almost doubled since the turn of the century. Investment and fresh capital flow easily between the two nations, he said.

"Our economic interests are fundamentally aligned," Geithner said. "When the global financial crisis hit, we worked side by side to support a coordinated international strategy to restart economic growth."

The United States has pushed for Brazil to have a greater role in multilateral organizations like the Group of 20 advanced economies, which has become the premier forum for global economic and financial cooperation. Brazil has also been a central partner with the United States in promoting greater trade liberalization under the Doha round of the World Trade Organization talks.

#### BRAZIL'S INFLUENCE

"The Obama administration's national security strategy

regards Brazil as an emerging center of influence, whose leadership it welcomes 'to pursue progress on bilateral, hemispheric and global issues,'" according to a February U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) analysis of U.S. and Brazilian relations. The two nations engage on a full range of issues, including counternarcotics, counterterrorism, energy security, trade, human rights and the environment, says Peter Meyer, a Latin American affairs analyst for CRS and author of the report.

Meyer notes that Brazil is widely regarded as a world leader in energy policy for successfully reducing its reliance on foreign oil. Brazil increased domestic production and developed alternative energy resources. It is the world's second largest producer of ethanol, and currently generates 85 percent of its electricity through hydropower.

Brazil began its national program to promote the production and consumption of sugarcane ethanol in 1975, Meyer noted.

"At the same time, Brazil has attained the ability to produce large amounts of enriched uranium as part of its nuclear energy program," Meyer said in the report.

Brazil has been placing significant emphasis on eliminating poverty while advancing the role of women.

President Dilma Rousseff was inaugurated to a four-year term on January 1 and is Brazil's first woman president. Clinton attended her inauguration and said the programs between the two nations hold enormous promise for broadening and deepening the partnership.

Rousseff has launched programs to eliminate poverty and advance the empowerment of women, which are issues Clinton has strongly endorsed. The two issues are connected, Clinton said, because empowered women tend to be entrepreneurial women who lift their families, communities and regions out of poverty.

Patriota said Brazil was pleased the United States recently supported its initiative to hold a debate at the U.N. Security Council on the links between peace, security and development. Experts in conflict management believe that where there are strong economic development programs in place, the chances of civil strife are diminished.

This approach is the essence of the effort to address some of the challenges nations face and where the nations of the Western Hemisphere are working cooperatively, such as improving conditions in Haiti, Patriota added. Both Brazil and the United States are among Haiti's top 10 donors of humanitarian assistance.

Arturo Valenzuela, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for

Western Hemisphere affairs, said in recent congressional testimony that Brazil and the United States share many common interests and values, and they are also natural partners on a wide range of regional and global issues. He said Brazil was the first country to take the lead in an initiative under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas.

"Brazil stands out in the global marketplace for the tremendous potential opportunities it offers U.S. companies," he told Congress. "We will work with American exporters and investors to take advantage of that potential and would like to devote more resources to efforts that strengthen our bilateral mechanisms with Brazil, such as the Economic Partnership Dialogue."

Over the past year, the U.S. and Brazilian energy ministries have concluded a work plan for energy that will help both nations advance sustainable technology such as hydropower generation, smart grids and energy-efficient housing, Clinton said. And the United States and Brazil have recently initialed an open-skies agreement that will increase the number of commercial flights and make pricing more competitive, she added.

### **Arab-American Groups Offer Civil Society Models to Middle East**

By M. Scott Bortot  
Staff Writer

Washington — Arab-American civic activists say they are ready to help build democracy in their homelands — if asked.

The activists say they are excited to see political protest across the Arab world. And with a long history of fielding candidates and educating voters about their rights and responsibilities, they say they are ready to share their experience with new democratic movements.

"We firmly believe, as Americans of Arab descent, some of us who have been here for generations and some of us who are newer immigrants, we have an incredible connection to our countries of origin, and because of that, I think that we can play a very important bridge role when it is needed," said Maya Berry, executive director of the Arab American Institute. The group is dedicated to the political and civic empowerment of Americans of Arab heritage.

Founded more than 25 years ago, the institute concentrates on campaigns, elections and policy research on issues important to the Arab-American community. Connected to Arab countries by heritage, institute members inform American policymakers about the region and meet with visiting Arabs devoted to improving civil

society.

"We have given examples of how we have run our programs, from the most basic voter registration efforts to actual get-out-the-vote efforts, voter education ... what we do in an off year versus a presidential year. We have had those conversations with colleagues in the region," Berry said.

Yalla Vote, an initiative to organize voter-registration drives and community meetings about candidates and issues during election cycles, has often captured the interest of visiting delegations.

"When our friends from the Arab world come and see that, they always just respond so warmly to it and they say that it is perfect and makes complete sense," Berry said. "I think that it is helpful to see the level to which civic organizations are directly involved in elections."

Basim Elkarra, chair of the Arab American Caucus of the California Democratic Party, tries to involve more Arab Americans in party politics at the local and state levels. To do that takes time and effort by Democratic Party volunteers.

"We go around the state, and we find different candidates to run as delegates within the party, teaching the process," Elkarra said. "That, in turn, excites that particular community, and we see an increase in civic engagement [with] more leaders that we get involved from different communities all over the state."

Educating the electorate involves spreading information about candidate platforms and legislation. In California, for example, voters should understand propositions, proposed laws submitted for approval by direct vote, if they want a say in government.

"In local politics, or state politics, this is always the case — where there are propositions that affect the lives of everyone, but they just don't know which way to vote," Elkarra said. "Some people just don't have the time. Some people are just not that well-informed, and they want to turn to a trusted source about who to vote for and what proposition to vote for."

Sherine El-Abd, president of the New Jersey Federation of Republican Women and a board member of the Arab American Institute, said citizen participation is what creates vibrant democracies. She equates active citizens to parents who take an interest in the future of their children. "Being a good mother, being a good father, it means that you engage in your child's life," El-Abd said. "The way I look at government, especially a democracy, is that if you don't engage then you would be partly responsible for shortcomings in the system."

El-Abd, who served a five-year term as New Jersey's commissioner on civil rights, advised people interested in politics to start locally and work their way up.

"They should attempt to become a county committee person" after joining a political party. "You go to your municipal meetings, you go to your council meetings, to your PTA [parent teacher association]," El-Abd said. "You start very local, and then you grow with the system because then you develop a real understanding of how things work. You build support for yourself or your platform, or both, and you take it from there."

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