

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Says U.S. Seeks New Era of Equal Partnership with Americas

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama called for a “new era of partnership” between the countries of Latin America and the United States, saying the region’s economic growth and increased democracy means it must assume a greater role in the world.

He pledged to work with countries to continue confronting the challenges of poverty, the narcotics trade and corruption.

“In the Americas today there are no senior partners and there are no junior partners; there are only equal partners. Of course, equal partnership, in turn, demands a sense of shared responsibility. We have obligations to each other,” Obama said March 21 at the Palacio de La Moneda Cultural Center in Santiago, Chile.

Latin America is a “region on the move,” and has become more important to the security and prosperity of the United States than ever before, Obama said. Its importance to the U.S. economy especially will continue to grow.

The United States buys more goods from Latin America than any other country, and exports more than three times as much to the region than it does to China. “When Latin America is more prosperous, the United States is more prosperous,” Obama said.

But despite the region’s progress, millions of Latin Americans continue to live in extreme poverty, in fear of drug cartels and gangs, and under governments where there is corruption and an unwillingness to acknowledge the universal rights of their people, he said.

The United States is partnering with countries in the region to address these challenges, Obama said. To confront criminal gangs and narco-traffickers, it is supporting security forces, border control and police with U.S. equipment, training and technology, as well as information sharing and “unprecedented pressure” on the finances of drug cartels.

The president acknowledged that the demand for illegal drugs within the United States and elsewhere “drives this crisis.” The United States has increased its spending to \$10 billion in 2011 for drug education, prevention and treatment programs. U.S. officials are screening all southbound rail cargo to help stem the flow of guns into the region.

“But we’ll never break the grip of the cartels and the gangs unless we also address the social and economic forces that fuel criminality,” Obama said. He called for expanded programs in the region to reach at-risk youth and strengthen community-based policing and juvenile justice systems.

The United States is trying to promote broad-based economic growth and investment through regional trade pacts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and bilateral trade and “open skies” agreements. It is also working to spur investment through increased lending by the Inter-American Development Bank, encouraging tax reforms, and promoting its new Pathways to Prosperity microcredit and entrepreneurship training programs.

The people of the Americas have “shown that there is no substitute for democracy,” Obama said. Governments in the region have an obligation to defend recent progress by strengthening the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the press. They should also acknowledge that all leaders must maintain their power through consent rather than coercion.

With its decades of experience in building democracy “there’s so much Latin America can now share” with the rest of the world on how to navigate democratic transfers of power, political reform and post-conflict reconciliation, Obama said.

By working together, the United States and the countries of Latin America can accomplish their common goals of building prosperity, securing the region from crime and strengthening democracy in the region, Obama said.

He said the 2010 rescue of Chilean miners not only showed how Chile came together as a country but also how the region and the world came together in support of their rescue, which “was a truly global movement, watched and celebrated by more than a billion people.”

“When countries across Latin America come together and focus on a common goal, when the United States and others in the world do our part, there is nothing we can’t accomplish together,” the president said.

Secretary Clinton on Situation in Côte d’Ivoire

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
March 18, 2011

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Statement on Côte d’Ivoire

The United States condemns Laurent Gbagbo’s continued

attacks on unarmed civilians in Côte d'Ivoire and we demand an immediate end to this brutality. Gbagbo's indiscriminate violence against civilians cannot be tolerated. All individuals responsible for ordering or carrying out these heinous acts will have to answer for their actions.

Gbagbo's claim that he represents the Ivoirian people belies his persistent refusal to participate in the peaceful transition recommended by the African Union. Gbagbo's incendiary rhetoric, such as his recent call for civilians to take up arms against their fellow citizens, stands in stark contrast to President Ouattara's appeal for calm and restraint among the Ivoirian people. Now is the time for all Ivoirians to embrace the path of peace and to unite in rebuilding Cote d'Ivoire so that future generations can enjoy the stability and prosperity that all Ivoirians deserve.

The United States is providing humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the growing violence, including a \$4.5 million food aid contribution to the United Nations World Food Program in Côte d'Ivoire and a \$7.5 million contribution for refugees in neighboring Liberia. We will continue to assist those affected by this violence and help put an end to the crisis.

Libyan Airstrikes Needed to Prevent Humanitarian Catastrophe

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – President Obama's national security adviser says actions taken by an international coalition against the regime of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi are necessary to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

National Security Adviser Tom Donilon told reporters that the aim is to stop troops loyal to Qadhafi from any further attacks on civilians across Libya. Donilon is traveling with the president, who is on a five-day, three-nation trip to Latin America.

"The president authorized the armed forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to support and protect Libyan citizens," Donilon said at a March 20 briefing in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

"That had three ... elements to it, which are ... limited in duration and scope: one, to set the conditions for the enforcement of a no-fly zone in Libya; second, to take actions to protect citizens in Libya from attack; and third, to set the conditions and open up the ability for humanitarian assistance to reach citizens in Libya," Donilon said.

In an agreement with international partners, the United States is providing a set of its unique military assets – sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles and electronic jamming – at the front end of the effort, he said. That effort is being coordinated by General Carter Ham, commander of the U.S. Africa Command based in Stuttgart, Germany.

"That's allowed us in the first 24 hours of this operation to take very aggressive action against air-defense systems in Libya ... [and] air assets that the regime possessed that were being used against civilians," Donilon said.

Ham told reporters at a Pentagon briefing in a videoconference from his Stuttgart headquarters March 21 that U.S. and British navy forces in the last 24 hours had launched 12 more Tomahawk cruise missiles at Libyan command-and-control facilities, a Scud missile battery, and an air-defense site that had previously been attacked. On March 19 at the outset of coalition operations, U.S. and British navy ships in the Mediterranean Sea fired 112 Tomahawk cruise missiles at targets inside Libya.

"Coalition air forces from France, Spain, Italy, Denmark and the United Kingdom flew missions to sustain the no-fly zone over Benghazi to protect civilians from attack by regime ground forces and to conduct further reconnaissance," Ham said.

"Air attacks have succeeded in stopping regime ground forces from advancing to Benghazi and we are now seeing ground forces moving southward from Benghazi," he said. "I assessed that our actions, to date, are generally achieving the intended objective."

Since the coalition airstrikes and cruise missile strikes began March 19, U.S. and international partners said they have not observed Libyan military aircraft operating, and there has not been any indication of the regime's long-range air-defense radar operating.

Donilon said there has been a significant effort by coalition forces to protect Benghazi and lessen the threat posed by the regime's armored and ground forces that were on the outskirts of the eastern coastal city of more than 700,000 people. He said the specific short-term goal of the military operation is to protect civilians, which is what the United Nations sought in its March 17 resolution.

In the next phase of the operation, which involves maintaining a no-fly zone over Libya and preventing any attacks on civilians, the United States' role will change and events will be coordinated by coalition partners using NATO machinery, Donilon said.

The unique assets the United States can provide include electronic jamming, intelligence support and fueling support.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 was approved by the council by a 10-0 vote with five abstentions on March 17. It authorizes the use of all means necessary including a no-fly zone to stop the military forces of the Libyan regime from attacking the Libyan people.

Threat of Major Nuclear Accident in Japan Subsides

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — International experts provide hope that Japan is inching away from the brink of a nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, severely damaged by the earthquake and resulting tsunami that pounded the nation's northeast coast March 11.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a report March 21 noting some positive steps toward cooling the plant's nuclear reactors, which last week became dangerously overheated due to the failure of systems required to keep the fuel core temperatures in check. Seawater is being pumped into the containment structures and appears to be keeping the situation under control, even while it remains "very serious," according to the IAEA.

Fears of overheating and a subsequent release of radioactive material into the atmosphere have been focused on fuel cores and on pools where spent fuel is stored, and the IAEA statement reports progress in both situations. Radiation levels are still higher than normal at the plant, but are declining from where they were several days ago.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is also keeping a close eye on efforts to contain damage at Fukushima, according to the agency's executive director, Bill Borchardt. "I would say optimistically that things appear to be on the verge of stabilizing," he said at a March 21 meeting in the Washington metro area. The NRC sent a team of its experts to Japan last week to monitor events at Fukushima.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has dispatched 10,000 sets of personal protective equipment to Japan from a USAID warehouse in the United States. The equipment includes suits, masks, gloves, decontamination bags, and other supplies designed to protect the wearer from a chemical, biological or nuclear accident.

Rumors and fear about the potential for radiation to disperse across Japan and beyond swept the region when efforts to contain the nuclear accident seemed uncertain

last week. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported March 20 that "it seems unlikely that significant amounts of radiation will affect areas outside of Japan." The statement advised that people in the greater Pacific region could continue normal activities, and it did not recommend precautions.

"Exposure to radioactive material released from the affected facilities will be largely limited to the evacuation zone within Japan," the WHO statement said. The government of Japan evacuated the area 20 kilometers around the plant, and it urged people within 30 kilometers to stay indoors to prevent exposure to possible airborne radioactive particles.

Food inspectors are testing for radiation in a broad region around the Fukushima plant, and they have detected levels of iodine and cesium that exceed regulation levels, according to WHO. The Japanese government said the slightly elevated levels are not dangerous without ongoing exposure. Still, the Fukushima prefecture government is urging people not to eat produce grown within 30 kilometers of the nuclear plant, according to the Western Pacific Region office of WHO. The Ibaraki prefecture governor has stated that spinach from the prefecture will not be sold.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE CONTINUES

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a situation report March 21 saying that 5.5 million meals have been provided to evacuation centers and hospitals. Blankets and diapers are being distributed by the hundreds of thousands, but weather, fuel shortages and severely damaged highways have impeded the delivery of supplies. The Disaster Assistance Relief Team deployed by USAID cites limited fuel supplies as the most significant challenge in aid delivery. Rain and cold weather have hampered transport and worsened conditions for tens of thousands being housed in facilities lacking heat and electrical power.

About 350,000 people remain in shelters. The government of Japan has 120,000 national emergency service personnel repairing infrastructure and distributing supplies. The count of dead and missing approaches 22,000, according to the OCHA report.

Journalist Exchanges Promised from U.S.-Russia Conference

Washington — Building on the Obama administration's efforts to improve relations between the United States and Russia, a group of prominent media leaders from the two nations have come up with their own ideas to confront stereotypes and increase mutual understanding.

The executives, representing leading U.S. and Russian media companies – both traditional and social media, and nongovernmental media organizations – met in Boston March 2–4. They agreed to work on a number of joint projects, including an exchange program for young professional journalists, a roundtable on journalism ethics, and new communication platforms to continue their dialogue on media.

The executives were delegates at the first meeting on Mass Media, one of the subgroups of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission established in 2009 by President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

“No longer can we afford to let mutual frustration or outdated stereotypes stand in the way of our shared interests,” U.S. Under Secretary of State Judith McHale said in her opening remarks. “President Obama was right when he said we not only need a reset between our governments, we need a fresh start between our societies – more dialogue, more listening and more cooperation.”

“This is not a question of who is winning and who is losing the information war between the United States and the Russian Federation,” said Ambassador Mikhail Shvydkoy, President Medvedev’s special envoy for international cultural cooperation.

“But there is a problem that in both our societies – the Russian society and the American society – people still have their old stereotypes, the stereotypes of the Cold War,” he said in an interview. “We need to resolve shared problems ... and it is possible to do [that] today without the mass media.” Shvydkoy, a former Russian minister of culture, attended with McHale as co-chairs of the Bilateral Presidential Commission’s Working Group on Education, Culture, Sports and Media.

Reflecting the conference’s theme of the evolving new journalism, its three panels on “The Business of Media,” “The Evolving Practice and Profession of Journalism,” and “New Media Technologies” were webcast live worldwide with panelists participating in Web chats with university students from both countries.

JOURNALIST EXCHANGE

Headlining the proposals was a pilot exchange program for 25 young American and Russian journalists designed to help a new generation overcome stereotypes and rediscover the other’s country.

The idea came from three Russian delegates – two of them editors-in-chief of major Russian newspapers, the third a major television executive – each of whom had participated in exchange programs when they were

young.

Delegate Vladislav Fronin described his first visit to America, during the time of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, and the exchange program that enabled him to see the United States from the inside.

“There were very strong anti-American feelings in Russian society,” Fronin said. “As a result of this exchange ... we understood what a civil society was.”

Today, Fronin is editor-in-chief of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the largest newspaper in Russia, owned by the government of the Russian Federation.

“If this exchange is going to take place,” he said, “we are ready to receive American journalists in our newsroom.”

“They were very convincing,” said fellow panelist Eric Newton, senior adviser to the president at the Knight Foundation, which funds journalism projects. The delegates were so convincing that Newton obtained a pledge from the Knight Foundation to make a grant to the International Center for Journalists to fund half of the proposed young journalist exchange. It will include one-month reporting fellowships in all media sectors.

In some cases, Newton said, the journalists would be paired on a global story, with the news from America written by the Russian and the news from Russia written by the American.

Once completely funded, Newton said, the program could begin in 2012, an election year in both Russia and the United States.

The Knight Foundation has also agreed to support U.S. participation in a roundtable discussion in Russia later this year focusing on journalism ethics.

COLLABORATION

To overcome stereotypes, delegates proposed sharing jointly translated media products across Russian- and English-language markets. They also are devising the best ways to use advanced social media tools to collect data about remote areas in both countries.

Delegates Nargiz Asadova, editor-in-chief of the website of Echo Moskvyy radio, and Rob Baker, director of Universities 4 Ushahidi, a nonprofit training project, are working on a joint project to help Echo more efficiently use social media from Russia’s remote areas for the benefit of online readers and listeners, Baker said in an interview.

Fellow delegate John Della Volpe, founder and managing

director of SocialSphere Inc., agreed to establish an online platform to keep the conversation going, and announced plans to work with the Public Diplomacy Collaborative at Harvard University to develop more comprehensive strategies. The Collaborative, housed within Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, seeks to deepen interaction between media leaders and public diplomacy officers at U.S. embassies around the world.

Volpe is offering SocialSphere's collaborative platform, ARENA, to all the working groups who met in Boston. Delegates can use the platform to communicate and share ideas while preparing for future meetings in Moscow.

Baker is using the platform to provide a demonstration of SwiftRiver, a media filtering platform from Ushahidi. Based on this software, the delegates plan to develop a tool to analyze, filter and verify information in Russian.

SHARING BUSINESS PRACTICES

The "Business of Media" panel concentrated on identifying business models to integrate social media and citizen journalism into traditional media. Delegates plan to develop a platform to exchange information on such issues as: managing innovation, sharing best practices, incorporating copyright and other intellectual property protections, and exchanging recommendations for adapting traditional news gathering operations to new technology and economic challenges.

"Government has a role in helping create that environment [where innovation can thrive] ... respecting the rule of law, protecting intellectual property rights and promoting core freedoms," McHale said.

"That includes freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and what Secretary [of State Hillary Rodham] Clinton has termed the 'freedom to connect' – to the Internet, to unfiltered information, and to one another," McHale said.

The Bilateral Presidential Commission's subgroup on Mass Media tentatively plans their next meeting in Moscow in the late summer or early fall.

Co-chairing the sub-group were Dawn McCall, U.S. coordinator for international information programs, and Mikhail Gusman, first deputy director general of Russia's ITAR-TASS News Agency.

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