

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

April 18, 2011

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Leaders Seek Path to Peace in Libya

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy say they are working to find a pathway for peace in Libya even as NATO-led military operations continue to protect the civilian population from attack by Libyan government forces.

“We must never forget the reasons why the international community was obliged to act in the first place,” the three world leaders wrote in a newspaper editorial published April 15.

“As Libya descended into chaos with Colonel Muammar el-Qadhafi attacking his own people, the Arab League called for action. The Libyan opposition called for help,” they wrote. “And the people of Libya looked to the world in their hour of need.”

The U.N. Security Council voted 10-0 with five abstentions March 17 to authorize the use of all means necessary to stop the government military forces from attacking the Libyan people. The resolution, UNSCR 1973, also includes a demand for an immediate cease-fire and a no-fly zone over Libya, and for international humanitarian assistance to be delivered in areas of the country attacked by the government.

The U.N. resolution came after the Arab League voted March 12 for a no-fly zone over Libya to protect human lives.

NATO agreed March 27 to take command of the enforcement of the arms embargo and no-fly zone imposed by the resolution. NATO also agreed to take on the additional responsibility of protecting Libyan civilians.

“By responding immediately, our countries, together with an international coalition, halted the advance of Qadhafi’s forces and prevented the bloodbath that he had promised to inflict upon the citizens of the besieged city of Benghazi,” the leaders wrote. Benghazi has been the center of the opposition movement that has sought to topple the 42-year-old Qadhafi regime.

Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy said that even though efforts have been made to thwart Qadhafi’s forces and tens of thousands of ordinary Libyans have been protected, “the people of Libya are still suffering terrible horrors at Qadhafi’s hands each and every day.”

The U.N. mandate does not call for the international community to remove Qadhafi by force, they said. But they added that “any deal that leaves him in power would lead to further chaos and lawlessness.”

“There is a pathway to peace that promises new hope for the people of Libya — a future without Qadhafi that preserves Libya’s integrity and sovereignty, and restores her economy and the prosperity and security of her people,” they wrote.

First, the leaders said, all government forces must pull back from cities they have been besieging — including Ajdabiya, Misurata and Zintan — and return to garrison. NATO forces will maintain operations to protect civilians and to build pressure on the regime, they said.

Then, they said, a transition can begin from the dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process, led by a new generation of leaders.

“In order for that transition to succeed, Qadhafi must go and go for good,” the three leaders wrote. “At that point, the United Nations and its members should help the Libyan people as they rebuild where Qadhafi has destroyed.”

The editorial written by Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy appeared in the International Herald Tribune, Le Figaro and the Times of London.

U.S., France Pledge Support for Middle East, North Africa

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and France have pledged to provide support for the Middle East and North Africa as the regions undergo continued political unrest and regime changes.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde issued a joint statement April 14 saying the world’s major economies stood ready to assist the regions in creating “inclusive and sustained growth, transparency and improved governance,” according to news reports.

The statement was issued as the Group of 20 (G20) leading economic powers met for talks in Washington set to conclude April 15 with a joint statement of goals. The talks came at the start of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank annual spring meetings April 15-17, where 187 members are taking part in discussions on global financial challenges and solutions.

As the world continues to recover from the 2008–2009 financial and economic crisis, World Bank President Robert Zoellick said April 14 that leaders this year are set to discuss other challenges, such as high prices for food and fuel, political unrest across the Middle East and the risks of rising inflation in emerging markets.

IMF Managing-Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn stressed that while the global financial recovery is “getting stronger,” it is “still imbalanced between countries” and within countries, keeping uncertainty high. At an April 14 press conference, he emphasized that though “the apex of the crisis is behind us,” economic insecurity is not. He added that as the world continues to recover, “the biggest risk will be complacency.”

Strauss-Kahn called on advanced economies to focus on battling unemployment and emerging market economies to tighten monetary policy to avoid overheating, and stressed the importance of assisting low-income countries as food and fuel prices continue to rise.

He said the concern for all countries “is to preserve social cohesion without undermining the macroeconomic stability.” He called for increased international cooperation in facing this challenge, and said the IMF and World Bank “are standing ready to help, especially in the Middle East.”

Zoellick announced a new World Bank initiative to confront unemployment across the region. He said Education for Employment will help young people gain skills to succeed in the job market.

“This initiative means working with the public and private education providers, civil society, public sector policymakers and administrators and private employers so as to help realize the extraordinary potential for young people in the Arab world,” he said.

Zoellick said it was part of a multilateral approach “focused on doing real things in the short term while building toward mid- and longer-term action.”

In addition to education and employment initiatives, he said, a central objective of the spring meetings will be to devise a plan to assist countries in need of food security, with the goals of creating both immediate relief and enduring agricultural solutions.

The IMF and World Bank semiannual meetings bring together finance ministers and economic leaders from around the world to discuss the state of the international economy and set financial policies.

U.S. Seeks Greater Effort to Weaken Draw of Extremist Groups

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — A top U.S. counterterrorism official says the United States is looking to broaden its efforts against extremist groups, not just by foiling conspiracies but also by countering their messages and addressing the problems that make the groups appealing to some young people.

Daniel Benjamin, the State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism, offered the assessment in testimony April 14 before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee. The Obama administration is proposing to expand Benjamin’s office, adding staff and making it a full-fledged bureau within the State Department.

Benjamin said his office and the State Department as a whole “have assumed a growing role in counterterrorism over the past several years and have moved beyond coordination into an essential policymaking and programming role for the U.S. government.”

Benjamin said the agency needs to do more with other governments, directly and in multilateral groups, toward “reducing recruitment and radicalization” of those countries’ residents by terrorism groups and promoting the ability of those countries to deal with terror threats through law enforcement, countering violent extremism, and making finance and travel more difficult for terror groups.

“It would thus work to safeguard American security interests while promoting our values, including our support for human rights, democracy and the rule of law,” Benjamin said.

“Over the past 10 years, the United States has made great strides in tactical counterterrorism — taking individual terrorists off the street, disrupting cells and thwarting conspiracies,” he said. “Yet if we look at the strategic level, we continue to see a strong flow of new recruits into many of the most dangerous terrorist organizations.”

Benjamin said the U.S. approach relies on “three main lines of effort that will reduce terrorist recruitment: delegitimizing the violent extremist narrative in order to diminish its ‘pull’; developing positive alternatives for youth vulnerable to radicalization to diminish the ‘push’ effect of grievances and unmet expectations; and building partner capacity to carry out these activities.”

Benjamin also offered an assessment of the world’s changing landscape for terror groups such as al-Qaida, notably in the Arab world. The upheavals there might

offer some new opportunities for them to carry out conspiracies, he said, but the spread of democratic movements has “upended the group’s long-standing claims that change would only come to the region through violence.”

He said al-Qaida’s core has grown weaker in recent years, though it can still organize attacks, and its affiliates have grown stronger and spread to more areas of the world, including Yemen, East Africa and the Sahel.

World Bank Urges Countries to End Cycles of Violence

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington – Countries that experience cycles of violence need to strengthen their national institutions and improve governance in ways that prioritize citizen security, justice and jobs, according to the World Bank.

National and regional insecurity has become a primary development challenge, the World Bank states in its “World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development,” released days before the April 16-17 spring meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington.

“When state institutions do not adequately protect citizens, guard against corruption or provide access to justice; when markets do not provide job opportunities; or when communities have lost social cohesion – the likelihood of violent conflict increases,” writes World Bank President Robert Zoellick in the report’s foreword.

“The effects of violence in one area can spread to other parts of the world, hurting development prospects of others and impeding economic prospects for entire regions,” he added.

Some 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by repeated cycles of violence, and the gap in poverty between countries that frequently experience violence and others is widening. No low-income, fragile or conflict-affected country has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal, according to the report. Those international goals aim to end poverty and hunger, achieve gender equality, universal education and environmental sustainability, and significantly improve maternal and child health by 2015.

The report notes that 21st-century violence seems to be spurred by stresses such as youth unemployment, income shocks, and tensions among religious, ethnic and social groups and trafficking networks. Risks of violence are greater when stresses combine with weak capacity or a

lack of legitimacy in national institutions.

Capable, legitimate institutions are able to mediate solutions to stresses that can lead to repeated violence, but peace processes are often undermined by organized crime.

“Areas suffering from political instability and criminal violence are being left far behind and face stagnation, both in terms of economic growth and disappointing human-development indicators,” Justin Lin, World Bank chief economist, said in a press release. A civil conflict can cost a country as much as 30 years of the value of its national output.

Countries that have re-established and sustained lawful citizen safety have made the fastest gains in development, the report says.

Ethiopia increased the number of its people with access to improved water from 13 percent of the population in 1990 to 66 percent in 2010. Mozambique more than tripled its primary school completion, from 14 percent in 1999 to 46 percent in 2007. Between 1995 and 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina increased measles immunizations from 53 percent to 96 percent for children up to age 2.

The report recommends that international agencies increase support for national and regional programs to create jobs and build well-governed police forces and justice systems. National leaders can get better results from outside assistance, according to the report, by demonstrating greater accountability to donors and citizens.

International donors also can help develop regional markets that integrate insecure areas, pool resources, and act to reduce stresses caused by food-price instability. Global food prices are 36 percent higher than their 2010 levels because of severe weather in major grain-exporting countries, export restrictions, increasing use of grain for biofuel production, and surging oil prices. And prices remain volatile, according to the World Bank’s “Food Price Watch” released April 14.

The development report says international agencies must reform their procedures so they can provide faster assistance to regions and end stop-and-go patterns of aid.

International Momentum Builds to Improve Disaster Preparedness

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington – Images of Japan’s earthquake destruction remained fresh in the global memory five weeks after an

earthquake and tsunami, as Asian leaders and global donors came together April 15 to advance disaster preparedness and risk reduction at local, national and international levels.

The capability of the international community to recognize risk, prepare for the worst and respond with efficiency are "critical to global security," said U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Rajiv Shah. Addressing the one-day conference on "Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia," nations also have "a moral need and a moral commitment to stand together in times of crisis," Shah said.

"We are making an effort to shift the paradigm from reaction to prevention," said Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero. Countries that make investments in developing and enforcing sound building codes and public safety standards will find the actions pay off in lives saved after a disaster. Speakers repeatedly noted that Japan's long-standing commitment to quake-proof building designs saved perhaps thousands of lives during the March 11 earthquake.

"Our horizon is going to be darkened by natural disasters," Otero said. "But we can prevent that darkness from overwhelming us."

The Department of State and USAID are among the co-sponsors of this initiative, joined by the United Nations, the World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, a global partnership of nations committed to helping nations reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards.

The government of Nepal, another co-sponsor, is recognized for the steps it has been taking in recent years to prepare for potential disaster and reduce its exposure to risk. The Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Consortium involves the government and nongovernmental and international organizations, uniting them in a common action plan devoted to disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Nepal's action is especially important because of the many potential disasters that could befall the Himalayan mountain nation. Nepal is one of the 20 most disaster-prone countries in the world, according to the U.N. Development Programme, subject to earthquakes and flooding and with a high death count attributable to disasters. The risk reduction consortium has developed a plan to focus attention on a few key areas, to include boosting school and hospital safety, increasing capacity of first responders, introducing risk reduction strategies at the local and community levels, and land use management planning.

Advocates of increased disaster preparedness say they can have a difficult time convincing developing nation leaders of the priority that should be placed on this activity. Placed against other vital development needs, some nations say they can't afford preventive measures, said Valerie Amos, the under secretary-general of the United Nations.

"But I'll tell them they can't afford not to," said Amos, pointing out that nations with a high level of poverty are consistently more vulnerable in a disaster and will suffer greater numbers of fatalities.

Conference participants also discussed the need for nations and communities to plan and act together in developing preparedness plans and in responding to a disaster once it occurs.

The best endorsement of this recommendation came from the conference participant with the most recent and searing memory of disaster, Masaya Fujiwara, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan.

"Solidarity from all around the world has encouraged the people of Japan" as they begin recovery and rebuilding from the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, Fujiwara said. He said Japan is eager to participate in increased cooperation in disaster preparedness and to share with the world the lessons it has learned from this recent experience.

Attorney General Presses International Anti-Corruption Efforts

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — The top U.S. law enforcement official is offering praise and promises of assistance to countries that subject their own corrupt officials to justice. And he said a new U.S. team of prosecutors will focus exclusively on seizing assets from corrupt officials and returning them to their countries.

Attorney General Eric Holder was speaking April 15 in Slovenia to top justice officials from the Balkans, but he said the message applies throughout the world: that public corruption takes "scarce resources away from those most in need," erodes public trust, stifles investment and progress and "breeds contempt for the rule of law."

"In many countries, beating back corruption requires a fundamental shift in the way business leaders and public officials conduct themselves," he said, but he added that it can be done.

Holder said he began his career by prosecuting corrupt officials and the people who bribed them, and he said that every country – including the United States – struggles against corruption. But he said international cooperation on the issue can help in that struggle.

The United States provides experts and resources to train legal and law enforcement officials in other countries, he said.

Holder called on countries to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which was adopted in 2003. It commits them to establish tough anti-corruption laws and to assist one another in preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption. It also commits countries to return looted assets to the nations from which they were taken, which Holder called “a moral imperative.”

“When kleptocrats loot their nations’ treasuries, steal natural resources and embezzle development aid, they condemn their nations’ children to starvation and disease,” he said.

He added that the new Justice Department team is “combating large-scale foreign official corruption and recovering public funds for their intended – and proper – use.”

Holder also spoke against government policies that protect corrupt officials from prosecution. He said it can be legitimate to give officials immunity to some extent, to protect them from politically motivated prosecutions.

“In too many places, however, public officials are given blanket immunity from investigation and prosecution for any action – even where the conduct involves public corruption,” he said. “In such places, immunity becomes impunity.”

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