

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

May 16, 2011

Central Asia Should Heed Lessons of Mideast Unrest, Assistant Secretary Blake Says.....	1
U.S. Entrepreneur and Arabs Partner for Job Growth	1
U.S. Signs Arctic Search-and-Rescue Agreement	2

Central Asia Should Heed Lessons of Mideast Unrest, Assistant Secretary Blake Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Despite economic and societal differences with countries in the Middle East, Central Asian governments should “heed the lessons of the Arab Spring” by embracing political reforms and offering more freedoms to their citizens in the interest of their countries’ long-term stability, says Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake.

In his May 11 prepared remarks in Washington for the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Blake said he is “not predicting extensive changes in the near term” in Central Asia, but the most important lesson from the Mideast political unrest is that “governments must respond to the needs and the desires of their people.”

He said the economic situation in Central Asia is much better than in the Middle East because of higher employment prospects, the ability of workers to send home remittances from Russia and hydrocarbon wealth.

Central Asia also, historically, has had closer ties to Russia, and as a result “the Central Asian states remain relatively less exposed to the West and its history of democratic institutions, personal freedom and liberty,” Blake said.

Most Central Asians also do not have access to the Internet and social networking, and government control or suppression of media outlets largely has limited the news and information they can receive. Blake said there is also a lack of meaningful political opposition in the region, and that some citizens “value the stability and certainty afforded by their otherwise undemocratic governments.”

But there are similar dynamics with the Middle East and Central Asian countries, with the partial exception of Kyrgyzstan, Blake said, such as “unemployment and chronic underemployment, poverty, corruption at all levels of society, little or no outlet for meaningful political discourse, and a lack of opportunity, particularly for young people.”

The changes demonstrate “equally profound lessons for Central Asian governments and societies,” and U.S. officials have been telling Central Asian officials to pay attention to the events and their implications.

As the top U.S. diplomat to the region, “I have encouraged them to provide more space for political,

personal and religious freedoms, allow for the development of a robust civil society and democratic institutions, and chart a course for economic reform,” Blake said.

It is a mistake for leaders to fear that chaos and political upheaval will result from allowing greater freedoms. “While democracy can be messy and at times appear chaotic, it nevertheless provides for greater stability and security as it provides societies a necessary and peaceful release valve for political and economic tensions,” Blake said.

The assistant secretary highlighted Kyrgyzstan as “the primary exception” to the lack of democracy in Central Asia, saying its new constitution and presidential and parliamentary elections “are cause for optimism even as the ethnic violence in June of last year demonstrates the fragility of democracy in the country.” Kyrgyzstan is the first parliamentary republic in Central Asia.

The United States is prepared to help Kyrgyzstan “succeed as a democratic example in the region” and has provided more than \$140 million in humanitarian aid, economic development, support for democratic elections and good governance and other assistance, he said.

With other Central Asian countries, the United States sees an opportunity to reinforce its engagement on issues related to religious, political and personal freedoms, using bilateral consultations that include “candid discussions” on issues such as human rights and media freedom and engagement with civil society and business communities, he said.

“Democracy is a long-term process, and we will work with all of our Central Asian partners to help them develop stronger democratic institutions and more open societies,” Blake said.

U.S. Entrepreneur and Arabs Partner for Job Growth

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington – Ron Bruder, who works with Arab youth to boost their potential, says prospects are brightening as democracy gains a greater foothold in the Arab world.

“The climate of change in the region is in part due to youth dissatisfaction with their employment opportunities,” Bruder said. He believes new Arab governments will be more receptive to working with groups that promote job creation.

Bruder is the founder of Education for Employment (EFE) and was named by Time Magazine as one of the World’s

Most Influential People in 2011. While EFE has a New York location, Arab locals lead offices in their countries where they envision, direct and staff programs. Started in 2004, EFE recognizes that when young people are employed, "they help lay the foundations for secure and peaceful societies."

Since EFE began in Jordan, it has expanded training programs to the West Bank, Egypt, Yemen and Morocco. In 2011, 1,300 students will graduate from EFE programs, and by 2013 this number is expected to rise to 5,000.

Driving EFE's expansion are local staff and management. Locals take ownership of projects and tailor training to suit the needs of the workforce. Jordan focuses on air-conditioning repairs and land surveying, Yemen on business English and information technology training and Egypt offers textile merchandising and banking training.

"The way EFE operates, which I think is a plus, is it sets up local foundations where the board is local and the staff is local and they figure out how to make it country-specific," Bruder said. "They know how to figure out their needs better than we do."

The organization's growth, and local control, is a sign of its success. EFE graduates like 25-year-old Azeddine from Morocco embark on productive careers after attending training programs.

"The [EFE] training truly transformed me. I became very organized, more secure in my decisionmaking, and developed excellent relationship and communication skills, which I am using in my personal life and in the workplace," Azeddine said. He works as a human resources coordinator at a hotel. "My life has truly changed."

Plans are in the works to open an EFE office in Tunisia. After positive meetings with new government ministers, who Bruder described as "doers," the next step is for Tunisians to take control.

"We want to know that there are locals that believe in what we are doing, that will take ownership of it and make sure the money is spent wisely and carefully and effectively, by putting in money of their own and by knowing the local landscape," Bruder said.

Local ownership of EFE programs ensures that commitment remains strong. EFE operations continue even as an uprising goes into its third month in Yemen.

"Despite all that is going on in Yemen, our programs are continuing and going as business-as-usual," Bruder said. EFE Yemen Chairman Alwan Shaibani is committed to the organization "and nothing is going to slow it down."

Financing EFE operations continues to be a challenge as it expands. Funding comes from corporate sponsors, agencies, associations, foundations and individual donations from the Arab world and beyond. With EFE's growth and success, Bruder said, this is becoming less of an issue.

Bruder said that all the hard work that goes into making EFE a success is worth it.

"The greatest satisfaction is when I go to a graduation and I look at these kids," Bruder said. "I look in their eyes and I shake their hand and to me that's the best part."

U.S. Signs Arctic Search-and-Rescue Agreement

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has joined representatives of the seven other Arctic Council member states to sign a search-and-rescue agreement, the council's first legally binding deal.

The Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic "coordinates life-saving international maritime and aeronautical coverage and response among the Arctic states across an area of about 13 million square miles," according to a State Department fact sheet.

The fact sheet says the agreement "will improve search-and-rescue response in the Arctic by committing all parties to coordinate appropriate assistance to those in distress and to cooperate with each other in undertaking search-and-rescue operations."

The agreement was signed May 12 during the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Nuuk, Greenland.

The pact defines areas of the Arctic where one of the council members will take responsibility for responding to incidents requiring search and rescue. The State Department said parties to the agreement have committed to provide assistance "regardless of the nationality or status of persons who may need it."

Clinton, at a joint press conference with Danish Foreign Minister Lene Espersen May 12 in Nuuk, said the agreement is "an example of how the council can work collectively to effect positive change." The State Department emphasized the deal's significance, calling it "one of the most successful negotiations to date to address emerging issues in the Arctic."

Clinton joined Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International

Environmental and Scientific Affairs Kerri-Ann Jones at the ministerial meeting in a show of commitment to the region. According to the State Department, Clinton's participation marked the first time a secretary of state has represented the United States at the council.

In addition to formalizing the search-and-rescue agreement, participants in the May 11-12 meeting formed a standing secretariat, to be based in Norway, and established criteria for the admission of new council observers. The group also announced the results of two scientific studies on the Arctic environment, and created a new task force to negotiate measures for oil spill preparedness and response throughout the region.

The Arctic Council member states are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. Clinton called the council "the region's pre-eminent intergovernmental body," and reaffirmed the United States' commitment to the group.

"In all of these discussions, we have benefitted enormously from the wisdom and engagement of the council's permanent participants," Clinton said. She added that as an Arctic nation, regional issues "matter greatly" to the United States.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/iipdigital-en/index.html>)