

American

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President Obama's Europe Trip Underscores U.S. Commitment to Alliances.....	1
U.S. to Syria's Assad: Lead Reforms or Stand Aside.....	1
U.S. Aid Agency Chief Wants More Private Investment in Africa	2
Arab Youth, American Entrepreneurs Focus on Job Creation.....	2
Shuttle Crew Installs New Window on History of the Universe	3

President Obama's Europe Trip Underscores U.S. Commitment to Alliances

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama will emphasize Europe's vital role in international security and global economic recovery during a six-day trip that underscores his "strong commitment to revitalizing our alliances," senior White House officials say.

The president also will discuss events across the Middle East and North Africa in talks with European leaders.

The visit "is an opportunity to coordinate and align our approaches on a number of issues," said presidential adviser Ben Rhodes of the National Security Council during a May 20 White House briefing.

Rhodes added that the United States is collaborating closely with its European allies on its international agenda, and said ties between the United States and Europe are grounded in shared interests and values.

The deputy national security adviser was joined in the briefing by Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, special assistant to the president and senior director for European affairs, who outlined the trip's themes.

The visit will highlight the enduring U.S. commitment to Europe "because European security and prosperity benefit the United States as much as they do Europe," she said.

Sherwood-Randall said the trip also underscores the vitality of the trans-Atlantic link through institutions like NATO and the European Union. She said the United States has never been more engaged with the European Union than now, and cited significant sanctions on Iran as one achievement of that cooperation.

The trip also will enhance the growing cooperation between the United States and Europe as a "catalyst for global action" on issues such as the response to "the transformational events in the Middle East and North Africa," according to Sherwood-Randall. She said there is "no other grouping of countries with which we work as closely to advance the president's global agenda."

Rhodes said Obama will begin his trip May 23 in Dublin where he and the first lady will meet with Irish President Mary McAleese and her husband. Obama also will visit Moneygall, the hometown of one of his ancestors.

Obama travels to London the following day, where he is scheduled visit Buckingham Palace and Westminster

Abbey as part of his official state visit. While in London, Obama also plans to meet with Queen Elizabeth II and to hold talks with Prime Minister David Cameron and opposition leader Ed Miliband.

Rhodes said the United States is "closely aligned" with the United Kingdom on issues such as "our efforts in Afghanistan, our counterterrorism efforts, our ongoing efforts in Libya, our broader G20 agenda and our nonproliferation activities." The president is set to deliver what Rhodes called "the anchor speech of his trip" to the British Parliament.

"He'll be able to discuss both the alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom and the interests and values that that alliance is rooted in, as well as the broader trans-Atlantic alliance and the imperative of the United States and Europe retaining and strengthening our cooperation around the world," Rhodes said.

Obama will travel from London to Deauville, France, on May 26 for the Group of Eight (G8) Summit. On the sidelines of that meeting, he is set to hold bilateral talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

Finally, the president will stop in Poland, where he and Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski will host a dinner for Central and Eastern European heads of state. Obama will also hold talks with Komorowski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk before returning to Washington May 28.

U.S. to Syria's Assad: Lead Reforms or Stand Aside

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton agree Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must either follow through on his promises of reform and a democratic transition in Syria, or stand aside and allow the Syrian people to change their country.

In his May 19 speech on the Middle East, President Obama condemned the Syrian regime's "path of murder" in response to demonstrators calling for reforms, and he called upon Assad's government to stop shooting demonstrators, allow peaceful protests, release political prisoners and stop "unjust arrests."

Obama also said the Syrian government must start a "serious dialogue" to advance a transition to democracy and allow human rights monitors access to cities like Dara'a.

"The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way," Obama said.

On May 18, the United States extended its sanctions on Syrian officials to include President Assad, Vice President Farouk al-Shara and other top officials.

According to a May 18 Treasury Department press release, the action was meant to send "an unequivocal message to President Assad, the Syrian leadership and regime insiders that they will be held accountable for the ongoing violence and repression in Syria."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told CBS Television May 19 that Assad has called for reforms in his country in response to the unrest and "said a lot of things that you didn't hear from other leaders in the region about the kind of changes he would like to see."

"That may all be out the window, or he may have one last chance," Clinton said. "Unfortunately, the evidence thus far is that he's not providing the kind of leadership that is needed."

The secretary repeated President Obama's call for Assad to either "lead the transition or get out of the way," and said how that would happen "is up to the people of that country."

Asked why the United States and the international community are increasing the pressure on the Syrian government through sanctions, rather than undertaking a military intervention as they did in response to the violence in Libya, Clinton said the Obama administration is evaluating the situation in each country in the region and tailoring its responses on a country-by-country basis.

In the case of Libya, its neighbors in the Arab League and the U.N. Security Council had called for the imposition of a no-fly zone and an arms embargo.

"We haven't had any of the kind of pressure that we saw building from our European NATO allies, from the Arab League and others, to do what has been done in Libya," Clinton said.

Although the situation in Libya generated "a unique international coalition," Clinton said, international pressure on Syria is increasing. "I think you'll see more in the days to come," she added.

U.S. Aid Agency Chief Wants More Private Investment in Africa

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — With \$5.5 billion invested in economic development in Africa, the seven-year-old Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) wants more private investment in the region, said Daniel Yohannes, the agency's chief.

"The private sector is the most dynamic engine of development, job creation, innovation and increased productivity," Yohannes said May 19 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based policy research organization.

Yohannes spoke a week before the May 26–27 G8 summit meeting of heads of the world's major economies in Deauville, France. Part of their discussion will focus on encouraging private sector development in Africa. The core members of the G8 are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. This year, the leaders of Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Guinea have been invited to take part in the outreach discussions on Africa.

Yohannes said that between 2000 and 2008, Africa's gross domestic product grew 54 percent. Now home to 850 million people, Africa is expected to grow to 1.8 billion people by 2050, according to United Nations estimates. "The private sector has a clear interest in investing in Africa's development," he said.

Of the 23 multiyear funding agreements MCC has signed, 13 are with African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Morocco, Namibia, Senegal and Tanzania.

Yohannes said the MCC is helping the countries it funds forge partnerships with private companies "to enhance the impact of our investments" and sustain them after its funding ends. He said the agency is helping those countries improve their transportation infrastructures and their capacities to attract investment and trade.

"MCC is helping Africans say to the world, 'We are open for business,'" Yohannes said.

Arab Youth, American Entrepreneurs Focus on Job Creation

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Logging in from Mauritania to Iraq on May 18, Arab youth and American social entrepreneurs

Ron Bruder and Hossam Abdel-Maksoud talked online about how to solve the region's unemployment crisis.

Bruder, founder of Education for Employment (EFE), and Abdel-Maksoud, chairman of the Egyptian American Community Foundation (EACF), said creating jobs is crucial for Arab economies in the wake of recent political change.

"Many of the educational institutions in the [Middle East and North Africa] region train their youth, but in skills that are not necessarily optimal for the working environment," Bruder said, adding that only when youth have opportunities will society grow and prosper.

The EFE, which graduated its first trainees in 2006, expands every year. In Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, the West Bank and Gaza, EFE is staffed and led by local affiliates to ensure that job training meets marketplace demands.

"Our success has less to do with who we are in the U.S. and more to do with the fact that the citizens, the leaders, in each of the countries have taken this foundation and have made it their own and grown it, stabilized it and made it much more powerful than we could have anticipated," Bruder said.

During a recent visit to Tunisia, Bruder was impressed by business leaders and government officials. Bruder said EFE is seeking local partners to create jobs.

"I was extremely impressed with the positive attitudes displayed by everybody I met," Bruder said. "These were engaged people, these were agents of change."

EACF, a charitable organization founded by Egyptian Americans, plans to work with EFE and Habitat for Humanity to develop model villages in Egypt, Abdel-Maksoud said.

"We hope that this serves as an example as to how other Egyptian villages can develop and be better than what they are now," Abdel-Maksoud said. The villages would offer suitable housing, job training and health facilities. "We can't fix the problem of housing in Egypt, but we can offer expertise so that housing in Egypt will be planned properly."

In response to the needs of Egypt's emerging democracy, EACF is working with Egyptian-American and Egyptian organizations to address a range of issues. Recently, EACF partnered with Egypt's youth-led Nahdet El Mahrousa.

"EACF will help secure funding for the projects that Nahdet El-Mahrousa is carrying out so that they

succeed," Abdel-Maksoud said. The projects are in the education, health and employment sectors.

As with most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), project funding presents challenges to EFE and EACF. Bruder said EFE receives donations from around the world and local affiliates in Arab countries cover the cost of training programs.

"It is a challenge to finance NGOs, especially in this era with the economy not as strong as we would like it, but we have been able to raise money globally," Bruder said. "We are also charging employers for the services that we are providing, which helps us defray some of the operating costs."

Another source of funding for EFE comes from graduates of its training programs.

"In all of the countries the graduates come back and donate voluntarily," Bruder said. Sixty percent of graduates in Egypt return to the office regularly to donate money "because they want to see other Egyptians having the same opportunity."

EACF, which provides social services locally while organizing fundraisers to support programs at home and in Egypt, is staffed by people who donate time and money.

"We are all volunteers; our entire board, including me, are volunteers. Most of the organizations that we deal with, either Arab or Egyptian, are also volunteers," Abdel-Maksoud said. "The services offered are done on a volunteer basis."

As change emerges across the region, Bruder said, EFE programs should grow and cooperation with local officials improve.

"I think it will be easier and the governments will be more proactive in some of the countries that are undergoing change than what they had been. ... This change in the Arab Spring will make it easier for us to grow successfully," Bruder said.

Shuttle Crew Installs New Window on History of the Universe

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Astronauts onboard the space shuttle Endeavour successfully completed a spacewalk of more than six hours May 20. They installed antennas, cabling and related hardware for an external wireless communication system outside the International Space

Station.

Another successful procedure conducted May 19 was one of the hallmarks for the entire mission, taking science one small step forward in humanity's long pursuit of understanding how the universe was made, and of what. Astronauts installed a highly sophisticated instrument that will allow collection of more data from space than ever before. Mission specialists extracted the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS) from the shuttle's cargo bay with a robotic arm and handed it off to a similar arm operated by the space station crew, who then secured it in place on the starboard side of the station itself.

AMS is a ring of powerful magnets and ultrasensitive detectors, weighing almost 7 metric tons, and designed to remain affixed to the station for its lifetime. The device will track cosmic rays constantly surging through space in pursuit of information that will improve science's understanding of antimatter and dark matter.

Antimatter is an equal and opposite partner to matter, as "positive" is to "negative." AMS is supposed to provide a better observation platform for a substance not previously seen in space. Earthbound experiments have proven the existence of antimatter, but that which AMS will detect in space, it is hoped, will be millions of times stronger, and more easily studied.

Dark matter is a form of matter that emits no electromagnetic radiation. Because of that, its existence has only been inferred from gravitational effects on visible matter. Dark matter has never actually been observed, and AMS will provide information to allow a better understanding of its true nature.

A multinational cooperative project has worked toward this successful installation since 1995. The creators of the AMS come from 60 institutes and 16 countries and comprise the largest scientific collaboration ever involved in a space station project. Professor Samuel Ting, a Nobel laureate for a previous discovery in particle physics, is leading the AMS research, but more than 600 scientists worldwide will be poring over the data generated by AMS, according to briefing materials.

"This is the type of collaboration that NASA hopes the ISS National Laboratory will help foster in the space scientific community," said Trent Martin, AMS project manager for NASA, in a statement issued after the installation.

AMS was assembled and tested by various collaborating institutes and agencies in Europe (see list on NASA website, and further work to calibrate its instruments was done at the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland, the world's biggest particle accelerator.

Shuttle Endeavour is on its last mission in space and the next-to-last voyage for the entire shuttle program. The 135th mission for the program is expected to launch next month, after which the 30-year-old program will end and the shuttle fleet will be retired.

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