

American

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Protesters Demanding Basic Rights for All Syrians, U.S. Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Syrians calling for political and economic reforms are doing so on behalf of all Syrians, not as a movement seeking to divide the country along sectarian lines, and they are becoming increasingly organized and adept at spreading their positive and inclusive message to the Syrian people, says a senior State Department official.

In remarks to Al Hurra Television in Washington July 20, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime has sought to portray those protesting against his government as sectarian "to try to stoke fear ... [and is] trying to raise the specter of civil war" between the Alawite-dominated regime and the Sunni majority.

Feltman acknowledged Syria's religious diversity and said that no one should underestimate the risks of sectarian conflict. But he said most of the demonstrations that have been taking place across Syria since March have been calling for all Syrians to be allowed to exercise their basic human freedoms.

"The demonstrations are composed of people from all walks of life, from all communities. They are led by people from all communities, and they are asking for things like dignity, like jobs, like security, like an end to the torture, the theft and the terror that characterizes the Assad regime," Feltman said.

"They are projecting a positive message for the future of Syria — a positive message of inclusiveness where no part of Syria geographically, or in terms of community, [is] excluded from the government," he said, and they are becoming increasingly organized and better able to get their messages out.

He said it is good that the Syrians are getting together and talking among themselves about the direction they want to see their country go, and that it is not the role of the United States or anyone else to determine their country's future.

"Syrians are deciding the agenda. Syrians are deciding what's important to accomplish," he said.

The international community is trying to find more ways to pressure the Assad regime into responding to the demands of the Syrian people "rather than torturing and killing," he said. He called upon the Syrian government to stop hiding the truth of what is happening inside the country by denying access to the international media, human rights groups and humanitarian aid organizations.

The Assad regime has become a source of instability in the region, Feltman said, citing the violence it is inflicting against demonstrators in cities and towns across the country, and the refugees that are fleeing into neighboring Turkey and Lebanon as a result.

United States Continues Regular Engagement with Yemen

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — Yemen is confronting an array of political, economic, social and security challenges, and the current crisis there is making other issues worse, a senior U.S. State Department official says.

The political crisis Yemen faces has worsened such issues as unemployment, the effects of a rapidly growing population, weak state institutions, declining government revenue, a growing scarcity of natural resources and violent extremism, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Janet Sanderson said at a U.S. Senate committee hearing July 19.

"Consistent with U.S. national interests, we have adopted a two-pronged strategy for Yemen: helping the government confront the immediate security threat represented by al-Qaida, and mitigating serious political, economic and governance issues that the country faces over the long term, the drivers of instability," Sanderson said in prepared testimony.

The Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs met to evaluate the complex set of policy challenges facing the United States in Yemen, Subcommittee Chairman Robert Casey said. That examination comes amid five months of protests and political unrest in Yemen.

"During this historic period of sweeping change in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, Yemen often gets overlooked," Casey said. "However, as a result of the power vacuum caused by President [Ali Abdullah] Saleh's departure to Saudi Arabia in June, there are serious concerns over the government's ability to prevent al-Qaida from gaining a foothold or, I should say, a stronghold in the country, as well as broader concerns about the growing humanitarian and economic crises that are plaguing Yemen today."

Casey said al-Qaida's presence in Yemen is not new, but in the past several years it has grown increasingly worrisome both in the region and in the West. Saleh, who has ruled Yemen since 1978, was wounded in a bomb attack June 3 and was hospitalized in Saudi Arabia, where he is recovering from injuries sustained in the attack.

During her testimony, Sanderson, who is a deputy

secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, said that while the situation in Yemen remains fluid, the solution must come from the Yemeni people with assistance from international partners such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Saudi Arabia. The GCC countries are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

“Conditions in Yemen continue to deteriorate under the pressure of growing protests and increasing divisions throughout the country,” Sanderson said.

Yemen is buffeted by widespread inflation and the threat of a food shortage this summer, she said. These factors tend to indicate a potential economic crisis in the coming months.

“The goal of the U.S. and international efforts is a stable, secure, prosperous and effectively governed Yemen,” Sanderson said. But she conceded that it is an ambitious, long-term goal that demands a deep and ongoing coordination with the Yemeni government and its partners.

“We will be able to more effectively engage in Yemen once the Yemeni government initiates the political transition and identifies its way forward,” she said.

Daniel Benjamin, the State Department’s counterterrorism coordinator, said the Saleh government had been working closely with the United States in its struggle to curb efforts by the terrorist group al-Qaida. Cooperation has fallen off and terrorists have taken advantage of a lack of security in various regions of the country as a result of the political uncertainty and internal conflicts, Benjamin said.

“Our political efforts are just one element of our work in Yemen,” Benjamin testified. “We are implementing a multifaceted strategy designed to address the terrorist activity that threatens Yemen and the United States, as well as the causes underlying Yemen’s instability.”

The strategy seeks to improve the country’s overall economic stability, increase the sustainable and equitable delivery of services and improve local governance and civic participation, he added.

A part of the counterterrorism strategy is to build the capacity of Yemen’s security forces to counter al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, Benjamin said.

U.S. Ready to Meet Doha Trade-Liberalization Goals

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — The United States stands ready to address the challenges of meeting the trade-liberalization goals outlined in the World Trade Organization’s 2001

negotiations in Doha, Qatar, says Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Michael Punke.

“Over the past two and a half years, the United States has played the leading role in seeking an ambitious outcome in Doha, including numerous initiatives to find creative solutions within the confines of the current framework,” Punke said July 19 at a WTO conference in Geneva. “Over the upcoming weeks and months, we will be at the forefront of determining whether any variant of the current Doha framework can result in a successful outcome.”

The long-stalled talks, formally known as the Doha Development Agenda, were launched in 2001 and designed as a global free trade agreement meant to alleviate poverty and boost the international economy. They were halted in 2006 primarily because of divisions among the major trading nations, and have yet to reach a successful conclusion.

Punke said the United States has been flexible in its negotiating and that “if Doha could be completed by virtue of throwing a pile of concessions on the table, we would have had a deal many, many years ago.” But he said the situation remained complicated, and the United States is working toward “not just any deal, but a good deal.”

He said the agreement must reflect the realities of the 21st-century global economy, and he called on all major parties to “grapple directly with the challenges we face.”

Punke, who serves as the U.S. ambassador to the WTO, spoke in response to remarks made by World Bank President Robert Zoellick on July 19. Zoellick, who was the U.S. trade representative when the Doha talks were launched, called on the United States to take the lead in reviving the negotiations. He said opening trade drives growth, which could benefit both developed and developing countries as they work toward global economic recovery.

Zoellick and Punke spoke in Geneva during the WTO’s third global review of its trade-capacity-building program, Aid for Trade. Launched in 2005, the program aims to help developing countries build the skills and infrastructure to benefit from WTO agreements that expand trade, such as the Doha agenda.

Punke said the U.S. response to the call of Aid for Trade has been “robust,” noting the country has contributed more than \$11 billion in trade-related assistance since 2001. He said this represents the ongoing U.S. commitment to an inclusive and open global trading system.

Space Shuttle Lands, NASA Looks to New Era

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington – The space shuttle Atlantis dropped through the pre-dawn darkness July 21 toward a long strip of pavement at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, landed in perfect form, and ended a 13-day journey. The craft rolled to a stop and closed a 30-year chapter in U.S. manned space flight.

Atlantis, launched in 1985, has flown almost 200 million kilometers in its lifetime, about 8.5 million on this trip alone. Atlantis made about 200 orbits of the Earth this trip, many of those docked with the International Space Station (ISS). The primary objective of the mission was to load needed supplies and equipment on the station and offload unneeded material to keep the station operating until its next supply flight.

Moments after the landing, Commander Chris Ferguson spoke for his crew. “We sure hope that everybody who has ever worked on, or touched, or looked at, or envied or admired a space shuttle was able to take just a little part of the journey with us.”

The end of the shuttle program is going to put many NASA employees out of work, some having spent most of their professional lives devoted to the program. But NASA officials say the loss of the shuttles isn't putting the agency out of business. NASA Administrator Charles Bolden, a former shuttle commander himself, issued a statement after the landing, emphasizing the new frontiers in the agency's future.

“We recommit ourselves to continuing human spaceflight and taking the necessary – and difficult – steps to ensure America's leadership in human spaceflight for years to come.”

The United States loses its capability to put humans in space with the retirement of the shuttle. It will depend on Russian ships giving rides to U.S. astronauts for assignments on board the ISS. NASA regards that as a short-term arrangement, however. The agency is counting on fledgling commercial space-flight companies to expand, improve and develop the capability to launch humans into space within a relatively short time.

NASA is also looking beyond the ISS, beyond low Earth orbit, to more distant destinations in space. The agency must first develop the equipment, the knowledge and the science to achieve that goal, but that process is under way. Bolden said, “I want to send American astronauts where we've never been before by focusing our resources on exploration and innovation.”

The space agency has been quietly pursuing that goal

even while the final shuttle mission has seized most of the attention. An unmanned flight is traveling through our solar system, making observations and gathering data that will help science understand more about space to better inform future plans for voyaging farther and farther from the home planet.

NASA's Dawn spacecraft swung into orbit around the asteroid Vesta on July 16 and became the first probe to enter orbit around an object in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Dawn will circle Vesta for a year, providing close-up observations of the asteroid that, it is hoped, will broaden understanding of the earliest years of the formation of the solar system. In a statement issued when Dawn slipped into the Vesta orbit, Bolden said Dawn “points the way to the future destinations where people will travel in the coming years.”

President Obama's vision for U.S. space exploration has NASA landing humans on an asteroid by 2025, and using that as a stepping stone to more distant destinations.

After a year in orbit around Vesta, Dawn will travel on to the dwarf planet Ceres. In so doing, Dawn will become the first spacecraft to orbit two destinations in the solar system. Vesta and Ceres were chosen as the study subjects for this mission, according to NASA documents, because of their very different natures. Vesta is like Earth and the other rocky planets of the inner solar system, while Ceres appears to be more similar to the icy moons of the distant planets. Scientists want to learn more about forces at work in the early universe that led to the very different conditions on the two bodies.

Dawn may be something of a newcomer to the public eye, but actually has been around for awhile; it was first launched in 2007. The University of California, Los Angeles is responsible for the science side of the mission. Orbital Sciences Corporation of Dulles, Virginia, designed and built the spacecraft. The German Aerospace Center, the Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, the Italian Space Agency and the Italian National Institute for Astrophysics are part of the mission team.

How Islam's Golden Age Shaped the Modern World

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer

Washington – What do cameras, coffee, toothbrushes and perfume have in common? All of them trace their origins to the Golden Age of Muslim civilization.

These are a few of the innovations showcased by *1001 Inventions: Discover the Golden Age of Muslim Civilization*, a traveling exhibition that opened May 27 at the California Science Center in Los Angeles. Running until December 31, 2011, 1001 Inventions reveals how science and technology flourished in the Islamic world during a

period that stretched from the seventh to the 17th century.

Islamic culture reached from southern Spain to China and drew on scholars of many faiths who built on the knowledge of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans to make breakthroughs that paved the way for the Renaissance. According to Diane Perlov, senior vice president of exhibit development at the California Science Center, *1001 Inventions* “conveys the multicultural roots of modern science” and demonstrates strong links between Western and non-Western societies.

The show, which debuted in London and moved to Istanbul and New York before opening in Los Angeles, explores advances in engineering, navigation, architecture, mathematics and medicine, along with items of Islamic provenance now commonly found in households everywhere.

Exhibition curator Salim al-Hassani, professor emeritus at the University of Manchester in Great Britain, stressed the “historical amnesia about the scientific and cultural advancement that took place during the Middle Ages,” which *1001 Inventions* aims to correct.

Visitors can study a 6-meter-high working replica of the 13th-century Elephant Clock, named for the carved elephant that forms its base. Designed by a mechanical engineer from Mesopotamia (now Iraq) called al-Jazari, the cross-cultural emblem features Chinese dragons, an Egyptian phoenix and wooden robots wearing Arab turbans.

The exhibition’s interactive displays include a computer game “where you travel an ancient trade route making decisions about which items to exchange in which markets,” said Perlov. “Guests learn how not only goods and services traveled throughout the world, but how information and knowledge spread this way.”

In addition, visitors can “direct a figure to walk through a modern house and find all the items that trace their roots back” to early Muslim civilization, she said. “A bell rings when they find each item such as perfume, soap, toothbrush, cosmetics and coffee.”

Visitors learn about innovators from the classical Islamic world, such as Princess Fatima al-Firhi, who founded the first degree-granting university in 859, located in Fez, Morocco. Another innovator — the Egyptian physicist Alhazen, born in 965 — laid the foundation for the modern understanding of optics. Alhazen also invented the camera obscura, a precursor to the modern camera.

The Andalusian physician al-Zahrawi (936–1013) was the first surgeon to systematically use catgut sutures (actually derived from sheep intestines). Al-Zahrawi developed

sophisticated surgical instruments, including scalpels, syringes, forceps and surgical needles. Although similar instruments are now created from materials that far surpass those available to early surgeons, “the design and practicality of the tools remain the same,” said al-Hassani.

“One of the most important messages from this exhibition is about the shared scientific heritage of humanity,” he said. “We hope that [*1001 Inventions*] will inspire children of all backgrounds to explore careers in science and technology.

“Today, we live in a global age, with science and ideas shared across continents, and this occurred in the past, as well,” al-Hassani explained. “Men and women of many different faiths — and none — worked together within Muslim civilization in order to advance our understanding of the world.”

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