

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Pledges Vigilance After Attack on U.S. Embassy in Kabul

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton pledged continued U.S. vigilance in Afghanistan following a series of attacks in and around the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, and she said American civilians who are serving in the Afghan capital will continue their work to improve the lives of Afghan men, women and children.

Speaking in Washington September 13, Clinton said the Obama administration “will take all necessary steps not only to ensure the safety of our people, but to secure the area and to ensure that those who perpetrated this attack are dealt with.”

According to press reports, Afghan insurgents engaged in a 20-hour assault targeting the embassy with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and small arms fire. By the time the assault ended on September 14, at least nine Afghans, including four police officers, were killed, and 23 people including civilians were wounded.

Among the injured were three U.S. visa applicants and one local contract guard, according to a September 13 statement from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

“Our thoughts are with these individuals and the other victims of the terrorist attacks that happened today in Kabul. We appreciate the response of the Afghan National Security Forces whose operations stopped the attack on the embassy compound,” the embassy statement said.

Clinton said the U.S. presence in Kabul includes civilians who “are there with the sole purpose of assisting the people of Afghanistan in a transition toward stability, security and prosperity.”

“They will not be intimidated by this kind of cowardly attack,” she said. “While they work hard every day along with their Afghan colleagues to help children go to school, to help save mothers’ lives at childbirth, to build roads, to assist farmers, the opposition of violent extremists, the Taliban and their allies engage in a constant effort to threaten and to undermine the peace and progress of the Afghan people.”

The secretary said U.S. officials will be vigilant but will also increase their commitment to give the Afghan people “a chance at a better future for themselves and their children.”

In remarks to U.S. lawmakers at a joint hearing of the House of Representatives and Senate intelligence committees September 13, Central Intelligence Agency

director David Petraeus said one of the injured Afghan citizens waiting for a U.S. visa was a small girl. She was taken across the street to a hospital at the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan.

Petraeus said that perhaps five individuals armed with weapons and suicide vests carried out the attacks and “were able to move into a building that’s under construction several hundred meters from the embassy” before firing small arms and RPGs into the embassy compound area.

He said that, in general, the frequency of attacks in Kabul has been reduced and that Afghan forces are “completely in charge” of security in their capital city and its municipality.

“In fact it is Afghan forces who are ... clearing the building from which that small arms and RPG attack took place,” he said. “There are very good Afghan forces. They have demonstrated the ability to do this and they are indeed again doing it right now.”

The United States remains engaged in Afghanistan to ensure that it is “never again a sanctuary” for transnational extremists such as al-Qaida, which planned the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States from Afghanistan while the country was under control of the Taliban.

“That prospect remains real and a concern, and is of course why we are working so hard to help enable our Afghan partners to be able to secure and to govern themselves so that we can continue the orderly process of transitioning security tasks to them,” Petraeus said.

Press Statement: Special Representative for Burma Ambassador Derek J. Mitchell

September 14, 2011

Minglaba. Good Morning. Let me read a brief prepared statement. I have just completed my first visit to Burma as U.S. Special Representative and Policy Coordinator. I have spent the past five days in intensive consultations with a full spectrum of interlocutors in Nay Pyi Taw and in Rangoon to discuss the situation here and ways in which the United States can support and promote democracy, human rights, development, and national reconciliation in the country in our common interest.

I want to acknowledge the government’s excellent hospitality, Chargé d’Affaires Michael Thurston and his outstanding team at the U.S. Embassy for a quick turn around in organizing my visit, and all my interlocutors for their time and candor during our meetings over the past several days.

Being my initial visit, my primary goal was to introduce myself, listen to local perspectives, and establish relationships that I will build on as I proceed to fulfill my mandate and responsibilities for managing U.S. Burma policy.

In Nay Pyi Taw, I met with Union Parliament Speaker Khin Aung Myint, People's Parliament Speaker Thura Shwe Mann, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, Labor and Social Welfare Minister Aung Kyi, Border Affairs Minister Lieutenant General Thein Htay, Information Minister Kyaw Hsan, and USDP Secretary General Htay Oo. I also met with a cross section of opposition MPs, including representatives from ethnic minority regions.

I was encouraged by and pleased with the quality and openness of the exchanges, and the constructive and respectful tone of each interaction I had. During these meetings, my government interlocutors repeatedly stated that this country had opened a new chapter to a civilian-led democratic governing structure and expressed that they were sincerely committed to reform in the interest of human rights, democracy, development, and national reconciliation.

I responded that the United States recognized and welcomed recent gestures from Nay Pyi Taw, such as President Thein Sein's meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission, public emphasis on dialogue with ethnic minority groups in the interest of national reconciliation, and moderate easing of media censorship. Among both the international community and the Burmese people, it is clear that there are heightened expectations and hopes that change may be on the horizon.

At the same time, I was frank about the many questions the United States – and others – continue to have about implementation and follow-through on these stated goals. I noted that many within the international community remain skeptical about the government's commitment to genuine reform and reconciliation, and I urged authorities to prove the skeptics wrong.

To that end, I raised concerns regarding the detention of approximately 2,000 political prisoners, continued hostilities in ethnic minority areas accompanied by reports of serious human rights violations, including against women and children, and the lack of transparency in the government's military relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

I offered respectfully that the government should take concrete actions in a timely fashion to demonstrate its sincerity and genuine commitment to reform and national reconciliation, including by releasing all political prisoners unconditionally, engaging in meaningful

outreach to the political opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and engaging in dialogue rather than armed conflict with ethnic minority groups. I affirmed the importance of establishing a legitimate and credible mechanism for investigating reported abuses in ethnic areas as a first step toward building trust and promoting national reconciliation through accountability. I also urged the government to adhere to all of its obligations under UN Security Council Resolutions related to proliferation.

I want to emphasize that our dialogue on these topics was respectful and open, which I greatly appreciated. I noted that progress on these issues will be essential to progress in the bilateral relationship, and that if the government takes genuine and concrete action, the United States will respond in kind.

Here in Rangoon, I continued the conversation on current conditions and trends in the country with a broad cross section of civil society. I consulted with the business and diplomatic communities, and local and international NGOs, including citizens doing heroic and courageous work providing free funeral services for the poor and treating those with HIV/AIDS.

And of course I met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of the National League for Democracy to discuss their perspectives on recent developments in the country, the future of their party, and U.S. policy approaches. I was reminded consistently during my visit that Daw Suu remains deeply important to the citizens of this country, Burman and ethnic minority alike, and that any credible reform effort must include her participation. It was also clear that she remains fully committed to the cause of peaceful change through dialogue.

Unfortunately, I was only here for a few days and thus was unable to explore the full breadth and diversity of this beautiful country. However, the courage and commitment of those with whom I met give me great hope for the country's future should genuine reform and reconciliation proceed. I will be following developments closely from afar, and look forward to many return visits here to continue the United State's principled engagement policy.

Again, I would like to thank the government for hosting me so warmly for my inaugural visit in my new post, and to all my interlocutors for sharing their valuable insights. I consider this a highly productive visit. I now will take a few questions before I must catch my plane.

Ambassador Locke Discusses Expanded U.S.-China Relations

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — The ultimate strength of the U.S.-China partnership and the degree to which the two nations build mutual trust depend on the investment, support and active engagement of the American and Chinese peoples, U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke says.

“So many problems in the world today — from climate change to poverty and disease — simply will not be solved without strong U.S.-China cooperation,” Locke said.

Locke, speaking to 400 students and faculty at the Beijing Foreign Studies University on September 9, said the United States unequivocally welcomes the rise of a prosperous and successful China that assumes a greater role in world affairs. The former commerce secretary was sworn in as ambassador to China August 1, and is the first Chinese American to hold the post.

“I reject the notion that China and the United States are engaged in a zero-sum competition, where one side must fall for the other to rise,” Locke said in prepared remarks. “We can and must achieve security and prosperity together.”

Locke told the students that he begins his ambassadorship with confidence that the overall state of the relationship is strong and that it will grow. To strengthen the relationship, Locke pledged:

- To improve economic and commercial ties between the United States and China by building on the trade relationship in a way that reduces barriers to trade and creates jobs for both nations.
- To further the bilateral dialogue on human rights, religious freedom and civil society on the basis of mutual respect.
- To increase people-to-people interactions and cultural exchanges to build genuine understanding and cooperation.
- To do even more to reduce the amount of time that Chinese students, business executives and tourists must wait to obtain visas.

In January, President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao met during a state visit in Washington and pledged to expand cooperation across a range of issues, to conduct visits among high-level U.S. and Chinese officials and military leaders, and to expand cultural and education programs. A significant portion of that effort will be focused on commerce and trade, Locke said.

“The highest priority of the United States today is to

create jobs for Americans and revitalize our economy,” Locke told the students. “Given our economic interdependence, a stronger American economy is in the economic self-interest of the Chinese people.”

Locke said he will support policies that double U.S. exports, which would create jobs in the United States and provide high-quality U.S.-made products and services in high demand in China. Locke said he also supports increasing Chinese investment in the United States, which will help Chinese companies prosper and bolster jobs, and ensure that U.S. companies can compete equally in China and be able to operate in an open and fair environment like the one Chinese companies enjoy in the United States.

But the partnership also hinges on closer relations between the U.S. and Chinese people, Locke said. That is why, he added, President Obama launched the 100,000 Strong Initiative to send American students to live and study in China and why the United States wants even more Chinese students to come to America and experience its culture and society.

“And of course, there are millions more Chinese — like my family — who have experienced America as immigrants,” Locke told the students. His grandfather left his ancestral village near Jiangmen city for the United States in the 1890s. Locke’s grandfather arrived in Olympia, Washington, to work as a houseboy in exchange for English lessons.

A hundred years later, Locke was elected governor of Washington state, becoming the first Asian-American governor on the U.S. mainland.

Libyans Addressing Differences Through Debate

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The top U.S. diplomat for the Middle East says the diverse Libyan groups that joined together in opposition to Muammar Qadhafi’s regime are peacefully discussing their differences and looking ahead to national elections as the country continues its transition from Qadhafi’s 42-year reign.

Speaking to reporters in a September 14 conference call, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and North African Affairs Jeffrey Feltman acknowledged that rebel groups “came together with one goal, which was to get rid of Qadhafi and have a different future for Libya,” but that there are divisions among them in terms of geography and political views, and in how they see the way forward for their country.

Feltman spoke after visiting Tripoli and meeting with a broad array of Libyans, including Transitional National Council leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil, Prime Minister

Mahmoud Jibril, civil society representatives and health professionals.

He said no one knows where Qadhafi is or how much money he has at his disposal, but in his informal conversations with Libyans, the people speak as if the former leader has become irrelevant. Libyans have moved on, he said, and Qadhafi "is already part of the past."

The Libyan people are now "trying to figure out what is the best way forward," and Feltman said he had left Tripoli "somewhat encouraged by how they're dealing with the differences among them."

The assistant secretary said he had heard "broad support for the basic outline the TNC put forward, which is sort of a consolidation for now, leading to elections in a period of about eight months from now."

By accepting that outline, Libyans know "they are going to be able to play out their political differences through the ballot box and [they] have time to prepare for that," he said.

"I really did leave today feeling that the question of east versus west, the question of Islamist versus non-Islamist, the question of Tripoli versus the rest of the country, are being discussed in a ... positive way rather than a fearful way," he said.

The debate among Libyans "is now evolving away from the sort of fear that some people had" over the direction of the revolution against Qadhafi into how best to centralize the country's command structure and fighters, and how to build "an inclusive system for the interim period" that will allow the differences among them to be settled by voting.

"It's really a far different debate than it was even a few weeks ago," he said.

There is a sense that the differences among Libyans "can be worked out in a peaceful way, and not fighting on the streets," Feltman said.

Feltman said he told Libyan leaders that the Obama administration wants to build "a broad relationship" with the new Libya that will be "based on mutual respect and shared interests."

He also said the United States wants to see the TNC's positive language on human rights, including minority and women's rights, translated into "real action on the ground," such as having women play leadership roles in the post-Qadhafi state.

Civil Society's Role in New Democracies

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer

Washington – Civil society must be involved when countries transition from autocratic regimes to democracy, said Eric Bjornlund, co-founder of Washington-based Democracy International.

He will share this message when he talks to members of Tunisia's civil society via videoconference September 19 from the State Department. Tunisians ousted President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011, ushering in a wave of political promise, as well as uncertainty.

"Strong civil society organizations in a transition can provide constructive channels for democratic participation," Bjornlund said. Civil society organizations "can help rebuild citizens' trust in government, promote their rights and interests, and encourage the inclusion of minorities and disenfranchised groups."

The lawyer, who has long been involved in monitoring elections, said civic advocacy often concerns such issues as the timing of elections, eligibility for political office, whether the chief executive will be a president or prime minister, and how that person will be elected. Another issue is whether former officials should be prosecuted for past crimes, he added. "It's important these decisions not be held behind closed doors by political elites," he said.

"Civil society can organize around these issues and advocate for more open decisionmaking," Bjornlund said. "People around the world want to have a say in their government and to have control over their lives and make sure the elections have real integrity." Civil society may include nongovernmental groups, professional associations and religious organizations, he said.

Bjornlund cited the example of citizens who advocated for democracy in Indonesia. Their efforts led to the 1998 resignation of President Suharto after a 32-year rule. Indonesia eventually amended its constitution in 2004 to provide for the direct election by popular vote of the president and vice president.

Bjornlund added that another key area of a government's transition is educating the public about the election process and the responsibilities of both the public and the election officials. This educational role should involve both civil society and government.

He pointed to a series of citizen discussions in the Palestinian Territories in the mid-1990s funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development that he directed through the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Bjornlund cited the thousands of groups that met to encourage people to learn about

democracy, share their views and, most importantly, have the experience of engaging with fellow citizens on issues of governance. The forum became a model for other civic education programs in Haiti and countries in Eastern Europe.

International groups have monitored elections to ensure their integrity since the mid-1980s. Over the years, the activity has evolved from an informal one to an international norm that is included in many international agreements.

Bjornlund, author of the book *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy*, has worked with former U.S. president Jimmy Carter monitoring elections in five countries. He said election monitoring involves both civil society groups and the international community to ensure that the results of an election express the will of the voting public. "Civil society groups organize around the ideas that they want to have democratic elections. They want a certain set of rules, then to make sure those rules are respected."

Democracy International works to promote free and legitimate elections through monitoring, election administration strengthening, and support for democratic political parties.

State Department on Emergency Law in Egypt

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
September 13, 2011

QUESTION TAKEN AT THE SEPTEMBER 13TH DAILY
PRESS BRIEFING

Egypt: Emergency Law

QUESTION: What is the view of the U.S. Government regarding the Supreme Military Council move to revive the emergency law and to extend its application to categories of behavior that previously had not been covered?

ANSWER: Egypt's transitional government, led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), has committed itself to carrying out a transition to the free and fair election of a civilian-led government. Critical components of this transition process are rule of law and a respect for human rights. As such, we have encouraged the transitional government to lift the state of emergency immediately. Moreover, we believe that the trials of accused civilians appropriately belong in Egypt's civilian courts. The SCAF has said publicly they are prepared to eliminate the emergency law as soon as conditions permit, and before parliamentary elections. We have repeatedly

encouraged them to do so.

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