

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Obama Announces New Defense Strategy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama announced a new defense strategy that emphasizes U.S. strategic interests for a fast-changing world after a decade of war.

“Our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats,” Obama said at a Pentagon briefing January 5. He was flanked by the senior U.S. defense leadership.

The new strategy reflects both a shift in global strategic thinking and the realities of a more austere national budget climate that is mandated by the U.S. Congress. The strategy is based on a comprehensive defense review by civilian and military leaders at the Pentagon, the departments of State, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. intelligence community. Obama ordered the review to guide defense planners on priorities over a decade with planned defense cuts of more than \$450 billion.

The strategy “requires all elements of our national power, working together in concert with our allies and our partners,” Obama told reporters at the Pentagon press center. His briefing was the first time a president has released a new defense strategy at the Pentagon, which is the home of the U.S. Department of Defense and the armed services.

Last year, Congress passed the Budget Control Act, which mandates reductions in federal spending across the entire government, including defense spending. The measure won support from both Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Obama said that for the United States to renew its economic strength, it must put its fiscal house in order, and budget reductions are an essential aspect of that process.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said in the introduction to the strategy that the United States is at a strategic turning point after a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that it is time to shape a joint force for the future. He said the force that emerges will be smaller and leaner, but also agile, flexible, ready and technologically advanced.

“It will have cutting-edge capabilities, exploiting our technological, joint and networked advantage. It will be led by the highest quality, battle-tested professionals,” Panetta said.

Echoing the president’s remarks, Panetta said the strategy calls for an armed force that has a global presence

emphasizing security interests in the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East, while still maintaining defense commitments to Europe and NATO, and strengthening alliances and partnerships across other regions.

Obama said the United States will invest in the capabilities that are needed for the future, including: intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; and the ability to operate in environments where adversaries try to deny access.

Panetta said the new strategy calls for effectively operating in cyberspace, space, and across all domains; and maintaining a safe and effective nuclear deterrent. And the defense strategy makes it clear that the United States will continue to take an active approach to countering threats from far-reaching extremist groups that often capitalize on ungoverned territories.

The strategy acknowledges that no plan can predict “with absolute certainty” how the global security environment will evolve, which means the United States must maintain a broad portfolio of military capabilities.

“Wholesale divestment of the capability to conduct any mission would be unwise, based on historical and projected uses of U.S. military forces and our inability to predict the future,” the strategy says.

Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma Derek Mitchell

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC

January 5, 2012

Ambassador Mitchell will travel to Burma and northern Thailand January 9-13, 2012. He plans to meet with interlocutors in Nay Pyi Taw and Rangoon to follow up on Secretary Clinton’s December visit. Ambassador Mitchell will also travel to Bagan to see microfinance programs and other development work in Burma’s dry zone.

He also plans to travel to northern Thailand to meet with local officials and assistance groups working with refugees in the border region.

Ambassador Mitchell, as Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma, plans to visit Burma

frequently to build on our principled engagement, including dialogue with the Burmese Government and local stakeholders.

Travel of Ambassador Luis CdeBaca to Burma

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC

January 5, 2012

Luis CdeBaca, Ambassador at Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, will travel to Burma January 9 - 11, 2012 to assess the human trafficking situation firsthand and to explore opportunities to strengthen the government's anti-trafficking efforts. While visiting the capital of Nay Pyi Taw, Ambassador CdeBaca will join Ambassador Derek Mitchell, U.S. Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma, in meetings with officials to discuss recent steps to address transnational sex trafficking and improve labor conditions for workers.

Ambassador CdeBaca will then travel to Rangoon to meet with nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and the new Human Rights Commission.

State Department on Burma's Independence Day

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
January 3, 2012

STATEMENT BY VICTORIA NULAND,
SPOKESPERSON

Burma's Independence Day

January 4, 2012 marks the 64th anniversary of Burma's independence.

We are unwavering in our support for a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Burma.

The United States remains committed to pursuing principled engagement, and we are prepared to provide further support as reforms proceed and progress is made toward realizing the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people. We continue to call for the release of all political prisoners, a halt to hostilities in ethnic areas and an inclusive dialogue with ethnic minorities toward national reconciliation, space for all political parties to

freely compete in April 1 by-elections, and full implementation of legislation to protect universal freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

State's Campbell Visits China, South Korea, Japan

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell is visiting China, South Korea and Japan for five days of talks with leaders on a broad range of issues, including the recent political changes in North Korea and Burma.

Speaking January 4 in Beijing, the first stop on his trip, Campbell told reporters he met with Chinese leaders for "very fruitful, broad discussions" covering a series of topics. He said the United States and China "share strong determination to maintain peace and stability" as North Korea undergoes political transition, adding that both Chinese and U.S. leaders will continue to monitor the situation there.

Washington's relations with Burma have been warming since the country began to implement certain democratic reforms, including the release of some political prisoners and the easing of restrictions on the media, in late 2011.

Political change has also been under way in North Korea since the death of longtime leader Kim Jong Il on December 17. Kim's son, Kim Jong Un, was named his father's successor as supreme commander of the communist country's powerful National Defense Commission by the government shortly after his father's death.

Campbell is the most senior U.S. diplomat to visit Northeast Asia since Kim Jong Il's death. He urged all parties in the region to "cautiously deal with the situation and to refrain from any provocations."

The assistant secretary left Beijing January 4 to travel to Seoul, where he is scheduled to stay until January 6. He is then set to visit Tokyo before departing for Washington January 7, according to the State Department.

The department said in a statement that Campbell's trip presents an "important opportunity to continue to build a cooperative partnership with China on shared global challenges," "to continue our close consultation and coordination on the broad range of issues important" to the U.S.-South Korea alliance and to "reinforce our close cooperation with the government of Japan."

Iowa Has Spoken. Does It Matter?

By Bridget Hunter | Staff Writer

Washington — On January 3, Iowa voters from 99 counties met at nearly 1,800 caucus sites across the state to discuss who should be the next Republican nominee to the office of U.S. president.

Approximately 25 percent chose former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, and another 25 percent (only eight fewer votes than Romney) chose former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania. Ron Paul, a U.S. representative from Texas, finished third with 21 percent of the vote. But how much do those results matter?

Iowa is important in the U.S. election process because it is the first political referendum on presidential candidates. It tests the candidates' stamina, poise, fundraising ability and organizational skills, but success in Iowa is no guarantee of future success, nor does failure in Iowa mean the death of a campaign.

Since 1976, Iowa has held seven contested caucuses for the Republican nomination. Only three of the seven winners went on to secure the nomination. On the Democratic side, in the nine contested caucuses since 1972, five victors eventually won their party's nomination.

In the past four decades, four candidates who lost in Iowa became president: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

In 2008, a young senator from Illinois — Barack Obama — won the Iowa caucus, the Democratic nomination and the White House. In contrast, the 2008 Republican victor in Iowa, Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, lost the nomination to Arizona Senator John McCain, a fourth-place finisher in Iowa.

Sixteen years earlier, another Arkansas governor finished third in Iowa, with just 3 percent of the vote, but in November Americans elected that governor — Bill Clinton — president.

Many pundits link a third-place Iowa finish in 2004 with the end of Vermont Governor Howard Dean's presidential hopes. His on-camera whoop, aimed at cheering up his supporters, was endlessly replayed on television and the Internet. It convinced many American voters that Dean lacked the gravitas to be president.

CAUCUS-GOERS NOT TYPICAL U.S. VOTERS

One reason Iowa results are unreliable predictors of a White House victory is demographic. Few people participate in the Iowa caucus; average turnout (100,000

to 150,000) is equivalent to the population of a dozen city blocks in New York's Manhattan. In addition, caucus participants are a more homogenous group than the American electorate, and less diverse than voting populations in many other states.

The Iowa economy, with stable home prices and a 5.7 percent unemployment rate, is better than that of most states.

Another reason for unreliability is the process itself.

In the United States, participating in a political caucus is a much bigger commitment than simply going to a polling place to vote. For that reason, caucus participants tend to be more politically active than the average voter. They also tend to spend more time researching the issues and listening to candidates, and are more likely to take an active role in campaigns.

Caucusing is not for the timid. The rigors of the process impose a sort of political Darwinism, in which only candidates with the most committed followers survive.

Finding the caucus site is the first challenge, because it probably is not a regular polling place. Instead, it could be a firehouse, a church basement or a neighbor's living room. Attending an Iowa caucus means you must travel after dark in one of the nation's northernmost states, frequently in bad weather. Once there, you must remain until the caucus concludes, sometimes several hours later, listening to speeches on behalf of candidates and arguing in support of your candidate.

The caucus also is a rite of passage for candidates, who crisscross the state in rented buses, visiting coffee shops, diners and pizza parlors to meet prospective supporters. In Iowa, candidates get tired, hoarse and sometimes a little fatter.

But, despite the hardships, the Iowa caucus, like the New Hampshire primary scheduled for January 10, is a cherished tradition of American politics and an important milestone on the long road to the White House.

Successful Animal Vaccine Holds Clues to Human Vaccine for HIV

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — An international research team has developed a vaccine that provides some protection for monkeys against the simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), and the discovery may light the path to a vaccine candidate that will protect humans from HIV.

The research demonstrates that "scientists are homing in

on the critical ingredients of a protective HIV vaccine," according to an announcement January 4 by Harvard University, which is among the supporters of the Ragon Institute, an institution expressly created in 2009 to bring fresh approaches to the pursuit of a vaccine against HIV, the virus that brings on AIDS.

The U.S. Military HIV Research Program (MHRP), Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and the pharmaceutical company Crucell Holland B.V. were also partners in the collaboration. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) joined the other institutions in providing backing for the work.

This is the first research effort to show partial vaccine protection in a test with animals, and it also demonstrated that novel combinations of different vaccines – rather than a single vaccine alone – administered to rhesus monkeys can achieve that protection. Monkeys don't develop disease when exposed to HIV, so closely-related SIV offers the best testing ground for a vaccine that might ultimately be administered to humans.

The group used a "prime boost" vaccine technique developed over the last decade that involves a two-stage immunization process, administering different vaccine formulas several months apart. After they administered a second vaccine, the "boost," the researchers injected the monkeys with SIV.

This regimen resulted in a more than 80 percent reduction in the per exposure probability that the monkeys would become infected.

"This study allowed us to evaluate the protective efficacy of several prime-boost vaccine combinations," said Dr. Dan H. Barouch of BIDMC, "and these data will help guide the advancement of the most promising candidates into clinical trials." As BIDMC's chief of vaccine research, Barouch led the study.

The researchers also analyzed the type of responses mounted by the monkeys' immune system. They found that animals produced different antibodies in response to each of the vaccines administered. Attacking the SIV cells differently, these antibodies achieved their most significant level of protection when monkeys' immune systems mounted defenses against both the envelope protein that makes up the outer coat of SIV and the virus's capability to replicate after infecting the host.

Those distinctly different immune system responses "likely reflect fundamentally different requirements to block establishment of infection compared with controlling viral replication after infection," said Colonel Nelson Michael, director of the U.S. MHRP at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.

These findings produce enough positive evidence to push the research to the next phase, according to statements by the partners. The collaborators plan to move to the first phase of clinical testing in which vaccine candidates will be administered to humans at trial sites in the United States, East Africa, South Africa and Thailand. Participants in the research still caution that results in animal testing cannot be projected forward as an outcome of future human testing. Medications always must move through three phases of clinical testing for both efficacy and safety before they are even submitted to regulators for approval.

These positive results in vaccine research come after the 30th anniversary of the identification of the virus. It was an occasion that led the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) to reaffirm its commitment to addressing the global epidemic of HIV/AIDS at a special session in New York. On the sidelines of that event, U.S. officials expressed optimism about multilateral partnerships against the disease and the prospect of finding an effective vaccine that could stop HIV contagion.

The United States is the single largest donor in the huge global effort to combat the disease. On World AIDS Day December 1, the White House released the latest statistics on the numbers of lives touched by U.S.-backed programs, including:

- 3.9 million people receiving lifesaving anti-retroviral treatment.
- 9.8 million pregnant women receiving HIV testing and counseling.
- 13 million people receiving care and support, including more than 4.1 million orphans and vulnerable children.

Women's Issues Envoy Visits Bangladesh, Nepal

03 January 2012

Washington – Melanne Verveer, U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, is traveling to Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Kathmandu, Nepal, January 2-8 to meet with government, community-based and civil society leaders involved in advancing the rights and well-being of women and girls. She also will promote U.S. policy on women, peace and security.

During the Bangladesh portion of her trip, from January 4-6, Verveer will join a congressional delegation engaging with host country officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on such issues as child marriage, maternal and child health, women's political and economic participation, gender-based violence, the role of women in climate change and improving girls' access to education.

Verveer will continue on to Kathmandu, Nepal, January 6-8 to focus on promoting the role of women in conflict and post-conflict situations and meet with Nepalese government leaders, civil society representatives and the NGO community to discuss the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, which aims to promote political participation of women in all aspects of peace and security.

The Obama administration unveiled a new policy on December 19, 2011, on women, peace and security, proposing a detailed action plan intended to give women everywhere a louder voice in preventing and resolving conflicts. In describing the new policy in a December 19 speech, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said there is growing evidence that women around the world contribute to making and keeping the peace and that these contributions lead to better outcomes for entire societies.

"From Northern Ireland to Liberia to Nepal and many places in between," Clinton said, "we have seen that when women participate in peace processes, they focus discussion on issues like human rights, justice, national reconciliation and economic renewal that are critical to making peace, but often are overlooked in formal negotiations. They build coalitions across ethnic and sectarian lines, and they speak up for other marginalized groups. They act as mediators and help to foster compromise. And when women organize in large numbers, they galvanize opinion and help change the course of history.

Clinton also has highlighted the need for giving women greater access to jobs and economic opportunities as means for improving entire economies. "At a time when the global economy is still struggling, we cannot afford to ignore this potential. ...When we liberate the economic potential of women, we elevate the economic performance of communities, nations and, indeed, the world," she said in November 2011.

Allowing half of the population the same economic opportunities as men will bring businesses more consumers and will result in more spending and saving by families, more food production, improved education and political stability, Clinton said.

"This is simply smart economics," the secretary added.

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