American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Weekly Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

September 14, 2012

President Obama: U.S. Respects All Religious Faiths, Beliefs 1

Secretary Clinton Condemns Anti-Islam Film, Subsequent Violence 2

President Obama Condemns Attack that Killed Four U.S. Diplomats in Benghazi 2

U.S., Trans-Pacific Partners Make Progress on Trade Deal 3

U.N. Meeting to Focus on Rights of Disabled Persons 4

U.S. Trade Slows in July, Causes Slight Deficit Rise 5

Agencies Announce 32 Innovations to Improve Child Literacy 6

U.S. Congratulates Russia on Joining World Trade Organization 7

U.S., Japan Must Work as Allies in Energy Issues, Analysts Say 7

U.S. Removes Nepalese Communist Party from Terrorist List 8

Goodbye, Sun; Hello, Space: Voyagers Mark Anniversaries 8

President Obama: U.S. Respects All Religious Faiths, Beliefs

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
13 September 2012

Washington — The United States is a nation that respects all religious faiths, and it rejects efforts by anyone to denigrate the religious beliefs of others, President Obama said in the aftermath of an attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya.

Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasized that message in remarks September 12 in Washington following the Benghazi attack on September 11 that claimed the lives of U.S. Ambassador John Christopher Stevens, Sean Smith, and two other diplomats assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli. The names of the two other victims have not been released pending notification of their families.

The four diplomats had traveled from the Tripoli embassy to Benghazi in the hopes of helping evacuate other diplomats stationed at the small mission after it was attacked in a near six-hour battle by unknown extremists, according to senior U.S. officials. At least three other officials were injured in the attack.

The embassy in Tripoli has since been reduced to emergency staffing levels, and U.S. officials have asked the Libyan government for additional security support.

The September 11 attack on the mission is still under investigation, and many of the details of what happened in the eastern city of Benghazi are still unknown or unclear, a senior U.S. administration official said in a late September 12 briefing.

Even as the president and secretary of state emphasized sorrow at the loss of four U.S. diplomats in an attack by armed extremists who used machine guns, light mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, they emphasized a long-held and cherished American belief in the importance and value of religious freedom. The belief in religious freedom is considered so important to Americans that it is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights.

"America's commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation," Clinton said in remarks at the State Department's Treaty Room. She later joined the president at the White House for additional remarks to journalists.

"Let me be clear — there is no justification for this" attack, Clinton said. "Violence like this is no way to honor religion or faith."

"As long as there are those who would take innocent life in the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace," Clinton said.

Clinton praised Libyans who came to the aid of the U.S. diplomats, saying the attack was carried out by "a small and savage group — not the people or government of Libya."

"When the attack came ... Libyans stood and fought to defend our post," Clinton said. "Some were wounded. Libyans carried Chris' body [Ambassador Stevens] to the hospital, and they helped rescue and lead other Americans to safety."

"And last night, when I spoke with the president of Libya [Mohamed Yousef Magariaf], he strongly condemned the violence and pledged every effort to protect our people and pursue those responsible," Clinton said.

Obama telephoned President Magariaf September 12, their first conversation since Magariaf's election in August, according to the White House. Obama thanked Magariaf for extending his condolences for the tragic deaths of the four Americans, according to the White House.

Obama "also expressed appreciation for the cooperation we have received from the Libyan government and people in responding to this outrageous attack, and said that the Libyan government must continue to work with us to assure the security of our personnel going forward," the White House said in a prepared statement.

Many of Obama's remarks following the Benghazi attack echoed similar remarks he made June 4, 2009, at Cairo University in a global speech hosted by Al-Azhar University, the chief center of Arabic literature and Islamic learning in the world.

"I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition," Obama said. "Instead they overlap, and share common principles — principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings."

Obama noted in his Cairo speech that there is a mosque in every U.S. state and more than 1,200 mosques in all within the United States. "So let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America," he said.

Obama emphasized to the Cairo audience that "America is not — and never will be — at war with Islam."

Secretary Clinton Condemns Anti-Islam Film, Subsequent Violence

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
13 September 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemned an anti-Islam film that has spurred protests across the Middle East, saying, "this video is disgusting and reprehensible."

"It appears to have a deeply cynical purpose to denigrate a great religion and to provoke rage," Clinton said in remarks at the start of the U.S.-Morocco Strategic Dialogue in Washington September 13.

But Clinton added that "there is no justification, none at all, for responding to this video with violence. We condemn the violence that has resulted, in the strongest terms. And we greatly appreciate that many Muslims in the United States and around the world have spoken out on this issue."

Clinton told journalists at the pre-conference briefing that violence has no place in religion and is not the way to honor religion or religious faith. Her remarks follow in the aftermath of protests that began in Cairo, Egypt, on September 11 and have since spread to other nations following the release of a 14-minute anti-Islam video trailer on the Internet.

"Islam, like other religions, respects the fundamental dignity of human beings, and it is a violation of that fundamental dignity to wage attacks on innocents," Clinton said. "As long as there are those who are willing to shed blood and take innocent life in the name of religion, the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace."

Clinton also emphasized in her brief remarks that America has always been committed to religious freedom and tolerance since the beginning of the nation. It is a fundamental belief so strong in the American people that it is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights.

"We are home to people of all religions, many of whom came to this country seeking the right to exercise their own religion, including, of course, millions of Muslims," she added. President Obama in remarks September 12 at the White House said that in the United States there is a mosque in every state in the nation, and more than 1,200 mosques within the borders of the United States, illustrating the strong presence of the Islamic faith.

Specific to the inflammatory film, Clinton said that the United States government had nothing to do with the production of the anti-Islam video and that "we absolutely reject its content and message."

On September 11 in Libya, extremists attacked the U.S. mission in Benghazi with machine guns, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades after protests over the film began in Cairo. In that attack, four U.S. diplomats, including Ambassador John Christopher Stevens and Foreign Service Officer Sean Smith, were killed.

Clinton said that it is "especially wrong for violence to be directed against diplomatic missions. These are places whose very purpose is peaceful, to promote better understanding across countries and cultures."

President Obama Condemns Attack that Killed Four U.S. Diplomats in Benghazi

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
12 September 2012

Washington — President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemned a rocket attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya, that took the lives of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador John Christopher Stevens.

Stevens, a 21-year U.S. diplomat, and three U.S. Embassy personnel were killed when they went to the eastern city of Benghazi to try to evacuate mission staff late September 11 during a riot in which a mob fired machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades at the mission. Also on September 11, demonstrators attacked the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, breaching the embassy walls and destroying the U.S. flag.

"I strongly condemn the outrageous attack on our diplomatic facility in Benghazi," Obama said in a prepared statement September 12. The president added that the diplomats "exemplified America's commitment to freedom, justice and partnership with nations and people around the globe, and stand in stark contrast to those who callously took their lives."

Obama ordered the U.S. government to provide all necessary resources to support the security of U.S. personnel in Libya and to increase security at diplomatic posts around the globe. He said at the White House September 12 that those responsible for the attack on the mission will be brought to justice.

"While the United States rejects efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others, we must all unequivocally oppose the kind of senseless violence that took the lives of these public servants," Obama said.

At the State Department September 12, Clinton told journalists that "this is an attack that should shock the conscience of people of all faiths around the world. We condemn in the strongest terms this senseless act of violence and we send our prayers to the families, friends

and colleagues of those we've lost."

But Clinton also said that this attack on the U.S. mission was by "a small and savage group" and not the Libyan people or the Libyan government. "Libyans stood and fought to defend our post. Some were wounded. Libyans carried Chris' body to the hospital and they helped rescue and lead other Americans to safety."

It was an especially difficult time for the United States because this attack and the similar attack in Cairo occurred on the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, Clinton noted.

Clinton telephoned Libyan President Mohamed Yousef el-Magariaf September 11 to coordinate additional support to protect Americans in Libya.

"President Magariaf expressed his condemnation and condolences and pledged his government's full cooperation," Clinton said in a State Department statement.

"Some have sought to justify this vicious behavior as a response to inflammatory material posted on the Internet," Clinton added. "The United States deplores any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others. Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation."

"But let me be clear: There is never any justification for violent acts of this kind," she said.

Ambassador Susan Rice, the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, said September 12 in New York that "the United States has lost four brave individuals who, in President Obama's words, exemplified America's commitment to freedom, justice and international partnership."

She noted that in Ambassador Stevens, the Libyan people lost a close friend — one who stood by them in their revolution and its aftermath, one who understood and shared in their aspirations, their culture and their traditions.

"He was passionate about his work to bring about a better future in Libya, and he cared deeply for the Libyan people," Rice said. "He and the rest of his team risked their lives daily to support the Libyan people's democratic aspirations, including during the height of the revolution, when he represented the United States in Benghazi."

On Capitol Hill, U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said on the floor of the Senate that he and the members of the Senate join in condemning "the murder of these innocent Americans. And I support employing every available tool at our disposal to ensure the safety of Americans overseas and to hunt down those responsible for these attacks."

Stevens, 52, is the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in the line of duty since 1979, when Adolph Dubs was killed in Afghanistan, according to the State Department's Office of the Historian. Five U.S. ambassadors have been killed in the line of duty by terrorist acts, while two others died in plane crashes.

Stevens had served two previous diplomatic tours in Libya and directed the mission in Benghazi during the revolt against former Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi.

Killed with Stevens was Sean Smith, a U.S. Foreign Service information management officer stationed at the Tripoli Embassy. The names of the other two personnel are being withheld until their families can be informed.

Defense Department spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Steven Warren told journalists that the Pentagon was working with the State Department on the president's order for increased security around the world. He said the Pentagon would provide any support the State Department requests.

A special U.S. Marine fleet antiterrorism security unit was being dispatched to Tripoli and the U.S. Embassy to provide additional security, according to the Pentagon. In addition, U.S. Marines stationed at the embassy were being sent to the Benghazi mission to provide additional security.

U.S., Trans-Pacific Partners Make Progress on Trade Deal

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 12 September 2012

Washington — The United States and its fellow Trans-Pacific Partnership members continue to make significant progress toward concluding a comprehensive regional agreement to liberalize trade and investment while addressing emerging and traditional trade issues.

The leaders of the nine TPP member nations met in Vladivostok, Russia, to discuss progress made during negotiations since the last leaders' meeting, which took place in Honolulu in November 2011, as well as the next steps toward finalizing the deal.

"The conclusion of the TPP will provide a promising pathway for free trade across the Asia-Pacific, support the creation and retention of jobs in our markets, boost our competitiveness, promote economic growth throughout our region and advance our development goals," the leaders said in a September 9 joint statement. "Based on the significant advances our negotiators have made in the

fourteen negotiating rounds and other intersessional meetings since Honolulu, we are confident that this goal is within our reach."

Meeting following the TPP trade ministers' meeting, also in Vladivostok, the leaders pledged to renew their efforts to conclude negotiations in a timely manner "so that our manufacturers, service providers, farmers, ranchers, workers and consumers can begin reaping as soon as possible the considerable benefits" of the agreement.

The deal aims to address existing trade issues, such as tariffs as well as regulatory and other nontariff barriers to trade, while also building a sustainable framework for 21st-century trade by ensuring workers' rights and promoting environmental protection.

Earlier September 9, the trade ministers released a statement detailing significant progress made on many of the 29 chapters under negotiation, including customs, cross-border services, government procurement, telecommunications, competition policy, small- and medium-sized enterprises, competitiveness and business facilitation, and cooperation and capacity building. The group moved ahead on other issues as well, including rules of origin, investment, financial services and temporary entry.

"We are determined to build on the momentum we have achieved to close as many of these chapters as possible this year, recognizing that the agreement is a single undertaking and must result in a balanced package that all TPP countries can embrace," the ministers said. "While our nine countries have different approaches to some of these issues, we are working closely and constructively to find compromises so that we can ensure this agreement will promote synergies between our economies and raise living standards for our people."

The Trans-Pacific Partnership includes Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. Mexico and Canada have been invited into negotiations, and are scheduled to formally join the partnership once current members approve the additions through their own domestic procedures.

The 14th round of negotiations is under way in Leesburg, Virginia, and is scheduled to end September 15.

U.N. Meeting to Focus on Rights of Disabled Persons

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 11 September 2012

Washington — More than 120 nations worldwide have ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), committing their governments to work toward providing this population with the assistance, access and opportunity that is available to citizens at large. How to turn those intentions into reality will be the focus of a New York meeting September 12–14 as member nations gather in an annual conference.

More than 1 billion people worldwide live with some form of disability, about 15 percent of the population, according to a joint report from the World Health Organization and the World Bank. Of those, 110 million to 190 million people have great difficulty functioning in everyday activities.

The Disabilities Convention came into force in 2008, rooted in the principles of nondiscrimination, equality and inclusiveness for persons with disabilities and affirming that they should have the same opportunities as others. Overcoming actual physical and attitudinal barriers that limit disabled persons' equal opportunities takes time, effort, legislation and enforcement.

"What we're looking at is expanding the knowledge and capacity of civil society and governments to be able to move forward in breaking down those barriers," said Judith Heumann, the U.S. State Department's special adviser on international disability rights and the leader of the U.S. delegation to the conference.

The United States has been working steadily for nearly 40 years to open doors and remove physical and attitudinal barriers that deny access and opportunity for persons with disabilities. Although the United States signed the treaty in 2009, Senate approval, as required by law, has not yet come to a vote. Even short of full adoption of the agreement, Heumann said, the U.S. experience in serving this disadvantaged population can be helpful to other countries still working to put appropriate laws and policies in place.

"The United States is working with many different countries for creating and supporting opportunities that civil society and governments are doing to advance the implementation of the CRPD," Heumann said. Members of the U.S. delegation will be following through on these goals in a number of bilateral meetings and panel discussions set for the session in New York.

Heumann said the United States worked with representatives of various states in the African Union earlier this year to develop a Continental Plan of Action, which is intended to guide the region in fulfilling the commitments of the CRPD.

Full implementation of every treaty provision in every nation will take years, if not decades, she said. But nations need to begin by laying the groundwork.

"What is expected is the development of meaningful

legislation [and] budgeting to take into consideration disability in a whole host of areas," Heumann said. "The right for disabled people to go to school, to experience lifelong learning, to participate in employment, elections, etc."

Heumann was stricken with polio as a child and became disabled, unable to walk. She uses a wheelchair and brings that special perspective to her work as the State Department adviser on this issue.

Many of the accommodations that a society should make for persons with disabilities are obvious — wide doors, for example, and elevators and ramps allowing passage to wheelchairs — but other government actions to ensure equal rights to persons with disabilities are more complex.

"In the area of elections, what we're looking at is selecting sites where disabled people can vote," Heumann explained, and "allowing a blind person to bring [a companion] into a voting booth," to assist and ensure the vote is cast as the individual intends.

In a U.S.-hosted panel discussion, members of the U.S. delegation from the Department of Justice and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission will give presentations about the U.S. experience with protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The conference of the parties to the treaty will also place particular emphasis on how to help women and children with disabilities overcome the obstacles and prejudices that may limit their opportunities. Heumann said, for instance, that children with disabilities are barred from schools in some places where the civil rights of this group are not yet fully accepted.

The WHO–World Bank study on disability found in a global survey that disability disproportionately affects already marginalized populations, such as women and the poor. Persons with disabilities are more likely to receive little education and economic opportunity, and thus are more vulnerable to poverty and less likely to receive adequate health care.

Though the United States has not ratified the treaty, the process leading to that vote is under way. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has endorsed U.S. ratification of the treaty and sent the matter forward for a vote.

U.S. Trade Slows in July, Causes Slight Deficit Rise

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 11 September 2012

Washington — The U.S. trade deficit hit $42 billion in July, a slight increase from June due to a 1 percent drop in exports and a 0.8 percent decline in imports during the month, according to a new Commerce Department report.

The International Trade in Goods and Services report for July was issued September 11 by the department's Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis.

"Today's data shows that U.S. exports in July posted one of the highest levels on record, despite challenging global economic conditions," Acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank said in a statement following the report's release.

The document found U.S. exports fell from $185.2 billion in June to roughly $183.3 billion in July as imports declined from $227.1 billion in June to $225.3 billion in July, resulting in a deficit increase of about $100 million for the month.

The July deficit came in $3.6 billion lower than in July 2011, as exports increased $4.9 billion and imports grew $1.4 billion from the previous year.

"While there's still more work to do, we remain on track toward exceeding last year's export total of $2.1 trillion, meaning we continue to make historic progress toward achieving President Obama's National Export Initiative goal of doubling our exports by the end of 2014," Blank said.

She said since President Obama's goal was established in 2009, exports have helped to create 4.6 million new private-sector jobs.

The decrease in goods exports from June to July reflected drops in industrial supplies and materials; automotive vehicles, parts and engines; other goods; and consumer goods. Increases occurred in capital goods and foods, feeds and beverages.

Exports of services were virtually unchanged from June to July, with slight increases in royalties and license fees, travel and other private services. These were mostly offset by decreases in other transportation, which includes freight and port services.

The June to July decrease in imports of goods reflected drops in industrial supplies and materials, capital goods and other goods. Slight increases occurred in automotive vehicles, parts and engines; consumer goods; and foods, feeds and beverages.

Imports of services increased $0.3 billion from June to July, accounted for largely by increases in royalties and license fees. Decreases in passenger fares and travel were partly offsetting.

The July report shows trade surpluses with Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Egypt. Deficits were recorded with China, the European Union, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Japan, Mexico, Germany, Ireland, Canada, South Korea, Taiwan, Venezuela and Nigeria.

Agencies Announce 32 Innovations to Improve Child Literacy

11 September 2012

Washington — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its partners World Vision and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) announced 32 winning innovations for children's literacy at an International Literacy Day celebration at USAID headquarters in Washington September 7.

The competition to create innovative solutions to improve early grade reading in the developing world — the "All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development" grant competition — brought more than 450 proposals from more than 75 countries.

“Today, on International Literacy Day, we have the opportunity to celebrate an initiative designed to generate game-changing ideas to help children around the world improve their reading skills. The ability to read is central to all aspects of a child’s life and future. Yet, 61 million boys and girls are out of school. And just as troubling, schooling doesn’t always translate into learning,” said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah.

All Children Reading, launched in November 2011, is a multiyear partnership to find groundbreaking solutions for illiteracy and to inspire global action around this issue. The focus was on innovative practices in applying research to improve teaching and enhancing the quality of education data. The 32 award nominees are proposing innovative ideas to promote literacy in more than 20 low-income countries. For example:

• In Haiti, the Institute of Higher Education and Infotronics is planning to introduce 250 interactive white boards into Haitian classrooms, bringing the same technology that children are learning with in the United States to more than 20 primary schools in Port au Prince and reaching 25,000 students.

• In the Philippines, the Education Development Center is harnessing the power of mobile technology to address the lack of reliable education data. In the past, the Department of Education in the Philippines had to rely on a pencil-and-paper system that often took as long as 18 months to receive and process data. This led to more than 50 percent of public primary schools failing to submit any required data.

With the center’s support, teachers will be able to submit text messages with student reading performance data directly to a Department of Education database. In turn, teachers will have access to the database and receive training in interpreting the results and designing new strategies around them.

• In India, a local organization called PlanetRead is aiming to improve the literacy skills of 28 million children by adding subtitles to Hindi TV programs, music videos and popular movies. Through a five-year pilot study in five Hindi states, the approach has already shown significant results. In their rural sample, 45 percent of girls could not read after five years of schooling. But that number dropped to 16 percent when the girls were exposed to same-language subtitling.

All winners showcased their innovations at a DevelopmentXChange session. “Since the ability to read is the most basic skill required to overcome poverty, one of humanity’s greatest challenges is to invent ways to ensure that all of our children are reading. If we fail, tragically their vast potential will be lost to all of us,” said Kofi Essien, project manager for Open Learning Exchange Ghana.

OLE Ghana proposes to develop a national network of low-cost digital libraries. Other innovators will address critical needs for teaching materials in a child’s mother tongue, teaching and learning tools for the blind, and more accurate and timely data to make the right decisions to improve learning.

“Our work in communities around the world over the past 60 years has taught us that education, particularly for young girls, is absolutely foundational to the future success of a country," said Kent Hill, senior vice president of international programs at World Vision. "By seeking innovative new ideas for reading and education, we are focusing our efforts on one of the areas of community development that brings the greatest dividends for the future."

“Education is one of the best investments we can make to lift people out of poverty, and that’s why it is the flagship of the Australian aid program,” AusAID Director General Peter Baxter said. “One-fifth of Australia’s overseas aid budget is targeted at literacy and other education programs. AusAID is proud to be working with USAID and World Vision to inspire innovations that will bring the joys and benefits of reading to children and their families.”

In addition to announcing the 32 All Children Reading innovators, the International Literacy Day event featured

education leaders, senior Obama administration officials, and taped messages from former first lady Laura Bush and others discussing efforts to achieve quality education for all. The event was co-hosted with the Brookings Institution and the Global Partnership for Education.

U.S. Congratulates Russia on Joining World Trade Organization

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 10 September 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton praised Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), saying it was good for Russia, the United States and the global trading system.

"Three successive U.S. administrations worked steadily to advance Russia's WTO aspirations," Clinton said in remarks at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vladivostok, Russia, September 8. "We strongly support the basic bargain at the heart of the WTO: Nations that uphold internationally recognized norms — not just on tariffs but subsidies, procurement preferences, intellectual property rights and so on — these nations get to enjoy the benefits of open markets and free trade."

Clinton said the World Bank estimates that if Russia effectively implements its WTO commitments, it could increase its gross domestic product by approximately 3 percent in the medium term, and by as much as 11 percent over the long term.

"So it pays to join the rules-based global trading system. And Russia's trading partners stand to benefit as well," Clinton said. "We believe American exports to Russia could double or even triple."

Clinton also told APEC leaders that the Obama administration is working closely with the U.S. Congress to terminate the application of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1974 and grant Russia Permanent Normalized Trade Relations (PNTR). "We hope that the Congress will pass on this important piece of legislation this month," she said.

According to a July Congressional Research Service report by international trade and finance specialist William Cooper, unconditional most-favored-nation status, or permanent normal trade relations status, is a fundamental principle of the WTO. Under this principle, WTO members are required to treat imports of goods and services from any WTO member no less favorably than they treat the imports of similar goods and services from any other member country.

But under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, most communist or nonmarket-economy countries were denied that status unless they fulfilled certain freedom-of-emigration conditions or were granted a presidential waiver of the conditions subject to congressional disapproval.

The statute still applies to many of these countries, even though most have replaced their communist governments. The majority of these countries have joined the WTO or are candidates for accession, Cooper said.

Congress is expected to vote this year on extending PNTR to Russia and Moldova, Cooper said. On July 18, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee reported out legislation granting that status to both nations, and on July 26 the House Ways and Means Committee reported out similar legislation.

Deputy Secretary of State William Burns told the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington September 6 that Congress must approve PNTR status to Russia for the United States to benefit from trade opportunities in one of the largest and fastest growing markets in the world.

"A vote to extend PNTR is not a favor to Russia. PNTR legislation has attracted bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress and from leaders of states across the country," Burns said. "Continuing to deny PNTR for Russia at this stage only hurts American companies and workers, who are facing fierce economic cooperation."

Russia has the seventh largest economy in the world, but it is only the 20th largest trading partner to the United States, Burns told the business executives. For many U.S. states, though, exports to Russia are growing faster than exports to the rest of the world.

In April U.S. goods exports to Russia reached $1 billion, a new record.

U.S., Japan Must Work as Allies in Energy Issues, Analysts Say

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 07 September 2012

Washington — The United States and Japan, close security allies for the past 50 years, have a common interest in developing alternative energy technologies and protecting shipping lanes between the Middle East and East Asia, according to two former senior U.S. defense officials.

Former Assistant Secretaries of Defense for International Security Affairs Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye have released a report, The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia, that says the trauma caused by the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, in March 2011 must not cause Japan to turn its back on nuclear power

permanently.

The Armitage-Nye report, released August 15, says the U.S.-Japan alliance has been the lynchpin of peace and stability in East Asia for the past half century, but today it is in need of reinvigoration to deal with changing circumstances. Increased cooperation in the energy sector between the two allies would result in greater energy security for Japan and bring benefits in trade to both, according to the report.

"Permanent nuclear shutdown would hinder responsible global development of nuclear power," said Robert McNally, who wrote the bulk of the segment in the report devoted to energy issues. "China plans to join Russia, South Korea and France as vendors of nuclear power plants. Japan can't afford to fall behind. These plants will be built around the world, and the world will benefit from Japan's efficient, reliable and safe nuclear services."

McNally said that nuclear energy is critical to Japan's efforts to reduce its reliance on oil while strengthening its economy and meeting its goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 25 percent by 2020. Before the Fukushima disaster, Japan was the world's third-largest producer of electricity from nuclear power. Since then, Japan has increased its consumption of fuel by 64 percent while the government has issued a white paper that states, "Japan's dependency on nuclear energy will be reduced as much as possible in the medium-range and long-range future."

"Together, Tokyo and Washington must take on the broad lessons of Fukushima and resume world leadership in promoting safe reactor designs and sound regulatory practices," McNally said.

The energy policy specialist said increasing Japan's access to the large reserves of natural gas in the United States should be part of the effort to update the alliance. "Japan needs natural gas and we have it," he said. Since the Fukushima disaster, Japanese companies have been investing heavily in natural gas production in Australia and elsewhere, according to the World Nuclear Association.

The absence of a free trade agreement between the United States and Japan inhibits Japan's access to U.S. natural gas at a time when the United States is set to become a major gas exporter, the Armitage-Nye report says. It recommends that the United States apply to Japan the same terms of sale of natural gas as it does to countries that have free trade agreements with the United States. McNally also warns U.S. policymakers not to heed voices inside the United States who oppose natural gas exports on environmental or economic grounds. "This is not a time for resource nationalism. It's a time for resource alliance," he said.

The report says fossil fuels will remain the dominant source of energy for the global economy for the foreseeable future, and the next major shift in the global oil energy market is likely to be "a massive surge in flows of oil and gas from Middle East producers to increasingly wealthy Asian consumers." It says that Japan and the United States share a core strategic interest in ensuring that shifts in global oil trade do not create instability that could threaten access to energy suppliers in the Middle East.

U.S. Removes Nepalese Communist Party from Terrorist List

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 07 September 2012

Washington — The U.S. government has removed the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from its list of terrorist organizations after determining that the party no longer engages in terrorist activity that threatens the people or the foreign policy of the United States.

In a statement released September 6, the State Department noted that the Maoist party has been elected to lead Nepal's coalition government and that the party has taken steps to dismantle its apparatus for conducting terrorist operations and demonstrated a "credible commitment" to pursuing peace and reconciliation.

The removal of the party from the U.S. list of terrorist organizations means that the United States will lift restrictions on party assets and that U.S. entities may engage in transactions with the party without having to obtain a license from the U.S. government, according to the statement.

The U.S. action does not imply that the U.S. government seeks to overlook or forget the party's violent past, but rather "looks ahead towards the party's continued engagement in a peaceful, democratic political dialogue in Nepal," the statement said.

"Nepal's political culture remains tumultuous, and so we continue to urge all parties to express their views peacefully and in accordance with Nepali law," State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said at a press briefing.

Goodbye, Sun; Hello, Space: Voyagers Mark Anniversaries

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 07 September 2012

Washington — Humankind sent two emissaries on a distant journey 35 years ago, and the most exciting chapter is just about to begin.

The Voyager spacecraft — 1 and 2 — left the launch pad and began a trip through the solar system in late August

1977 and early September 1977. The two craft have each earned superlatives as they approach interstellar space. Voyager 2, launched first in August 1977, is the longest-operating spacecraft ever. Voyager 1 is the most distant object ever sent from Earth.

The two craft also provided the first views humans ever had of the distant neighbors of our system.

"Voyager results turned Jupiter and Saturn into full, tumultuous worlds, their moons from faint dots into distinctive places, and gave us our first glimpses of Uranus and Neptune up close," said Ed Stone, the Voyager project scientist and a physics professor at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, the institution which is home to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).

The images returned by these craft include the tipped magnetic poles of Uranus and Neptune, geysers on Neptune's frozen moon Triton, the volcanoes of Jupiter's moon Io, and the hazy Saturn moon Titan.

"We continue to listen to Voyager 1 and 2 nearly every day," said Suzanne Dodd, the Voyager project manager at JPL. "The two spacecraft are in great shape for having flown through Jupiter's dangerous radiation environment and having to endure the chill of being so far away from our sun."

Dodd and her team keep the craft flying toward interstellar space by carefully managing the use of power from their diminishing energy sources. The team calculates that the two spacecraft will have enough energy to continue data collection and transmission to Earth through 2020 and possibly through 2025.

The actual boundary between our solar system and space is not clearly defined, but, for several years, data from the craft have recorded their voyage through a turbulent region of charged particles. Now scientists are seeing a prevalence of high-energy particles streaming into Voyager's paths from outside the solar system, and a lower level of energy particles originating from inside our solar system. The team is analyzing data on the direction of the magnetic field, which they predict will change when the vehicles cross into interstellar space.

The Voyagers carry some interesting and carefully planned cargo on their mission that is aimed at introducing other life forms to the people of planet Earth. Each craft carries an object known as the Golden Record, a 30-centimeter, gold-plated copper disc inscribed with sounds and images selected to portray the diversity of life and culture on Earth. They may one day tell the story of humanity and our world to extraterrestrials.

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