

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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After First Debate, Incumbent Faces Re-energized Challenger

By Bridget Hunter | Staff Writer | 04 October 2012

Washington — On October 3, with fewer than 1,000 people in attendance, the Republican and Democratic nominees to the U.S. presidency faced off in the first of three scheduled debates.

The true audience for the 90-minute discussion at the University of Denver in Colorado was much larger, with television viewership estimated at 60 million in the United States and 200 million worldwide.

Over the course of the evening, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and President Obama were each trying to win the votes of U.S. citizens who have not yet decided whom to support.

In a wide-ranging exchange focused on economic issues, each candidate faced a slightly different challenge. According to political analysts, Romney, as the challenger lagging in recent polls, needed to project leadership, carry himself with authority, and refute his elitist image. For Obama, the incumbent president and apparent front-runner at this point in the race, the challenge was to avoid mistakes and make the case for keeping his job.

In the morning after the debate, it appeared that both men succeeded, but pundits generally assessed Romney's performance as the stronger in this debate.

"I think Romney did himself considerable good during the first debate," William A. Galston of the Brookings Institution said in a posting to the institution's website late on October 3. "I would not be surprised to learn that a majority of the American people think he won it outright. At the very least, he vastly exceeded expectations."

Galston, now a senior fellow in the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, is a former policy adviser to President Clinton and other presidential candidates.

In recent U.S. political history, the challenger has tended to perform well in the opening debate, in part due to certain inherent advantages. For instance, in the 2004 presidential debates, challenger John Kerry was widely perceived to have trounced incumbent President George W. Bush.

Typically, a challenger has more time to devote to debate preparation, while the incumbent has to balance prep time against the demands of a job widely acknowledged to be one of the world's most difficult. In addition, an incumbent president has become accustomed to some level of deference during four years in the nation's

highest office. The challenger, in contrast, typically achieves nomination only after surviving a grueling series of debates with other presidential hopefuls within the political party.

In the midst of parsing the fine points of tax cuts and economic projections, one particular moment in the October 3 debate stood out for viewers and took on a life of its own in social media.

When Romney, with the disclaimer "I like PBS, I love Big Bird," pledged to cut federal funding for public broadcasting, he triggered a virtual firestorm on Twitter as the fans of the popular Sesame Street character leapt to its defense.

PBS is a private, nonprofit corporation whose members are America's public television stations. These stations, supported by public funds and private donations, are noncommercial and provide educational programming to audiences in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa.

Twitter reported that, at the peak of the response, users were posting 17,000 tweets per minute mentioning Big Bird. A spoof Twitter account, @firedbigbird, quickly won thousands of followers.

The next televised debate, between vice presidential contenders Joe Biden and Paul Ryan, will take place October 11 at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky.

Obama and Romney next will meet October 16 in a town hall-style format at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. Their final debate, this one focused on foreign affairs, is scheduled for October 22 at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida.

Turkish Response to Syrian Attack Appropriate, U.S. Says

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 04 October 2012

Washington — State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland says Turkey's response to a recent mortar attack on civilians from Syrian military forces was appropriate and proportional.

At a State Department briefing October 4, Nuland told journalists that "as was clear last night in the unanimous support that Turkey had from the North Atlantic Council, from our perspective, the response that Turkey made was appropriate." The North Atlantic Council is the ruling body of NATO, of which Turkey is a member.

Nuland said the Turkish response was designed "to strengthen the deterrent effect that these kinds of things

don't happen again, and it was proportional."

Syrian military forces fired mortar rounds into Turkey on October 3, killing at least five Turkish citizens. Later the same day, Turkey responded with artillery fire on targets in Syria.

Nuland said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu by telephone that the United States extended its deepest condolences to the families of the Turkish victims killed and those injured by the mortar attack from Syria.

"The secretary also used that opportunity to condemn the Syrian attack and to pledge U.S. support for our ally Turkey," Nuland told journalists.

Nuland also said the United States has no reason to challenge the Turkish military and the government's assertions that the mortar attack was fired by the Syrian military. She noted that, since the attack, the Syrian regime has acknowledged the attack and apologized to Turkey.

"Our fervent hope and expectation is that there will not be further violations of Turkish sovereignty," Nuland said.

NATO issued a statement in Brussels following an emergency session condemning the Syrian attack.

NATO officials said in the statement that "in view of the Syrian regime's recent aggressive acts at NATO's southeastern border, which are a flagrant breach of international law and a clear and present danger to the security of one of its allies, the North Atlantic Council met today [October 3], within the framework of Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, and discussed the continuous shelling of locations in Turkey adjacent to the Turkish-Syrian border by the Syrian regime forces."

"The most recent shelling on 3 October 2012, which caused the death of five Turkish citizens and injured many, constitutes a cause of greatest concern for, and is strongly condemned by, all allies," the statement says.

"In the spirit of indivisibility of security and solidarity deriving from the Washington Treaty, the alliance continues to stand by Turkey and demands the immediate cessation of such aggressive acts against an ally, and urges the Syrian regime to put an end to flagrant violations of international law," it says.

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice told journalists in New York October 4 that the United States strongly condemned the shelling.

"Turkey is a core ally of the United States, and this sort of cross-border military activity is very destabilizing and must be stopped," Rice said.

A spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Ban "is alarmed by escalating tensions along the Syrian-Turkish border."

Ban's spokesman, Martin Nesirky, told journalists October 4 at U.N. headquarters that "as the situation inside Syria deteriorates yet further ... the risks of regional conflict and the threat to international peace and security are also increasing."

Turkey asked the U.N. Security Council to take the "necessary action" to stop Syrian aggression and ensure Turkish territorial integrity is respected.

Turkey's parliament gave authorization on October 4 for military operations outside Turkish borders, if the government deemed them necessary.

Secretary Clinton, Afghan FM Launch U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 03 October 2012

Washington — The United States and Afghanistan have successfully worked together for more than a decade to improve security, strengthen democracy, support civil society and enhance economic opportunity for the Afghan people, and the United States will continue support for Afghanistan as the country works toward lasting peace and stability, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

"The American people have invested a great deal in Afghanistan's future," Clinton said October 3. "Even though our role in Afghanistan is changing, this partnership will continue."

The secretary spoke alongside Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul at the launch of the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission at the State Department.

Clinton said the new commission "reflects a shared vision and a shared commitment to mutual responsibility and accountability."

She said it will focus on areas critical to Afghanistan's future, including security, human rights and democracy, institutions and governance, women's rights, economic development and regional cooperation.

The commission will implement a strategic partnership agreement signed by President Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul in May, a deal that outlines the next phase of bilateral relations as U.S. and

international troops work to complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

"The transition is on track," Clinton said. "Every day, Afghans are increasingly capable and taking more responsibility for their nation's security."

The secretary praised Afghan's agenda of political reforms leading up to the country's 2014 election, and said Afghanistan also is working closely with the international community to transform its economy.

Rassoul said Afghanistan is committed to building on its recent successes to deliver results for its people.

"As we continue to advance human rights; enhance regional cooperation for peace and prosperity; develop our human and national resources; combat corruption; improve governance; build infrastructure, public health and education; and to fight terrorists and extremism, we will count on the continuing and substantial support of our biggest and most important ally, the United States," the foreign minister said.

He said the Afghan government is committed to pursuing all priorities, with special attention to the continued promotion of the rights of Afghan women and girls and increasing their significant role in the social, political, economic and cultural life of Afghanistan.

Rassoul and Clinton both also spoke about the importance of negotiating a comprehensive bilateral security agreement, and said talks will be led by U.S. Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan James Warlick and Afghan Ambassador Eklil Hakimi.

Clinton said the launch of the bilateral commission brought together leaders and experts from across both the Afghan and American governments, reflecting the breadth and depth of the joint commitment to an enduring partnership.

U.S. Helps Ensure Americans Overseas Can Vote

03 October 2012

Washington — Americans serving their nation overseas will have the resources they need to exercise their right to vote, U.S. military officials affirm.

In an October 2 press briefing, Pentagon spokesman George Little outlined the measures in place to ensure U.S. military personnel and other Americans can cast their ballots regardless of where in the world they are stationed.

"The assistance we provide is completely nonpartisan,"

Little said. "The Federal Voting Assistance Program strives to ensure that every absent military and overseas citizen voter has the tools and resources to receive, cast and return an absentee ballot and have it counted."

The program, developed to ensure absentee military and overseas citizens have the necessary tools to cast their votes, has taken a global, innovative and user-friendly approach, Little said, including implementing several congressionally mandated measures to assist voters.

Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and other Defense Department leaders believe "that it is vitally important for our service members and their families who have made great sacrifices in defense of this democracy to have their voice heard in this election," he said.

For the 2012 U.S. elections, more than 200 voter assistance offices staffed by assistance officers will be available worldwide to assist every unit, in every service, including in Afghanistan and aboard deployed ships, according to Little.

"Between the installation offices and these unit-level voting officers, the department assisted more than 500,000 service members in the first six months of this year alone," he said.

Voter assistance officers help absentee voters navigate a sometimes complex process. In addition, the Defense Department has developed a robust social media campaign to inform absentee service members and overseas citizen voters about these resources.

As of October 2, users had downloaded nearly 600,000 documents on absentee voting registration from the Federal Voting Assistance Program website, Little noted. The program also staffs a toll-free help line to support voters.

The program aims to improve on the voter experience in 2008, when 22 percent of military and overseas voters surveyed were unable to return their ballots because of various administrative and technical problems, according to the Overseas Voter Foundation, a nonpartisan advocacy group.

In 2008, when election turnout nationwide was 62 percent, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission reported that only 5.5 percent of eligible military and overseas voters cast ballots that were actually counted.

Since then, state and federal election officials have worked to find faster ways to handle the ballots of these voters, which in past elections might have gone uncounted because of distance and unreliable mail service.

In the 2010 elections, nearly 3 million overseas and military voters from 33 states were permitted to cast ballots over the Internet using email or facsimile transmissions.

Military voters – veterans and active-duty personnel – make up about 15 percent of the American electorate. In certain swing states, such as Florida and Virginia, the military vote can be especially important to a candidate's success.

Climatic Researchers Recruit Online Community in Storm Analysis

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 03 October 2012

Washington – The National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) is asking the online community worldwide to help out in a data analysis project that could lead to better and more accurate forecasts of major storms like cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons.

NCDC, an agency in the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and other partners launched the website www.cyclonecenter.org in September in the hope that Web surfers everywhere will want to help analyze a catalog of some 300,000 satellite images of 3,000 storms by answering a set of pretty simple questions.

“They’ll be presented with a colorized satellite image,” said Ken Knapp, a climate scientist at NCDC in Asheville, North Carolina. “They’ll be asked a series of questions about the image: What does the image look like? Does it look like it has an ‘eye’? Does it look like it has a band of cold clouds?” Knapp explained the project in a telephone interview.

Knapp said the research group, including several other institutions such as the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNC Asheville), is seeking the public’s help because the human eye is the best available instrument for analyzing the images of swirling storms and spotting the patterns meaningful to scientific analysis. A participant in the Cyclone Center Project will see a series of images taken of the same storm. He or she will answer prescribed questions, and the responses will help create a description of how the storm changed over the time span of the images.

“By having people analyze images of storms from around the world, it provides a uniform analysis between different regions as well,” Knapp said.

Methods for determining the strength of tropical cyclones have differed across scientific organizations around the world. That inconsistency has led to uncertainty and discrepancies in the global historical record of these

storms, Knapp explained.

“We want to take this one technique, and have everyone apply this exact same technique for all times and all ocean basins so that we can have [a data set] that is more uniform.” On CycloneCenter.org, many online participants will review the same sets of images, allowing scientists to use those observations to extrapolate a more accurate assessment of the cyclone’s intensity.

The data on the website are images of storms dating back to 1978, so improving the accuracy of what the images record can contribute to science’s long-term understanding of changes, trends and cycles that churn the atmosphere as these storms move, Knapp said.

Without the public’s help, tropical cyclone analysts would need to spend decades trying to sort through the data. In the first five days of the website’s availability, 1,400 users classified more than 45,000 images, Knapp said, expecting those numbers to jump significantly as news of the project spreads more widely.

The online community’s storm analysis will be just one tool scientists use to improve understanding of cyclonic storms. Data collection from ocean buoys, shipboard observations and land observations are also important to learning more about the behavior of violent weather events. Low-lying regions in Asia have an especially tragic history with cyclones. Bangladesh lost 500,000 lives to a cyclone in 1970. India, Vietnam and China have also experienced horrific loss of life in cyclones. The historical record shows many storms that have destroyed thousands of homes and buildings with property losses running into hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Zooniverse, a nonprofit organization using volunteers to help scientists and researchers in data analysis, developed the website with scientific input from NCDC, UNC Asheville and the Cooperative Institute for Climate and Satellites, a consortium of research institutions.

Georgia’s Vote Sets Democratic Example

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 02 October 2012

Washington – Georgia’s October 1 parliamentary elections have achieved “another significant milestone” in the country’s democratic development, and the United States stands with the Georgian people in welcoming what White House press secretary Jay Carney says is “a significant step in the consolidation of Georgian democracy.”

In an October 2 statement, Carney said the Georgian people have “set a regional and global example by conducting a competitive campaign, freely exercising

their democratic rights, and affirming their commitment to undertake a peaceful transfer of power.”

He said local and international election monitors, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, helped to ensure a transparent electoral process. President Obama and other U.S. officials “look forward to furthering our close cooperation and strong bilateral partnership with Georgia,” Carney said.

Carney also called upon Georgian officials, including President Mikheil Saakashvili and leader of the Georgian Dream coalition Bidzina Ivanishvili, to work “in a spirit of national unity to ensure continued progress on the advancement of democracy and economic development.”

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters October 2 that Georgians had gone through a “hotly contested election” between the Georgian Dream coalition and Saakashvili’s United National Movement, and she praised Saakashvili and his party for “graciously conceding when they lost at the ballot box.”

According to press reports, Saakashvili told Georgians October 1 that despite his disagreements with his political rivals, “democracy works in a way that the Georgian people make decisions by majority,” and he expressed “my respect toward the decision of the majority participating in the elections.”

Nuland said that by conceding the vote and asking the Georgian Dream coalition to form a new government, Saakashvili had sent “a very good signal” that the United States wants to “commend, underscore and continue to encourage going forward.”

“This is a really important milestone for democracy in Georgia, but it’s also a really important democratic signal for the region and for other countries that are struggling to be democratic,” Nuland said.

Report Reveals Visa Improvements for Visitors to U.S.

By Heather Regen | Staff Writer | 02 October 2012

Washington — In January, President Obama issued an executive order aimed at vastly improving the visa application and entry process for visitors to the United States. Working together, the departments of State and Homeland Security have exceeded the president’s goals, cutting interview wait times and streamlining visa processing without compromising security.

The White House released a report detailing the results of these efforts on September 19. The report reveals that the U.S. Mission in Brazil reached a milestone in visa

processing, joining Mexico and China as the only U.S. missions that process more than 1 million visas each year.

Brazil’s dramatic increase in visa processing marks a growth of almost 37 percent from last fiscal year. Along with increased capacity, wait times for obtaining visas have dropped substantially.

While the president’s executive order required that 80 percent of all nonimmigrant visa applicants receive interviews within three weeks of submitting their application, the departments of State and Homeland Security ensured that 88 percent of applicants worldwide are now interviewed within that timeframe.

Applicants once waited up to 140 days to obtain a visa in São Paulo, but the Consulate General there has brought that wait time down to just two days. Across Brazil, consular officers have decreased wait times by 98 percent from last year.

The substantial increase in visa processing in Brazil is not an isolated success. The U.S. Mission in China now keeps interview wait times to an average of five days while at the same time managing a growing regional demand for U.S. travel visas.

Much of the departments of State and Homeland Security’s success can be attributed to a pilot program that allows consular officers to waive in-person interviews for certain low-risk applicants looking to renew expired visas. Active in 28 countries, the program has waived interviews for more than 120,000 applicants to date.

The State Department also increased the capacities of individual embassies and consulates by creating 50 new visa adjudicator positions in China and 60 in Brazil. A new program that targets recruits with Mandarin and Portuguese language skills brought in 43 of the new visa adjudicators.

“Every year, tens of millions of tourists come from all over the world to visit America. That’s good for business, it’s good for the economy, and it’s good for our country,” stated President Obama in the White House progress report.

Progress continues as the State Department invests millions of dollars to upgrade and expand its existing consular facilities. By 2014, the department will open new consulate buildings in Guangzhou and Wuhan in China and Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre in Brazil. The State Department will build improved facilities in Mexico as well, with new buildings opening in Monterrey in 2014.

Since the president issued the order to ensure faster visa processing in January, the departments of State and

Homeland Security have made international travel to the United States easier and more accessible. "I'm glad we're making progress and I'll continue to do whatever I can to strengthen the travel and tourism industry," President Obama said.

Panetta, MacKay Share Concerns on Iran

By Jim Garamone | American Forces Press Service |
01 October 2012

This article was originally posted September 28 to the Department of Defense website.

Washington — U.S. policy toward Iran's nuclear capability "is not about containment, it's about prevention," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said September 28, in reference to what Western nations believe is Tehran's attempt to enrich enough uranium to acquire a nuclear weapon.

Panetta and Canadian Defense Minister Peter G. MacKay spoke to the Pentagon press corps following a meeting during which they discussed bilateral relations, Western Hemisphere concerns, Afghanistan and the Middle East with a particular emphasis on Iran.

In their session with reporters, both stressed they want the Iranian government to respond to diplomacy and international sanctions aimed at thwarting suspected efforts to develop a nuclear weapon.

Canada has deep concerns about the Iranian nuclear program and recently closed its embassy in Tehran. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen J. Harper has called Iran the most dangerous place on Earth, and spoke of the "clear and present danger" that Iran poses to the world during a speech to the United Nations.

There were questions at the joint news conference about red lines for Iran regarding its alleged nuclear ambitions. "There have been a number of red lines placed already, and Iran has edged closer and stepped over those red lines on a number of occasions now, particularly when it comes to cooperation around the subject of inspections," MacKay said.

On Syria, Panetta said there were indications the Syrian military had moved some chemical weapons in recent weeks, but that the main bases with these armaments remain secure.

In their meeting, Panetta and MacKay also discussed the need for greater security collaboration across the Western Hemisphere, particularly for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. "We think that's a real potential for bringing countries together in a common effort," Panetta said. He hopes this will be part of the agenda at the

Defense Ministerial of the Americas beginning next week in Uruguay.

Panetta thanked MacKay for Canada's steadfast support in Afghanistan, where it has deployed about 500 troops who are training Afghan national security forces.

"There is progress and there is hope" in Afghanistan, MacKay said.

Labor Department Reports on Child Labor, Forced Labor

01 October 2012

Washington — Two revised reports on global child labor and forced labor were released by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) on September 26.

"These reports remind us of what happens to the most vulnerable members of society when poverty and labor exploitation unite," said Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis. "The information in these reports is a vital tool in the effort to stop this abuse and can have an enormous impact in the hands of those who want to join efforts to end these labor practices."

"Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor" is a report mandated by the Trade and Development Act of 2000 that analyzes the worst forms of child labor in 144 foreign countries and territories. The 11th annual edition introduces a tool to assess countries' efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, tracking from year to year whether a country has made significant, moderate, minimal or no advancement.

"The country assessments provide a status update that highlights accomplishments and spotlights remaining challenges," said acting Deputy Undersecretary for International Labor Affairs Carol Pier. "We hope they inspire governments to redouble their efforts to meet commitments and goals on eliminating the worst forms of child labor."

The "List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labor," required by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005, has been updated to include four new goods (baked goods, beef, fish and thread/yarn) and three new countries. The new list has a total of 134 goods from 74 countries that DOL's International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB) has reason to believe are produced by forced labor, child labor or both in violation of international standards.

ILAB, foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations use these reports to inform policies and develop programs targeting vulnerable children and their families. Over the past decade, ILAB has funded more

than 250 projects in more than 90 countries to combat the worst forms of child labor.

U.S. Continues to Pursue Closer Ties with Asia-Pacific

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 28 September 2012

Washington — The United States is continuing its “sustained, all-out effort to build an enduring, multifaceted relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton pledged September 28.

Speaking at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the sidelines of the 67th annual United Nations General Assembly in New York, Clinton said U.S. engagement with the association is part of a broader effort to deepen the country’s commitment to the Asia-Pacific region.

“We want to work with all of you to build a stable and just regional order that will benefit every nation,” the secretary said. “That means supporting mature and effective institutions that can mobilize common action and settle disputes easily.”

She said the United States is also committed to crafting regional rules and norms that safeguard universal rights and help manage relations between people, markets and nations, as well as establishing security arrangements that provide stability and build trust.

“Our relationship with ASEAN is at the heart of all these efforts, including our participation in the East Asia Summit,” Clinton said. “The United States supports the East Asia Summit as the Asia-Pacific’s premier institution for political and strategic issues, and we believe it is the capstone of increasingly mature and effective regional architecture.”

She commended the East Asia Summit for making progress across a range of issues, including energy and education, and called on leaders to stay focused on pursuing a clear agenda during the November leaders’ meeting.

President Obama’s administration has called for three items to head this year’s agenda: disaster relief, nonproliferation and maritime security.

Additionally, Clinton said, the United States plans to bring up the issue of wildlife trafficking during the November talks.

“We hope to focus our EAS partners on the challenge of wildlife trafficking and the related issues of protecting biodiversity and preventing the emergence of pandemic diseases,” she said. “The illegal trade in protected and endangered species is now estimated between \$7 [billion]

and \$10 billion a year.”

The secretary said wildlife trafficking is increasingly intertwined with other illicit activities that undermine regional security and prosperity, including organized crime. The United States, she said, is ready to work with its ASEAN partners to develop an initiative to stop poachers.

The 21st ASEAN Summit and the 7th East Asia Summit are scheduled to be held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 18 to 20.

G8 Countries Work to Empower Arab Social and Economic Reformers

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 28 September 2012

Washington — Arab countries transitioning to democracy are receiving help from the world’s eight largest economies to address their economic and social challenges following the collapse of dictatorships in the region.

Addressing the September 28 meeting in New York of foreign ministers from the Group of Eight (G8) Deauville Partnership with Arab Countries in Transition, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the partnership, first announced in May, is “taking practical steps to help more people in the region feel the benefits of democracy in their daily lives.”

Clinton said economic and social challenges “did not disappear with the dictators,” adding that too many people “still can’t find jobs, and young and growing populations crave a sense of opportunity and self-determination.”

She also said that because extremists in the region are “clearly determined to hijack these wars and revolutions to further their agendas and ideology,” the Deauville Partnership is trying to “empower those who would see their nations emerge as true democracies.”

Working with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the G8 is targeting economic support for small and medium-sized enterprises in the region, which Clinton said are the “growth engines” in any country’s economy.

“They create the bulk of new jobs and they spread wealth more broadly through more communities. And when people have the opportunity to unleash their talents and create something of their own, they are more invested in their communities, their countries and their new democracies,” she said.

The OECD is helping to find ways to loosen financial

regulations to make it easier to start or expand a small business, and funds are being established to help small businesses obtain access to financing, she said.

RECOVERING STOLEN ASSETS

The United States has championed the Arab Forum on Asset Recovery to discuss specific steps for recovering assets that previous leaders stowed abroad, such as appointing attorneys to work with transition countries, to work with law enforcement and to help train their counterparts in the region, she said.

"People of the region need to see that their governments can be fair and just. So we are stepping up our efforts to return billions of dollars that were stolen or siphoned away over decades of cronyism and corruption," Clinton said.

The Deauville Partnership is also helping to build accountable and transparent governing institutions through a transition fund to help Arab countries build court systems, ministries and other public institutions that are responsive to the needs of all their citizens, she said.

As dissidents and former prisoners take over as new leaders, they will have programs to help them transition "from protest to politics," such as their recent participation in a U.S. training session that was designed for newly elected members of the United States Congress. They received "real-life insights into what it means to stand up for your beliefs and at the same time serve your constituents in a large and diverse democracy," Clinton said.

Through the Deauville Partnership, the United States and other members of the G8 are supporting democracies that will unlock the full potential of those in transitioning countries and help them stand against the extremists who are trying to exploit popular frustrations, Clinton said.

"We are trying to help societies leave behind old enmities and look ahead to new opportunities. We are supporting civic groups who seek to strengthen their societies. We are backing reformers who build accountable institutions and combat corruption that stifles innovation, initiative, hope and dignity," she said.

The secretary told Arab social and economic reformers that the United States and the G8 "stand with you and we will stand with you as long as it takes."

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