

American

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United States Will Back Arab Democracy on Multiple Fronts

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 13 December 2012

Washington — The United States will work with elected leaders in emerging Arab democracies regardless of their political origins provided they pursue inclusive, pluralistic policies, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns says.

“When it comes to building sustainable democracies, the most consequential distinction is not between Islamists and secularists, but between those who embrace a rights-respecting pluralistic approach and those who seek to impose their own will,” Burns said in speech to the Forum for the Future in Tunis, Tunisia, December 13.

The deputy secretary said the United States supports democratic transitions and political reform not only out of idealism but also out of strategic necessity. “Representative government, open economies, rights and protections and vibrant civil society are essential building blocks of successful societies,” he said.

The Forum for the Future is an annual gathering of the foreign ministers from the G8 and Middle Eastern and North African countries along with representatives from civil society and private sector groups.

The 2012 forum, co-hosted by Tunisia and the United States December 12 and 13, focused on three themes: women’s empowerment, economic governance and entrepreneurship, and freedom of expression and association.

Commenting on the turmoil in Egypt, Burns said Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, as his country’s first democratically elected leader, “has a particular responsibility to work to build greater consensus on such important issues as the constitution.

“The future of Egyptian democracy depends not on the ability of one side to prevail over another, but on the commitment of all to engage in an inclusive process to negotiate their differences — one that may not resolve every disagreement,” he said.

The deputy secretary said the Tunisian revolution remains full of promise even as it faces challenges.

“Strikes, riots, and the same economic grind that led to a street vendor’s desperate act all speak to the work ahead. But America still believes Tunisia can and must be a model for the rest of the region. And we will stand with Tunisians as they deal with the interlocking challenges of transforming its political system, protecting its people and

developing its economy,” Burns said.

Economic opportunity is an important ingredient to stabilizing the budding democracies in the region, Burns said. To that end, the United States provided \$549 million in 2012 to support economic governance and entrepreneurship. Burns proposed the creation of the Middle East/North Africa Partnership for Democracy and Development and said the United States is prepared to fund the startup costs for that partnership. He also announced a special program to help Arab women succeed in business — the Arab Women’s Entrepreneurship Alliance.

“Conventional assistance, no matter how generous, will not be enough,” he said. He called for more creative and ambitious thinking to open up trade and investment across the region and “ensure the Arab awakening is also an economic awakening.”

To facilitate peaceful dissent, another pillar of democracy, Burns said police need training to help them respect peaceful protests. “The inescapable lesson of the past two years is that security requires more than military might and must be pursued without committing human rights violations that create new grievances,” Burns said.

In the coming year, Burns said, the United States will launch new programs to support journalists and civil society groups.

The Journalist Response Fund will provide training to at-risk journalists, bloggers, and citizen journalists and offer assistance to journalists facing difficulties or repression. The Freedom of Association Index, comparable to the World Bank’s ease of doing business report, will measure and track the ease of forming and operating civil society groups.

“We support the development of civil society, media, and political parties, with an emphasis on youth, women, and marginalized groups,” he said.

Panetta Outlines U.S. Military's Transformation

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 13 December 2012

Washington — Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said the U.S. military is transforming into a smaller but more flexible and technologically advanced force as it transitions from years of continuous operation in Iraq and Afghanistan and looks ahead to troop reductions and smaller budgets.

In remarks to U.S. military personnel at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait on December 12, Panetta said the United States is at a turning point more than 10 years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the wars in Iraq

and Afghanistan, which U.S. combat forces plan to leave before the end of 2014.

The past decade has been “the longest ... continuous period of warfare in the history of this country,” he said. Along with the transition from a period of war, U.S. lawmakers have instructed the U.S. military to reduce its budget by \$487 billion over the next 10 years.

Panetta said there will be some gradual reductions in the number of U.S. military personnel over the next five to 10 years, and the Defense Department will be looking into ways to increase its bureaucratic efficiency and to save money in procuring weapons and other needs.

But the secretary said that even with a reduced size and budget, the United States “will remain the strongest military power in the world,” and it will retain the capability to “defeat more than one enemy at a time.”

In the new U.S. defense strategy, “we have to be agile. We have to be flexible. We have to be quickly deployable. We've got to be able to move fast, and we've got to be on the cutting edge of technology,” he said.

“Even as we draw down after these many years of war, we still confront real threats in today's world,” Panetta said.

The United States will maintain a strong force projection in both the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East in response to security challenges from North Korea and Iran and continued turmoil in the Middle East region, he said.

There will also be a rotational U.S. presence in Latin America, Africa and Europe that Panetta said is designed to help other countries develop their own military competency.

“We'll have people that will go in, help train, exercise with other countries, develop their capabilities, build new alliances, build new partnerships in order to provide security in other parts of the world,” he said.

Panetta said the United States will also need to deal with the threat of cyberwarfare, as more countries and individuals develop the capability of deploying tools over the Internet that can take down systems controlling power grids, finances, government operations and other critical services.

“The war of the future is going to involve cyberwar. That's a reality,” he said.

“Every day, there are literally hundreds of thousands of attacks that are taking place. Now, a lot of this is

exploitive. They basically go into systems. They try to get information. They try to see what's going on — not only government systems, but private-sector systems,” he said.

The secretary urged better cooperation between the government and the private sector in sharing information about attacks.

“What we have to do is ensure that we can defend against those kinds of attacks and, if necessary, be able to go back at those that would attempt to come at us,” Panetta said.

Global Trends Report Predicts Vast Changes by 2030

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 13 December 2012

Washington — By 2030, 17 years from now, the world will be vastly different from what it is today. For starters, for the first time in history, the majority of the world's people will no longer be impoverished. The middle class will be the dominant economic and social force in most countries by then, a new report says.

This is one of the scenarios laid out in the National Intelligence Council's report *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*. The council, an advisory arm for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, releases a global trends report once every four years after the U.S. presidential election on factors such as globalization, demography and the environment. The purpose is to help policymakers in their strategic planning. The report draws from a multitude of sources, including government officials, businesses, universities and think tanks in nearly 20 countries, and is available to the public worldwide.

As the global economy grows and people across the world rise into the middle class, individuals will find themselves empowered as never before to determine their own destinies, according to the report. Individual empowerment will mean greater educational attainment and better health care for more people.

But individual empowerment is not without risks, particularly in the realm of terrorism. “With more widespread access to lethal and disruptive technologies, individuals who are experts in such niche areas as cybersystems might sell their services to the highest bidder,” said council chairman Christopher Kojm, briefing reporters December 10.

Parallel with individual empowerment, power will become more diffuse among states, and informal networks will see their influence rise. “We will see growing democratization at both the international and national level,” Kojm said.

There will also be dramatic shifts in terms of gross domestic product, population size, military spending and

technological investment, with Asia surpassing North America and Europe combined, according to the report.

A good portion of the world's population will lose much of its youthful bloom, the report says. In most of Europe, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, the median age will be above 45. Countries with large aging populations will face challenges to maintain their living standards. Kojm added that the median age in China is younger than that of the United States today, but China's median age will be higher by 2030.

Meanwhile, the shift of people from rural to urban areas will continue. Today half the world's people live in urban areas, but by 2030 the figure will be 60 percent. "What this means is that another 1.4 billion people will need housing, roads, power, infrastructure and employment in urban areas," Kojm said.

At the same time, global demand for food and water will grow between 35 percent and 40 percent by 2030. This reflects mostly the consumption patterns and diets of an expanding middle class.

"We are not necessarily headed into a world of scarcities, but leaders will need to act to avert such a future," Kojm said.

The council chairman described energy independence for the United States in the next 10 to 20 years as another "tectonic shift" with global implications. The trends report predicts that the United States will diminish or stop importing crude oil from its current suppliers – Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Latin America and West Africa. This change will be brought about by the use of hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, which releases natural gas and oil from shale rock. The United States may become a major energy exporter, instead of an importer, in the next decade or so, Kojm said.

U.S. Recognizes Syrian Opposition, Pledges More Aid

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 12 December 2012

Washington – The United States has recognized the Syrian Opposition Council as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people" in opposition to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and it is providing an additional \$14 million in humanitarian assistance to help Syrians get emergency medical care and to prepare for the coming winter.

In remarks to ABC News December 11, President Obama said Syria's opposition coalition "is now inclusive enough, is reflective and representative enough of the Syrian population" to be recognized as their representative.

"With that recognition comes responsibilities to make sure that they organize themselves effectively, that they are representative of all the parties, that they commit themselves to a political transition that respects women's rights and minority rights," Obama said.

Deputy Secretary of State William Burns is representing the United States at the Friends of the Syrian People meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco. He said December 12 that the Obama administration's recognition of the council marks "an important step forward."

Burns said the United States has invited Syrian opposition leader Moaz al-Khatib to visit Washington "at the earliest opportunity," and he urged the Syrian opposition to create more formal structures for itself and to accelerate its planning for a democratic transition in Syria that will protect the rights, dignity and aspirations of all of its people.

"That means taking concrete steps to include women and minorities, engage with religious leaders and civil society, and discourage reprisals and inter-communal violence," he said.

Burns said the United States will support the Syrian opposition's efforts through a \$50 million contribution aimed at helping civil society and civilian opposition groups "communicate, organize, and evade regime attacks," as well as give direct support to local Syrian councils as they begin to provide basic services and governance.

The Syrian opposition needs to stand firm against extremists who would hijack the Syrian resistance for their own ends or sow division among Syria's many ethnic and religious communities, Burns said.

"Human rights abuses cannot be tolerated, no matter who commits them. They will only weaken the Syria you hope to inherit," he told the Friends of the Syrian People meeting.

With many Syrians expressing strong support for the coalition's vision, the task is now to "make that vision real," and to offer "a true alternative" to the Assad regime that is "democratic and inclusive rather than dictatorial and divisive," he said.

The United States is supporting U.N. and Arab League Joint Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's diplomatic efforts to end the crisis, and it has been intensively engaged with him, Russian diplomats and other partners to help bring about a political transition, including a governing body "formed on the basis of mutual consent, which would exercise full executive power," he said.

Burns announced that the Obama administration is providing an additional \$14 million in humanitarian assistance that is focused on providing emergency medical care and helping Syrians prepare for winter.

“This includes essential medicines and surgical supplies, special nutritional supplements for 225,000 hungry children and everything from heavy-duty plastic insulation to blankets and boots for thousands of families,” he said.

With the additional \$14 million, the total U.S. humanitarian assistance to Syria stands at more than \$210 million, which Burns said is reaching more than 1.5 million Syrians inside and outside of the country.

Burns said the Assad regime’s hold on power is weakening by the day and it is losing control of territory, while the opposition is becoming more unified and better organized.

A transition is coming “one way or another,” and the sooner Assad steps aside, “the better for all Syrians,” he said.

Afghanistan Advances Toward Full Security Responsibility in 2014

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 11 December 2012

Washington – U.S. and coalition forces and their Afghan partners blunted an insurgent offensive during the 2012 summer fighting season and advanced toward the goal of putting the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in full control of security by the end of 2014, a Defense Department report says.

“The transition process is on track for completion by the end of 2014,” the report said. The latest semiannual Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, issued in December, assessed progress from April through September 2012.

“More than three-quarters of the Afghan population currently live in areas where the ANSF are transitioning to security lead, with areas in all 34 provinces now in some stage of transition,” the report said.

The report added that the Afghan security forces now are unilaterally conducting approximately 80 percent of all operations and are starting to expand security independently in areas where the U.S. and coalition forces do not have an established presence.

“The insurgency was unable to re-take significant territory during the reporting period, despite stating this as one of its chief goals during the fighting season,” the report said. Nevertheless, the insurgency is resilient and

not likely to be defeated decisively in the near term, the report concludes.

The Taliban generally wage armed struggle during the spring, summer and early fall, then retreat to sanctuaries where they pass the brutal winters.

Although the insurgents have been weakened since 2010, they remain dangerous. The Defense Department document describes them as determined and predicts they will try to regain lost ground and influence through continued assassinations, intimidation, high-profile attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices. Commenting on insider attacks on U.S. and coalition forces, the report said countermeasures have been taken to stop them, and the number of attacks has dropped off sharply from the peak in August, but it will take time to know how thoroughly the countermeasures have worked.

“The insurgency’s safe havens in Pakistan, the limited institutional capacity of the Afghan government and endemic corruption remain the greatest risks to long-term stability and sustainable security in Afghanistan,” the report added.

The report noted that U.S. relations with Pakistan have begun to improve following the reopening of international supply routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The report added that cross-border cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan has shown “nascent improvement.”

Looking to the future, the report noted that the United States, its coalition partners and other members of the international community will remain engaged with Afghanistan after the transfer of security responsibility two years from now.

It pointed to the strategic partnership agreement signed by President Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in May 2012. The United States committed to continuing to support Afghanistan’s social and economic development, long-term security, good governance and regional cooperation. In return, the Afghan government committed to strengthening accountability, transparency and the protection of human rights.

In July 2012, the international community gathered in Tokyo to define its pledge of support for Afghanistan through 2025. At the end of the conference, the international community announced that it will provide \$16 billion for Afghanistan through 2015 and set measurable reform goals to improve Afghan governance, rule of law, anti-corruption efforts and development performance.

Vigilance, Commitment from U.S. on Human Rights Day

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 10 December 2012

Washington — The United States joined the international community in recognition of International Human Rights Day December 10.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said governments that respect their citizens and the will of the people enjoy greater stability, security and prosperity.

“The Universal Declaration is not just a catalog of rights and government obligations,” Clinton said in a prepared statement released in Washington. “It is a time-tested blueprint for successful societies.”

Human Rights Day commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations in 1948.

Clinton’s statement also emphasized that human rights cannot be “disconnected from other priorities.” A determined focus on the importance of human rights is “inextricably linked with all of the goals we strive for at home and around the world,” according to the prepared statement.

The human rights issue was also the main theme of a speech Clinton delivered in Dublin December 6 as she wound up a trip through several European nations. She said citizens of the United States, Ireland and other free societies have two responsibilities toward peoples in nations with repressive governments.

“First, to remain vigilant in ensuring that we honor and implement our own commitment to human rights at home,” Clinton said, “and second, to help others gain what we have, the chance to live in dignity.”

To fulfill that responsibility to oppressed people, Clinton said, the United States is developing new mechanisms to help survivors of gender-based violence and “those under credible threat of imminent attack due to their gender, and organizations that may need protection.”

U.N. delegates who adopted the Declaration of Human Rights 64 years ago wouldn’t have known how to define the words “Internet” or “online activity.” Still, they showed a clear intent to emphasize the universality of the principles with declaration language that calls for the protection of the free exchange of information “by any medium, regardless of frontiers.”

Repressive governments are attempting to censor critical information on the Internet and prosecute those who disseminate it, Clinton said, but the United States is

committed to defending free speech online.

“By the end of this year, the United States will have invested \$100 million to help ensure that people in repressive Internet environments can exercise their rights more safely and reliably,” she said.

Religious freedom and the protection of minority rights are also on what Clinton called “the front lines” of human rights worldwide today. The protection of civil society, activists, organizations, journalists and citizens working peacefully to improve their communities also has a place on the front lines, she said in the Dublin speech.

Respecting the human rights of women and girls “is the unfinished business of the 21st century,” Clinton said, identifying another frontline issue in human rights.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also underscored the challenges before women and girls in the exercise of their human rights. In his official statement recognizing International Human Rights Day, Ban said too many groups “face far too many obstacles” in the full enjoyment of rights that should be theirs. Ban further noted the challenges facing indigenous peoples; religious, ethnic and political minorities; people with disabilities; and those with different sexual orientations.

“My Voice Counts” is the theme for International Human Rights Day 2012, as designated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The campaign emphasizes that every person in a community has a right to express his or her ideas about community policies and everyone has the right to representation in that community. The campaign is being waged broadly on social media and can be followed on Twitter: @unrightswire.

The OHCHR also points out that the keystone document of the movement — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — has really earned its name. The Guinness Book of World Records has recognized OHCHR for having collected, translated and disseminated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in more than 380 languages and dialects, from Abkhaz to Zulu. “The Universal Declaration is thus the most translated document — indeed, the most ‘universal’ one in the world,” OHCHR reports.

Russia, U.S. Inspect Antarctica Stations

10 December 2012

Washington — A joint Russian-U.S. team concluded a 10-day inspection of foreign research stations in Antarctica on December 8.

The team inspected six stations: India’s Bharati and Maitri

stations, Belgium's Princess Elisabeth, Japan's Syowa, Norway's Troll and China's Zhongshan.

The inspectors looked for violations of international environmental commitments and other aspects of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty that established Antarctica as a scientific preserve and banned military use. Under an agreement signed by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on September 8, 2012, the United States and Russia agreed to carry out the inspections together.

The new agreement strengthens Russian-U.S. coordination in Antarctica, improving scientific cooperation, logistics, search and rescue, training and public outreach. "Scientists from both our countries will work together to explore Antarctica's terrain, study the effects of climate change, and cooperate on a range of issues to better understand and protect our shared environment," Clinton said after signing the agreement.

Officials from the U.S. Department of State and the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the Antarctica inspection. The two countries will present a joint report on the inspection at the next Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, to be held in Brussels in May 2013.

The United States and Russia were architects of the Antarctic Treaty and today conduct some of the most extensive scientific activities in Antarctica, the State Department said in a December 10 press release.

U.S. and Allies Work to Block Increased Internet Regulation

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 07 December 2012

Washington — The United States and allies from Europe and the Western Hemisphere are standing firm against proposals that might allow increased government regulation of Internet content and content providers at the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) under way in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The main focus of the conference is revision of the 1988 International Telecommunications Regulations (ITRs), rules adopted before the burgeoning growth in mobile communications and the Internet. The United States and its allies are intent on maintaining the conference focus on how to find "the best ways to accelerate broadband availability globally," said Ambassador Terry Kramer, the head of the U.S. delegation to the conference.

Kramer says the United States and its allies agree that creating a successful environment for continued growth and expansion of these technologies should confine ITR governance to the "recognized operating agencies...[that are] public providers of telecommunications services."

That approach precludes governance over Internet companies that are primarily providers of content.

Speaking to reporters December 6, Kramer said the United States and its allies want to ensure free and open debate and discussion on the Internet. He said some proposals for increased government monitoring of Internet content, made in the name of security, can open a door to censorship.

Government regulation of content would allow bureaucrats to use their own judgments about what's appropriate, Kramer said. That approach, he added, can result in "suppressing people's freedoms and rights to express themselves, to share points of view, to access information, et cetera."

Several governments have withdrawn proposals that caused the most concern prior to the WCIT meetings, including government regulation of content.

Kramer said another matter of importance for the United States and its allies at WCIT is the issue of governance. In most countries, current Internet governance is focused mostly on technical and operability issues, and governments, private sector companies and user organizations are involved in the "multistakeholder approach" of governance. Some proposals are circulating at WCIT for the ITU or some other U.N. body to take on a stronger role in governance. Kramer said the current arrangement provides the greatest potential for innovation and expansion online.

"We see a common alignment about the need for multistakeholder organizations driving a lot of the successes in the market," Kramer said, "and also the importance and criticality of liberalized markets, liberalized markets where there are competitive alternatives, where there are a variety of providers, providing a variety of alternatives that drives down prices and creates better availability."

The ITU has built an extensive website for the conference, but hackers successfully crashed the site for a few hours this week, giving some 2,000 delegates a real-world experience in the importance of cybersecurity.

ITU wanted to host a "paperless conference," in the interest of environmental responsibility. The site features live Web-streamed debates and a massive document cache, including proposed regulation amendments and position papers. The website is the main source of information for delegates to know what's going on as the conference unfolds.

"The incident blocked civil society, media and other interested parties from following the proceedings,"

according to an ITU new release, "and prevented access to the wealth of online information on the ITU's WCIT home page and newsroom."

The outage continued for several hours before the site was restored, and the ITU news release said that "some hacker groups" claimed they pulled the stunt. ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré had to point up the irony.

"It is ironic that the very people who claim to be fighting for a free Internet are preventing those around the world trying to follow the event online from getting access," Touré said in the news release. "Do they believe in one rule for them, and one for everyone else?"

The ITU has a membership of more than 190 governments and 700 private sector organizations. The Dubai meeting continues through December 14.

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