

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Weekly Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

February 1, 2013

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Vice President Biden's European Trip to Include Discussions on Syria, Mali

31 January 2013

Washington — Vice President Biden is traveling to Germany, France and the United Kingdom February 1–5. He will attend the Munich Security Conference and discuss the conflict in Syria, as well as U.S. support for military action by France and the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to take back northern Mali from armed Islamist rebels.

Biden's national security adviser, Tony Blinken, said the vice president will join 350 world leaders, government ministers and opinion leaders in Munich and plans to meet on the sidelines of the February 2 conference with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, U.N. and Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi and Syrian National Coalition President Moaz al-Khatib for discussions on the continuing violence between Bashar al-Assad's regime and the Syrian political opposition.

Speaking in a January 31 conference call with White House Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes, Blinken said the Obama administration is "looking at Syria very intensely" and that it would be "very important for the Russians to put their full weight into political transition" from the Assad regime. "That's the best path forward," he said.

Rhodes said that along with U.S. sanctions and other means of pressuring Assad to step down, the Obama administration is working to bolster the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people in order to "indicate that the metrics are turning away from Assad and that there is a broadly inclusive opposition that Syrians can get behind, but also so that we can begin the work of planning for a future within Syria after Bashar al-Assad leaves power."

In his discussions with the Syrian opposition leader and others, Biden also plans to discuss how the United States can continue to provide humanitarian assistance to deal with the dire humanitarian situation in Syria and to continue political and nonlethal support to the opposition that Rhodes said is "helping them coalesce and become more organized and provide certain services like medical services to the Syrian people."

Biden will begin his European visit with talks in Berlin February 1 with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Following his participation at the Munich Security Conference, he will proceed to Paris for meetings February 4 with President François Hollande.

"There, I think the agenda will focus on our strong support for the French and African mission in Mali," as well as counterterrorism cooperation in the Sahel region, Blinken said, which requires a comprehensive approach using political and economic as well as military tools.

"What we're seeing across North Africa and parts of the Middle East is an extremist threat that is fueled by the reality of porous borders, ungoverned territory, too readily available weapons, increasing collaboration among some of these groups and, in many cases, new governments that lack the capacity and sometimes the will to deal with the problem," he said.

Rhodes said the Obama administration has been very supportive of the French-led intervention against Islamic extremists in Mali and has provided assistance, including aircraft refueling and logistical support to move equipment into the country.

"We're also looking at the broader question of how to achieve a more lasting political resolution within Mali that includes ... a process within the country to address underlying political questions that are unresolved, as well as working with neighboring states in Africa who are going to be able to commit resources to help keep the peace in Mali in the aftermath of the French-led operation," he said.

Biden's last stop will be in London, where he will meet with British Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nicholas Clegg February 5 before returning to the United States.

"There again, I would expect the issues to be many of the ones that will be covered in meetings with Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande, including Syria, Afghanistan, North Africa, Iran and the economic relationship between the United States and Europe," Blinken said.

Secretary Clinton Announces \$86.5 Million in Public-Private Partnerships

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 31 January 2013

Washington — On her last day as secretary of state, Hillary Rodham Clinton announced four new or expanded public-private initiatives valued at up to \$86.5 million.

"Partnerships have been a hallmark of what we've done in the last four years here at the State Department, because many of the challenges that we face extend beyond traditional, political and even geographic divisions," Clinton said at a January 31 State Department event meant to bring together and thank representatives from the many nongovernmental organizations, faith

communities, businesses and companies that have participated in such initiatives in the past.

Since 2009, the U.S. Department of State has worked with more than 1,100 partners and mobilized more than \$650 million in public and private resources to support key foreign policy objectives including climate change mitigation, women's empowerment, economic growth and human rights, according to Kris Balderston, Clinton's special representative for global partnerships, who introduced the secretary.

These are the new or expanding initiatives:

- **wPower.** This new program will train more than 7,000 women entrepreneurs, helping them to sell new technologies, like clean cookstoves and solar lanterns in India and Nigeria and throughout East Africa. The MacArthur Foundation, USAID, CARE International, Solar Sister, the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves and the Wangari Maathai Institute are among the participants supporting this program.
- **Alliance for Affordable Internet.** This new effort by multilateral institutions, civil society and the World Wide Web Foundation will be aimed at providing affordable Internet access to a billion people in developing countries, where only about 25 percent of the population is currently online. Internet access, Clinton said, "is a key element of economic growth and innovation."
- **Global Equality Fund.** First launched in 2011 to promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons around the world, this program will be expanded. Clinton announced that the governments of Norway, the Netherlands and France have recently joined this partnership.
- **Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves.** This program, which has already aided millions of families by helping them obtain affordable residential cookstoves that use less fuel and produce less pollution, is being expanded to include 600 partners and 18 foreign governments, Clinton said. Recent studies, she said, find that pollutants from conventional cookstoves are responsible for some 4 million deaths worldwide. New commitments from Paradigm Project and Bunge will bring as many as 5 million clean cookstoves to East Africa. And in Kenya, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and General Electric Company are establishing a clean cookstove manufacturing facility, with additional plants in Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

"Partnerships have proven to be an invaluable tool for meeting very tough challenges," Clinton said, but she added: "Partnerships themselves are not a solution; rather, they bring together the people and the resources that can then lead to solutions."

"Diplomacy and development is not in any way confined to government-to-government relations," Clinton said. "We have to think differently."

John Kerry: The Next Secretary of State

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 30 January 2013

Washington — Massachusetts' John Kerry is moving from the U.S. Senate — where he offered advice and consent on U.S. foreign policy — to the State Department, where he will implement it.

On January 29, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved Kerry as the next secretary of state, and a few hours later the full Senate voted overwhelmingly to confirm him for the job.

"From his decorated service in Vietnam to his decades in the Senate as a champion of American global leadership, John's distinguished career has prepared him to guide American diplomacy in the years ahead," President Obama said in a statement after the confirmation vote. Outgoing secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton leaves the job February 1.

At his confirmation hearing January 24, Kerry demonstrated broad knowledge of foreign policy issues gleaned from serving on the foreign relations committee since 1984. The son of a U.S. diplomat, Kerry has been immersed in foreign policy all his life and displayed his mastery of it when he ran for president as the Democratic Party's nominee in 2004. Since 2007, he has chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and was a firm supporter of the administration's foreign policy during President Obama's first term.

During that time, Kerry guided an arms reduction treaty with Russia to ratification through the Senate and undertook sensitive diplomatic missions for the White House to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan.

Kerry told his Senate colleagues during the confirmation hearing that "more than ever, foreign policy is economic policy. The world is competing for resources and global markets." He added that the U.S. fiscal crisis is a "first priority" that needs resolution because the United States cannot be strong in the world unless it is strong at home.

He said foreign policy addresses a broad range of issues and must make use of a multitude of tools. Economic health, environmental and demographic issues, proliferation, poverty, pandemic diseases, refugees, conflicts and the demands of new technology are "inextricably linked," he said.

He said that in many countries in the world, "burgeoning populations of young people, hungry for jobs,

opportunity, individual rights and freedom, are rebelling against years of disenfranchisement and humiliation.”

As secretary, Kerry said, he will continue to raise human rights concerns and push for greater religious tolerance, gender and ethnic equality, and an end to corruption.

Because of his 28 years as a senator, Kerry is expected to be able to work effectively with Congress.

“You have already built strong relationships with leaders around the world, which will help you seamlessly into the role of secretary of state,” said Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey. “You will need no introduction to the world’s political and military leaders and will begin Day One fully conversant not only with the intricacies of U.S. foreign policy but with an understanding of the nuanced approach necessary to effectively interact on the multinational stage.”

Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, the highest ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said there is “almost no one” who has spent so much time and effort as Kerry developing foreign policy expertise.

U.S. Economy Stalls, but Maintains Its Growth Potential

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 30 January 2013

Washington – The U.S. Department of Commerce reported that the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) shrank at an annualized rate of 0.1 percent during the last quarter of 2012, according to its initial estimate, citing a reduction in U.S. government spending, private inventory investments, exports and state and local government spending.

The report on the GDP, which is the sum of all goods and services produced in the country, also noted increased American consumer spending.

At the White House, press secretary Jay Carney told reporters January 30 that the reduction in U.S. economic growth reflects a “sharp drop in particular in defense spending,” with the reduction of American military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan and uncertainty over whether the U.S. Congress will reach agreement to avoid mandatory defense spending cuts that are scheduled to go into effect March 1.

The report shows the biggest reduction in U.S. defense spending in 40 years, Carney said, but he said the U.S. economy has the potential to see continued economic growth and job creation.

“We have seen consistent job growth over almost three years. Home prices are starting to climb back. Consumer

confidence overall has been rising, and consumer spending has been rising. But there's more work to do, and our economy is facing a major headwind,” pending Congress’ response to the scheduled spending cuts, Carney said.

The January 30 report is the Commerce Department’s first estimate of U.S. fourth-quarter growth, with updates expected in February and March. Most economists are predicting that the U.S. economy will grow at an annual rate of 1.5 percent in 2013. In 2012, there was a 2.2 percent growth rate.

Separately, the U.S. Federal Reserve announced that it is maintaining its policy of holding short-term interest rates near zero percent until the U.S. unemployment rate, currently at 7.8 percent, falls below 6.5 percent, following two days of meetings by the Federal Open Market Committee.

The Fed is also continuing to pump money into the U.S. economy to stimulate growth by purchasing \$85 billion of U.S. Treasury securities and mortgage-backed securities per month.

“These actions should maintain downward pressure on longer-term interest rates, support mortgage markets, and help to make broader financial conditions more accommodative,” the Fed said in a January 30 press release.

In its assessment of the state of the U.S. economy, the Fed cited “weather-related disruptions and other transitory factors” as chief causes behind the pause in U.S. economic growth over recent months. Hurricane Sandy, which hit the eastern United States in late October 2012, will ultimately cost the U.S. economy as much as \$60 billion, according to some estimates.

“Employment has continued to expand at a moderate pace but the unemployment rate remains elevated. Household spending and business fixed investment advanced, and the housing sector has shown further improvement. Inflation has been running somewhat below the Committee’s longer-run objective, apart from temporary variations that largely reflect fluctuations in energy prices. Longer-term inflation expectations have remained stable,” according to the Fed press release.

President Obama Encouraged by Bipartisan Efforts for Immigration Reform

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 29 January 2013

Washington – Speaking at a Nevada school with a student body that is more than half Hispanic, President Obama said he is upbeat about the prospects for U.S. immigration reform.

"The good news is that for the first time in many years, Republicans and Democrats seem ready to tackle this problem together," Obama told his audience January 29 at Del Sol High School in the city of Las Vegas.

Partisan politics have prevented any concrete proposals for dealing with the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants thought to be living in the United States. But in recent weeks, Obama said, members of both parties, in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, have been actively working on a solution.

"Yesterday," Obama said, "a bipartisan group of senators announced their principles for comprehensive immigration reform, which are very much in line with the principles I've proposed and campaigned on for the last few years. At this moment, it looks like there's a genuine desire to get this done soon. And that's very encouraging."

But Obama also promised that "if Congress is unable to move forward in a timely fashion, I will send up a bill based on my proposal and insist that they vote on it right away."

Obama said his plan for immigration reform involves enforcing border security and cracking down on employers that knowingly hire undocumented immigrants. "To be fair, most businesses want to do the right thing, but a lot of them have a hard time figuring out who's here legally, who's not," Obama said. "So we need to implement a national system that allows businesses to quickly and accurately verify someone's employment status. And if they still knowingly hire undocumented workers, then we need to ramp up the penalties."

The president emphasized the importance of immigrants to the well-being of the American economy, noting that in recent years one in four high-tech startups and one in four small businesses in the United States have been founded by immigrants. He wants to make it easier for bright entrepreneurs and immigrant students of science and technology to stay in the United States, he said. Immigration, he said, "keeps our workforce young. It keeps our country on the cutting edge. And it's helped build the greatest economic engine the world has ever known."

Obama decried the exploitation of undocumented workers and said that in many cases their unfair treatment by employers and low pay threaten citizen workers as well. Immigration reform, he said, is critical to strengthening the middle class. "We have to make sure that every business and every worker are playing by the same rules," he said.

Obama said immigration reform must provide "a clear path" to citizenship for undocumented immigrants already living in the United States. This, Obama said, involves registering and undergoing national security and criminal background checks, paying taxes as well as penalty fines for entering the country illegally, learning English and moving to "the back of the line" for consideration for citizenship.

"So that means it won't be a quick process, but it will be a fair process," he said. "And it will lift these individuals out of the shadows and give them a chance to earn their way to a green card and eventually to citizenship."

Immigration reform must allow for preserving families, Obama said. "If you are a citizen," Obama said, "you shouldn't have to wait years before your family is able to join you in America."

Although heartened by Congress's focus on immigration reform, Obama predicted that as reform proposals move closer to becoming reality, the debate will become more heated. "Immigration has always been an issue that enflames passions," he said, and often engenders an "us versus them" mentality. But he reminded his audience that "most of 'us' used to be 'them.'"

"When each new wave of immigrants arrived," Obama said, "they faced resistance from those who were already here," including racism and ridicule. But, he added, "they all came here knowing that what makes somebody an American is not just blood or birth, but allegiance to our founding principles and the faith in the idea that anyone from anywhere can write the next great chapter of our story."

Secretary Clinton Focuses Global Dialogue on Democracy, Women's Rights

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 29 January 2013

Washington — Hillary Rodham Clinton says that in her four years as U.S. secretary of state, she and President Obama have tried to promote a world where more nations take greater responsibility for shaping their futures. She explained that foreign policy strategy January 29 as she held satellite meetings with young adults in six important regional cities around the world.

Clinton noted several places in Africa where this philosophy has produced democratic advances. She referred to "a quite successful outcome in Somalia" in the September 2012 election, which was held after African troops broke the hold of al-Qaida-backed groups.

The outgoing secretary of state also cited peaceful transitions of power in Ghana and Malawi. Speaking to a group of young adults in the studios of Channels TV in

Lagos, she said the forthcoming Nigerian election will also be important, expressing hope that progress will be made in reducing corruption in the West African nation.

Referring to the many nations now undergoing turbulent change in their political systems, Clinton said transformation is never easy, nor is it preordained. "The people themselves will have to ensure" that transformation leads to democracy, prosperity and better opportunities for the future.

Speaking with informed young adults in six different regions of the world, Clinton appealed for their tolerance of different choices that nations will make in these transitions. At the same time, she denounced extremism and intolerance.

"Everyone should stand against those who wish to hijack [a democracy], whether they are internal or external, who believe that their extremist point of view should cancel out everyone else's point of view, and really stand up and speak out and work toward what were the aspirations of the people," Clinton said.

Questioned about the ongoing difficulty that women encounter as they strive for positions of importance in many countries, Clinton called the advancement of women and girls "the cause of my life." The question came from a young man on a panel hosted by New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV) in New Delhi.

The empowerment and rights of women and girls have seized the Indian public in recent weeks after a group of men brutalized and raped a young woman on a public bus. The victim died from her injuries, and the episode has sent crowds into the streets demanding greater protection and respect for women's rights. Clinton said she was gratified that both Indian men and women were among those crowds of demonstrators.

"Who knows what [the victim] could have contributed to India's future?" asked Clinton. "When you put barriers in the way of half the population, you, in effect, are putting brakes on your own development as a nation."

Clinton, who will serve her last day as secretary of state February 1, said she hopes to see great progress on this issue in India in the years to come.

Addressing questions on East Asia policy from a group of students assembled by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) in Tokyo, Clinton said the United States wants to expand its relationships with Japan and China. At the same time, she expressed concern and regret about the confrontational stance being taken by North Korea's new leader with new threats to conduct a nuclear weapons test. She said the Obama administration is disappointed

that the young leader of the long-isolated state is not taking greater steps toward bringing his nation into the world community.

Clinton told a group of young people assembled in Bogota by the network NTN24 that the United States has enjoyed a productive working relationship with Latin American governments in the first Obama term. Contradicting a question that said Latin America is not a high priority for this administration, Clinton said the cooperation and dialogue the United States enjoys with Latin America doesn't make headlines, so often fueled by controversy and conflict.

Like the U.S. media, the young people participating in the six satellite linkups with Clinton expressed great curiosity about her plans after leaving the Obama administration and the possibility of another presidential campaign in 2016. The outgoing secretary of state said she plans to catch up on "20 years of sleep deprivation" and write a memoir. She deflected questions about further political ambitions, but expressed her intent to continue her work to promote the rights and aspirations of women and girls.

Other overseas partners in the global discussion were the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in Beirut and the BBC in London.

U.S. Delivers \$155 Million More to Relieve Syria's Suffering

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 29 January 2013

Washington — The United States is releasing an additional \$155 million to buy food, blankets, medical supplies and other types of humanitarian assistance to help Syrians suffering under the Assad regime.

Speaking via video directly to the Syrian people January 29, President Obama said, "This new aid will mean more warm clothing for children and medicine for the elderly, flour and wheat for your families, and blankets, boots and stoves for those huddled in damaged buildings. It will mean health care for victims of sexual violence and field hospitals for the wounded."

The latest infusion of U.S. aid brings the U.S. total to \$365 million, more than any other single donor of assistance to the Syrian people. More than half the funding, \$202 million, is helping people inside Syria. The rest is going to Jordan (\$52 million), Lebanon (\$51 million), Turkey (\$34 million), Iraq (\$19 million), Egypt (\$2 million) and regional U.N. agencies (\$5 million).

The U.S. assistance is buying food for people in all of Syria's 14 governorates, providing medicine and medical treatment in Damascus, Dar'a and Homs, immunizing 1 million Syrian children against preventable diseases such

as measles, and delivering winter supplies to Syrians in areas including Aleppo, Dayr az Zawr and Homs.

The extent of the suffering inflicted by the Assad regime during the past two years is staggering. The United Nations says about 2.5 million people have been displaced inside Syria and more than 678,000 have fled to neighboring countries. More than 400,000 Palestinian refugees inside Syria have been affected by the violence. The U.S. assistance is enabling them to receive food, cash and winter supplies, according to a State Department fact sheet.

Obama said Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt have taken on a significant burden by opening their doors to refugees from the Syrian turmoil, and added, "They are not alone."

Jordan is receiving funds to address psychological trauma, including gender-based violence, in addition to providing food, water and winter supplies.

In Lebanon, U.S. funding supports the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) agency's work of delivering basic humanitarian services such as clean water, blankets and tents.

For Turkey, much of the U.S. assistance goes to the Turkish Red Crescent, which is active in helping Syrian refugees survive the winter.

The U.S. assistance earmarked for Iraq supports the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the World Food Programme.

The money supplied to Egypt goes mainly to buy food for Syrian refugees and to fund UNHCR operations in the country.

Obama is sending U.S. envoys to the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, taking place in Kuwait January 30, to urge a stronger international response to the deteriorating Syrian situation. He said the United States believes that funneling support through the United Nations and its partner organizations is the most effective way to help the millions of people affected by the Assad regime's brutality.

"We're under no illusions. The days ahead will continue to be very difficult," Obama said. But he added that the Assad regime will come to an end, and when that happens, the United States will be the partner of the Syrian people as they forge their own future.

More U.S. Sanctions Target North Korean Weapons Proliferation

28 January 2013

Washington — The United States has designated a Hong Kong-based company, two North Korean bank officials, North Korea's space agency and several space officials in response to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2087, which was unanimously adopted on January 22 in the wake of Pyongyang's launch — in direct violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions 1718 and 1874 — of a rocket using ballistic missile technology on December 12.

These sanctions target North Korea's efforts to fund its nuclear and ballistic missile activities and enable the United States to implement Resolution 2087 domestically.

The sanctions generally prohibit transactions between the designees and any U.S. citizen or entity and freeze any assets that the designees may have under U.S. jurisdiction.

According to a January 24 statement from the U.S. Treasury Department, Leader (Hong Kong) International Trading Limited was designated for facilitating the shipment of machinery and equipment to customers on behalf of Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID) and to KOMID representatives outside North Korea.

In April 2009, the United Nations designated KOMID North Korea's premier arms dealer and its main exporter of goods and equipment related to ballistic missiles and conventional weapons. The Treasury Department statement said that KOMID aims to facilitate weapons sales, has offices in multiple countries around the world and also operates under the alias Korea Kumryong Trading Corporation.

The Treasury Department also announced designations January 24 of Ra Ky'ong-Su and Kim Kwang-Il, who are the Tanchon Commercial Bank's representative and deputy representative, respectively, in Beijing, because of their actions to facilitate activity on behalf of TCB.

TCB was also designated by the United Nations in April 2009. The bank "plays a role in financing KOMID's sales of ballistic missiles and has also been involved in ballistic missile transactions from KOMID to Iran's Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group (SHIG), the U.S. and U.N.-designated Iranian organization responsible for developing liquid-fueled ballistic missiles," according to the statement.

Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen said TCB and KOMID are "part of the web of banks, front companies

and government agencies that support North Korea's continued proliferation activities," and the Treasury Department's actions to expose those entities and those who assist them "degrade North Korea's ability to use the international financial system for its illicit purposes."

Separately on January 24, the State Department designated the Korean Committee for Space Technology, which orchestrated the December 12 launch. It also designated Paek Chang-Ho and Chang Myong-Chin, two North Korean officials involved with the satellite launch.

In remarks to reporters in South Korea January 24, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Glyn Davies said the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2087, which was adopted after North Korea's December 12 launch, imposes strong sanctions on North Korea, and he urged all U.N. member states to "do their part" to implement its provisions.

The tightened sanctions against North Korea "will help to impede the growth of weapons of mass destruction programs in North Korea and reduce the threat of proliferation by targeting entities and individuals directly involved in these programs," Davies said.

The ambassador said it is important that the resolution was passed "by unanimous consent of 16 nations from all corners of the world" and followed condemnation of the North Korean missile launch by at least 60 countries and international organizations.

"This broad and growing consensus sends a unified message to Pyongyang. And the message is: 'Live up to your obligations. Keep your promises. Start down the path of denuclearization. Keep the commitment you made in 2005 in the Joint Statement of that year. Or you will only further isolate your nation and impoverish your people,'" Davies said.

Under the 2005 Joint Statement – concluded by North Korea and its partners in the Six-Party process, which include China, Russia, the United States, South Korea, Japan and Russia – Pyongyang agreed to take verifiable steps to end its nuclear programs.

Davies said the United States remains open to "authentic and credible negotiations" with North Korea aimed at implementing the statement.

"We are willing to extend our hand if Pyongyang chooses the path of peace and progress by letting go of its nuclear weapons and its multistage missiles. If North Korea comes into compliance with Security Council resolutions and takes irreversible steps leading to denuclearization, the United States ... [and] our other partners in the Six-Party process will do the hard work with the DPRK of

finding a peaceful way forward," Davies said.

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