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President Obama: U.S. Will Continue to Pursue Terrorists Overseas

By Nick Simeone | American Forces Press Service |
09 October 2013

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Washington — Just days after U.S. forces carried out raids in Libya and Somalia to bring wanted terrorists to justice, President Obama made clear October 8 the United States will continue to carry out similar strikes overseas as long as threats to the nation exist.

Obama made the comments two days after Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced the military had seized al-Qaida member Abu Anas al-Libi during an operation in Libya. Libi has been indicted in New York in connection with the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

“We know that Mr. al-Libi planned and helped execute plots that killed hundreds of people, a whole lot of Americans,” Obama said in response to a question at a White House news conference that dealt almost entirely with his call for Congress to end the government shutdown and raise the nation’s debt limit.

In a separate raid October 4 in Somalia, U.S. military personnel carried out a targeted operation against Abdikadir Mohamed Abdikadir, also known as “Ikrima,” identified as a top commander of the al-Qaida affiliated al-Shabaab terrorist group. A Pentagon spokesman said that operation did not lead to Ikrima’s capture.

“Where you’ve got active plots and active networks, we’re going to go after them,” Obama said, referring to terrorists and others who pose risks to the United States. He said the quick-strike military operations carried out by U.S. forces in Libya and Somalia do not signal the opening of a new war against terrorism.

“There is a difference between us going after terrorists who are plotting directly to do damage to the United States and us being involved in wars,” and he made reference to an address he delivered in May in which he said the United States will continue to dismantle networks that pose a direct danger to the country.

“The risks of terrorism and terrorist networks are going to continue for some time,” Obama told reporters. He added that a long-term plan is needed to prevent unemployed and uneducated young men from becoming radicalized.

“We’ve got to engage in a war of ideas in the region and engage with Muslim countries and try to isolate radical

elements that are doing more danger to Muslims than they are doing to anybody else,” he said.

A Pentagon spokesman said al-Libi is being detained under the laws of war in a secure location outside Libya. Obama said he will be brought to justice.

The president added words of praise for the service members involved in the operations.

“The operations that took place both in Libya and Somalia were examples of the extraordinary skill and dedication and talent of our men and women in the armed forces,” he said. “They do their jobs extremely well, with great precision, at great risk to themselves.”

Secretary Kerry Calls for Stronger Bonds with Southeast Asia

09 October 2013

Washington — Strengthening the established bonds between the United States and Southeast Asian nations is a “critical part of President Obama’s rebalance to Asia,” Secretary of State John Kerry said October 9 at the opening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit.

At the high-level gathering in Brunei, Kerry cited the importance of U.S. engagement with the 10 nations of the area, both bilaterally and through the ASEAN organization. Kerry expressed hope of “continuing to strengthen our partnership in many, many ways.”

The closed-door talks among ASEAN leaders cover a broad strategy for engagement across political, security, economic and sociocultural themes, according to White House briefing documents.

The Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (PROGRESS) is a key element of U.S.-ASEAN political-security and sociocultural cooperation. The initiative is focused on improving good governance and regional security and promoting equitable and sustainable development. Member nations work to improve cooperation in addressing transnational crime, promoting human rights, disaster-response planning, science and technology and other issues.

E3 — or Expanded Economic Engagement — is a U.S.-ASEAN initiative to encourage international investment with shared policies of market access, transparency and responsible businesses. E3 launched in November 2012, and member nations are making progress on developing shared principles for international investment, according to a State Department fact sheet.

The United States promotes sociocultural engagement with Southeast Asian nations through interchanges tailored for scholars, students, youth, young professionals and others. The history of U.S. exchanges across the Pacific dates back more than 35 years through the Fulbright Scholar Program.

A specially designed Fulbright program to underpin other ASEAN development priorities began in 2012. Participating scholars visit partner institutions in other countries to focus their studies on particular regional concerns, such as food security, public health, monetary policy, law and other matters.

Coinciding with the ASEAN Summit itself, the United States hosted a gathering of young people from 10 nations of the region for a dialogue about issues of the day.

"The future really belongs to you," Kerry said as he opened a conversation with these young leaders October 9. "You're going to define it, and you're going to live it," he continued, citing the problems of economic growth, human trafficking and climate change that demand solutions from future generations. "So don't get impatient even as you're fighting and struggling and watching things change. You have to keep doing it, and it takes time," Kerry said, as he recalled the important influences that U.S. youth have had on social change since he came into adulthood in the 1960s.

ASEAN members are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Through the course of the summit, Kerry also emphasized the broad U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia to achieve environmental objectives, such as combating illegal logging and wildlife trafficking while encouraging emissions curbs, water stewardship and biodiversity preservation.

Kerry's Asian engagement continues October 10 when he attends the East Asia Summit. Representatives of the 18 nations of this alliance will hold an informal discussion about many of the same issues regarding regional peace, security and prosperity.

A senior U.S. State Department official said in a briefing before the summit that discussions will also cover climate change, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The official described the meeting as "important and a high priority" because it provides a setting for talks on "difficult" topics such as nonproliferation and maritime security. The briefer noted however that attending nations may hope to "steer clear of controversial issues" and avoid discussing disputed matters such as the territory and sovereignty in the South China Sea.

The East Asia Summit brings together all the ASEAN nations plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States.

Secretary Kerry Says Trans-Pacific Trade Pact About Jobs, Growth

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
08 October 2013

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry says a proposed 12-member Trans-Pacific Partnership seeks to generate economic growth and fresh jobs by sparking a wave of investment and business development across the Asia-Pacific region.

"At a time when we, all of us, seek strong and sustainable growth, TPP is creating a race to the top, not to the bottom," Kerry said. The fact that the trade and investment pact seeks the highest standards over any previous international trade agreement will be good for businesses, workers, economics, stability and relations among nations, he said.

"It's why we are working to complete the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations by the end of this year," Kerry added at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum's chief executives' summit in Bali October 7.

In a joint statement October 8 following a leaders' meeting, the 12 nations negotiating the TPP agreement — Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and the United States — announced that they are on track to complete TPP negotiations. TPP ministers have been working in smaller groups in recent months on the legal texts and annexes on access to their respective goods, services, investment, financial services, government procurement and temporary entry markets.

"We have agreed that negotiators should now proceed to resolve all outstanding issues with the objective of completing this year a comprehensive and balanced, regional agreement," the joint statement says.

The meeting with the leaders of TPP nations was held October 8 on the sidelines of the 21-member APEC summit being held on the Indonesian island of Bali. Kerry represented President Obama at the leaders' meetings because the president remained in Washington to work on a budget impasse with the U.S. Congress.

U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman told journalists in Bali that trade ministers have been working on TPP and are strongly committed to concluding negotiations on schedule.

"In Brunei in August, and now in Bali, trade ministers

have been charting a path forward on outstanding issues, particularly state-owned enterprises, intellectual property rights, environment and market access, in order to move the negotiations toward completion," Froman said.

The 12-nation group seeking a new trade partnership says it wants the "deepest and broadest possible liberalization of trade and investment" to ensure the greatest benefits. They said the partnership is seen as setting pioneering standards for new trade disciplines and as a model for future trade agreements. APEC leaders have set a goal of achieving a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific.

President Obama launched the TPP on the margins of the 2010 APEC leaders' meeting in Yokohama, Japan, and then again during the 2011 APEC meeting in Honolulu hosted by the United States, a senior administration official told journalists during a briefing October 8. The goal of the TPP is to create a comprehensive, high-standard trade agreement that brings new disciplines into the global trading system that reflects the current challenges of the international trading system, he said.

There have been 19 rounds of talks, several ministerial meetings, several leaders' meetings and dozens of smaller meetings with chief negotiators, trade ministers and the TPP leaders, the official said. He added that the partnership nations are not going to accept a poor agreement just to meet a deadline, but the collective view is that while the partnership is an ambitious undertaking, it is also a doable one.

Secretary Kerry Emphasizes U.S. Commitment to Asia-Pacific Region

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
07 October 2013

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry told Asian business executives attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum that the United States remains committed to the region by ties of geography, history, culture, economics and a substantial investment expended in the framework for the architecture on which the current prosperity is being built.

"I want to emphasize that there is nothing that will shake the commitment of the United States to the rebalance to Asia that President Obama is leading," Kerry said to Asia-Pacific chief executives meeting on the Indonesian island of Bali October 7. Kerry is representing Obama at the forum because the president remained in Washington to address a continuing budget impasse with the U.S. Congress.

"The Asia-Pacific region, which we are all a part of, is by far the largest, the fastest-growing and the most dynamic economic region in the world," he said in his keynote

address. "But in the 21st century, happily, our lives are defined not just by the work of troops or of diplomats, but increasingly by the efforts of entrepreneurs and executives, of the private sector."

Kerry said the importance of the region is reflected in its global economic impact. More than half of the global gross domestic product — the broadest measure of the world's economic output — about 55 percent, is represented by the Asia-Pacific region, and 44 percent of global trade occurs in the region. APEC members account for 40 percent of the world's population, according to the forum.

APEC also notes that within the group, trade has expanded sevenfold since APEC was founded in 1989, reaching \$11 trillion in 2011.

Half of the United States' top 10 trading partners come from the APEC economies, and more than half of U.S. exports go to the region, Kerry said. "And over the next five years, nearly half of all the economic growth that will happen outside of the United States will happen in the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

President Obama made it a top priority of his administration to rebalance U.S. relations in the Asia-Pacific region, and emphasized that priority several times during presidential visits. Kerry said the president has worked to expand U.S. exports by more than 50 percent since taking office, a measure economists believe helps to stabilize a nation's economy over time, and expand two-way trade with APEC economies — and "today, both American exports and American trade with APEC stands at record levels."

Kerry told the international conference that the United States is now the world's largest energy producer and its manufacturing sector is showing renewed strength. "Our innovation is strong, our debt is coming down, our deficit is coming down, and I am absolutely confident that the innovation and strength that has characterized our economy for some period of time will continue well beyond this moment," he said.

Moving on to national security, Kerry told business executives that it is not just about the threats that nations face, but it's also about what can be done to prevent the seeds of tomorrow's threats from being planted today. "In a world where vast populations of young people are exploding on the scene with aspirations and demands, all interconnected by social media, at that time anarchy and terror are sometimes offered as alternatives to the fulfillment of those jobs and opportunity, to the fulfillment of good governance," Kerry told the executives.

Kerry also told them that the private sector must work with governments to eliminate corruption and promote the rule of law as ways to expand investment and development.

Earlier on the sidelines of the APEC meetings, Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss progress in the international control and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons by international inspectors. They also discussed a November meeting in Geneva on a potential political settlement in Syria under the auspices of the United Nations.

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