

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Weekly Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

---

November 29, 2013

---

<b>Biden's Visit to Northeast Asia Continues U.S. Engagement.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Food Prices Decline but Near Record Highs, World Bank Says .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>New USAID Program Aims to Spur Entrepreneurship .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chinese, Americans Research Flu Patterns and Prevention.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Obama: New Agreement Halts Iranian Nuclear Program .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>U.S., Canada Sign Asia-Pacific Cooperation Framework.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Equal Access to Health Services for All People in the Americas .....</b>	<b>5</b>

**Biden's Visit to Northeast Asia Continues U.S. Engagement**  
27 November 2013

Washington — Vice President Biden leaves Washington December 1 on a trip to Northeast Asia, further demonstrating intense U.S. engagement in the region in 2013.

Biden will visit Japan, China and the Republic of Korea December 2-7. His overarching intent will be to emphasize the U.S. commitment to a rebalance of relations with the Pacific region, a strategy that has economic, strategic and values-based dimensions, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the trip via teleconference November 27.

The officials underscored the high-level attention that the Obama administration is focusing on Asia in 2013, noting visits by a number of Cabinet-level officials. Secretary of State John Kerry has made several trips to the region recently and will return in the months ahead. The White House announced earlier in November that President Obama has rescheduled a trip to the region canceled in October as a result of the U.S. government shutdown.

The United States “is actively engaged in the full spectrum of issues,” a senior administration official said in the briefing. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is the centerpiece of an agenda devoted to shared growth through boosting trade, investment and innovation.

Beyond that broad objective, the officials described some “urgent and immediate issues” that Biden is likely to address in his separate meetings with Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, China’s President Xi Jinping and South Korean President Park Geun-hye.

The portfolio of issues includes removing the threat of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula; reducing tension and heightening diplomacy in the East China Sea and the South China Sea; strengthening the economic relationship with China and enhancing free trade between the United States and Korea.

The potential exists currently for some “miscalculation and mistrust” among the governments of the region, the official said, so this is a particularly important time for the United States to offer a voice for diplomacy, dialogue, restraint and communication.

China made a unilateral announcement recently to establish what it called an “air defense identification zone” over international waters surrounding islands disputed by China and Japan.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel framed the U.S. response to that action November 23. “We view this development as a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region,” Hagel said.

Questioned about this action during the November 27 briefing, one administration official noted that the zone is in international air space. The United States, the international community and global aviation all have interests in unrestricted passage over the East China Sea, the official said.

“There is a need for China to clarify its intentions,” the official said. The vice president will have an opportunity to raise U.S. concerns and questions, the official said, while noting that “the strains” among regional governments caused by declaration of the zone are “not a good thing.”

With a long-standing involvement in foreign affairs during his more than 40 years as a senator and vice president, Biden has “extraordinarily close and warm relations with the leaders of each of the three countries.” He has had one-on-one meetings with all three leaders, and that is a valuable asset Biden brings to the visits with these three Asian powers, the official said.

By virtue of that relationship-building, one official said, Biden now will be engaged in a “high-level and high-quality dialogue that’s particularly valuable among these three countries.” The official said Biden will be interested in calm, direct consultations at a “very important time.”

**Food Prices Decline but Near Record Highs, World Bank Says**

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 27 November 2013

Washington — World food prices continued to decline during the five-month period ending in October, thanks to record harvests of wheat, maize and rice, stronger global stocks and a weakened dollar, the World Bank reports.

However, even though prices were 12 percent lower than a year ago, prices remained close to their 2008 all-time highs, the bank says in its November *Food Price Watch*. While overall prices declined 6 percent between June and October, prices of wheat increased 4 percent from June to October and then by 6 percent in October, it says.

The World Bank says that despite the months of food price declines and significant improvements in reducing extreme poverty, progress in reducing global chronic hunger has been fairly modest. It says that increases in food demand as the world’s population grows to 9 billion people by 2050 continue to highlight the need for sustained increases in agricultural productivity.

To help meet the world’s current and future food needs, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is scaling up its support for scientific and technological agricultural research. USAID also is helping countries develop sustainable agricultural strategies and helping farmers access capital and extension services so they can

produce more food.

Wheat markets remain tight as China's demand increases and as unfavorable weather in South America, the Black Seas region and India causes concerns for winter wheat harvests that may drive up wheat prices over the coming months, the bank says. In contrast, maize and rice stocks remain strong and are expected to stay that way through the end of 2013.

The World Bank's *Commodity Market Outlook* says that, historically, global stocks take time to recover from supply shocks such as those caused by the 2012 droughts.

Domestically, prices across countries varied widely during the five-month period due to bad weather, public procurement policies, local stock shortfalls, uncertainties over how much maize will be used to produce ethanol, and currency devaluations, according to *Food Price Watch*.

*Food Price Watch* is a series that aims to draw attention to trends in food prices and their implications. [The report](#) (PDF, 924KB) is available on the World Bank website.

### **New USAID Program Aims to Spur Entrepreneurship**

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 25 November 2013

Washington — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched an initiative to spur the development of promising, high-growth and financially sustainable entrepreneurial ventures that have the potential to lift less-advantaged communities out of poverty.

Through its Partnering to Accelerate Entrepreneurship (PACE) Initiative, USAID will invest up to \$10 million over three years to identify, test and put into operation concepts that accelerate the growth of small businesses that promote prosperity and address development challenges in areas like food security, health, education and energy.

The partnership aims to catalyze the development of entrepreneurial systems in certain industries and geographical areas, USAID says.

"USAID recognizes the value in supporting entrepreneurs who advance market-based solutions using sustainable business models," Ricardo Michel, acting director of USAID's Office of Innovation and Development Alliances, wrote November 21 on the agency's blog.

According to USAID, while more than 400 million people in developing countries are estimated to work as entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship has not reached its full potential in most of those countries largely because entrepreneurs are prevented from accessing the resources they need to start new ventures, refine their business models and become profitable.

"Our role is to help remove barriers that stand in the way of entrepreneurs starting and scaling their businesses, while also addressing market failures that limit the inclusion of poor and vulnerable populations," Michel wrote.

"Our investments address common challenges facing entrepreneurs such as a lack of access to capital; limited availability of technical assistance; mentoring and peer networks; and a lack of awareness among investors regarding investment-ready enterprises," USAID says.

USAID has issued an open call for entrepreneurship concept papers that address PACE objectives. USAID intends to invest with partners in select programs, the agency said.

The Obama administration supports entrepreneurial ventures in developing countries as critical engines of economic growth by driving innovation, creating industries and promoting new jobs, according to a USAID fact sheet.

"In the last 20 years alone, human ingenuity and entrepreneurship around the world have reduced child mortality rates by 42 percent and poverty rates by 48 percent — lifting over 600 million people above the dollar-and-a-quarter poverty line," said USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah.

Since 2001, USAID has enabled more than 1,500 public-private partnerships with an estimated value of more than \$20 billion in public and private funds, the agency said.

USAID also recently announced a \$4 million partnership with several U.S. foundations to invest in young social entrepreneurs in developing countries with ideas for solutions to development challenges.

[More information about PACE](#) is available on USAID's website.

### **Chinese, Americans Research Flu Patterns and Prevention**

25 November 2013

Washington — An international research effort working to better understand global patterns in influenza outbreaks has developed a vaccination strategy that is likely to prevent more cases of flu in China.

Flu outbreaks could be better controlled with vaccination campaigns timed to match differing regional disease patterns, according to findings from the Fogarty International Center at the U.S. National Institutes of Health. Fogarty scientists collaborated with the Chinese Centers for Disease Control in the work.

"This research suggests the need for staggered timing of vaccination in three broad epidemiological regions," said

Dr. Cecile Viboud, who co-authored the study with Fogarty colleagues and Chinese collaborators.

In northern China, flu season coincides with winter outbreaks in the world's other northern temperate zones, where vaccinations are recommended to begin in October. Flu typically begins circulating in the colder months that follow, as people spend more time in enclosed spaces, where viruses more readily pass from person to person.

Southern China is different. Flu outbreaks in the warmer regions typically occur in the spring, and the study finds that a vaccination campaign beginning in February is likely to yield the best results. Outbreak patterns in an intermediate zone between these two regions are more complex and will require further research to better understand.

China introduced seasonal influenza vaccination in 1998. The campaign is not yet countrywide, and just about 2 percent of the population is routinely immunized. Health workers in Beijing and a few other cities now vaccinate the most vulnerable populations — older adults and school-age children. It is estimated that influenza annually causes 11–18 deaths per 100,000 people in China, with underdeveloped rural areas suffering two to three times higher flu-related death rates.

More research will be needed to confirm the optimal vaccination policy, particularly for the mid-latitude provinces around Shanghai, the authors said.

“Before a national influenza vaccination program can be established in this large, climatologically diverse country, public health experts need a clear picture of influenza seasonally across the country that could be used to optimize the timing of a future Chinese vaccination effort,” Viboud said.

Previous studies have shown that while cold temperatures and low humidity favor influenza transmission in temperate settings, flu seasons in tropical climates coincide with periods of high rainfall. Intermediate regions sometimes have twice-annual epidemic cycles, rather than the single season observed in the United States and Europe, for example.

Hospitals in cities in each of China's 30 provinces provided data from 2005 to 2011 that formed the basis for these conclusions. Researchers used statistical analyses to distinguish the three epidemiologically distinct flu regions.

The need for identifying regional differences in flu outbreaks is important as more low- and middle-income countries aim to launch national influenza immunization programs, the Fogarty announcement said.

The findings on China's flu patterns are part of a larger

international study underway since 2001, the Multinational Influenza Seasonal Mortality Study (MISMS). Flu causes some 250,000–300,000 deaths each year, according to the World Health Organization, and about 3 million to 5 million cases of severe illness. That level of sickness also puts considerable pressure on public health resources and affects workplace productivity and economic activity.

MISMS is working to better understand the seasonal variations associated with influenza patterns both within and amongst countries. International researchers conducting this work also learn more about the circulating subtypes of flu virus and how they move about the globe. The ultimate MISMS goal is to develop a world map of influenza mortality burden and seasonal patterns.

### **Obama: New Agreement Halts Iranian Nuclear Program**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 24 November 2013

Washington — President Obama says an agreement reached between the six world powers and Iran in Geneva is an initial step that will halt progress of the Iranian nuclear program for the first time in a decade.

“These are substantial limitations which will help prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon,” Obama said in a nationally televised address November 23.

“Meanwhile, this first step will create time and space over the next six months for more negotiations to fully address our comprehensive concerns about the Iranian program,” the president said, adding, “If Iran does not fully meet its commitments during this six-month phase, we will turn off the relief and ratchet up the pressure.”

The initial steps agreed upon by six major powers and Iran will provide limited, temporary, targeted and reversible relief to Iran, senior administration officials said during a background briefing from Washington. This agreement does not recognize that Iran has a right to process uranium or plutonium, which is essential in building nuclear weapons.

Under the terms of the deal, Iran committed to halt certain levels of uranium enrichment and neutralizing part of its uranium stockpiles. Iran cannot use its next-generation centrifuges, which are used in the process for enriching uranium.

In addition, Iran cannot install or start up new centrifuges, and its production of centrifuges will be limited, the president said. Iran will halt work at its Arak plutonium reactor, and new inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will provide extensive access to Iran's nuclear facilities. These inspections will allow the international community to

verify whether Iran is keeping its commitments, the president said.

“On our side, the United States and our friends and allies have agreed to provide Iran with modest relief, while continuing to apply our toughest sanctions,” Obama said.

The breakthrough came at the end of five days of often tedious and detailed negotiations among six major powers – the United Kingdom, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States – negotiating with Iran in Geneva, and hosted by Lady Catherine Ashton, the European Union high representative for foreign affairs and security policy.

Secretary of State John Kerry and foreign ministers and representatives from the six nations joined in the talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif late November 22. The initial agreement was announced in Geneva early on November 24.

At a briefing in Geneva, Kerry told journalists that “the measures that we have committed to will remain in place for six months, and they will address the most urgent concerns about Iran’s nuclear program.”

The agreement, which contains a stringent verification and inspection process spearheaded by the IAEA, impedes progress that will roll back the stockpile of existing enriched uranium that would be necessary for development of nuclear weapons, Kerry said. Iran has agreed to suspend all uranium enrichment above 5 percent, and also has agreed to dilute or convert its entire stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium.

“That means that whereas Iran today has about 200 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium, they could readily be enriched towards a nuclear weapon,” Kerry said. “In six months, Iran will have zero – zero.”

He added that “Iran has agreed to submit its program to unprecedented monitoring,” to ensure that these commitments are met.

Kerry said this first step does not say that Iran has a right to enrichment of uranium or plutonium. It does say that Iran’s nuclear program is subject to negotiation and to mutual agreement.

Under the agreement, the international community provides Iran with limited economic relief in return for these measures in the first step, Kerry said, but that relief is reversible if Iran fails to meet its obligations.

The international community will permit humanitarian transactions that already are permitted by U.S. law, Kerry said, and do not provide Iran with any new sources of outside funding. The core architecture of economic sanctions put in place by the international community

remains in place during this six-month period, including sanctions on oil and financial services, he added.

Obama said diplomacy has opened up a new path toward a world that is more secure and a future in which the world can verify that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful and cannot be used to build a nuclear weapon. The November 24 agreement, reached after extensive negotiations by senior diplomats from six nations and Iran, reflects Obama’s commitment from 2009 when he began his presidency to see a diplomatic resolution to the threat posed by a nuclear armed Iran.

If the interim agreement holds and Iran meets its obligations, Obama said, then the six nations and Iran will begin negotiating “final-stage” agreements to halt Iran from building nuclear weapons, and to begin dismantling long-standing economic and political sanctions imposed by the international community, led by the U.N. Security Council, the United States, the European Union and others.

#### **U.S., Canada Sign Asia-Pacific Cooperation Framework**

By Karen Parrish | American Forces Press Service | 23 November 2013

*This article originally was posted on the Defense Department website on November 22.*

Halifax, Nova Scotia – The United States and Canada will increase their security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, American and Canadian defense leaders announced here November 22.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Canadian Defense Minister Rob Nicholson signed the Canada-U.S. Asia-Pacific Cooperation Framework November 22 as both leaders take part in the Halifax International Security Forum. The forum continues through the weekend, but Hagel will return to Washington late November 22.

Hagel said that signing the agreement on America’s day of remembrance for President John F. Kennedy reminded him of a speech Kennedy made to the Canadian parliament in 1961.

The secretary quoted from that speech: “The warmth of your hospitality symbolizes more than merely the courtesy which may be accorded to an individual visitor. They symbolize the enduring qualities of amity and honor which have characterized our countries’ relations for so many decades.”

Canada has long been among America’s most valued allies, Hagel said.

“Our bilateral defense relationship – symbolized by NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command], the world’s only true binational command –

is one of the strongest in the world,” the secretary said.

The new agreement, he said, “is another example of our two nations being able to leverage each other’s strengths in order to help address global challenges.”

Canada and the United States are both Pacific nations, and each can benefit by working together, Hagel said.

“The United States and Canada will establish an annual strategic defense dialogue on the Asia-Pacific within the context of the Canada-U.S. Permanent Joint Board on Defense, which will meet for the 232nd time next month,” the secretary said.

Hagel added that the dialogue will help establish clear parameters for coordination of operations among the United States’ Pacific Command, Canadian Joint Operations Command, and the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command.

“It will also help foster ties among our respective defense attachés in the region, as well as improve coordination for high-level visits and military-to-military activities where appropriate,” he said.

Hagel noted that an area of particular emphasis for both nations is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

“At a time when both the U.S. and Canadian armed forces are proud to be providing relief to the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan, implementing this framework will help us coordinate these activities even more effectively going forward,” he said.

In response to a reporter’s question, the secretary reiterated that America’s rebalance to the Asia-Pacific is based on national interests, alliances and partnerships in the region.

“Our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific is about more than just military-to-military relations,” Hagel said. “It’s economic, it’s trade, it’s social, it’s cultural, it’s education, it’s security, it’s stability — all of these are part of relationships in an interconnected world.”

The Canadian minister said Canada has no greater or closer friend and ally than the United States.

“As the global security environment grows ever more complex, we also continue to seek ways to work together beyond the hemisphere,” he added.

Nicholson said Canada recognizes the importance of maintaining security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure its continued peaceful growth.

“Both Canada and the United States share with our Asian partners an interest in promoting stability,” Nicholson said.

## Equal Access to Health Services for All People in the Americas

22 November 2013

*This blog post by Nils Daularie, assistant secretary for global affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was published on the AIDS.gov and Huffington Post websites on November 21. There are no republication restrictions for use by U.S. embassies.*

### A Victory for LGBT Health in the Americas

By Nils Daularie

Early in October, global health leaders in the Americas Region made a major step forward to improve access to and quality of health care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons.

At the annual meeting of the Pan American Health Organization, delegates from governments throughout the region unanimously passed a resolution entitled *Addressing the Causes of Disparities in Health Service Access and Utilization for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Persons*. By passing this resolution, health authorities in the Americas have pledged to promote equal access to health services for those in the LGBT community, taking into account the widespread stigma, discrimination, and persecution experienced by many in the population. This is a huge victory, as approval of the resolution marks the first time any United Nations body taken steps to address discrimination in the health sector against LGBT persons.

Unequal treatment against LGBT people exists both in and outside of the health sector in the Americas region. In some countries it is government sanctioned, where laws or policies exist criminalizing same-sex conduct. However, even where there are no explicit laws, stigma and outright discrimination often prevent LGBT persons from accessing needed services. However, the discussions my colleagues and I had at PAHO before the vote took place were not about areas of disagreement, but instead focused on what it would take to reach the public health goal of achieving universal access to care. When I introduced the nondiscrimination agenda item on behalf of the United States I cautioned, “If we exclude the LGBT population from our work, a portion of universal health care will become an illusion.”

This resolution will improve norms and standards in the Americas to promote equal access to health services for all people. Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr. Margaret Chan has called universal coverage, “the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer. It is the best way to cement the health gains made during the previous decade. It is a powerful social equalizer and the ultimate expression of fairness.” This resolution also creates an important precedent for other World Health Organization (WHO) regional bodies

as well as for WHO itself. The U.S. government stands firm in our resolve to capitalize on this significant step forward for LGBT health. We will continue our work at WHO to raise these issues and we look forward to the report PAHO will produce on “the health situation and access to care of LGBT persons, the barriers they can face in accessing health care services, and the impact of reduced access for this population.”

While discussions about LGBT health are sensitive in every country, what I said at PAHO remains true: “Ensuring access to nondiscriminatory care is a goal that all countries can and should support. Despite religious or cultural differences, we all recognize the fundamental principles of making sure that every person can see a health provider when they are injured, get medicine when they are sick, and have access to the basic preventive care necessary to live a healthy and active life.”

I am proud of the leadership role the United States continues to play to advance LGBT nondiscrimination, and we will continue to push ahead to provide equal and quality health outcomes for all citizens of the world.

*(Nils Daulaire is the assistant secretary for global affairs, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)*

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