

American

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President Obama's Rebalancing in Asia Is Win-Win Strategy

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 19 December 2013

Washington — The Obama administration's "rebalancing" policy in Asia is a win-win strategy for both sides of the Pacific, according to Scot Marciel, the State Department's principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

"The president set out a clear, overarching objective for the United States in the region: to sustain a stable security environment and advance a regional order rooted in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for universal rights and freedoms," Marciel told the Senate subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific affairs at a December 18 hearing.

Although the economic pillar of the president's rebalance policy is critical to achieving his highest priority — creating jobs and opportunity for the American people — it will provide handsome economic payoff for the nations of the Asia-Pacific region as well, Marciel said.

Progress in this area is already evident, he said. For example:

- U.S. trade with the East Asia-Pacific region grew by 22 percent between 2008 and 2012, far outpacing the 13 percent growth in global U.S. trade.
- The United States is the leading foreign investor in the East Asia-Pacific region, with the stock of U.S. foreign direct investment standing at around \$622 billion in 2012, up 35 percent from 2008.
- Investment into the United States from economies of the East Asia-Pacific is also growing, increasing by 31 percent since 2008 to reach \$422 billion by the end of 2012.

And the outlook for future economic growth is good, Marciel said. The World Bank recently projected that the East Asia-Pacific region will contribute 40 percent of global growth this year, and some forecasters expect that nearly 50 percent of world growth over the next two decades will be generated in this region, yielding hundreds of millions of new middle-class consumers.

But there are a number of dark clouds looming over this otherwise sunny future, Marciel said. "For example, rapid economic and population growth has created enormous strains on the region's food, water, forest, marine and energy resources," he said. "In many areas, the increased use of fossil fuel for industries and transportation has resulted in dangerous levels of pollution that in turn pose dangers to people's health and accelerate climate change. On the political and security fronts, the resurfacing of long-standing territorial disputes threatens the stability of

the region."

"How we respond to these challenges will determine our long-term ties to the region, as well as the region's future," Marciel said. But the State Department, he said, is working on a number of fronts to fuel the economic engines while meeting possible threats. For example:

- To promote environmental sustainability, the United States has advanced work with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum to improve energy efficiency, promote greener standards in building construction, combat illegal logging and reduce wildlife trafficking.
- To address the economic dimensions of human security in the region, the United States supports APEC in promoting sustainable health systems, building resiliency in supply chains after natural disasters and addressing food security.
- To build up human resources and expand economic opportunities, the United States is working to connect small and medium-sized enterprises to global value chains, increase mobility of university students and promote women's economic empowerment.

While working to keep challenges at bay, the State Department and U.S. missions in the region have established Interagency Commercial Task Forces to provide economic, commercial, agricultural and trade services in the most efficient and productive manner possible, Marciel said. They are also promoting investment and tourism, hosting investment promotion seminars, talking to business leaders around the region to encourage them to consider job-creating investments in the United States, and working with American service providers to help educate potential investors about how to comply with U.S. laws and regulations, he said.

The State Department, Marciel added, continues to promote a more open trade and investment environment in the East Asia-Pacific through collaboration with economies of the region in APEC, and through the full implementation of free-trade agreements.

The State Department "understands the importance of laying the policy groundwork on which the East Asia-Pacific region and the United States can continue to grow with shared prosperity," Marciel said.

U.S. Concerned About Central African Republic Violence

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 19 December 2013

Washington — The United States is deeply concerned about the sectarian violence that has swept across the Central African Republic (CAR), and particularly the nature of the attacks on civilians, Assistant Secretary of

State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield says.

"We are working closely with the United Nations Security Council, the French, other EU countries, and our African partners to support efforts to end the violence and restore security, rule of law and democratic governance to the CAR," Thomas-Greenfield said in prepared testimony December 17 before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs.

The African Affairs Subcommittee held the hearing to determine what more the United States can do to support multilateral efforts to ensure African Union troops have the capacity necessary to improve security and end the violence, Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Coons, a Democrat from Delaware, said. Senator Jeff Flake, a Republican from Arizona, echoed those comments and noted the importance of U.S. involvement to prevent the violence from spilling over into the region and the effects it would have for a long time to come.

The violence stems from the Seleka rebellion, which began in December 2012 and has taken an "alarming turn for the worse," Thomas-Greenfield said.

After 10 months of abuses by the largely Muslim Seleka fighters, Christian self-defense militias formed and began to attack both Seleka fighters and Muslim communities, creating a dangerous dynamic of reprisals where once there had been ethnic and religious tolerance, Thomas-Greenfield said.

Thomas-Greenfield said the United States has condemned Seleka's seizure of power and its campaign of rape, pillage and killings. An exact total of those killed and displaced as a result of what has become a sectarian conflict between Muslim and Christian factions is not fully known, according to the United Nations.

"We have publicly and privately called on CAR transitional authorities to end the violence and have warned them that those responsible for fueling and engaging in violence and human rights violations would be held accountable," Thomas-Greenfield said.

She said that U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Samantha Power gave that message directly to Transitional President Michel Djotodia in a December 7 telephone call.

Power and Thomas-Greenfield are leading a U.S. delegation to Bangui, the Central African Republic; Abuja, Nigeria; and N'Djamena, Chad. The delegation is meeting with transitional government officials, as well as U.N., French and other officials, to assess and support recent efforts of the African Union and French forces to protect civilians, stabilize the country and restore humanitarian

access, according to the State Department.

"To take a plane in here at this stage is very important and very much a sign of the priority the president attaches to events on the ground and, ultimately, stabilization in the Central African Republic," Power told reporters traveling with the U.S. delegation. Power said she has spoken twice with Djotodia to impress upon him President Obama's "great interest in the events in the Central African Republic."

"People in the Central African Republic are in profound danger, and we have profound responsibility which we must meet to help them move away from the abyss," Power told journalists in New York before departing for Bangui.

To strengthen efforts to hold the responsible parties accountable, Thomas-Greenfield said, the United States has supported the U.N. Security Council's establishment of an arms embargo, a sanctions committee and a panel of experts, and authorization of a Commission of Inquiry and an increase in the human rights monitoring capacity of the U.N. Political Office in CAR, and co-sponsored a U.N. Human Rights Council resolution creating an independent expert position for the Central African Republic.

To immediately stem the sectarian violence, the United States has supported action by the U.N. Security Council for a one-year mandate for the African Union-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) and for an expanded French troop presence in support of MISCA, Thomas-Greenfield testified.

This combination of forces on the ground should provide the most immediate mechanism for ending the violence, she noted.

"In addition, we believed MISCA's more robust stabilization mandate is what is needed now to confront and disarm the armed groups," Thomas-Greenfield said.

The White House announced December 19 that the United States is providing up to \$101 million in support for restoring security in the Central African Republic. That figure includes support for security operations and humanitarian support. In the last fiscal year, which ended September 30, the United States provided \$24 million in humanitarian assistance to CAR.

USAID Assistant Administrator Earl Gast said December 17 that his agency "is expanding the provision of humanitarian assistance to respond to the most urgent health, nutrition, protection, food security, and logistical needs in areas affected by instability." USAID is also

participating in the EU-hosted “Friends of CAR” working group, which serves as a platform for interaction and coordination among donors who are funding, or considering funding, activities in the country.

On December 19, CAR Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye announced that his country would move its presidential election up to 2014. It had been set for 2015.

WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement a Gain for Small Businesses

18 December 2013

Washington – Under a trade facilitation agreement recently completed by the World Trade Organization (WTO), small businesses will have new opportunities to benefit from international trade.

The agreement will provide increased transparency and access to customs documents, regulations and procedures and will publicize other information required for small businesses to engage in trade, according to a December 17 blog post by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). The information will be provided in a comprehensive online publication, giving small business exporters a “how-to” guide for trading with the WTO’s 160 member countries, USTR said.

In a December 8 statement following the conclusion of the WTO deliberations in Bali, Indonesia, President Obama said: “This new deal, and particularly the new trade facilitation agreement, will eliminate red tape and bureaucratic delay for goods shipped around the globe.

“Small businesses will be among the biggest winners, since they encounter the greatest difficulties in navigating the current system. By some estimates, the global economic value of the new WTO deal could be worth hundreds of billions of dollars.”

In Bali, the World Trade Organization marked the first successful conclusion of multilateral trade negotiations in its nearly two-decade history. The trade facilitation agreement, one of the results, will help make it easier for small businesses to navigate customs procedures and sell their exports to customers around the world. As the USTR noted, small businesses play an increasingly vital role in the global economy.

Among their new obligations under the agreement, WTO members will undertake to reform customs practices and increase efficiency of goods crossing borders, as well as provide access to expedited shipping channels. This is particularly important to small businesses that are developing their logistics capacities, USTR said.

With improved access to shipping channels and express

carriers, small businesses will have better access to global supply chains and can export their goods in a more cost-efficient and timely manner, USTR said. In addition, the reduction of documentary requirements, processing of documents before goods arrive, use of electronic payments and quick release of perishable goods are measures in the agreement that can further reduce costs for small business exporters.

Bringing countries even halfway to “best practices” in trade facilitation would add 4.7 percent to world GDP, with much of the growth supported by small businesses, USTR said, citing World Bank and World Economic Forum statistics. And small business success, it noted, plays an important role in the growth of the global economy.

Secretary Kerry Says U.S. Committed to Philippines

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |

17 December 2013

Washington – Secretary of State John Kerry says the United States is committed to working with the Philippines to address its most pressing security and economic challenges.

“That’s why we are negotiating a strong and enduring framework agreement that would enhance defense cooperation under our alliance,” Kerry said during a joint press conference with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario December 17 in Manila, the Philippines.

The alliance agreement would include increased rotations of U.S. forces in the Philippines, Kerry added, but he said that the United States has no plans to reopen former U.S. military bases there.

Del Rosario told reporters that he and Kerry continue to work on promoting bilateral relations that extend from political to defense and security, to economic cooperation, to regional and global concerns.

“We discussed on how we would elevate our alliance to another level, and this came in the form of the framework on increased rotational presence which we are currently negotiating,” del Rosario said. They also discussed how to address transnational threats, including counterterrorism, and securing Philippine maritime borders, he said.

Kerry and del Rosario also discussed how economic cooperation between the two historic allies will be expanded and what areas they are moving toward, del Rosario said. Talks also centered on a proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is intended to be a high-standard agreement on emerging trade issues of the 21st century.

The TPP is a proposed trade arrangement under negotiation by Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam.

Kerry also told reporters that the United States will continue to help the Philippines as the nation goes through the process of recovery and reconstruction following the devastating Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda.

“The American people are proud to help, and the American people, I think, take great pride in the fact that there is a spirit in our country of helping those in distress, but also there is a special affection for the Philippines,” Kerry said. The secretary visited the Philippine city of Tacloban, which was hard hit by the typhoon in November. The United States has been a major contributor of disaster relief in the aftermath of the storm.

Kerry also announced that the U.S. State Department and Defense Department intend to implement a joint three-year, \$40 million program for the Philippines under the Global Security Contingency Fund. The program will be used to improve maritime security and maritime domain awareness, and to provide assistance for law enforcement counterterrorism capacity.

Earlier while visiting Vietnam, Kerry announced a \$32.5 million assistance package to help Southeast Asian nations protect their territorial waters. Vietnam will receive up to \$18 million to provide the Vietnamese Coast Guard with five new fast patrol boats.

The United States also supports efforts to reduce tensions surrounding territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea, Kerry said. In that regard, the United States supports efforts by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to move quickly to conclude a code of conduct as a crucial means of reducing the risk of accidents or miscalculation in the area, he said.

“We think that claimants have a responsibility to clarify their claims and to align their claims with international law,” Kerry said. “That is the way to proceed in resolving any disputes over the South China Sea – peacefully, and with international law.”

Youth Provide Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 17 December 2013

Washington – The world’s youth – more than half the world’s population is under age 30 – provide huge opportunities for social change and the advancement of human rights, says Uzra Zeya, the U.S. State Department’s acting assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor.

“Unburdened by convention and fresh with new ideas, young people will always be at the forefront of societal change,” she said in a speech December 13 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank.

“Nowhere is this more true than in the space of human rights,” Zeya said, noting young champions such as Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, who survived being shot by extremists for promoting education for girls, as well as iconic champions such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom began their push for human rights when they were young.

“Young people have always played a unique role in the protection and promotion of human rights,” Zeya said. “This is even more true today, where the proliferation of technology has diminished the space between people, where a picture on Instagram can document an abuse, a reliable hashtag can mobilize a protest, and a YouTube video can raise the awareness of millions.”

But the youth demographics point to “an intriguing dynamic,” Zeya said. “When it comes to human rights abuses, this generation is on the front lines – at once the most visible and the most vulnerable. Put differently: Young people are the most likely to stand up against human rights abuses and the most susceptible to being abused.”

The vulnerability of most of the world’s youth has to do with “democratic transitions during a time of global youth unemployment and disenfranchisement,” she said. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more youth are poor or underemployed than ever before.

Citing ILO statistics, Zeya noted that 73 million to 75 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are looking for work, while another 309 million work but live in households that earn less than the equivalent of \$2 per day.

“The dim prospects for success, let alone a stable future, can lead to disenfranchisement,” Zeya said. Moreover, youth are more vulnerable to labor exploitation, she said, “because they are desperate to find work and don’t have a voice in society.”

“We must ensure that freedom of association and decent conditions of work are not sidelined as we support democratic transitions now underway,” she said.

Recognizing the opportunities today’s youth offer for promoting growth and stable democratic governments, the U.S. State Department has taken a number of steps to nurture the development of youth across the world, Zeya

said.

For example, in 2010 the secretary of state named a special adviser on global youth issues. That post is currently held by Zeenat Rahman, whose job is to address the issue of youth unemployment by partnering with multilateral institutions, the private sector and foreign governments to develop training and employment opportunities.

Rahman and her team have worked with U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide to establish 70 youth councils, Zeya said. These councils were formed to give young people a voice and an opportunity to address local policy concerns, in partnership with U.S. policymakers, she said.

The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor works with the ILO and the G20 to ensure that youth training and employment is addressed as a human rights, development and economic challenge, and also to encourage inclusive solutions, Zeya said.

During a strategic dialogue in 2012 with civil society on the margins of the annual International Labour Conference, State Department officials heard from young workers and activists how best to tackle the youth unemployment crisis. Their ideas, Zeya said, have fed into the State Department's foreign assistance budget and affected programs that will boost economic opportunity for all working people, especially youth.

Young people will determine the future, but they also determine the present, Zeya concluded. She called for a universal commitment to build a world where all people, young and old, "are born free and equal in rights and dignity," as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Pressure to End Apartheid Began at Grass Roots in U.S.

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 16 December 2013

Washington — On November 21, 1984, a group of African-American leaders, frustrated by South Africa's systematic racial injustice, entered the South African Embassy in Washington and demanded freedom for Nelson Mandela and the release of South Africa's political prisoners. When the leaders refused to leave, they were arrested.

Protests outside South Africa's embassy would continue nearly every day for the next few years, attracting larger and larger crowds. Over time, there was increased media attention as the list of those arrested included 25 members of the U.S. Congress and leaders from the U.S. civil rights movement such as Rosa Parks, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s widow and two of his children. In all, about 5,000 people were arrested

outside the embassy, including tennis star Arthur Ashe and musician Stevie Wonder.

But the Washington protests were only one part of a decentralized but widespread U.S. public campaign to pressure the South African government over its apartheid policies and express solidarity with the South African people's struggle to change their country.

Beginning in the late 1970s, a grass-roots movement of American college students and faculty across the country started demanding that their academic and civic institutions divest their holdings in companies doing business in South Africa and that pension funds and banks divest any South African assets. The divestiture movement, in part, was a response to the 1976 uprising by the youth in Soweto and the massacre of protesters by the South African police.

By 1988, more than 155 academic institutions had fully or partially divested from South Africa, including the University of California, which withheld some \$3 billion from the country. In addition, by 1989, 26 U.S. states, 22 counties and more than 90 cities had taken economic action against companies doing business in South Africa.

U.S. groups also raised funds to help pay legal expenses for South African political prisoners and their families and organized boycotts of South African sporting events and cultural performances to show their solidarity with the South African people. Many U.S. churches also voiced their protest and found ways to apply economic pressure.

The combined force of this decentralized group of American anti-apartheid activists finally pressured the U.S. Congress to pass the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which imposed economic sanctions against South Africa until the government agreed to release Mandela and all political prisoners and entered into "good-faith negotiations" with the black majority. President Ronald Reagan vetoed the measure, but Congress overturned that veto and followed by voting for even more restrictive sanctions.

These efforts, accompanied by increased media interest in the anti-apartheid struggle within South Africa itself, helped to educate an American public that in the mid 1980s largely never had heard the names of Nelson Mandela, martyred South African activist Steve Biko or Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who himself was arrested outside the South African Embassy in Washington in 1986.

The grass-roots effort to pressure the South African government and raise awareness was so successful that only five years after many Americans first heard the term apartheid, hundreds of thousands met the newly freed

Nelson Mandela in New York at the start of his 1990 visit to the United States. People across the nation flocked to hear his remarks in the U.S. cities on his 11-day tour.

In a December 7 broadcast, National Public Radio journalist Arun Rath reflected on the mass mobilization, which coincided with his high school and college years of the 1980s and early 1990s.

"I don't think I saw real political activism until I encountered the anti-apartheid movement," he said. "My own church sent a busload of congregants to picket the South African Embassy. We all felt like we had a moral stake in ending apartheid and freeing Nelson Mandela."

In his own recollection, President Obama, who was attending Harvard Law School at the time Mandela was freed, told an audience in Senegal June 27 that the period "gave me a sense of what is possible in the world when righteous people, when people of goodwill work together on behalf of a larger cause."

Three days later in Cape Town, South Africa, Obama said that the grass-roots mobilization inspired by Mandela had shown that "one man's courage can move the world."

High-Level Visit to China Will Strengthen U.S. Asia-Pacific Ties

13 December 2013

Washington – U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker and U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman will travel to Beijing to co-chair the 24th session of the U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) December 19–20 with Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang.

The two top U.S. trade officials will be joined by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

"The Obama administration is committed to strengthening our partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region and deepening our commercial and economic ties," Pritzker said, according to December 13 news releases from both the Commerce Department and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

"The JCCT is a critical component of U.S. engagement in Asia and an important mechanism in our efforts to further build on the U.S.-China bilateral relationship," she added.

Pritzker said the high-level JCCT meeting is "the capstone of a year of work," and the U.S. officials are eager to engage with their counterparts on issues of importance to the two countries.

"The JCCT continues to provide an important platform to

address wide-ranging issues in our bilateral trade relationship with China," U.S. Trade Representative Froman said. "This year we're focused on making progress on areas including enforcement of intellectual property rights, market access for our goods and services, and removal of regulatory barriers."

Established in 1983, the JCCT is the main forum for addressing bilateral trade issues and promoting commercial opportunities between the United States and China. It holds high-level plenary meetings annually to review progress made by working groups that focus on a wide variety of trade issues.

The working groups meet throughout the year on such topics as intellectual property rights, agriculture, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, information technology, commercial law, services trade, regulatory barriers to exports, tourism and statistics.

At the 2012 JCCT meeting, held in Washington, the two sides addressed intellectual property and innovation issues, regulatory obstacles that impeded U.S. exports and issues surrounding China's Government Procurement Agreement accession.

China was the largest supplier of U.S. goods imports in 2012, and the third-largest market for U.S. exports in 2012 (after Canada and Mexico). U.S. goods exports to China were \$110 billion in 2012, up 583 percent since 2000. Trade in services with China (exports and imports) totaled \$43 billion in 2012; services exports were \$30 billion and services imports were \$13 billion.

"China is one of our most important trading partners," said Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, "and I look forward to joining Secretary Pritzker and Ambassador Froman in this year's JCCT discussions to further strengthen this important relationship."

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