

American

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President Obama Says Proposed Crimean Referendum Illegal

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
06 March 2014

Washington – President Obama said a proposed March 16 referendum on the future of Crimea that is being supported by Russia would be illegal.

At a White House briefing, President Obama said, “Any discussion about the future of Ukraine must include the legitimate government of Ukraine.” The proposed referendum would violate the Ukrainian Constitution and international law, he said.

“In 2014, we are well beyond the days when borders can be redrawn over the heads of democratic leaders,” he added March 6.

Earlier in the day, the 100-seat parliament in Crimea, a southeast region of Ukraine that borders Russia and faces a portion of the Black Sea, voted 78-0, with eight abstentions, in favor of joining the Russian Federation. The lawmakers agreed to hold the public referendum on March 16 to let the Crimean people decide their future. Crimean voters would also be given the choice of remaining part of Ukraine with greater local powers.

The latest crisis follows closely on the February 27 invasion by Russian forces wearing ski masks and combat uniforms without markings, who seized the Crimean regional parliament, several government buildings and the airport. The Russian Navy, by mutual agreement with Ukraine, bases its Black Sea naval fleet in Crimea.

While condemning the proposed referendum, Obama also announced March 6 that the United States is imposing new visa restrictions on pro-Russian opponents of the new Ukraine government in Kyiv. The unspecified and unidentified number of people and entities subject to the visa restrictions were accused by the Obama administration of threatening Ukraine’s sovereignty.

The visa bans will be imposed immediately by the U.S. Department of State. Officials will deny U.S. entry to those involved in human rights abuses in Ukraine and now to those associated with violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation.

“In addition, the president has signed an executive order that authorizes sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for activities undermining democratic processes or institutions in Ukraine,” White House press secretary Jay Carney said in a prepared statement. The sanctions plan provides the legal framework for the U.S. Treasury Department to impose financial penalties on

offenders specified in the president’s executive order and carries with it a heavy financial penalty.

Carney said that these measures build on previous actions taken, including suspending bilateral discussions with Russia on trade and investment, suspending other bilateral meetings on a case-by-case basis, putting on hold U.S.-Russia military-to-military engagement, and an agreement among the Group of Seven advanced economies to suspend participation associated with the Group of Eight Summit in Sochi, Russia, in June. The United States is prepared to consider additional steps and sanctions, the statement said.

Obama told journalists the actions he has taken “continue our efforts to impose a cost on Russia and those responsible for the situation in Crimea. And they also give us the flexibility to adjust our response going forward based on Russia’s actions.”

The response from Washington is in coordination with the European Union, Obama says. The EU, meeting in Brussels March 6, strongly condemned actions taken by Russia to undermine the integrity of Ukraine and also indicated that any further action by Russia could bring more serious consequences.

“Any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to severe and far reaching consequences for relations between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand, which will include a broad range of economic areas,” the EU said in a prepared statement.

Obama also said that while these measures are being implemented, there are still diplomatic efforts that can be taken to de-escalate this crisis, including the use of unarmed monitors in Crimea from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State John Kerry was holding bilateral meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Rome in an effort to defuse the Ukrainian crisis.

Secretary Hagel, General Dempsey Outline U.S., Partner Approach to Ukraine

By Cheryl Pellerin | American Forces Press Service |
06 March 2014

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on March 5.

Washington – In advance of their budget testimony March 5 before a Senate panel, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Martin E. Dempsey, outlined Defense

Department activities pertaining to the crisis in Ukraine.

Hagel and Dempsey appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee to discuss President Obama's fiscal year 2015 budget request for DOD, and Hagel alluded to the Ukraine situation in his statement to the panel.

"I think it's clear ... that the events of the past week underscore the need for America's continued global engagement and leadership," he said. "The president's defense budget reflects that reality."

The DOD budget request is helping the department and the services "navigate through a period of great uncertainty regarding the future level of resources DOD will have to defend the nation," the secretary added.

Addressing the unrest in Ukraine that led to the invasion of Crimea by Russian troops, Hagel said that over the past few days he and Dempsey have been in constant touch with their fellow ministers and chiefs of defense in NATO, Russia and Ukraine.

"Today we are putting together a call for me with the new minister of defense for Ukraine," he said. "Over the last couple of weeks, I have had conversations with the previous two ministers, and General Dempsey spoke this morning with Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu." Hagel also spoke March 1 with Shoygu about the situation in Ukraine.

The secretary attended a NATO defense ministers conference last week in Brussels. While there, he took a few hours to meet with the NATO Ukraine Commission and spent time with Ukraine's acting defense minister, Oleksandr Oliynykof.

"Across the administration, our efforts have been focused on de-escalating crisis, supporting the new Ukrainian government with economic assistance and reaffirming our commitments to allies in Central and Eastern Europe," Hagel said, adding, "I strongly support the administration's approach to this de-escalation."

Secretary of State John F. Kerry was in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev March 4 and was in Paris March 5, and he was scheduled to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov March 5. NATO officials met March 4 and were to meet again March 5, the secretary said.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, or OSCE, announced that it is sending 35 observers to Ukraine. The United Nations has had a Security Council meeting, and Hagel said he expects more activities along the diplomatic and economic front.

"Earlier this week, I directed the Department of Defense

to suspend all military-to-military engagements and exercises with Russia," he added. These include two scheduled trilateral exercises with the Russians, one with the Canadians and Russians and the other with the Norwegians and Russians.

"Also, this morning the Defense Department is pursuing measures to support our allies, including stepping up joint training through our aviation detachment in Poland ... and augmenting our participation in NATO's air policing mission on the Baltic Peninsula," the secretary said.

At U.S. European Command, Eucom's commander, Air Force General Philip M. Breedlove, is convening meetings with the Central and Eastern European chiefs of defense, he said.

"I think everyone on this committee knows ... that this is a time for wise and steady and firm leadership, and a time for all of us to stand with the Ukrainian people in support of their territorial integrity and their sovereignty," Hagel said. "That, in particular, is what President Obama continues to do as we pursue diplomatic and economic options."

The United States and the OSCE, with the International Monetary Fund, have proposed separate economic packages that for Ukraine are particularly important, the secretary said.

In his remarks, Dempsey acknowledged what he called the alarming progression of events in Ukraine over the past few days.

"Our senior leaders have made it clear that they wish to see Russia's provocation resolved through diplomatic means in close collaboration and coordination with our allies," the general added.

Over the past several days, Dempsey also has spoken with most of his NATO counterparts, in particular those in the Baltics and Eastern Europe. He said they are concerned and seek U.S. assurance for their security.

"During our conversations, we committed to developing options to provide those assurances and to deter further Russian aggression, [and] we agreed that together we must help shape a path back to sovereignty and security for all the people of the Ukraine," the general said. "Simply put, the allies stand together."

Dempsey recommended suspension of the department's military-to-military exchanges with the Russian Federation and directed Eucom to consult and plan within the construct of the North Atlantic Council. "Obviously, we want to provide NATO's leaders with

options that stabilize and not escalate tension in the Ukraine," he said, "but we are only one part of that equation."

On the morning of March 5, Dempsey said, he spoke with his Russian counterpart, General Valery Gerasimov, urging continued restraint in the days ahead to preserve room for a diplomatic solution.

"Russia's actions remind us that the world today remains unpredictable, complex and quite dangerous," Dempsey said. "We cannot think too narrowly about future security challenges, nor can we be too certain that we have it right. The world will continue to surprise us, often in unpleasant ways."

Iraq, U.S. Make Progress in First Trade, Investment Meeting

06 March 2014

Washington – Senior representatives of the governments of Iraq and the United States advanced trade and bilateral relations between the two countries at the inaugural meeting of the United States–Iraq Council on Trade and Investment (TIFA Council) in Washington March 5.

The TIFA Council was established under the United States–Iraq Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), and the dialogue under the agreement reaffirms both governments' commitment to increase bilateral trade and investment.

"Both governments place strong importance on broadening their strategic partnership beyond military and security ties. Today's meeting demonstrates the continuing close cooperation between Iraq and the United States on economic, trade and investment issues," the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said in a March 5 news release following the meeting. "U.S.-Iraqi cooperation in these areas is aimed at further integrating Iraq into the global economy and thereby creating jobs and attracting investment in both countries."

The TIFA process is a key part of the sustained and multifaceted high-level engagement between the two governments and focuses on tackling major trade and investment challenges.

In the meetings, the United States expressed its continued support for Iraq's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the two governments discussed ways for Iraq to advance its WTO accession process, USTR said.

Representatives from both countries also discussed business development and trade diversification, USTR said, with an emphasis on trade and investment

cooperation in the following sectors, which are quickly growing in Iraq: agriculture; electric power; housing projects and infrastructure; water, sewage and sanitation; roads and bridges; engineering; metallurgical and petrochemical projects; light and heavy industry; and health, financial and educational services.

Iraq is currently the United States' 27th-largest goods trading partner and 60th-largest export market, according to the USTR. U.S. goods exports to Iraq from January to December 2013 totaled \$2 billion, and Iraqi goods exports to the United States in that period totaled \$13.3 billion. Total U.S. foreign direct investment in Iraq is \$1.2 billion.

"Iraqi representatives explained that Iraq is making important progress to facilitate the importation of goods into Iraq and to ensure that U.S. companies can participate in Iraqi government procurement tenders by reducing unnecessary documentation requirements," USTR said. In a number of areas, it added, the United States is providing technical assistance to help Iraq improve its capacity to regulate trade in a way that does not unnecessarily burden commerce.

USTR said the bilateral discussions during the meeting covered the following areas: investment climate issues, business development, government procurement, import policies, labor issues, agricultural trade and services sector issues. The two governments also identified three general areas for additional attention during future TIFA Council meetings: government procurement, women's economic empowerment and intellectual property rights.

International Visitors Break U.S. Tourism Record

05 March 2014

Washington – International visitors welcomed to the United States in 2013 gave a record-breaking boost to U.S. travel and tourism, Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker announced February 28.

The nation looks forward to even more international visitors enjoying its parks, beaches and urban centers in 2014 as it continues to improve the processes for entering the United States, according to Pritzker.

International visitors spent \$180.7 billion on U.S. travel and tourism-related goods and services in 2013, an increase of more than 9 percent from the record set in 2012.

The United States' National Travel and Tourism Strategy, which President Obama launched in 2012, charted a new course toward making America a more attractive and accessible destination than ever before. The strategy sets a goal of drawing 100 million international visitors by 2021.

"This president is the first ever to establish a national strategy for increasing travel and tourism here in the U.S., and we clearly have great momentum behind this effort," Pritzker said in a Commerce Department news release.

In discussing U.S. tourism at a meeting of industry leaders February 28, Pritzker pointed to the success of efforts such as BrandUSA, a public-private partnership that has promoted travel to the United States in eight international markets so far.

Pritzker also noted a presidential executive order that has led to new visa positions and expanded visa processing facilities around the world, with the result that 94 percent of nonimmigrant visa applicants worldwide are interviewed within three weeks.

"Wait times in key markets like Brazil, India, China and Mexico are all currently less than 10 days," Pritzker said, and "in China, wait times have been under five days for the past two years."

More than 2 million people now have access to U.S. Customs and Border Protection Trusted Traveler Programs – which provide expedited travel for pre-approved, low-risk travelers through dedicated lanes and kiosks – up 60 percent from December 2012, she said. And more than 30 million visitors received Transportation Security Administration "PreCheck" expedited screening as of the end of 2013.

But Pritzker also acknowledged that the rise in international travelers has sometimes resulted in bottlenecks at borders, long wait times and customer service challenges at ports of entry.

The U.S. Travel and Tourism Board, she said, recommended that "we must make continued progress on travel facilitation, including sustaining the progress on visa issuance and continuing to improve the entry experience."

Women Prove that Courage Takes Many Forms

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 04 March 2014

Washington – A diminutive doctor defies the Taliban to bring health care to Afghan women. A pop music star brings attention to corruption and human rights issues in Ukraine. A victim of an acid attack overcomes the pain of her disfigured face to become the standard-bearer in India for the movement to end acid attacks.

These are the many faces and forms of courage that were honored at the U.S. Department of State on March 4.

At the secretary of state's annual International Women of Courage Awards, 10 extraordinary women from 10

countries were recognized for their leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment – often at great personal risk.

In her remarks at the awards ceremony, first lady Michelle Obama said the honorees, "with every life they touch and every spirit they raise ... are creating ripples that stretch across the globe."

"When we see these women raise their voices and move their feet and empower others to create change," Obama said, "we need to realize that each of us has that same power and that same obligation."

Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom officiated at the 2014 awards ceremony for Secretary of State John Kerry, who was called away to Ukraine. The goal of President Obama and Secretary Kerry, Higginbottom said, is "full participation of women in the economic and political lives of their countries."

Speakers at the awards ceremony included Catherine Russell, U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, and Kerry's daughter Vanessa Kerry, a doctor who has been active in global health for more than a decade.

These are the 2014 International Women of Courage awardees:

- Dr. Nasrin Oryakhil, director of the Malalai Maternity Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- Roshika Deo, a political activist in Fiji.
- Rusudan Gotsiridze, bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia and advocate for gender equality and equal protection of all of Georgia's minorities.
- Dr. Iris Yassmin Barrios Aguilar, tribunal president for the High Risk Court in Guatemala, who has fought high-profile corruption, organized crime and human rights abuses.
- Laxmi, a campaigner to end acid attacks against women in India.
- Fatimata Touré, a community activist who advocates for women's health rights and fights gender-based violence in Mali.
- Dr. Maha Al Muneef, a pediatrician who works to end domestic violence and child abuse in Saudi Arabia.
- Oinikhol Bobonazarova, who works to draw attention to women's rights, torture in detention centers and the plight of migrant laborers in Tajikistan.
- Ruslana Lyzhychko, a former pop music star and currently a civil society activist, human rights advocate and leader of Ukraine's Maidan movement for democratic reform.
- Beatrice Mtetwa, a human rights lawyer in Zimbabwe.

Full biographies and photos of the awardees are available

on the State Department website.

Following the awards ceremony at the State Department and meetings with U.S. officials and nongovernmental organization leaders in Washington, the honorees will travel to cities across the United States to engage with the American people through an International Visitor Leadership Program.

Since the inception of the award in 2007, the Department of State has honored 76 women of courage from 49 different countries.

Knowledge Is Power in Battling Greatest Health Threats

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 04 March 2014

Washington – An international network of medical professionals calls for an education campaign targeting the greatest causes of death worldwide – cardiovascular disease (CVD) and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). In a February edition of *Circulation*, an article suggests a "whole of society approach" to lowering the public health toll of NCDs, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes.

Medical organizations, health advocates, governments, communities and industry must all be involved in raising individual awareness about lifestyle choices and disease, these authors say.

"How people live, move, work and eat is of paramount importance," according to the *Circulation* article, "and interventions to reduce exposure to modifiable risk factors, as well as address the underlying social determinants, must be planned and implemented now to protect future generations."

Circulation is published by the American Heart Association. A writing committee with experts from the World Heart Federation, the American Heart Association, the American College of Cardiology Foundation, the European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology co-authored the article, "Moving From Political Declaration to Action on Reducing the Global Burden of Cardiovascular Diseases."

Dr. Sidney Smith, professor of medicine and cardiology at the University of North Carolina, represented the World Heart Federation on the committee as the immediate past president of that organization. In an interview, Smith explained that U.S. health care practitioners have achieved solid results in reducing cardiovascular disease by educating people about healthy lifestyles and preventive medical therapies.

"Recognizing that smoking prevention, treatment of

hypertension [high blood pressure], the use of statin medications to lower cholesterol and things as simple and inexpensive as aspirin therapy can have a major impact," Smith said from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he treats patients and teaches.

At a 2011 U.N. General Assembly session, governments adopted a political declaration on NCDs, acknowledging the severity of these health conditions and resolving to take greater strides to address them.

In 2013 more than 190 member nations of the World Health Assembly adopted "25 by 25," a set of actions to reduce premature mortality from NCDs 25 percent by 2025. Helping emerging nations reach that goal is the challenge ahead, Smith said.

"I feel strongly that there should be a dialogue in all countries," Smith said, "between the professionals, the public and governments about how best to proceed," in order to reach that goal in disease reduction.

According to the latest data available from the World Health Organization, the two most prominent CVDs – coronary heart disease and stroke – cause 13.5 million deaths annually. CVD deaths are expected to remain a major killer, taking 23 million lives or more by 2030, WHO predicts.

Surveys show that regions and nations differ widely on heart health risks. In South America, for example, obesity is a top risk factor. In China, high blood pressure and widespread smoking give rise to more cardiovascular disease.

In related work, Smith collaborates with Chinese counterparts on improving public outreach about heart health risk factors. With 40 years of experience fighting heart disease in the United States, Smith has been working with professionals at more than 60 Chinese hospitals on reducing the recurrence of heart attack. The North Carolina cardiologist has helped develop education programs for CVD patients who need to change habits to prevent second and third heart attacks or strokes.

Smith anticipates that Chinese CVD prevention activities will expand in the future to include more hospitals and more members of the public to prevent what can be a disabling if not fatal event.

The challenges to disease prevention are greatest in emerging nations with underdeveloped health infrastructure, according to the *Circulation* article. Historically, infectious diseases have been the most urgent health threat in low-resource nations, so refocusing on NCDs is likely to be a significant adjustment.

Low literacy levels can further impede the message about self-responsibility and health, Smith said, but the problem must be overcome.

The connection between low literacy, low socioeconomic status and poor health is “everywhere you look,” Smith said. The international health community, national and local governments and citizens themselves must all apply efforts to overcome that challenge.

WHO and other experts rank CVDs as an impediment to development in low- and middle-income nations for a variety of reasons. They kill or disable individuals prematurely, when they should have productive years of life ahead. Caring for CVD patients is expensive and can contribute to entrenched poverty in already struggling families.

Beyond the difficulties for individual CVD patients and their households, WHO estimates that CVDs and diabetes together reduce national economic output by almost 7 percent.

Ukraine Getting Extensive Assistance Package from U.S.

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
04 March 2014

Washington — The United States is providing economic assistance to the Ukrainian government — including a \$1 billion energy subsidy package — that is part of a broader international effort to ensure sufficient funding to restore financial stability and a return to prosperity in Ukraine, the White House announced March 4.

“The United States has developed a package of bilateral assistance focused on meeting Ukraine’s most pressing needs and helping Ukraine to enact the reforms needed to make its [International Monetary Fund] program a success,” the White House said. The IMF has already begun engaging with the new government to help stabilize the Ukrainian economy.

The announcement from the White House came as Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kyiv to reinforce Washington’s support for the new Ukrainian government and for crucial security talks with Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov.

Kerry’s arrival comes as Ukraine struggles with a Russian military takeover of Crimea, a strategic southeast region that borders Russia and the Black Sea. On February 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a major military training exercise involving 150,000 troops, hundreds of tanks and armored vehicles, and dozens of combat aircraft and troop-carrying helicopters just across the border with Crimea, and then on February 27 masked

military forces seized the regional parliament and other government buildings in Crimea. President Obama called Russia’s military incursion into Crimea a violation of international law and the U.N. Charter.

“I spent the weekend talking to leaders across Europe, and I think the world is largely united in recognizing that the steps Russia has taken are a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, Ukraine’s territorial integrity, that they’re a violation of international law. They’re a violation of previous agreements that Russia has made with respect to how it treats and respects its neighbors,” Obama said at the White House March 3.

“My interest is seeing the Ukrainian people be able to determine their own destiny,” Obama added.

Obama talked with Russian President Putin by telephone March 1 for approximately 90 minutes to encourage him to withdraw Russian combat troops from Crimea and engage in diplomatic talks with the new Ukrainian government. Obama told Putin: “Going forward, Russia’s continued violation of international law will lead to greater political and economic isolation.”

In addition to energy subsidies assistance, the aid package Kerry delivered to Kyiv provides training for financial and election institutions and anti-corruption efforts.

“The IMF will be at the front lines of an international package for Ukraine and is positioned to support robust and market-oriented reforms needed to restore Ukraine to economic health, including via providing large-scale financing and technical support,” the White House said in its announcement March 4.

Specifically, the Obama administration is working with the U.S. Congress and the Ukrainian government to provide \$1 billion in loan guarantees aimed at helping insulate vulnerable Ukrainians from the effects of reduced energy subsidies, the White House said.

Treasury Secretary Jack Lew said separately March 4 that the United States is prepared to work with the Ukrainian government and its partners to provide as much support as Ukraine needs to restore financial stability and return to economic growth, if the government is prepared to implement necessary reforms.

“At the request of the Ukrainian government, a mission from the International Monetary Fund is currently in Kyiv working with the Ukrainian authorities,” Lew said. “The IMF will be at the center of an international assistance package and is best placed to support Ukraine’s implementation of robust and market-oriented reforms. In parallel, the United States is working alongside international partners to assemble a package to help make

the IMF program a success.”

The United States has developed a package of assistance focused on meeting Ukraine’s four most pressing needs: implementing critical economic reforms and cushioning their impact on vulnerable Ukrainians; conducting free, fair and inclusive elections, with robust involvement by a strong and independent civil society and media; combating corruption and recovering stolen assets; and withstanding politically motivated trade actions by Russia, Lew said.

European leaders have begun considering economic sanctions on exports of Russia’s natural gas, uranium and coal, according to published news reports. The possibility of U.S. sanctions, which have been mentioned by administration and congressional officials not speaking for attribution, would likely take a similar approach to Europe’s.

Meanwhile, the Group of Seven advanced economies – which includes Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States – announced March 2 in response to the Russian military invasion of Crimea that it was suspending preparations for the 2014 Group of Eight Summit planned for May 18–19 in Sochi, Russia. Russia is the eighth member of the G8.

At the same time, the United States has suspended talks with Russia over a bilateral trade and investment treaty, and the Pentagon announced March 3 that it was suspending military-to-military engagements between the United States and Russia.

“We call on Russia to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine and for Russian forces in Crimea to return to their bases, as required under the agreements governing the Russia Black Sea Fleet,” Pentagon press secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby said. He added that the United States has suspended military exercises, bilateral meetings, port visits and planning conferences with its counterparts in the Russian military.

To clarify the U.S. military position, Kirby added that there has been no change in the U.S. military posture or activity in Europe or the Mediterranean Sea and that the U.S. Navy continues to conduct routine, previously planned operations and exercises with allies and partners in the region.

In Brussels March 4, ambassadors from NATO’s 28 member nations prepared to hold a second emergency meeting on Ukraine after Poland, which borders Russia and Ukraine, invoked an article of the North Atlantic Treaty calling for consultations when a member nation regarded its “territorial integrity, political independence or security” as being threatened, according to European

news reports.

Who Might Govern the Oceans?

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 28 February 2014

Washington — With a view of the Pacific Ocean stretching to the horizon, about 250 experts and thinkers met at a California hotel February 24–26 to discuss a problem that spans the planet: the oceans. They focused on what humankind might do to protect the state of the waters and diminishing populations of wildlife.

Covering more than 70 percent of the globe’s surface, the oceans are Earth’s largest habitat, supporting nearly 50 percent of all species. They are controlling forces in planetary climate and the source of food, jobs and resources for billions of people. Unsustainable and destructive practices cause well-documented damage to the oceans, but how to stop them is the thorny question considered by the attendees at the World Ocean Summit.

The Economist and National Geographic hosted the meeting, and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was among the keynote speakers. In a February 25 speech, he identified three main problems threatening the oceans: overfishing; pollution from garbage, debris and fertilizers; and greenhouse gas emissions.

A longtime senator from the coastal state of Massachusetts, Kerry is no stranger to the harm being done to oceans and marine life. During his decades in the U.S. Senate, Kerry urged the United Nations to restrict drift-net fishing. This practice deployed nets as long as 90 kilometers, capturing and discarding many more species than are sold at market.

The discarded creatures are known as “bycatch,” and the problem is so severe that it has endangered the survival of some species. Data is difficult to collect across the vastness of the oceans, but the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated in 2005 that more than 7 million tons of marine animals are discarded globally each year.

With entreaties from Kerry and others, in 1992 the United Nations put a moratorium on drift nets longer than 2.5 kilometers, but no enforcement mechanism exists. Responsible fishermen adhere to sustainable practices, Kerry said, but pirate fishermen continue using large-scale drift nets. U.S. maritime authorities apprehend boats using illegal nets every year, but their jurisdiction is limited to American coastal waters.

Summit attendees discussed ideas for global oceanic enforcement mechanisms, perhaps under the U.N. umbrella, and they questioned the secretary of state about governance. Kerry said both he and President Obama

support “the notion” of an enforcement mechanism, but how to achieve that is another question.

“How we will enforce regulations and what rules we will put in place in order to preserve our fisheries and manage our coastlines and do the things necessary to reduce the pollution and preserve these ecosystems,” Kerry said, is going to take “some kind of global understanding.”

But, Kerry also acknowledged, “I know people resist and hate the idea.” The idea of global governance can violate national concerns about maintaining the sovereignty of coastal economic zones designated by other international agreements. The many industries with maritime interests are cautious about proposals that can complicate their operations or erode their profits.

The co-chairman of the Global Ocean Commission, José María Figueres, also advocated a new regimen for oceanic governance. The Economist published a Figueres editorial February 27 headlined “Anarchy Rules the Waves,” decrying inadequate governance of the oceans.

“The incoherent patchwork of Ocean governance does nothing to prevent the abuse of the natural riches and freedom of the high seas that are the common inheritance of humanity,” Figueres wrote. A former president of Costa Rica, Figueres is recognized for sustainable policies adopted by the country during his 1990s administration.

The regulatory “patchwork” he describes includes the FAO, the U.N. Environment Programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Law of the Sea Treaty. Established international law also attempts management and conservation of far-ranging fish stocks through regional fisheries organizations. The U.N.’s International Maritime Organization is responsible for shipping safety and security and prevention of marine pollution by ships.

Secretary Kerry said the United Nations provides the obvious global structure to establish a better system of oceanic governance, but “huge global cooperation” will be necessary to get there. Kerry said representatives from the many ocean interests must come together to find shared and enforceable solutions.

The U.S. Department of State will attempt to set the international community on that course at another oceans conference in June.

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