

**INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE**  
**December 7 - 14, 2011**

1. [Obama Praises U.S. Troops' Efforts as Iraq Winds down](#) (12-14-2011)
2. [Panetta, Karzai Salute Progress in Afghanistan](#) (12-14-2011)
3. [State's Gordon at Senate Hearing on U.S. Policy in Russia](#) (12-14-2011)
4. [As Last Troops Depart, U.S. and Iraq Foresee Equal Partnership](#) (12-12-2011)
5. [U.S. Counterterrorism Expert Assesses al-Qaida After bin Laden](#) (12-09-2011)
6. [Clinton and Dzurinda Sign Agreement to Fight Nuclear Smuggling](#) (12-07-2011)

-----

**1. [Obama Praises U.S. Troops' Efforts as Iraq Winds down](#) (12-14-2011)**

By Jim Garamone  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14, 2011 – When the last U.S. troops in Iraq case their colors and move to Kuwait, they can leave with their heads held high, secure in the knowledge they did what was right for America and peace in the region, President Barack Obama told service members at Fort Bragg, N.C., today.

Obama noted the end of the war in Iraq during his speech to thousands of service members -- many of whom served multiple tours in Iraq since 2003.

The most important lesson from the war in Iraq is about America's national character, Obama said.

“For all of the challenges that our nation faces, you remind us that there's nothing we Americans can't do when we stick together,” he said. “For all the disagreements that we face, you remind us there's something bigger than our differences, something that makes us one nation and one people. Regardless of color, regardless of creed, regardless of what part of the country we come from, regardless of what backgrounds we come out of, you remind us we're one nation.”

That fact is why the American military is the most respected institution in the country, the president said.

The young men and women at Fort Bragg represent more than 1.5 million Americans who have served in Iraq. More than 30,000 Americans have physical wounds from the conflict with tens of thousands afflicted by unseen wounds like traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress.

“Nearly 4,500 Americans made the ultimate sacrifice, including 202 fallen heroes from here at Fort Bragg -- 202,” Obama said. “So today we pause to say a prayer for all those families who've lost their loved ones, for they are part of our broader American family.”

This 9/11 generation has earned its place in history, the president said.

“Because of you, because you sacrificed so much for a people that you had never met, Iraqis have a chance to forge their own destiny,” he said. “That’s part of what makes us special as Americans. Unlike the old empires, we don’t make these sacrifices for territory or for resources; we do it because it’s right.

“There can be no fuller expression of America’s support for self-determination than our leaving Iraq to its people,” he added. “That says something about who we are.”

And U.S. service members in Afghanistan are taking on the Taliban and breaking the back of al-Qaida, the president said.

“Because of you, we’ve begun a transition to ... the Afghans that will allow us to bring our troops home from there,” Obama said. “And around the globe, as we draw down in Iraq, we have gone after al-Qaida so that terrorists who threaten America will have no safe haven, and Osama bin Laden will never again walk the face of this Earth.”

Soon the last soldiers will leave Iraq, and the achievements of Americans who fought there will belong to history, the president said. He compared them to the men and women who fought for independence from Great Britain and who defeated fascism and communism. He also recalled the Civil War saying this generation, like the one that fought for union, has been “touched by fire.”

“All of you here today have lived through the fires of war,” Obama said. “You will be remembered for it. You will be honored for it, always. You have done something profound with your lives.”

Today’s service members enlisted during a time of war knowing that they’d be the ones who went into harm’s way, Obama said.

“When times were tough, you kept fighting. When there was no end in sight, you found light in the darkness,” the president said. “And years from now, your legacy will endure in the names of your fallen comrades etched on headstones at Arlington, and the quiet memorials across our country, in the whispered words of admiration as you march in parades, and in the freedom of our children and our grandchildren.”

And they will remember that they were touched by fire, and can be proud they answered the call, the president said.

“You served a cause greater than yourselves, you helped forge a just and lasting peace with Iraq and among all nations,” he said. “I could not be prouder of you, and America could not be prouder of you.”

Related Sites:

[Remarks](#)

## **2. Panetta, Karzai Salute Progress in Afghanistan (12-14-2011)**

By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service

KABUL, Afghanistan, Dec. 14, 2011 – Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta joined Afghan President Hamid Karzai here today to laud the progress that’s been made in Afghanistan as they conducted what Panetta called “very productive discussions” about ways to build on it.

Panetta, here for his second visit as defense secretary, said he believes 2011 will prove to be “a very important turning point in the war.”

“We have not won,” he said. “We have not completed this mission. But I do believe we are in the process of making significant progress here.”

Panetta noted the lowest levels of violence in five years, with the Taliban insurgency weakened to the point that it has not been able to conduct successful attacks or regain lost territory.

“There is no doubt that over the last two years, Afghan and international forces have been able to seize the momentum ... from the Taliban insurgency and establish security in critical areas, including Taliban heartland in the south,” the secretary said.

Panetta noted that he visited U.S. troops in eastern Afghanistan -- an area he said will continue to be a focus of efforts in the coming years -- earlier today to get a firsthand assessment of the situation from commanders and troops on the ground.

“I come away convinced that as we continue making important progress and building security, that we are moving closer to our goals of denying al-Qaida and its affiliates safe haven in this area to conduct attacks on the homeland,” he said.

Panetta also recognized the increasingly capable Afghan national security forces that “are absolutely essential to the ultimate success of our efforts here.”

These forces, who Panetta said have sacrificed alongside their American and international counterparts, have set the stage for security transition in Afghanistan.

Panetta noted that based on Karzai’s transition plans announcement last month, half of the Afghan population will soon live under Afghan governance and security control.

This transition “represents the fact that we have now made important gains during the campaign,” Panetta said. “We are moving toward a strong Afghanistan that can govern and secure itself for the future.”

Particularly promising, he said, is the fact that these gains continue even as the United States begins the process of drawing down the first 10,000 of its surge forces.

“When we look at these achievements, clearly we are going in the right direction,” the secretary said.

Karzai said Afghanistan now is more stable and moving toward a better future. What's left to be done, he said, is to extend individual security to protect the Afghan people from attacks.

Panetta agreed that despite the progress made, much work remains to be done.

"Are there challenges? Of course there are. Does the Taliban remain dangerous? Of course it is. Does this mean that we are going to continue to see high-profile attacks in the future? Yes we will," the secretary said.

"But are we going in the right direction?" he continued. "Are we making significant progress here in Afghanistan? Yes we are."

Looking to the future, Panetta offered assurance that the United States is committed to forging a long-term relationship with Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has the support of the United States, he said, and it also "has the backing of the region and the international community as it seeks to build a stronger and more stable country for the future."

Expressing regret for Afghan as well as American lives lost in pursuit of this future, Panetta pledged that their sacrifices "will not be in vain."

"Ultimately, we will achieve the goal of a sovereign and independent Afghanistan," he said, "that can secure and govern itself -- one that will never allow al-Qaida and the Taliban to be able to establish a safe haven here from which to conduct attacks on America."

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

Related Sites:

[Special Report: Travels With Panetta](#)

[NATO International Security Assistance Force](#)

---

### **[3. State's Gordon at Senate Hearing on U.S. Policy in Russia \(12-14-2011\)](#)**

U.S. Department of State Testimony by Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Statement before the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC

#### **The State of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Russia: U.S. Policy Options**

Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Barrasso and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the state of human rights and the rule of law in Russia. These issues have always been central to the Administration's strategy toward Russia. As President Obama said in July 2009, "Americans and Russians have a common interest in the development of rule of law, the strengthening of democracy, and the protection of human rights." There are real challenges in these areas, as you well know. And there are not always easy solutions. But we believe that our policy is guided by clear principles that enable us to have an effective

working relationship with Russia's government and civil society on a wide range of important foreign and domestic policy concerns. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these principles and challenges with the committee.

When President Obama and President Medvedev first met in London in April 2009, bilateral relations in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war were as contentious as they had been in more than twenty years. The decision to make a fresh start, to reset relations between the United States and Russia, has brought practical benefits for both countries as well as for the rest of the world. U.S. policy toward Russia in this Administration has been guided by several defining principles. First, we recognize that the United States and Russia have many common interests. Second, we believe that engagement with Russia's government can produce win-win outcomes, by rejecting ideas such as "privileged spheres of interest" or "great game" politics as well as the notion that we cannot engage on human rights concerns. Third, we have sought to develop a multi-dimensional relationship that goes beyond the traditional security arena and advances core U.S. national interests. And finally, we remain guided by the belief that we can engage effectively with Russia's government and civil society at the same time, that we can cooperate with its government without checking our values at the door, and that we can pursue a reset with Russia without compromising our relations with countries that have difficult relations with Russia.

To be sure, few things come quickly or easily in U.S.-Russian relations and it will take considerable time and effort to overcome a legacy of mistrust. Our interactions are often an uneasy mix of competition and cooperation. We are not so naïve as to think that areas of common ground can be fully insulated from areas of friction, but our starting point has been that problems in one area of our relationship should not preclude progress in others. We have much to gain by working together on global security and economic challenges, as opportunities for effective collaboration far outweigh our differences.

President Obama, Vice President Biden and Secretary Clinton have invested significant time in the bilateral relationship with Russia. Their diplomatic efforts, as well as constant contact between working-level officials, have produced practical results. The benefits of our engagement strategy are particularly evident in the foreign policy arena. We signed the New START Treaty. We brought into force a 123 Agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation, and agreed to dispose of enough weapons-grade plutonium for 17,000 nuclear warheads. We reached a military transit accord on Afghanistan that – as of this week – has allowed over 1,700 flights across Russian airspace, carrying more than 275,000 U.S. military personnel to the region. Our law enforcement agencies have stepped up information sharing and conducted joint operations to slow the flow of narcotics.

Russia and the United States have been effective partners in the development of multi-lateral solutions to global challenges. We are both key participants in the Six Party talks and resolute in our determination to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We are also working together to hold Iran to its international non-proliferation obligations and prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Russia remains an important partner in the Quartet, which is working to implement the vision for Middle East peace outlined by President Obama in his May 2011 remarks. As Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States and Russia coordinate closely, along with France, on efforts to achieve a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

There are certainly foreign policy issues on which we have different perspectives; these remain the topic of regular discussion. Our governments differ in their preferred responses to events in Syria. We disagree fundamentally about the situation in Georgia. The United States strongly supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and has raised consistently and at high levels the need

for Russia to fulfill its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement. We have participated in the Geneva talks to help resolve the conflict through direct dialogue between Georgia and Russia. We have repeatedly urged Moscow to provide transparency regarding Russian militarization of the occupied regions and re-establish an international monitoring presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We also remain concerned about the insurgency in the North Caucasus. While we recognize the Russian government's right and duty to protect its citizens, we remain troubled by security forces who – in the name of fighting the insurgency – have engaged in human rights abuses.

Our aim now is to deepen the reset and widen the arc of our cooperation. In particular, we need to expand our economic ties. This remains one of the most under-developed areas of our relationship, yet is vitally important – especially amidst a global financial crisis.

After a decade of growth, an emerging generation of Russians aspires to belong to a wealthy nation that boasts an economy able to compete in the global marketplace, a culture of entrepreneurial success, and a strong middle class. Russia's realization of these aspirations would have profound importance for Americans. In the last year alone, we have seen major business deals such as Boeing's sale of 50 aircraft to Aeroflot and 40 planes to Russian airline UTAir, the ExxonMobil-Rosneft joint venture to explore the oil and gas fields of the Arctic, and General Electric's joint ventures with two Russian partners.

Yet much more could be done. While two-way trade flows grew last year, they still reached just \$31 billion – less than one percent of our total trade. Russia is the world's seventh-largest economy, but it is our 37th largest export market. Today, Russia is the only member of the G20 that does not belong to the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, this is about to change as Russia is on the verge of completing procedures to become a WTO member. The simple fact is that Russia's accession to the WTO matters to the U.S. economy, as it will create new markets for American exporters in one of the world's fastest growing markets and support new jobs at home.

In addition to the economic benefit for American companies and workers, Russia's membership in the WTO will deepen its investment in the success of the global economy. For the first time, Russia has pledged to comply with the WTO rules that underlie open, transparent and fair global economic competition. Russia has agreed to predictable tariff rates and will be subject to an enforceable dispute resolution mechanism. History shows that economic and political modernization goes hand in hand, as Vice President Biden said in his speech to the students of Moscow State University this past March. As the first generation in Russia that never lived under communism begins graduating from universities and taking its place in the Russian workforce, there is good reason to expect considerable change in coming years.

For American companies to take advantage of this new market opening, Congress must terminate the application of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and extend permanent normal trading relations to Russia. Because this step has not yet been taken, the United States will invoke "non-application" of the WTO agreements with regard to Russia because of the conditions on normal trading relations status applied under Jackson-Vanik. Russia has met the freedom of emigration criteria under Jackson-Vanik since the early 1990s, demonstrating that the amendment long ago achieved its historic purpose by helping thousands of Jews emigrate from the Soviet Union. But until permanent normal trading relations are extended to Russia and we can apply the WTO agreements to Russia, American companies will not fully benefit from non-discriminatory terms of trade and the United States will not be able to use WTO mechanisms to resolve trade disputes. If this situation remains unchanged, foreign competitors will benefit fully from Russia's accession to the WTO and American firms will be disadvantaged.

After meeting with President Medvedev in Hawaii last month, President Obama said that Russia's pending entry into the WTO meant "this is going to be a good time for us to consult closely with Congress about ending the application of Jackson-Vanik to Russia, so that the U.S. businesses can take advantage of Russia's membership in the WTO, and we can expand commerce and create jobs here in the United States." Our timeline is short, as the Russian Parliament is likely to act on ratification in the spring of 2012. In the coming weeks and months, the Administration looks forward to consulting with Congress on a way forward.

Terminating the application of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to Russia is critical for our business interests. While we believe that Jackson-Vanik has long since accomplished the goals for which it was adopted, we want to work together with Congress to address our shared concerns about human rights in Russia. The Administration has already shown it is committed to this objective.

The Administration has welcomed Senator Cardin's campaign for justice after the tragic death of Sergey Magnitskiy following the denial of necessary medical treatment while he was in pre-trial detention. Congressional calls for travel restrictions against officials responsible for his death have helped keep attention focused on this case. The State Department has already taken important actions – using the existing authorities of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as well as the expanded powers provided by the presidential proclamation issued in August – to ensure that no one implicated in Mr. Magnitskiy's death can travel to the United States. In Russia, two prison officials involved in Mr. Magnitskiy's death have been arrested and several investigatory commissions have been established. These actions are steps in the right direction but more needs to be done. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee on these issues.

Unfortunately, the Magnitskiy case is not the only human rights challenge in Russia. Well-known journalists – such as Anna Politkovskaya, Paul Klebnikov, and Natalya Estemirova – have been killed. Mikhail Khodorkovskiy remains in prison on politically motivated charges. And Russian activists encounter difficulties while attempting to exercise their rights to free speech and assembly. Last week, Secretary Clinton and the White House expressed concerns about the conduct of the December 4th Duma elections. These concerns are reflected in the preliminary report issued by the OSCE's international election observation mission, which noted the lack of a level playing field and a process marked by limited political competition. The Administration welcomes the fact that, following the elections, the Russian public was able to hold a peaceful political demonstration in Moscow this past Saturday. In a democracy, the people have the right to make their voices heard in a lawful way; the authorities have the responsibility to provide the safe and secure conditions for the pursuit of that right. We were greatly encouraged to see these rights and responsibilities carried out so well.

Let me take the opportunity of today's hearing to review the Administration's Russia human rights strategy, which relies on simultaneous engagement with both governmental and non-governmental actors to advance democratic development and human rights promotion.

First, there is considerable government-to-government engagement at all levels on these issues. The President and Secretary regularly raise human rights concerns in meetings with their Russian counterparts. In fact, Administration officials have made 84 public declarations on Russian human rights issues over the last 35 months – all of which are compiled for public access on the State Department's website [see [www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c41670.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c41670.htm) ].

Second, the United States continues to use the full range of legal measures to impose serious consequences on those involved in serious human rights abuses in Russia. As I noted earlier, we have restricted travel to the United States by such individuals.

Third, the United States provides financial support to Russian civil society. Since 2009, the U.S. Government has given approximately \$160 million in assistance to support programs on human rights, rule of law, anti-corruption, civil society, independent media, good governance, and democratic political processes. Most recently, U.S. funding was used to support independent Russian monitoring of the Duma elections and education for independent media on professional and unbiased reporting, encourage informed citizen participation in elections, and enhance the capacity to conduct public opinion polling. We are grateful to Congress for continuing to provide these resources, especially in this difficult budgetary environment.

As part of our democracy strategy, the Administration has been consulting with Congress on an initiative to create a new fund to support Russian non-governmental organizations that are committed to a more pluralistic and open society. The fund would not require an additional appropriation, as necessary funding would be drawn from the liquidated proceeds of the U.S. Russia Investment Fund – an example of successful U.S. foreign assistance to Russia. We are working with several Congressional committees to address their questions and hope to resolve these issues soon.

Fourth, American officials engage regularly with Russian non-governmental leaders involved in strengthening democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. For example, President Obama met with hundreds of civil society leaders and opposition political figures during his July 2009 visit to Moscow. Vice-President Biden and Secretary Clinton have similarly engaged with civil society and opposition leaders.

Fifth, the U.S. supports the modernization of Russian civil society organizations by, among other things, taking advantage of new technologies to make their work more effective.

Sixth, we have supported a range of Russian government efforts to fight corruption, provide more transparency about government activities, and improve the rule of law. For example, at their June 2010 meeting in Washington, Presidents Obama and Medvedev issued a joint statement underscoring the need to cooperate on open government. The U.S. Government has been providing small grants to civil society organizations in Russia to work with local governments to identify and address community priorities. In addition, the U.S. has strongly backed Russia's efforts to become a member of the OECD – a key part of Moscow's efforts to address endemic corruption. We welcome Russia's membership in the OECD Working Group on Bribery, which it joined in May; we look forward to Russia's deposit of the instrument of ratification of the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

Seventh, a credible dialogue about democracy and human rights should involve direct communication between American and Russian NGOs and policy experts. Through the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission and its 20 working groups, we have built new partnerships and engaged our citizens, businesses and non-governmental institutions in areas such as health care and energy efficiency. We have launched a U.S.-Russia Civil Society Partnership Program to build peer-to-peer relationships between U.S. and Russian civil society organizations. In addition, concrete steps have been taken to improve the daily lives of our citizens. Last July, Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov signed an agreement to build trust on inter-country adoptions. They also approved a reciprocal visa agreement to make it easier for business people and tourists to travel between our countries.

Let me assure you that the United States will continue to be forthright in our firm support for universal human rights, as well as our conviction that democratic institutions and the rule of law are the keys to unlocking Russia's enormous human potential. We do not seek to impose our system on anyone else, and change within Russia must be internally driven. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with Russian partners to foster democracy and respect for human rights by encouraging transparent and accountable government and strengthening civil society. We believe, as President Obama said in his speech to the New Economic School in Moscow in July 2009, that "the arc of history shows that governments which serve their own people survive and thrive... governments which serve only their own power do not."

In conclusion, the reset in U.S.-Russia relations remains a work in progress. We are proud of our accomplishments to date, which have advanced core American national interests. However, we recognize that there is much more to be done – including on the important issues of human rights and the rule of law. This is a moment of domestic preoccupation in both Russia and the United States, when election-year decisions and political personalities dominate the headlines. While personalities matter, national interests don't change. Both nations have pragmatically approached issues such as arms control and Iran's attempts to acquire a nuclear weapon. We expect to continue our successful approach of cooperating with Russia when it is in our interests, addressing our disagreements honestly, building links to Russian society and government, and maintaining the United States' long-held commitment to keep our values at the center of our foreign policy.

---

#### **4. As Last Troops Depart, U.S. and Iraq Foresee Equal Partnership (12-12-2011)**

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — By the end of December, the last American troops will have departed from a "sovereign, self-reliant and democratic Iraq," President Obama said, and both countries are moving forward on a postwar relationship that he said is one "based on Iraqi sovereignty and one based on equal partnerships, mutual interests and mutual respect."

Obama met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in Washington December 12 and declared that "after nearly nine years, our war in Iraq ends this month," and Iraq is assuming its rightful place in the international community.

"People throughout the region will see a new Iraq that's determining its own destiny, a country in which people from different religious sects and ethnicities can resolve their differences peacefully through the democratic process," Obama said.

Maliki said the relationship between Iraq and the United States "will not end with the departure of the last American soldier." While Iraq has successfully proven its ability to be self-reliant in meeting its security challenges, he said, it wants to continue its security cooperation with the United States, as well as cooperation in the economic, educational, cultural and judicial fields.

"Iraq today has a lot of wealth, and it needs experience and expertise and American and foreign expertise to help Iraq exploit its own wealth in an ideal way," Maliki said, adding, "We hope that the American companies will have the largest role in increasing our wealth in the area of oil and other aspects as well."

The prime minister also called for a wide range of educational reforms and welcomed agreements that will bring hundreds of Iraqi college graduates to pursue advanced degrees in American universities.

Obama said that the United States will continue to support Iraq and that he wants to see a comprehensive relationship develop so that as cooperation on trade, science, development and security expand, “there is a constant communication between our governments ... there are deep and rich exchanges between our two governments and between our peoples.”

After nearly nine years, the United States has made “an enormous investment of blood and treasure in Iraq,” he said, and even as the U.S. military presence in the country comes to an end, both countries should understand that “our commitment to Iraq’s success is going to be enduring.”

“What’s happened over the last several years has linked the United States and Iraq in a way that is potentially powerful and could end up benefiting not only America and Iraq, but also the entire region and the entire world,” Obama said.

With its diverse population and its potential for economic prosperity, an Iraq that is inclusive and brings together all of its people to build and share in its success can be “a model for others that are aspiring to create democracy in the region,” he said.

[Joint Press Conference by Obama, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki  
Clinton Remarks with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari](#)

---

## **5. U.S. Counterterrorism Expert Assesses al-Qaida After bin Laden (12-09-2011)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The State Department’s top counterterrorism expert says the loss of Osama bin Laden has put the terrorist group al-Qaida on “a path of decline that will be difficult to reverse.”

“There is no question that bin Laden’s departure from the scene was the most important milestone ever in the fight against al-Qaida,” Daniel Benjamin, the U.S. coordinator for counterterrorism, said at a recent conference in Washington.

Bin Laden was the founder and sole commander of the terrorist group for 22 years, and was also the iconic leader whose personal story had a profound attraction for violent extremists, Benjamin said during the Jamestown Conference at the National Press Club December 8.

However, Benjamin noted that bin Laden was not the only terrorist leader in al-Qaida who has been lost in the past year:

- Ilyas Kashmiri, who was implicated in the 2009 Mumbai attacks and widely considered to be the most dangerous terrorist planner in South Asia, was killed in Pakistan.
- Harun Fazul, one of the architects of the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and the foremost member of al-Qaida in East Africa, was killed in Somalia by the forces of the Transitional Federal Government.

- Atiya Abdul Rahman, who was also a highly capable operational commander, was killed in Pakistan.
- Anwar al-Aulaqi, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula's chief of external operations in Yemen, was also killed. Aulaqi was intimately involved in planning and directing attacks against the United States and had opened up a new door on recruitment in the English-speaking world.

Benjamin was quick to point out that even as the core of al-Qaida, who have planned and plotted for the transnational group for decades, have been killed or captured, activity by the affiliates has continued to spread geographically, as have other terrorist groups that are related ideologically.

Al-Qaida and its affiliates "continue to show resilience ... continue to operate in worrisome ways ... and continue to pose a threat to our national security," Benjamin said.

Benjamin noted that al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula remains at the top of the affiliates list despite the loss of Aulaqi. He added that Western governments are concerned about the group's ability to hold territory and to exploit current unrest to advance its plots against regional and U.S. interests.

He noted that in the Sahel, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has been the weakest of the major affiliate terrorist groups, but it still raises operating funds with ransoms from kidnappings. Other al-Qaida affiliates have taken to kidnapping as a means to make money.

In the Horn of Africa, al-Shabaab may have had some setbacks in Somalia, but it too has shown interest in pursuing a more diverse set of targets, such as the twin suicide bombings in Uganda during the 2010 World Cup that killed 76 people, Benjamin said.

Meeting the challenge posed by this durable threat requires a redoubling of those things that have worked well in the past and innovating in areas where more can be accomplished, he said.

Benjamin said the United States is focusing on three elements in its counterterrorism strategy:

- Strong partnerships, both individually and multilaterally.
- Creating capable partners by building durable capabilities.
- Countering violent extremism.

"Our diplomatic engagement is essential for this effort, and whether through our frequent bilateral consultations ... or through the kind of intense effort in New York and around the world that led to the U.N. General Assembly's powerful rebuke to Iran for plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here in Washington ... this work is vital," Benjamin said.

He added that "regional cooperation on counterterrorism remains a necessity."

Benjamin said the historical development brought about by the Arab Awakening has helped to discredit the extremist argument that only violence can bring about change. Millions of people are pushing their nations to move away from repressive regimes that have long fueled resentment that underscores extremism. "They are embracing universal human rights and dignity," he said.

"Should these revolts result, as we hope, in durable, democratically elected, nonautocratic governments, al-Qaida's single-minded focus on terrorism as an instrument of political change would be severely and irretrievably delegitimized," Benjamin said. "Because democracies increase

the space for peaceful dissent and give people a stake in their governance, they greatly weaken those who call for violence and create ways of containing extremism not available to autocratic regimes.”

---

## **6. Clinton and Dzurinda Sign Agreement to Fight Nuclear Smuggling (12-07-2011)**

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Slovak Foreign Minister Mikulas Dzurinda signed a Joint Action Plan at NATO Headquarters in Brussels December 7 to combat nuclear smuggling. Slovakia is the first EU member and NATO ally to sign such an agreement with the United States and demonstrates Slovak leadership in this critical area. The agreement outlines concrete steps both countries will take to increase our mutual ability to prevent, detect, and respond more effectively to the threat of threat of nuclear smuggling.

The agreement is yet another example of the key role Slovakia plays as an ally of the United States and further deepens the ongoing partnership between the two countries.

*The full text of the Secretary's remarks is below:*

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on the U.S.-Slovak Joint Action Plan to Combat Nuclear Smuggling, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium

SECRETARY CLINTON: I am very pleased, Minister, that we were able to do this. It has been a very important bilateral matter that our respective governments have worked diligently on. And it is an incredibly significant subject, combating the smuggling of nuclear and radioactive materials. There is no greater threat to the safety and security of our world than preventing nuclear or highly radioactive materials coming into the hands of terrorists, and it's a danger that no one country can protect against on its own. And today, Slovakia has made an important commitment to our collective efforts, and we are very appreciative.

My country has now signed nine such agreements with other countries around the world, but this is the first one we have signed with an EU nation and a NATO ally. So this agreement reflects Slovakia's strategic importance as a gateway to the EU as well as your government's commitment to exercising leadership in advancing nuclear security.

As you already have heard, this agreement takes the form of an action plan. It specifies more than 40 steps our two governments intend to take to strengthen our mutual capacity to prevent, detect, and respond more effectively to the threat of nuclear smuggling. The United States has guaranteed our efforts to work with you to make sure that it's not only the two of us working together but our neighbors, and particularly Slovakia's neighbors, because in a networked world like the one we live in today, all nations have to be committed to this joint effort.

So, Mr. Dzurinda, I am grateful to you for your leadership, to the people and Government of Slovakia, and thank you for being here with me for this important signature.

[Statement from the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

[Clinton, NATO Secretary General at Unveiling of NATO Summit Logo](#)

[Briefing on Secretary Clinton's Meetings in Brussels](#)

[State Department Officials on Clinton's Meetings at NATO](#)