

**INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE**  
**February 6 - 13, 2013**

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**1. [Strong Defense Rests on Strong Congress, Panetta Says \(02-13-2013\)](#)**

By Karen Parrish  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13, 2013 – The current lack of effective partnership in government is his biggest disappointment as he leaves Washington after 50 years of public service, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said today.

Panetta told Pentagon reporters during what he called his final news conference here that his Defense Department team has achieved remarkable things.

“First and foremost, we've kept the country safe,” he said. “Secondly, we have ... dedicated ourselves to bringing two wars to a conclusion, the war in Iraq and now we're well on the way to bringing the war in Afghanistan, hopefully, to a conclusion, as well.”

Military members serving under him have weakened terrorism and strengthened cooperation with their counterparts in intelligence, he added. And together, he said, military and civilian defense leaders crafted and put in place a defense strategy that “really makes good sense for this country, in terms of the force we need for the 21st century.”

The secretary added that as the son of Italian immigrants, he's also proud to have led the effort to "expand opportunities for everyone to serve in the military." Panetta's acts as secretary included expanding the number of jobs for servicewomen, and increasing the rights of same-sex couples with military members.

"And I'm proud of the care that we continue to provide for our wounded warriors and for their families," he said. "They are truly deserving of whatever we can provide because of the sacrifices they've made."

The secretary said he has put a lot of burdens on the military in working through tough decisions.

"And, you know, they always responded. They responded ... with dedication to country and dedication to the military. We've been able to do some historic things as a result of that," he said.

In turning to what threatens those achievements, Panetta expressed some frustration.

"I'm sorry about this, but I've got to say it," he said. "All of the work that we do here to try to make this country strong and develop a strong defense" depends on a strong partnership with Congress, the secretary said.

"What should be and what our forefathers, I think, envisioned as a strong bond between an administration, an executive branch, and a legislative branch ... is not as strong as it should be," he said. "Oftentimes, I feel like I don't have a full partnership with my former colleagues on the Hill in trying to do what's right for this country."

When he served in the House as a representative from California, Panetta said, there was a customary form of speech between members who disagreed: "With the greatest respect, I disagree with my friend."

What makes Congress work is that it's a place to fully debate political and ideological differences, he said.

"That's the whole purpose of our forefathers fashioning that legislative branch, to debate fully those differences," the secretary added. "But there are also some lines that are there that make that process work."

Without mutual respect and courtesy among those seeking to resolve differences, those lines break down, Panetta said.

"Everybody's got legitimate points, but there's a way to express it in a way that complements our democracy, doesn't demean our democracy," he said. "And I think, you know, what you see on display is too much meanness."

Panetta said he has spoken to leaders around the world during his extensive travels as secretary. Leaders everywhere, he said, see the United States as a nation with strong values and a strong military.

"I think what they worry about is what I worry about, which is whether or not ... we can govern and whether or not we can face the tough decisions that have to be made," he said.

Panetta noted he repeatedly has said the biggest threat to U.S. national security “is that budget uncertainty and that inability to govern and find solutions.”

As a step toward better government and a better world perception of the nation, he said, “somehow the members both in the House and Senate side have to get back to a point where they really do respect the institution that they're a part of.”

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[Panetta Discusses 2014 Defense Budget Request](#) (02-06-2013)

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## **2. Sequestration 'Wolf' Eats at Nation's Readiness, Carter Says (02-13-2013)**

By Claudette Roulo

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13, 2013 – “The wolf is at the door,” Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter told members of the House Armed Services committee today during testimony on the effects of sequestration – major, across-the-board spending cuts that will take effect March 1 unless Congress finds an alternative.

For 16 months, Carter said, he and Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta have used the word “devastating” when describing the potential effects of sequestration on the Defense Department.

“That was then,” he said. Now, with sequestration just over two weeks away, the nation faces a readiness crisis, Carter said. “It doesn’t take a genius to figure out the consequences of sequester,” he added. If sequestration is not averted, on March 1 the department will have to subtract \$46 billion from the funds it planned to have available for the rest of this fiscal year, the deputy secretary said.

Compounding the problem of sequestration and its attendant \$500 billion in across-the-board defense cuts is the continuing resolution now funding the government in place of a budget, he said.

“The continuing resolution's a different problem,” Carter said. Because an appropriations bill was not signed last year, some accounts are underfunded, he explained, while others have a surplus. “There's enough money in the continuing resolution,” he added. “It's in the wrong accounts.”

In particular, there isn't enough in the operations and maintenance accounts, Carter said. Funding for Afghanistan will be protected, he told the panel, as will that for urgent operational needs and wounded warrior programs. In addition, Carter noted, military personnel expenses have been exempted by the president from sequestration.

But in the long term, Carter told the committee, sequestration will mean the department will be forced to discard the national security strategy it devised last year.

The Defense Department recognizes the role it plays in helping the nation address its fiscal situation, Carter said. "We have already cut \$487 billion from our budget plans over the next 10 years," he noted. "I also understand that the taxpayer deserves a careful use of the defense dollar."

But, both a strategic approach to reducing the budget and good use of the taxpayer money are endangered by the chaos of the current situation, Carter said, and the abruptness and size of the cuts.

What's particularly tragic, he said, is that sequestration is not the result of an economic recession or emergency or because discretionary spending cuts are the answer for the nation's fiscal challenges.

"All this is purely the collateral damage of political gridlock," he said, "and for our troops, for the force, the consequences are very real and very personal."

The department will not have enough money to train its service members, Carter said. It will have to furlough a majority of its civilian employees, likely for 22 days between the beginning of April and the end of the year -- the maximum statutory length of time, he said.

"So there's a real human impact here," Carter said. "I'm a presidentially appointed civilian, and I can't be furloughed, but I'm going to give back a fifth of my salary ... at the end of the year, because we're asking all those people who are furloughed to give back a fifth of their salary."

Sequestration's impact also will be felt by industry, Carter said.

"The quality of the weapons produced by our defense industry is second only to the quality of our people in uniform in making our military the greatest in the world," he said. "As such, a technologically vibrant and financially successful defense industry is in the national interest."

But sequestration and other budget uncertainty may make companies less willing to invest in defense, he said.

"The cloud of uncertainty hanging over our nation's defense affairs is already having a lasting effect," Carter said. "Ultimately, the cloud of sequestration needs to be dispelled, and not just moved to the horizon.

"The world is watching," he continued. "Our friends and allies are watching, as are potential foes all over the world. And they need to know that we have the political will to implement the defense strategy we need."

Biographies:

[Ashton B. Carter](#)

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[Carter Warns of Readiness Crisis, Urges Delay in Cuts](#)

[Dempsey: Budget Factors Place Defense Strategy in Jeopardy](#)

### **3. Obama Announces 34,000 Cut to U.S. Force in Afghanistan (02-12-2013)**

By Karen Parrish  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12, 2013 – U.S. troops in Afghanistan will decrease by 34,000 over the coming year, President Barack Obama announced tonight in his annual State of the Union address.

“After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home,” he said early in his remarks to a joint session of Congress. Later in the speech, the commander in chief outlined his plan for troops in Afghanistan, now numbering about 66,000.

“Already, we have brought home 33,000 of our brave servicemen and women,” he said. “This spring, our forces will move into a support role, while Afghan security forces take the lead. Tonight, I can announce that over the next year, another 34,000 American troops will come home from Afghanistan. This drawdown will continue. And by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over.”

The president credited “the troops and civilians who sacrifice every day to protect us. Because of them, we can say with confidence that America will complete its mission in Afghanistan, and achieve our objective of defeating the core of al-Qaida.”

America’s commitment to a unified and sovereign Afghanistan will endure beyond 2014, Obama said, but the nature of that commitment will change.

“We’re negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions: training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country does not again slip into chaos, and counter-terrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates,” he noted.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, in a statement, said he welcomes the commander in chief’s announcement. The figure was based, he said, on Marine Corps Gen. John Allen’s strategic recommendation of a phased approach to decreasing the force, now numbering about 66,000.

Allen turned over command of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force and U.S. forces in Afghanistan to Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. during a Feb. 10 ceremony in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The secretary said in his statement that in consultations with the president and his national security team, “I strongly supported General Allen’s recommendation and I believe the president’s decision puts us on the right path to succeed in Afghanistan.”

Panetta said he is confident Dunford will have the combat power he needs to protect coalition forces, continue building up Afghan forces, and “achieve the goal of this campaign - to deny al Qaeda a safe haven to attack our homeland.”

Panetta noted the United States, NATO and the Afghan government agreed in Lisbon in 2010, and affirmed in Chicago in 2012, that Afghanistan will assume full responsibility for its security by the end of 2014.

“We are on track for that goal,” he said, “and we will maintain a long-term commitment to Afghanistan - including through the continued training and equipping of Afghan forces and counter-terrorism operations against al Qaeda and their affiliates.”

The American people should never forget 9/11 is the reason their men and women are fighting in Afghanistan, Panetta said.

“After more than a decade of great sacrifice and hard-fought progress, we are now on a path to an Afghanistan that cannot be used as a launching pad for attacks against our nation,” the secretary said.

“Our troops on the ground will continue to be in a tough fight, and they will continue to face real challenges, but our fundamental goal is now within sight,” he concluded. “Thanks to their continued dedication and sacrifice, I believe we will prevail.”

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

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#### **4. White House Fact Sheet on Afghanistan (02-12-2013)**

In his State of the Union address, the President announced that the United States will withdraw 34,000 American troops from Afghanistan by this time next year, decreasing the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by half – the next step to responsibly bringing this war to a close.

- **Afghans in the Lead:** Beginning in the spring of 2013, Afghan forces will assume the lead across the country. Even as our troops draw down, they will continue to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. In that capacity, we will no longer be leading combat operations, but a sizeable number of U.S. forces will provide support for two additional fighting seasons before Afghan forces are fully responsible for their own security.
- **Planning for post-2014:** We are continuing discussions with the Afghan government about how we can carry out two basic missions beyond 2014: training, advising and equipping Afghan forces, and continued counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda and their affiliates.

#### *The Security Transition Process*

At the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, the United States, our International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners, and the Afghan Government agreed to transfer full responsibility for Afghanistan’s security to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by the end of 2014. This transition process allows the international community to responsibly draw down our forces in Afghanistan, while preserving hard-won gains and setting the stage to achieve our core objectives – defeating al Qaeda and ensuring it can never again use Afghanistan as a launching pad for attacks against us.

At the Chicago NATO Summit in May 2012, leaders reaffirmed this framework for transition and agreed on an interim milestone in 2013 to mark our progress. This milestone will mark the beginning of the ANSF's assumption of the lead for combat operations across the country. When we reach that milestone this spring, ISAF's main effort will shift from combat to supporting the ANSF. As international forces shift our primary focus to training, advising, and assisting, we will ensure that the Afghans have the support they need as they adjust to their new responsibilities.

Today, Afghan forces are already leading nearly 90 percent of operations, and by spring 2013, they will be moving into the operational lead across the country. These forces are currently at a surge strength of 352,000, where they will remain for at least three more years, to allow continued progress toward a secure environment in Afghanistan.

As the international community's role shifts and Afghan forces continue to grow in capabilities, coalition troop numbers will continue to decrease in a planned, coordinated, and responsible manner. By the end of 2014, transition will be complete and Afghan Security Forces will be fully responsible for the security of their country.

### Supporting Political Transition

The United States believes that Afghan-led peace and reconciliation is ultimately necessary to end violence and ensure lasting stability of Afghanistan and the region. As the President has said, the United States will support initiatives that bring Afghans together with other Afghans to discuss the future of their country. The United States and the Afghan Government have called upon on the Taliban to join a political process, including by taking those steps necessary to open a Taliban office in Qatar. We have been clear that the outcomes of any peace and reconciliation process must be for the Taliban and other armed opposition groups to end violence, break ties with Al Qaeda, and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of all Afghan citizens.

The Afghan Government will be holding presidential and provincial council elections in April 2014 and the United States intends to provide technical assistance and funding to support a fair and inclusive process.

### The U.S. Role After 2014

In May 2012, President Obama and President Karzai signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement to cement our long-term relationship in the areas of social and economic development, security, and regional cooperation. The United States remains fully committed to a long-term strategic partnership with the Afghan Government and the Afghan people. The steps we are taking now are intended to normalize our relationship, including withdrawing troops in a way that strengthens Afghan sovereignty and the Afghan state, rather than abandoning it, as the international community did in the 1980's and 90's.

While it is too soon to make decisions about the number of forces that could remain in Afghanistan after 2014, any presence would be at the invitation of the Afghan Government and focused on two distinct missions: training, advising and equipping Afghan forces, and continued counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda and their affiliates. As we move towards decisions about a long-term presence, we will continue to assess the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, assess the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces, and consult with our Afghan and international partners. We also continue negotiations on a Bilateral Security Agreement with the Afghan

Government that would provide the protections we must have for any U.S. military presence after 2014. We hope that agreement can be completed as soon as possible.

Consistent with our goal of ensuring that al Qaeda never again threatens the United States from Afghan soil, the United States has committed to seek funds annually to support training, equipping, advising, and sustaining the ANSF. Helping to fund the ANSF is the best way to protect the investment we all have made to strengthen Afghanistan and insulate it from international terrorist groups.

Strengthening Afghan governance and economic development is also key to achieving our core objective. We've made significant economic and development progress in the past decade, but Afghanistan will require substantial international assistance through the next decade to grow its private sector and promote its integration in greater South Asia's thriving economy. The United States has committed to seek, on a yearly basis, funding for social and economic assistance to Afghanistan. At the July 2012 Tokyo Conference, the international community and Afghanistan agreed on a long-term economic partnership, based on the principle of mutual accountability. We expect Afghan progress in fighting corruption, carrying out reform, and providing good governance as the international community provides support after 2014.

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## **5. North Korean Announcement of Nuclear Test (02-12-2013)**

*Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Stakeout, New York, NY*

Good morning, everyone. The Security Council, as you know, just met to discuss North Korea's highly provocative nuclear test. Countries around the world, including every member of the Security Council, agreed that this test was an extremely regrettable act that further undermines international peace and security, as well as that of the region.

The nuclear test directly violates the DPRK's obligations under several unanimous Security Council resolutions, including 1718, 1874, and 2087. Moreover, the test contravenes North Korea's commitments under the September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks and increases the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

North Korea does not and will not benefit from violating international law. Far from achieving its stated goal of becoming a strong and prosperous nation, the DPRK has instead increasingly isolated and impoverished its people through its ill-advised pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

North Korea's continued work on its nuclear and missile programs seriously undermines regional and international peace and security and threatens the security of a number of countries, including the United States. When the Council responded to the last DPRK provocation and violation of its obligations, we said—and the Council said—that it was clearly committed in Resolution 2087 to take, and I quote, "significant action" in the event of any further launch using ballistic missile technology or another nuclear test. And indeed, we will do so.

To address the persistent danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities, the UN Security Council must and will deliver a swift, credible, and strong response by way of a Security Council resolution that further impedes the growth of DPRK's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs and its ability to engage in proliferation activities. In the days ahead, we will consult

closely with other Council members and concerned UN member states to pursue appropriate further action.

I'm happy to take a couple quick questions on North Korea.

Reporter: Thank you very much. Ambassador Rice, what else can this resolution do that further—that might stop the North Koreans from acting?

Ambassador Rice: Well, as you may anticipate, we and others have a number of further measures that we will be discussing with Council members in various spheres that will not only tighten the existing measures but—we aim to augment the sanctions regime that is already quite strong as implemented in 1874 and 2087.

Reporter: With financial sanctions? Sanctions on the financial institutions? Anything more in significant action?

Ambassador Rice: All of those categories are areas that we think are ripe for appropriate further action.

Reporter: Madame ambassador, could you tell us your view—what is the difference between the past two times—past two nuclear tests—and this new nuclear test, both in the impact with the international community and the outcome (inaudible)?

Ambassador Rice: Well, North Korea continues to violate repeated Security Council resolutions and that in itself makes this different. It is a third test. We'll await further information on the technical specifications of that test, but we will be interested to see whether in fact this indicates a difference in their success level or a difference in the quality of the test itself. Whatever the outcome, however, the international community—this Council—has been quite clear: The actions of North Korea are a threat to regional peace and security, international peace and security. And they are not acceptable, they will not be tolerated, and they will be met with North Korea's increasing isolation and pressure under United Nations sanctions.

Thank you very much.

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[Statement by the President on North Korean announcement of nuclear test](#) (02-12-2013)  
[Forging Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities for the NPT](#) Remarks by Rose Gottemoeller, Acting Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv (02-12-2013)

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## **6. Panetta: Distance, Time Affected Benghazi Response (02-07-2013)**

By Karen Parrish  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7, 2013 – Better intelligence and closer interagency cooperation can help to prevent future crises like the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said here today.

Speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Panetta said an exhaustive review of the Benghazi events has established the Defense Department responded appropriately to the attacks.

“This was, pure and simple, a problem of distance and time,” he said.

“The interagency response was timely and appropriate, but there simply was not enough time given the speed of the attacks for armed U.S. military assets to have made a difference,” Panetta told the senators, quoting the Accountability Review Board’s findings.

The secretary and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before the committee in what may be Panetta’s last appearance before Congress as defense secretary. Since the attacks, he noted, DOD has fully supported Congressional and State Department efforts to review the actions and decisions surrounding the events in Benghazi.

“The Department of Defense and the rest of the United States government spared no effort to do everything we could to try to save American lives,” said Panetta, noting that two service members were part of the six-man team that evacuated Americans there within 12 hours of the initial attack.

“There will always be a tension between mission effectiveness for personnel — that ability to get out and do what they’re supposed to do in these countries -- and their physical security,” he noted. “We are committed to steps that avoid a ‘bunker mentality’ and yet still afford greater protection from armed attack.”

Panetta said DOD is taking a three-pronged approach to help prevent future attacks on U.S. diplomats and facilities by strengthening host-nation security capabilities, increasing security measures and enhancing intelligence and military response options.

“We have to be able to better assess and build up the capabilities of host governments to provide security,” he said.

While the military doesn’t have primary responsibility for security at U.S. diplomatic missions, he added, “where permissible and appropriate, and in collaboration with the Secretary of State and the U.S. chief of mission in the affected country, we believe that the Defense Department can assist in their development of host-nation forces using a range of security assistance authorities to train and equip these forces.”

DOD also is supporting the State Department’s efforts to harden facilities and reassess diplomatic security, the secretary said. Teams have evaluated 19 vulnerable diplomatic facilities, including the U.S. Embassy in Libya, he added, and officials are in the process of developing recommendations on potential security increases as required.

Over the next two to three years, he said, the Defense Department will assign nearly 1,000 additional Marines to diplomatic security detachments. There are 152 such detachments in place today, the secretary noted, and 35 more will stand up.

Officials also are focused on enhancing intelligence collection and ensuring that U.S. forces throughout the region are prepared to respond to crises, if necessary, Panetta said. He emphasized that the U.S. military is not a global emergency-response service, and troops need good intelligence information to operate effectively.

“We have forces on alert, and we’re prepared to move, but our ability to identify threats, to adjust posture, to prevent plots and respond to attacks to our personnel at home and overseas depends on actionable intelligence, and it always will,” he said.

Therefore, the secretary said, the Defense Department is working to enhance intelligence collection, improve the responsiveness of contingency assets and adjust the location of reaction forces.

“At the same time, we’re working closely with State to ensure they have our best estimate of response times for each at-risk diplomatic facility, so that they can make the best informed decisions about adjustments to their staff presence in areas of increased security threat,” he added.

Panetta closed his statement with a reminder to the committee that he sees budget uncertainty as the greatest security risk facing the nation.

With a “sequestration” mechanism in budget law set to trigger major across-the-board spending cuts March 1, he noted, DOD could lose about \$500 billion in funding over the next decade, on top of the \$487 billion spending cutback already planned.

“I know the members of this committee share the deep concerns that I have raised about sequestration, and I urge you to do the responsible thing and avoid weakening our national defense,” he said.

Congress, DOD, the State Department and the intelligence community all have a responsibility for the nation’s security, Panetta noted.

“If we work together, we can keep our Americans safe,” he said.

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

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[DOD Releases Detailed Timeline for Benghazi Response](#)

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## **[7. U.S. Announces Sanctions against Iran \(02-07-2013\)](#)**

Washington — The United States took a number of actions February 6 to tighten sanctions on Iran’s access to its oil revenues and further expose the Iranian government’s continued abuse of human rights.

Key provisions of the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (TRA) went into effect, the U.S. Treasury Department announced in a press release the same day. Those provisions expand the scope of sanctionable transactions with the Central Bank of Iran and designated Iranian financial institutions by restricting Iran’s ability to use oil revenue held in foreign financial institutions and preventing repatriation of those funds to Iran.

The increased restrictions under the TRA do not apply to the sale of agricultural commodities, food, medicine or medical devices to Iran. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control issued guidance February 6 to make it clear that humanitarian trade with Iran is not subject to these or previous sanctions on Iran.

The Treasury Department, in consultation with the State Department, also designated one individual and four entities for their involvement in the Iranian government's censorship activities. These activities restrict the free flow of information in Iran and punish Iranians who attempt to exercise freedom of assembly and expression, the Treasury Department said.

The Treasury Department designated the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and its director, blocking their U.S. property and interests and prohibiting U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with them. The department also designated three other entities in Iran — the Iranian Cyber Police, the Communications Regulatory Authority and Iran Electronics Industries.

This action is pursuant to Executive Order 13628, which implements the TRA by giving the Treasury Department the authority to designate those in Iran who restrict or deny the free flow of information to or from the Iranian people.

“Our policy is clear — so long as Iran continues to fail to address the concerns of the international community about its nuclear program, the U.S. will impose tighter sanctions and intensify the economic pressure against the Iranian regime,” said Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David S. Cohen. “We will also target those in Iran who are responsible for human right abuses, especially those who deny the Iranian people their basic freedoms of expression, assembly and speech.”

## BACKGROUND

February 6 marked 180 days since President Obama signed the TRA, one section of which amends existing U.S. sanctions that target the Central Bank of Iran, designated Iranian financial institutions and Iran's energy sector. At the 180-day mark, that section also narrows the exception for countries that have significantly reduced their purchases of Iranian crude oil so that the exception now only applies to financial transactions that facilitate bilateral trade between the country granted the exception and Iran. For the exception to apply to a financial transaction, funds owed to Iran as a result of such bilateral trade will now have to be credited to an account located in the country granted the exception and may not be repatriated to Iran.

This provision will significantly increase economic pressure on Iran by restricting its repatriation of oil revenue. In addition to effectively “locking up” Iranian oil revenue overseas, this provision sharply restricts Iran's use of this revenue for bilateral trade and severely limits Iran's ability to move funds across jurisdictions.

For further details, including identifying information of sanctioned entities, see the [Treasury Department news release](#).

Related article:

[U.S. Treasury on Humanitarian Aid, Exports to Iranian People](#)

[U.S. Iran Sanctions Exempt Food, Medicine, Remittances](#) (02-07-2013)

## **8. Syrian Humanitarian Effort Strives to Meet Need, U.S. Says (02-06-2013)**

By Charlene Porter  
Staff Writer

Washington — The international humanitarian community is using every available channel to assist more than 760,000 refugees who have fled violence in their country and some 2.5 million others who remain in Syria, displaced from their homes, facing shortages and hardship wrought by the almost 2-year-old uprising.

U.S. officials involved in the effort briefed reporters February 6 on the U.S. contribution of \$365 million to the relief effort.

“What will be important going forward is that we ensure we have the access that we need to reach people throughout Syria, especially in those hard-to-reach conflict-affected areas,” said Nancy Lindborg, assistant administrator for humanitarian assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). “And that’s why we’re using all the channels we can to get there.”

Humanitarian assistance is reaching all 14 governorates in Syria, but it is not reaching all the people who really need it, said Lindborg’s colleague, Anne Richard, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration. In late January the two were in the region visiting refugee camps and assessing the state of the relief effort.

While there, Richard said, they were in touch with a convoy on a “risky venture” arranged by the U.N. refugee agency. Trucks full of aid supplies were on a mission to reach a corner of northern Syria in need of winter supplies. The trucks went through territory held by the opposition movement and by the Syrian government, Richard said.

“It took a lot of coordination for their route to actually open up and be able to get this very large convoy on its way,” said Richard.

The U.N. Refugee Agency reported that 200 metric tons of tents and blankets were airlifted from a warehouse in Copenhagen to a civilian airport on the Syrian coast. From there, an eight-truck convoy carried the aid shipment to an area between Aleppo and the Syrian-Turkish border.

Richard expressed hope that such an effort can be repeated and scaled up to deliver more aid in the future.

Allegations and rumors are circulating in the region that humanitarian aid has been given to, or seized by, the Syrian government. Richard heard such assertions while visiting the camps, and she described it as “misinformation” that the U.S. delegation refuted. Aid going into Syria is benefiting those for whom it is intended.

“We know that health supplies are getting into clinics that are overseen by the Ministry of Health, but the supplies are not benefiting the ministry,” Richard said. “They are benefiting the patients in those clinics.”

The Department of State official said the U.S. humanitarian team remains watchful for signs that aid is being diverted to the government or the black market. But as of now, “it is not happening,” Richard said.

The aid effort has been further criticized because assistance is not being extended directly to humanitarian groups backed by the Syrian Opposition Council (SOC). Lindborg said the relief effort is best managed by the established U.N. agencies and associated organizations that have long-term experience in the delivery of humanitarian aid on the basis of need rather than politics.

Lindborg said the information these groups can provide about areas of need is very helpful to the humanitarian effort, and SOC-related groups will continue to play a role in the campaign.

In related developments, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced February 5 a scale-up of feeding programs targeting Syria. WFP is providing food to 1.5 million people now, and plans to escalate its efforts in order to reach 2.5 million people in the next three months.

UNICEF announced February 4 that it is beginning to ship water chlorination supplies into Syria, addressing the concern that water purification facilities have been greatly damaged in the conflict.

At an international conference in Kuwait January 30, attending countries pledged more than \$1.5 billion to help Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and those displaced within the embattled country.

Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon are host to the 760,000 Syrians who have fled the fighting. The U.S. officials say two-thirds of that number are not in refugee camps, as organized by the U.N. and regional governments. They are staying in villages and schools, and in the homes of relatives and friends, in widely varying circumstances.

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