

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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**1. [Obama Acknowledges "Emerging Differences" Between Russia, U.S.](#)
(08-12-2013)**

Washington — President Obama said that while the United States and Russia have made much progress and cooperated on many important issues during the past four years, there are “emerging differences” between the two nations, but still room for both to work together for the betterment of both their peoples.

Speaking at the White House August 9, Obama acknowledged that while he will be attending the Group of 20 (G20) Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, September 5–6, he will not be meeting in a separate summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The move followed Russia's decision to grant asylum to Edward Snowden, an American citizen who has leaked classified U.S. government information, as well as differences between the two governments over the conflict in Syria and human rights issues, including recent Russian legislation penalizing gays and lesbians.

“Our decision to not participate in the summit was not simply around Mr. Snowden, it had to do with the fact that, frankly, on a whole range of issues where we think we can make some progress, Russia has not moved. And so we don't consider that strictly punitive,” Obama said.

Over the past four years, “there's been a lot of good work that has been done and that is going to continue to be done,” he said, citing the 2011 New START agreement that is reducing the nuclear stockpiles of both countries, as well as Russia’s help in supplying international forces in

Afghanistan. He also cited the administration's work in 2012 to help Russia join the World Trade Organization.

At the same time, "there are just going to be some differences, and we're not going to be able to completely disguise them," he said.

The United States will be assessing "where the relationship can advance U.S. interests and increase peace and stability and prosperity around the world," Obama said.

"Where it can, we're going to keep on working with them; where we have differences, we're going to say so clearly," the president said.

He urged Russian leaders to resist framing issues as "a zero-sum game," where what is good for one country is bad for the other, and consider where they want to take Russia in the future.

"I think if they are looking forward into the 21st century and how they can advance their economy and make sure that some of our joint concerns around counterterrorism are managed effectively, then I think we can work together," he said.

See also: [Excerpts from Obama's Press Conference](#).

The [full transcript](#) is available on the White House website.

[2. Israel, Jordan, U.S. Face Common Threats, Dempsey Says \(08-12-2013\)](#)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

TEL AVIV, Israel, Aug. 12, 2013 – Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is on a multi-day trip to Israel and Jordan for discussions on how regional alliances and partnerships can help contain the evolving threats of terrorism and civil unrest in the Middle East. Beginning his trip with a stop in Israel, Dempsey noted today that since he assumed office he has met with Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, chief of general staff of the Israeli defense forces, more times than any of his other counterparts.

Meetings between the two on this visit will be much like any other, though the challenges have become "even greater" since their last encounter, the chairman told reporters travelling with him. "In each case, it's a discussion about how he views the threats to Israel in the region, how we in the United States view the threats that could emanate out of the region -- globally and to the homeland -- and how we can continue to work together to make both of our countries more secure," the United States' top military officer said.

The chairman said he also expects the discussions with Gantz to include a fiscal dimension. Israel, he noted, is facing a cut in its own defense spending to balance a budget deficit. "I know he'll have exactly the same question for me," he said. "So it's important that we continue to share information; not just about the threats that might affect ... us, but also about how changing resources have to be addressed in that equation."

Dempsey noted that after leaving Israel he will travel to Jordan, a nation about which he has learned much since he took command of U.S. Central Command more than five years ago, he said.

“There, too, you’ve got a long-standing relationship with a military that has been a very close partner ... and has also deployed with us,” he said. “Physically, with my counterpart, I want to understand how they see the issues -- both emanating out of Syria, but also emanating out of Egypt -- affecting their plans moving forward.”

Jordan has Syria on its northern border and, to the south west, Egypt lies less than ten miles across the Red Sea’s Gulf of Aqaba. Dempsey last month called the situation in Syria “a human tragedy.” The United Nations estimates more than 100,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict that has now raged in that country since March 2011. U.N. officials said the Syrian civil war has led to the world’s worst refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide -- more than 1.5 million Syrians have fled the country and millions more are internally displaced.

One of the central challenges in crafting an effective international response to Syria is identifying a moderate opposition group that might establish stability if Bashar Assad’s regime falls, Dempsey said. The chairman said part of the United States’ approach to the Syria situation is to increase the self-defense capabilities of its international partners, “whether those partners are Turks, through our NATO channels; Lebanese armed forces; Jordanian armed forces; Israelis -- and as well, the Iraqis,” Dempsey said.

Dempsey said U.S. partners in the region may become “even more eager partners” as events in Syria keep unfolding.

“I think our ability to find common ground and common purpose with our regional partners is actually increasing,” he added.

Conflict in the Middle East moves in cycles, Dempsey said, noting, “Our adversaries will always migrate where we’re not, on that spectrum of conflict.”

He added that one of the lessons of history is that “What is symmetric today is asymmetric tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow it’s symmetric again. It’s a series of actions, reactions and counteractions.”

The challenge facing America and its close partners, Dempsey said, is how to build agility into the system, not abdicate any point on the spectrum of conflict, and find ways to collaborate and even become interdependent.

Those kinds of conversations, he added, “I have with our closest allies.”

3. U.S. Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Iraq and Pledges to Help Combat al Qaeda (08-10-2013)

Press Statement

Jen Psaki

Spokesperson, Office of the Spokesperson

The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the cowardly attacks today in Baghdad. These attacks were aimed at families celebrating the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The terrorists who committed these acts are enemies of Islam and a shared enemy of the United States, Iraq, and the international community.

The attacks today bear the hallmarks of similar suicide and vehicle bomb attacks in Iraq over the past ninety days. Most of these attacks have been perpetrated by al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224. He is also listed at the United Nations Security Council 1267/1989 al-Qa’ida Sanctions Committee.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, also known as Abu D'ua, is now based in Syria and has changed the name of AQI to the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). He has taken personal credit for a series of terrorist attacks in Iraq since 2011, and most recently claimed credit for the operations against the Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, the suicide bombing assault on the Ministry of Justice, among other attacks against Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi citizens going about their daily lives.

The United States has offered a \$10 million reward for information that helps authorities kill or capture Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. This reward is second only to information leading to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the chief of Al Qaeda's network, and symbolizes our ongoing commitment to helping our partners in the region eliminate this threat from their territory.

In this regard, the United States is prepared to work closely with the Iraqi Government to confront the threat posed by Al Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist groups. We look forward to discussing bilateral cooperation in this and other areas, pursuant to the Strategic Framework Agreement between our two countries, during the upcoming visit of Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari next week in Washington.

Our deepest condolences go out to the families of the victims of today's attacks and we hope for the quick recovery of the injured. The United States will stand with the Iraqi people as they work to overcome these horrific attacks perpetrated by a common enemy.

4. Hagel's Talks with Russian Minister of Defense Shoygu (08-09-2013)

U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

Prior to the formal "2+2" sessions, Secretary Hagel and Russian Minister of Defense Shoygu held their first meeting together as defense counterparts. Secretary Hagel began by noting it is the responsibility of major powers to find a way forward on the key issues facing our nations and the world. Secretary Hagel and Minister Shoygu agreed that it is time to build a more robust agenda for military cooperation and directed their staffs to put together a plan for more regular and frequent engagement.

Secretary Hagel stated that the Department of Defense is determined to overcome impediments to deeper cooperation by concluding necessary enabling agreements that will allow for improved information sharing, exchanges, joint exercises, and training.

Secretary Hagel discussed the United States and NATO approach to supporting security and stability in Afghanistan post 2014. The leaders also exchanged views on Syria and the importance of supporting a political process to end the violence.

See also: [State Dept. Briefing on U.S.-Russia 2+2 Meeting](#)

5. Obama Announces Steps to Advance Surveillance Debate (08-09-2013)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Aug. 9, 2013 – President Barack Obama today announced four steps that he said would move the public debate forward about classified government surveillance programs that gather data about the telephone records of Americans and others.

During an hour-long press conference at the White House, Obama said it is right to ask questions about surveillance, particularly as technology reshapes every aspect of people's lives.

"I'm also mindful of how these issues are viewed overseas . . .," he said. "In other words, it's not enough for me as president to have confidence in these programs. The American people need to have confidence in them as well."

Over the past few weeks the president said he has consulted with members of Congress, asked the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to review tensions between counterterrorism efforts and American values, and directed the national security team to be more transparent and pursue reforms of laws and practices.

"Today," Obama said, "I'd like to discuss four specific steps -- not all inclusive, but some specific steps that we're going to be taking very shortly to move the debate forward."

These include the following --

1. The president will work with Congress to pursue reforms to Section 215 of the 2001 Patriot Act, the program that authorizes collects the collection telephone records.

Obama called the program an important tool in the effort to disrupt terrorist plots that does not allow the government to listen to phone calls without a warrant.

"But given the scale of this program," he said, "I understand the concerns of those who would worry that it could be subject to abuse."

After speaking with members of Congress and civil libertarians, Obama said he thinks there are steps that can be taken to give Americans more confidence that there are safeguards against abuse.

"For instance," he said, "we can take steps to put in place greater oversight, greater transparency and constraints on the use of this authority."

2. The president will work with Congress to improve public confidence in oversight conducted by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, or FISC.

Congress created this court to provide judicial review of certain intelligence activities so a federal judge must find that federal actions are consistent with the Constitution.

But to build greater confidence, Obama said, "I think we should consider some additional changes to the FISC. One of the concerns that people raise is that a judge reviewing a request from the government to conduct programmatic surveillance only hears one side of the story -- may tilt it too far in favor of security, may not pay enough attention to liberty."

The president said looking at such issues from the perspectives of security and privacy might provide greater assurances to the public.

Specifically, he said, "we can take steps to make sure civil liberties, concerns, have an independent voice in appropriate cases by ensuring the government's position is challenged by an adversary."

3. The president said the government can and must be more transparent.

The president said he's directed the intelligence community to make public as much information about these programs as possible.

“We've already declassified unprecedented information about the [National Security Agency] but we can go further,” he said. “So at my direction the Department of Justice will make public the legal rationale for the government's collection activities under Section 215 of the Patriot Act.” The NSA is taking steps to put in place a full-time civil liberties and privacy officer, Obama said, and release information that details its mission, authorities and oversight.

The intelligence community is also creating a website that will serve as a hub for further transparency, the president said.

“This will give Americans and the world the ability to learn more about what our intelligence community does and what it doesn't do, how it carries out its mission and why it does so,” Obama said.

4. The president is forming a high-level group of outside experts to review all intelligence and communications technologies.

“We need new thinking for a new era,” Obama said. “We now have to unravel terrorist plots by finding a needle in a haystack of global telecommunications. And meanwhile, technology has given governments, including our own, unprecedented capability to monitor communications.”

The president is tasking the independent group to review U.S. capabilities, particularly surveillance technologies.

“They'll consider how we can maintain the trust of the people, how we can make sure that there absolutely is no abuse in terms of how these surveillance technologies are used, ask how surveillance impacts our foreign policy, particularly in an age when more and more information is becoming public,” Obama said.

The group will provide an interim report in 60 days and a final report by year's end, he said, “so we can move forward with a better understanding of how these programs impact our security, our privacy and our foreign policy.”

To others around the world, Obama said he wants to make clear that America is not interested in spying on ordinary people.

“Our intelligence is focused above all on finding the information that's necessary to protect our people -- and in many cases, protect our allies,” he said.

“It's true, we have significant capabilities,” he added. “What's also true is we show a restraint that many governments around the world don't even think to do That includes, by the way, some of America's most vocal critics.”

This is how the United States will resolve its differences, the president said. “Through vigorous public debate guided by our constitution, with reverence for our history as a nation of laws, and with respect for the facts.”