1. First Steps Made in Nuclear Scale-Back in Iran (02-04-2014)

Washington — A top U.S. official says a six-nation coalition eager to prevent the development of nuclear weapons in Iran has made notable progress on implementing the early stages of an agreement to achieve that end.

U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman appeared before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 4 to account for the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action forged between Iran and the P5+1 nations (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany) in November 2013.

Taking effect on January 20, the interim agreement is designed to do two things, Sherman told the panel. It stalls any further Iranian activity in the nuclear sector, and it creates room for negotiations to continue in pursuit of a long-range agreement.

Iran has taken a number of steps to rein in progress and even roll back its nuclear program, Sherman said. The International Atomic Energy Agency has verified that Iran has stopped producing enriched uranium; disabled the centrifuge cascades that produce the volatile material; begun diluting the stockpile of enriched uranium; and stopped further development of nuclear facilities.

For its part, the United States is ready to begin to return Iranian funds that have been frozen in U.S. financial institutions for years. The interim agreement includes a promise to return more than $4 billion, to be paid in installments.
Later in February, Sherman said, P5+1 negotiators will meet with Iran to continue their pursuit of a comprehensive solution. “Our goal for these negotiations is to reach a mutually agreed, long-term, comprehensive solution that would ensure Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful,” she said.

The initial steps taken under the Joint Plan of Action create the platform to begin the talks that will ensure a peaceful nuclear program in Iran, Sherman said. Iran has agreed to address concerns raised in U.N. Security Council resolutions passed over the years emphasizing the importance of a peaceful nuclear program to avoid regional instability.

“In addition, Iran has committed to implement agreed transparency measures and enhanced monitoring,” Sherman said.

Some members of Congress have expressed concern over Iran’s good faith in these negotiations. Suggestions have even rumbled through the Capitol building about the possibility of imposing more sanctions, in sharp contrast to the Obama administration’s tactic to hold out looser sanctions as a reward.

By no means have negotiators dropped sanctions from the potential consequences if a comprehensive solution remains elusive, Sherman said. “If Iran fails to live up to its commitment, or if we are unable to reach agreement on a comprehensive solution, we would ask the Congress to ramp up new sanctions,” she said.

Sherman said more and tougher sanctions now could be very disruptive to the negotiation process and to the U.S. agreement with its allies.

Even in the hopeful glow of negotiations, the P5+1 nations have not lost sight of Iran’s destabilizing activities in the region and its human rights abuses, Sherman said.

Related Articles:
Hagel Meets With Leaders of DOD Nuclear Enterprise
State’s Sherman on Negotiations with Iran

2. Defense Leaders Meet with President on Afghanistan (02-04-2014)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4, 2014 – President Barack Obama is meeting with defense leaders today on the way forward in Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., the vice chairman; Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, the commander of U.S. Central Command; Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, the commander of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan; and Navy Adm. William H. McRaven, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, will meet with the president in the Oval Office.

"This is the president's opportunity to hear directly from his commanders," Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters ahead of the meeting. "This is an opportunity for the
president to weigh inputs from the military, as well as other sources, for the president to make decisions as we move forward."

In a related note, Warren commented on news reports that Afghan President Hamid Karzai has been meeting in secret with Taliban officials. "We've long said the path to peace in Afghanistan is political and diplomatic, and not military," he said. "We've long said that Afghans speaking to Afghans are what's going to bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan."

Warren did not confirm whether those meetings had taken place.

Finally, the United States continues to urge the Afghan government not to release dangerous terrorists. The government has said it will release 37 prisoners from an Afghan-run detention facility in Bagram.

In the past, Warren has called these men "bad guys" who have the blood of innocent Afghans on their hands. "We believe they continue to be dangerous and should not be released prior to going through the Afghan judicial process," he said today.

3. Kerry, Hagel Discuss Balance in U.S. Diplomacy and Defense (02-03-2014)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told an international audience of efforts by the Obama administration to restore the balance between American diplomacy and defense as the United States moves away from a 13-year war footing.

“It’s clear to us, it’s clear to President Obama that our future requires a renewed and enhanced era of partnership with our friends and allies, especially here in Europe,” Hagel said at the 50th Munich Security Conference on February 1.

At the gathering of the world’s top diplomats and defense officials, Kerry said the trans-Atlantic community cannot retreat from the challenges and threats that arise across the globe. Kerry proposed that what is needed in 2014 is a trans-Atlantic renaissance, “a new burst of energy and commitment and investment in the three roots of our strength: our economic prosperity, our shared security and the common values that sustain us.”

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January, Kerry told political, business and academic leaders that the United States was not withdrawing from the world or its responsibilities into some form of isolationism. He said the United States would be engaged more than ever, a theme echoed by President Obama.

Obama said in his recent State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress that “in a world of complex threats, our security and leadership depend on all the elements of our power — including strong and principled diplomacy.”

Kerry added that successful diplomacy depends on harnessing the power of strong alliances, such as NATO. The United States strongly believes that it is no longer possible for a single nation, acting on its own, to resolve sweeping issues such as Middle East peace, convincing nations to forgo development of nuclear arsenals, or ending the violent civil war in Syria, Kerry said.
“That’s why it’s so important that the United States and Europe stick together, that we continue to understand the importance of the strength of our unity and unity of action,” Kerry said.

“Our challenge today is to ensure opportunity, security and liberty for Americans and Europeans, but also for people all over the world who look to us for that possibility. Our challenge is to renew this partnership and to live up to the legacy of the world’s strongest alliance,” Kerry said.

Kerry also remarked on the depth and breadth of Europe and the United States’ economic partnership over the last 60 years. He said the two economies can do more to harness the energy and the talents of their people through the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which “will promote trade, investment, innovation.”

In his remarks at the Munich Conference, Hagel said he and Kerry have worked closely to rebalance the relationship between diplomacy and defense.

Hagel noted that as changes, challenges and threats emerge, the world will grow more complicated, interconnected and in many cases more combustible.

“The challenges and choices before us will demand leadership that reaches into the future without stumbling over the present,” Hagel told the conference. “Meeting this challenge of change will not be easy, but we must do so and we must do so together.”

Hagel said the emerging strategy in U.S. defense investments makes it clear that Europe is regarded as an indispensable partner in addressing these threats and challenges, as well as new opportunities.

Related Articles:
Hagel: Future Requires Renewed Era of Partnership
Hagel Meets With Defense Leaders at Munich Conference
Ambassador Lute: Munich Conference Spotlights Trans-Atlantic Renaissance


By Terri Moon Cronk
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3, 2014 – The Defense Department and Italy’s defense ministry have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote joint training and education for peacekeeping operations.

The agreement, signed today at the Pentagon, takes effect immediately and identifies and develops joint training and education as well as policies and procedures.

“I believe this is the first, formal agreement on education and training that the undersecretary of defense of personnel and readiness has ever signed with Italy’s Carabinieri,” said Frank C. DiGiovanni, DOD’s director of force readiness and training.

“This new MOU, while old in association, has a very productive objective to promote peace and stability to areas of the world that are under stress,” added Frederick E. Vollrath, assistant secretary of defense for readiness and force management.
Maj. Gen. Ilio Ciceri, Italy’s chief of staff of the Carabinieri General Headquarters, said the support and position of the United States has been a source of “immense pride” for his country.

Reflecting on critical moments of the Carabinieri deployments in peace support operations, Ciceri said the first Carabinieri intervention model was tried in the Balkans in the 1990s, marking the first shared experience with the United States.

It was also deployed in Albania and Kosovo, where it is still active, and in Iraq, he said, adding that it has become a specialized instrument supporting the coalition armed forces with police information gathering and public security.

Such experiences continued in Afghanistan, with the International Security Assistance Force mission, he said, by training and mentoring local police forces.

“The use of our training and deployment techniques in the theaters of operations has always enjoyed an extraordinary support and appreciation by U.S. commanders and by the highest political authorities and soldiers of your country,” he said.

The agreement lasts five years, and could be extended for another five.

Biographies:
Frederick E. Vollrath
Frank C. DiGiovanni

5. Hagel Ends Poland Trip With U.S., Polish Airmen (01-31-2014)

By Cheryl Pellerin
American Forces Press Service

POWIDZ AIR BASE, Poland, Jan. 31, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel spent the last afternoon of his first official visit to Poland by stopping at an air base where U.S. and Polish airmen work side by side, and later at a historic church where his great-grandparents were married in 1882.

At Powidz Air Base in central Poland, Hagel and Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak walked together into a hangar, a row of U.S. and Polish airmen fanning out on each side of the microphone, with the American and Polish flags in the background.

Rising up behind the flags was a hulking gray C-130 turboprop military transport plane with a sleek F-16 positioned at each end of its 133-foot wingspan.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to be here today to wish you all well and to thank you, all of you, Polish and American airmen working jointly in … common cause,” Hagel said in English, stopping every few sentences so his words could be translated into Polish.

“What you’re doing here is important … for our two countries, it’s important for NATO, it’s important for freedom, and it is a significant symbol to the world,” he said.

President Barack Obama and President Bronislaw Komorowski agreed in 2010 to strengthen the U.S.-Polish security partnership through increased cooperation between both nations’ air forces.
The first full-time stationing of U.S. troops was established in Poland in 2012 with an aviation detachment at Lask Air Base, about 90 minutes from Powidz.

In addition to strengthening cooperation, the aviation detachment allows Poland to host other allied air force elements and serve as a regional hub for air training and multinational exercises.

Hagel called it significant that the two countries are working together, adding that the collaboration will lead to “expanding opportunities for more jointness, more exercises and more opportunities.”

As Hagel and Siemoniak completed their remarks, the secretary wished the airmen continued success and a productive 2014.

“On a more personal note,” he told them, “my mother’s family is from this part of Poland and when I leave here in a few minutes I’m going to a little village, Kiszkowo, where my great grandparents were married. So I feel very familiar here and very comfortable.”

The Dabrowka Catholic church, nearly an hour by car from Powidza Air Base, sits on the same site in Kiszków where Hagel’s maternal grandmother’s parents were married. Their Polish names were Tomasz and Katarzyna Kąkolewski, a senior defense official said.

Tomasz Kąkolewski, born in Wierzonka, lived in Turostów near Kiszków and worked as a farmhand. Katarzyna Budnikowska, also recorded as Budzińska, was born in 1861 in Lednogóra. She lived in Gniewkowo near Kiszków and worked as maid.

In 1882 the couple married in the parish church in Dąbrówka Kościelna, which burned down in the 1920s and was later rebuilt. They left for the United States in 1888 and Katie, one of their daughters, was born in Nebraska in 1894. Katie Konkolewski, Hagel’s grandmother, eventually married Joseph Dunn, an American of Irish descent.

During his visit to the church today Hagel signed the guest book.

"Thank you for this very memorable opportunity to visit my family's history,” Hagel wrote. “It is very meaningful to my family and me. God bless you."

Biographies:
Chuck Hagel

Related Sites:
Transcript: Remarks by Secretary Hagel at a Troop Event at Powidz Air Base, Poland
Transcript: Media Availability by Secretary Hagel at Dabrowka Church, Kiszkow, Poland

6. U.S. Shifting Focus from Combat to Diplomacy (01-31-2014)

By Sonya Weakley
Staff Writer

Washington — The curtailment of overseas military commitments enables the United States to pursue a broader strategy of diplomatic and political international engagement.

Speaking to a gathering of international journalists on January 29, Ben Rhodes, White House deputy national security advisor for strategic communications, outlined a course strengthening global relationships through a step-by-step political process.
“We’ve seen a lot of progress made,” Rhodes said. “We’ve seen relations improve between the United States and countries that in the past we’ve had tensions with. … We’ve seen countries pursue democratic reforms. We’ve seen countries reach out to the United States.”

Remaining, however, is the uncertainty of continued U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, which has not yet agreed to a proposed bilateral security agreement. “We’re awaiting their signature so that the president then can make decisions about the nature of a potential follow-on force to do the two missions of counterterrorism against al-Qaida and training and assisting Afghan forces,” he said.

The U.S. approach to combating terrorism will shift to helping other countries strengthen their capabilities through political support. The United States is moving from “dealing with this issue through large military deployments to more focused capacity-building efforts,” Rhodes said.

This shift away from the “permanent war footing” that evolved after the 9/11 terrorist attacks includes limiting the use of drones, reforming U.S. surveillance activities and refocusing on one of President Obama’s longtime goals: closing the military detention center at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

The devastating conflict in Syria stands out in the Middle East, Rhodes said. Efforts continue to eliminate chemical weapon stores, pressure the government to allow delivery of medical supplies and food and, above all, negotiate a transitional governing body to end the conflict. Negotiations with Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks remain priorities.

Iran is “certainly a front-and-center priority … as we enter the six-month period of negotiation with the Iranian government, and the Middle East peace effort that Secretary Kerry is leading, and talks with the Israelis and Palestinians,” he said. Rhodes also announced that King Abdullah II of Jordan will visit the United States in February to discuss these issues.

Also in the coming year, “the pivot to the Asia-Pacific region continues to be a defining focus,” particularly in regard to enhancing commercial activity through the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement under negotiation, involving several countries in the region. Security efforts include supporting democratic reform in Burma.

Another primary concern is the territorial dispute between China and Japan over a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. The islands are prime fishing grounds, are close to shipping lanes and are near potential oil and gas reserves. Ensuring “maritime security … will continue to be an issue,” Rhodes said.

Other important topics regarding China include cybersecurity and the protection of intellectual property rights, maintaining strong economic ties, and cooperating to avoid destabilization in North Korea.

In Latin America, Rhodes highlighted commercial development, cooperation with Mexico on border security, and enhancing people-people contact through exchange programs. He also emphasized that the United States is committed to resolving any concerns, particularly in Brazil, about U.S. surveillance activities. Rhodes cited the importance of continued economic ties with Brazil. “So we don’t want to see this surveillance debate impede progress on all those other issues,” he said.
Rhodes highlighted plans for increased attention to Africa, where a number of initiatives are planned or in place to enhance commercial trade and investment relationships and promote democratic progress. Economic development efforts include a program to double access to electricity. The United States also will host a summit of African heads of state in August. “This is a very significant event, first of its kind for the United States,” Rhodes said.

In Europe, the concerted effort will be on negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Other highlights are the third Nuclear Security Summit in March at The Hague, a meeting with the European Union, the September NATO Summit in Wales, and a visit from French President François Hollande.

As always, U.S. engagement with the world revolves around core beliefs, Rhodes said: “We speak out for certain values. … We’ll make clear that our support for the rule of law, our support for independent media applies to any country in the world.”

---

7. Official Discusses Chinese Air Force, Missile Trends (01-30-2014)

By Amaani Lyle
American Forces Press Service


Donald L. Fuell, National Air and Space Intelligence Center force modernization and employment technical director at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, warned against taking a “symmetric” view of PLAAF with a direct comparison to U.S. missile modernization.

“We believe the Chinese are not trying to match the U.S. system versus system,” Fuell said, “but are pursuing more of a system-of-systems approach that exploits what they perceive to be adversary weaknesses or exploitable vulnerabilities.”

Regarding potential U.S. intervention in cases of conflicts involving Taiwan or in regions of the South China Sea, recent Chinese operational literature suggests the People’s Republic of China may be developing a more mature viewpoint on the broad application of military operations against the United States than in year’s past.

“This newer literature reflects a departure from past PLA writings that heavily focused on the need for pre-emptive operations against U.S. intervention, and we feel that this demonstrates, at least to a degree, a growing confidence within the PLA that they can more readily withstand U.S. involvement,” Fuell said.

As such, should the PRC decide intervention significantly impacts the success of their campaign, the PLAAF and Second Artillery would be tasked with strikes against U.S. forces and facilities, Fuell reported.

“Chinese writings, although not specifically directed at the U.S., discuss the importance of attacks on logistics, supply depots, air bases, and ports by air, ballistic and or cruise missiles, special forces and other means,” he said. “Chinese analysts note the importance of military on Okinawa and
Guam, and these assets and their supporting infrastructure are likely high-priority targets of the PLAAF and Second Artillery.

Given the advancements in command and control infrastructure and the emphasis on joint training events, Fuell explained, PLAAF has attained a moderate level of capability to conduct pre-planned joint fires against fixed targets in the Pacific theater.

“In 2009, the PLAAF and Second Artillery conducted one of the first large-scale joint live-fire exercises involving elements from four missile brigades and two PLAAF air divisions,” he reported.

Still, Fuell said, analysts assessed that true joint interoperability remains largely a work in progress for the PLA.

“Jointness will largely be executed via well-deconflicted, time-phased operations of high precision,” Fuell said. “However, due to lack of practiced interoperability, their efficiency will decline as they have to react to a dynamic environment and rapidly changing battlespace conditions.”

In addition to its missile and munitions assets, China also has an increasing number of aircraft capable of operating over water at ranges from 300-500 nautical miles from its coast without refueling, Fuell said.

“New precision guided munitions and conventional missiles continue to emerge and will continue for the foreseeable future as Chinese investment in these technologies remains high,” Fuell said. “Nevertheless, the pace of development of individual systems has not accelerated.”

Biographies:
Donald L. Fuell

Related Sites:
Testimony