

LIVEATSTATE WITH JAKE SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF POLICY PLANNING

January 24, 2012
Washington, D.C.

MS. JENSEN: Hi. Welcome to LiveAtState, the State Department's interactive webchat platform for engaging international media. I am delighted to welcome our participants from all over the world. Thank you for joining us today. Today in our studio, we have Jake Sullivan, the director of policy planning here at the State Department, and he'll be taking your questions on foreign policy priorities for 2012.

Before I get started, I would just like to give you a few housekeeping notes. You can start to ask your questions now in the lower left-hand portion of your screen, in the box titled questions for Director Sullivan. And if at any time you experience problems submitting your questions, you can email us directly at Live@State.gov, and we'll put your questions into the queue. And also, we have a listen-only phone bridge that's available, and that number is listed in the bottom lower left-hand portion of your screen, so that if you have connectivity issues you can call in and listen to the webchat platform in a listen-only mode.

And we will try to get to as many of your questions as we can in the 45 minutes we have. I just want you to know we have a lot of participants, so we'll do our best to get them as quickly as we can. And if you would like to continue this conversation, you can do so on Twitter by going to the State Department's official Twitter handle, it's [@StateDept](https://twitter.com/StateDept) and using the hashtag [#JakeSullivan](https://twitter.com/hashtag/JakeSullivan).

And with that, I'll turn it over. Welcome.

MR. SULLIVAN: Thank you very much, Holly. I appreciate being here. And I'm very much eager to take everybody's questions. I just thought I would start by saying that 2012 is going to be a very important year in foreign policy. There are a number of significant summits over the course of the year, including two that the United States will be hosting. There are fast-moving events that are sweeping the world, starting in the Middle East and North Africa but extending elsewhere as well. There are long-term global trends that are driving decisions and events all across the world from our own hemisphere to the Asia Pacific and elsewhere.

And so the United States Government, the Secretary of State, the State Department, are all focused on what we need to do this year to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the moment as well as to take steps to secure and sustain America's global leadership on behalf of the American people and on behalf of solving problems across the world so that more people in more places can live up to their potential.

So with that, I'd be happy to take your questions on any topic under the sun. I can't promise that I'll be able to give a complete answer to all of them, but I look forward to a conversation over the next 45 minutes.

MS. JENSEN: Our first question comes from the *Daily News* in Tanzania: There's a shift of U.S. foreign policy. What is your priority for this year?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, when you take a complex and multidimensional foreign policy like that which the United States needs to pursue because of our interests and our relationships around the world, it's hard to boil it down to a single priority. But I would say that there are a few things that are at the top of our agenda, and one of them is to consolidate the efforts that we have undertaken to shift from a decade of war and a focus on threats, which by necessity the last 10 years were mostly about, to a decade of opportunities, opportunities to help support democratic transitions in the Middle East and North Africa, opportunities to consolidate America's engagement as a Pacific power in the part of the world that is increasingly becoming the strategic and economic center of gravity, opportunities to deepen partnerships in our own hemisphere as we head into the Summit of the Americas in April of 2012, and opportunities to drive a development agenda alongside our diplomacy agenda that gets to issues like health and food and climate so that we are creating better chances for people across the world to be able to redeem their aspirations, their political aspirations as well as their economic aspirations.

So broadly speaking, that's the frame with which we are seeing much of which will happen this year. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't going to be ongoing threats. There are. We've seen just in the last 24 hours continuing threatening statements out of Iran about the Straits of Hormuz. We have seen a continued effort on the part of violent extremists on virtually every continent to terrorize people and other threats as well. So we'll remain vigilant, along with our partners, to deal with those challenges as well.

MS. JENSEN: Our next question comes from Sean Embrack: Good morning. I am Sean Embrack, Newswatchguyana.com. What kind of support can the Caribbean region expect with regards to fighting HIV/AIDS and trans-border smuggling of narcotics and other illegal activities? And finally, is the U.S. cutting down on foreign spending in support of logistical activities to prevent these illegal activities?

MR. SULLIVAN: The United States has really, over the past three years, deepened our partnership with the countries of the Caribbean. The CARICOM organization, which is the organization that represents the Caribbean states, has each year held a high-level meeting with the Secretary, with Secretary Clinton. And in those meetings, HIV/AIDS and the fight against narcotics have been front and center.

On HIV/AIDS, we have extensive programming across the region as we try to deal with the challenge of those who currently have contracted HIV by providing them with

lifesaving drugs, but then more broadly, an effort to build health systems in the countries of the Caribbean so that we can lick this disease once and for all to produce what Secretary Clinton has called an AIDS-free generation.

On the narcotics side, the United States has been proud to partner with the Caribbean on something called the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, which is about security assistance, yes, but it's also about strengthening institutions in the countries of the Caribbean, law enforcement and judicial institutions, so that they gain greater capacity to be able to take on the threat, the scourge of drug trafficking within their own countries. And so it's a multidimensional effort that we are putting significant resources behind. And when the Secretary was in Barbados some months ago, she laid out what the various components of this would look like, and will continue her engagement and consultations with the people of the Caribbean and the government of the Caribbean as we move forward.

MS. JENSEN: Our next question comes from Anas Al Madhoun: Good morning, and thank you for giving us this opportunity to know about U.S. policy during 2012 regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

MR. SULLIVAN: With respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we are heartened by what we have seen over the course of the past few weeks with the Jordanian initiative to help broker direct face-to-face contacts between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, where they can sit and actually discuss the real issues of the conflict, starting with territory and security. And we would like to see that process continue. Indeed, we'd like to see it grow into a sustained and systematic negotiating process that takes on all of the permanent status issues that have divided the parties and kept peace elusive for all this time.

At the same time that we're supporting the Jordanian effort, and the Secretary had the opportunity just in the past week to engage with King Abdallah of Jordan and thank him for his efforts as well as the efforts of Foreign Minister Judeh, we are also trying to work with the Palestinian Authority, with President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyed to help with their effort to build the institutions of a future Palestinian state, to respond directly to the economic aspirations of the Palestinian people by providing economic opportunity, by providing the chance to grow an economy that can thrive over time and by deepening security cooperation so that every Palestinian citizen can live in peace and security.

And so the combination of the political efforts and the state and institution building efforts that we are supporting is something that will remain a top priority for us in 2012. This is not to say that it's going to be easy. It won't. And over the past three years, we've seen challenges and difficulties and setbacks. But we believe that with good faith and with rolling up all of our collective sleeves, both the parties, the regional actors, the United States and the international community, that we can make progress in 2012. And so we don't say this glibly or lightly, and we say it with clear eyes about what the

obstacles are and have been for so long, but it is very important to the United States that we move along the path towards peace and that we do so at a time when change is sweeping the rest of the region and progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue is important to progress in terms of broader regional security and prosperity.

MS. JENSEN: J. Brooks Spector wants to know: What is the long-term goals for U.S. policy vis-a-vis Iran? Where do you want to get in the future, assuming you get past the current tensions? And how is this tied to U.S. involvement with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and of course, Iraq?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, our long-term goal with respect to Iran is quite straightforward in terms of how we state it. It's not as straightforward in terms of getting there. It is to ultimately, after Iran has fulfilled its obligations, welcome the people of Iran back into the international community as full participants. That is what the President and the Secretary have said since the start of this Administration. We would like to see Iran with a future that is as bright as – and as potent as the history of its great ancient civilization.

Now, in order to get from where we are today to there requires Iran to take steps to come into compliance with its international obligations. That goes for its nuclear program. That goes for its sponsorship of terrorism and violence and its efforts to destabilize actors in the region. And in that regard, the question of Iran and Afghanistan and Iran and Iraq comes into play. We look to Iran to take steps to ensure that they are not engaging in activities in either Afghanistan or Iraq that attempt to destabilize or advance an agenda of violence or attempt to thwart the democratic aspirations of the people of those countries.

And overall, we look to Iran to show the international community once and for all that it has a nuclear program that is peaceful and that is not intended for nuclear weapons, and so far, it has been categorically unwilling and unable to do that. And so it is very clear what is required of Iran, and now the choice is Iran's to make, whether it's prepared to step up and meet its obligations or whether instead it will continue to choose a course of continued diplomatic isolation and pressure.

MS. JENSEN: The next question comes from Wen Xian from *People's Daily* of China: What's the priority of the U.S.'s policy towards China in 2012?

MR. SULLIVAN: Every year has been a significant year in U.S.-China relations because this is one of the most complex and consequential and important relationships that the United States has. We are looking ahead, just in a few weeks time, to the visit – the return visit – of Vice President Xi who will come to Washington and then go out to the American heartland to Iowa. I'm actually from Minnesota myself, which is a state that borders Iowa to the north, so we're going to be pleased to welcome the vice president to see, once again, life in the American Midwest and the values that the people of the heartland reflect in their daily lives. And then he'll go out to Los Angeles.

And that visit will be an important opportunity for us to both take stock of the progress we've made, to address some of the differences that remain between us, and to look forward to an action-oriented period of cooperation on significant issues. Among those issues are the global economy and the need for the United States and China to work together to ensure that the basic rules of the road are respected, that the international economic system become increasingly open, free, transparent, and fair. And in addition to global economics, there are questions around nuclear proliferation and the work that we can do together to pursue pressure on Iran to come into compliance within its international obligations and to pursue an effort to ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Those are just some of what is an incredibly broad-based agenda that we have with the Chinese Government and the Chinese people. And we will also be clear along the way that we continue to have concerns about human rights in China and that we believe that, for China's future, it is in the best interests of all of the people of China for the government to pursue a path of increasing respect for human rights and for political reform.

MS. JENSEN: Just a quick note: You'll notice that we have a live stream of all of our in-language Twitter feeds running across the bottom scroll of your screen. So if you would like to follow us on Twitter, you can do so in-language by going to any one of our 10 in-language Twitter feeds.

Our next question comes from Hala Mohammed from Al Hurra Iraq: What do you – what will you do in America to help the Iraqis in establishing law?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, we have a very broad-based diplomatic engagement with Iraq across the board, across every segment of engagement that you'd see between two countries. And the rule of law is an incredibly important part of that, and it begins with the leadership of Iraq, from all of the various stakeholders across the country, coming together to produce a political pathway forward that is in keeping with the Iraqi constitution. And on an increasingly stable political platform that we are looking to them to build, we can then talk about increasing the capacity of Iraqi Government institutions, including the judiciary, including the police and security forces.

And the United States is continuing support on all of those fronts. We have a police training program that seeks to improve the ability of the Iraqi police to protect citizens, but to do so in a way that's in keeping with their rights under the Iraqi constitution. We have a program that works with judges across Iraq. And what we would like to see is for every Iraqi to know that when he or she goes to court, they will get a fair hearing, an impartial hearing, and a hearing where their grievances can be addressed in a way that is effective and transparent.

And so those are just a couple of the examples of what is an incredibly broad-based effort by the United States Government to partner with and support the people of Iraq as they move along the path of democracy. Again, here, as in so many other places, this is not an easy proposition. There were many decades in which Iraqis lived under the fear and tyranny of a brutal dictator, where the institutions weren't strong, where the courts weren't fair. And so it will take time and effort and the support of the United States and the international community – and we're intent on staying the course – to try to steadily build the strength of those institutions so that there can't be backsliding, there can't be the kinds of challenges and divisions that have marked Iraqi political history in the past.

MS. JENSEN: Mainul Alam would like to know: Despite the rise of militancy, how will the USA deal with South Asia, particularly Bangladesh? Bangladesh has a good record to fight terrorism.

MR. SULLIVAN: I would agree with that statement. Bangladesh does have a good record of counterterrorism cooperation with the United States and with the international community. And our relationship with Bangladesh, of course, extends beyond the question of counterterrorism, although that is a critical priority in our relationship.

It includes a very significant development agenda on the health front, on the agriculture front, on trying to deal with the effects of climate change, especially in the low-lying areas of Bangladesh. And the progress that Bangladesh has made in its development has really been quite remarkable, but the distance it still has to travel to deal with poverty and health challenges and the effects of climate change is great, and the United States understands that and is committed to working both bilaterally and through international institutions to help the government and people of Bangladesh.

Now at the same time, there's a question of democratic development as well, and Bangladesh has traveled a far distance on this score as well. But there is also room for improvement too here, especially on the question of opening the political space to all of civil society and to all of the media to ensure that a vibrant, free media and civil society can help contribute to the long-term vitality of Bangladesh. And in this regard, as in others, the United States is committed to working with the government and people of Bangladesh to make progress and to continue to see the trend lines point in the right direction.

MS. JENSEN: George Rodriguez is asking: What are the Obama Administration's priorities regarding Central America?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, President Obama was in Central America in El Salvador last year and will be going to the Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia this year, where, among all of the other major regional issues, Central America will be on the agenda.

At the same time, Secretary Clinton has traveled to Central America multiple times, most recently to Guatemala, where, along with the presidents of many of the Central American nations and key leaders in the international community, the Central American states launched an initiative to deal with the regional security challenges that they are grappling with. And the international community pledged to support that not just with increased resources, but with better focused resources, with the kind of coordination that the leadership and people of Central America deserve so that all of the funds and assistance flowing in to fight drug traffickers, to fight violent criminals, flows in in a way that is in keeping with the priorities of the countries of Central America and is spent in a way and invested in a way that is efficient and effective.

And the Secretary followed up that trip to Guatemala with a meeting at the United Nations General Assembly, again with leaders from Central America and leaders from around the world. And 2012 is really an opportunity to take off the page and put into practice the commitments that were made in those various meetings. And the Secretary is very focused on making that a key priority over the course of this year.

But of course, it's not just security that the United States is interested in in Central America. It's human capital development. It's democracy. And in this regard, we've been very concerned about the nature of the Nicaraguan elections, which were not free and fair.

And so we are looking forward, over time, to working on a broad-based agenda with a particular emphasis on this regional security initiative that the Central American leaders themselves have embraced and led, and we're looking to come in behind them in support.

MS. JENSEN: We've gotten our first question in French, which we have translated to English for you. It comes from Wilfried Crecel from *Hebdomadaire Diplomatie Benin*. And he would like to know: What role will covert and overt operations in warfare play in the U.S. foreign policy in 2012? And what wars will continue? And if so, in which countries?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, the end of 2011 marked the end of the war in Iraq, and 2012 marks a period of transition in Afghanistan from the security lead being in the hands of the NATO-ISAF coalition to security lead over the course of this year and, moving into 2013 and 2014, increasingly shifting to the Afghan national security forces. So we will continue to fight in Afghanistan in 2012. We will continue to go after the violent extremist networks and the al-Qaida affiliates that pose a threat to U.S. forces, that pose a threat to the growth and development of a strong and stable Afghan state. But as we do so, we will also continue the transition process that was announced at the Lisbon summit – the Lisbon-NATO summit.

In terms of other operations that the United States would be engaged in over the course of this year, of course, I can't speak to anything in specific. That sort of goes beyond the

scope of my position or my platform. But I will say that we will continue to take the fight the world over against terrorists who would threaten our friends and partners and would threaten the United States. And that will remain an important part of U.S. policy. And just as important as doing it is the partnership that we are building with other countries to be able to join us in that fight, to continue to put pressure on – relentless pressure – on those who would choose to use violence and terror to undermine progress, to sow fear, and to try to kill innocents. And the United States won't tolerate that, and we will continue to make that an important part of our national security strategy.

MS. JENSEN: Our next question comes from Alexander Gasyuk from Russia: Good morning and thank you for doing this. Under Secretary of State Ellen Tauscher has recently mentioned that the U.S. will get a missile defense agreement for cooperation with Russia. Given well-known serious disagreements on this matter between Washington and Moscow, what makes the State Department think so, and when, to your mind, will this happen? And can one think about 2012 as the year for signing this agreement?

MR. SULLIVAN: I learned long ago not to make predictions in terms of ever signing diplomatic agreements, because there are a lot of complexities and challenges built into them. But I would say that it has been the consistent position of the Obama Administration that missile defense cooperation between the United States and Russia is the best path forward for both of our countries, that we face common threats from other actors who would potentially use or threaten to use missiles to the detriment of our interests and Russia's interests and the interests of each of our friends and partners.

So we do believe very much that missile defense cooperation and us working together on these issues will be in the long-term best interests of our own countries and of regional peace and security. And that is really, I think, what underlies Under Secretary Tauscher's observation that we have been in an intense dialogue with the Russian Government about how we might work together. That dialogue has existed at every level, including at the level of President Obama and President Medvedev. And we would like to see 2012 as a year where we could make progress on this issue, where we could deepen understanding, where we could find ways to work together on questions related to missile defense, where we could ensure that there is transparency and understanding on both sides of what we are seeking to achieve and how we are seeking to achieve it.

So the path is not necessarily a straight or short one, but it is certainly the case that we believe we have made progress in these conversations and that we can continue to make progress to an ultimate goal of real earnest, serious, effective missile defense cooperation between our two countries.

MS. JENSEN: The next question comes from Mohammed Albishi: Increase economic sanctions Iran consistently. What is the political action you are waiting for in America from Iran in particular?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, I'm not sure I fully understand the political action in America. I think in terms of what we are looking for from the Iranians is quite straightforward. We are looking for them to abandon any effort to pursue a nuclear weapons program, to show the international community that they are committed to only a peaceful nuclear program. We are looking to them to cease destabilizing activities in the region, including the sponsorship of terror, and we are looking for them to uphold their broad range of international obligations, including treating their own citizens with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

Those are the steps that the Iranian Government has within their power to take and should take – not for us, but for their own people and for the future of their own people. And insofar as the Iranian Government is prepared to take those steps, the international community is prepared to begin to bring them back into the global fold, but as long as Iran continues to defy its international obligations, the United States and our partners around the world will continue to impose pressure, will continue Iran's diplomatic isolation, and that will remain the dynamic that we have seen over the course of the past month. So the choice is really Iran's to make.

Now, on a more specific element of this, Iran has suggested in various news outlets that it's interested in talking about the nuclear program and other issues. Well, the United States and our partners have made very clear that we are prepared to sit down if Iran is serious, and so far, Iran has not stepped forward to demonstrate that it is prepared to sit at a table in a serious and constructive way and discuss the nuclear program and other related issues. So we are awaiting that signal from Iran, and again, it is in the hands of Iran to take that step.

MS. JENSEN: Justin Stares, the Brussels correspondent for Public Service Europe would like to know: What are the remaining points of contention between the U.S. and European Union, please?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, it's actually – it's a little hard to answer that question, because the list of areas of convergence is just so long. And the United States works with the European Union in an incredibly effective and robust way. We have no better partner in terms of the broad range of activities that we are pursuing in the world, whether it is pressuring Iran to give up its nuclear weapons program or pressuring Syria to stop brutalizing its own people or working on a broad-based development agenda in places as far afield as Pakistan or East Asia or Africa and elsewhere. So it truly is a global partnership between the United States and the EU.

But of course, there are places where we can deepen that cooperation, where we can become even more effective in the ways that we work together. And one of those ways that we have discussed through the Transatlantic Economic Dialogue is deepening the economic engagement between the United States and Europe as we both work through

our own domestic economic challenges. So one of the agenda items, I think, that would be valuable this year for the United States and the EU to pursue is thinking about ways in which we can expand and deepen our links and our economic ties to the benefit of our people and the benefit of our economies.

MS. JENSEN: If you'd like to follow the State Department on Twitter, you can go to our official Twitter handle, @StateDept. Our next question comes from Silva Pisani from *La Nacion*, Argentina: We heard about a great opportunity right now in the relationship between Argentina and the United States. What does it mean, and what are you expecting from Argentina? Maybe to fulfill its international compromises?

MR. SULLIVAN: Secretary Clinton actually had the opportunity to speak with President Fernandez de Kirchner relatively recently, and the two of them talked about how it might be possible for the United States and Argentina to move forward in a greater and more effective spirit of cooperation, and there's a broad range of activities that we can work together on starting with an entire agenda around thinking about our common interests in economic growth and development. We're both members of the G-20, and cooperation in the G-20 could be an important place for us to work together. We both have deep interests in ensuring that nonproliferation norms are respected the world over. And whether it's the Nuclear Security Summit or it is efforts to pressure Iran and try to bring them into compliance with their international obligations, there is work that we can do together on those global security challenges as well.

So I think it is important for the United States and Argentina to think about what a program of work would look like over the course of 2012, what specific steps we could take together to show the people of both our countries how much we have to gain by intensive and effective practical cooperation. And I think that there is a real desire on the part of our government, as I think there is on the part of the Government of Argentina, to do exactly that.

MS. JENSEN: Our next question comes from Donga Ilbo, Seoul, Korea: President Obama didn't mention about the new North Korean leadership. Could you elaborate on the United States-North Korean policy?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, the United States's policy toward North Korea has been steady and consistent over the course of the past three years. We believe very much that it is in the interests of everybody for North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program, for there to be a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, for North Korea to end its proliferation and testing activities once and for all, and for North Korea to refrain from any kind of provocative acts that might undermine the stability of the peninsula or the broader region. At the same time, we have made clear that if North Korea can fulfill its commitments under the 2005 joint statement and under United Nations Security Council resolutions, that there is a path forward for North Korea to become a full member of the international community once again. And our goal over time is to move in that direction.

Now, North Korea has just undergone a leadership transition, and there is a lot of sorting out to do in that country about their choices for how they would like to proceed on all of the things I mentioned and many other things, including how the North Korean Government treats and deals with its own people. And so we are in a period now of real introspection there, and our message to the leadership of North Korea, working in partnership with our allies in Japan and South Korea – and especially South Korea – and working with other partners like China and Russia is to say we have a roadmap, we have a set of steps that you could take that over time would be as much in your interests as everybody else's, and that in response to those steps, the international community would be prepared to take steps of its own.

And that will continue to be our message when we engage with the North Koreans, when we speak both publicly and privately with our allies and partners in the region. And our goal is to see progress over the course of this year and in the years ahead. And as I said many times over the course of these 45 minutes, this is no easy task either. Again, we've had setbacks; again we've had difficulties achieving the kind of vision that I've just laid out. But the important thing is to set out a clear set of expectations and to approach what it takes to get to meet those expectations in good faith, in a straightforward and a direct and forceful way, and that's what the United States has been doing and is intent on continuing to do over the course of this year.

MS. JENSEN: The next question comes from Wajahat Ali Khan from Urdu daily, *Khabrain*: What is the new U.S. policy for Pakistan and Afghanistan?

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, that is a very big question that I could probably take the rest of the time that I'll be sitting in this chair to answer. I'll start with Pakistan and say that the Government of Pakistan, the parliament in Pakistan is undergoing a review of their expectations and their understandings in the bilateral relationship. And we look forward to continuing to engage with the Pakistani Government so that they understand our perspective and our needs and what we are looking for in future cooperation between our two countries.

The stakes in this are very high. We believe very much that cooperation between the United States and Pakistan on a broad range of issues is fundamentally in the interests of our two countries. And that's not just true in the counterterrorism space, although that's very important. It's also true in the way that the United States and the international community can support the democratically elected government of Pakistan and can support an economic program over time that will lead to growth and economic stability in Pakistan so that it does not face the kinds of challenges it has faced in the past.

So we will see over the course of the next several weeks an intensive period of work to deal with the very real issues that continue to exist between the United States and Pakistan in our relationship, and we're going to try to do that in a straightforward way and

we're going to try to do it in a way that keeps our eye on the long game. And hopefully, the Pakistanis will do the same. And in the long game, the United States and Pakistan have much more to gain through cooperation than through any other dynamic that might emerge in our relationship.

MS. JENSEN: We're moving to Africa now. Christine Haguma wants to know: What is the USA doing to increase the business partnership with Africa?

MR. SULLIVAN: This has been a very serious focus of Secretary Clinton's over the course of the past three years. She, in 2009 in her first year in office, went to Kenya to the African Growth and Opportunity Act Forum, where she immediately began engaging a broad range of African leaders on the question of how we can deepen economic and trade ties between the United States and Africa. How can the United States and our market provide greater opportunity for African entrepreneurs and African business people to grow jobs and sell products?

And over the course of the past three years, that has continued to be a central question that she has consistently posed to people in our government and to people in Africa. And so in 2012, as we host the AGOA Forum here in the United States, we're looking for making practical improvements to AGOA so that more people in more countries in Africa can take advantage of that act and what it has to offer.

At the same time, we're very much focused on an entrepreneurship initiative across the continent that finds young entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs from every corner of the continent, and says to them, look, if you've got a good idea, the United States is prepared to back you, not just with money but with opportunities to link you to markets, with opportunities to link you to other folks in the business sector who you can partner with in order to grow your business and in order to make your idea something that has real staying power.

So I would say on the trade front, on the entrepreneurship front, and then very importantly on the regional integration front, where Sub-Saharan Africa trades with itself less than almost anywhere else in the world, the United States would like to help countries there break down barriers so that farmers or business people in one country can trade effectively with their neighbors and sell their goods and sell their products and sell their services. So that will remain an important diplomatic and development priority for the U.S. as relates Africa.

Those are just three of what – I could talk about a dozen different ways in which the United States is trying to work through all kinds of innovative means to support job growth and business development in Africa. But it is an incredibly important priority for the Secretary and for this Administration.

MS. JENSEN: Our next question comes from Anas Al Madhoun: Are the U.S. Department open to a channel negotiations with Hamas if they want elections in May, like what happened in Egypt?

MR. SULLIVAN: Our position on Hamas has been very straightforward. We believe that Hamas needs to meet the three basic Quartet principles that should guide the future of peacemaking in the Middle East. That means, first, renouncing violence. It means, second, recognizing Israel and its right to exist. And it means, third, abiding by and declaring an unadorned intent to abide by past agreements and commitments made by the Palestinian leadership.

Until Hamas is willing to take those steps, basic steps that would reflect its good faith as prepared to join a future of progress in the region, it is hard for the international community to look at Hamas and see an actor that is serious about trying to produce better outcomes for the region as a whole. And so I think we have made our expectations clear, our position clear on this. It remains the same today, and we would look to Hamas to take those steps as in the interests of everybody, including its own members.

MS. JENSEN: The next question comes from *Al Watan* newspaper: Have you been affected U.S. foreign policy because of the proximity of elections, for example, your position on Syria?

MR. SULLIVAN: Our position on Syria really has nothing to do with the elections that are occurring in the United States later this year, and it has everything to do with Bashar Assad's continued brutality and violence and disregard for the dignity of his own people. And as long as the Syrian Government continues to use violence against its citizens, to put tanks into cities, to detain political prisoners, to deny access to international journalists who'd like to document the abuses happening there, the United States will work first and foremost with the Arab League but then with the broader international community to pressure this regime and to bring about a conclusion whereby Assad does the right thing and steps aside for the good of his country.

That is built on American values. It's built on an American interest in a Middle East that is sustainable over the long term with governments that respond to the aspirations of their people and don't use force against their citizens. And it's not in any way built on a sense of politics or things happening here domestically. So I think the people of Syria and the people of the world can rest assured that our policy towards Syria is serious, it is sincere, and it is very much focused on the welfare and well-being of the Syrian people.

MS. JENSEN: The next question comes from *Kosovo Times News Portal*: Good morning, Mr. Sullivan. Diplomatic relations between Kosovo and Serbia do not exist, as Serbia rejects independence declared by Kosovo authorities. What can the U.S. Government do to help them establish good neighbor relations?

MR. SULLIVAN: The United States is very much committed to progress on Kosovo-Serbia relations heading towards increasing normalization and practical cooperation between these two neighbors. Just a few days ago, Secretary Clinton spoke with President Tadic of Serbia to convey that position that the United States stands ready to work with Serbia and stands ready to work with Kosovo to help them head towards a process of normalization.

Now, this is a challenging and difficult proposition for two countries that have had conflict in recent time, that have suspicion and skepticism on both sides of the border, and that continue to see episodes and activities that run counter to efforts to bring about progress on their relationship.

But the United States, working with our European partners, working with the international community, is going to stay focused on trying to help on the practical steps that each country can take to improve confidence and to create a pathway ultimately towards normalization. And that will continue to be a priority for the United States, given how much we have invested in a Balkan region that can know a future of peace and prosperity as opposed to conflict and discord.

MS. JENSEN: I'd just like to apologize; we only have time for one more question and I understand there's a lot of really great questions in the queue. And I'd like to thank you for your participation, but this is going to be our last question. And it comes from Richard Thomas from *Muscat Daily*: You mentioned the importance of building partnerships with other countries in dealing with threats around the world. In terms of countering Iran, which partnership that the U.S. has in GCC/Middle East region are most important in this regard?

MR. SULLIVAN: What has been interesting about Iran policy over the course of the past three years is just how broad-based the international coalition is that has come together to sharpen the choice for the Iranian regime to impose pressure that sends a clear signal to the Iranian leadership that their choice is either to continue to face this relentless and growing pressure or to come into compliance with their international obligations.

And there is no one partner that can be singled out in this incredibly diverse coalition of actors. You've got the European Union in the just the last 48 hours announcing new, very powerful measures of pressure against Iran. You've got the countries of the GCC making clear that they are working to enforce the UN Security Council resolution and to send a message to Iran that it is not acceptable for Iran to threaten regional peace and stability. You've got countries like Korea and Japan who are playing an active role in this coalition. Then you have the members of the Permanent Five, including Russia and China, who signed on to UN Security Council Resolution 1929 and are part of the group that is sending a clear message to the Iranians that they have to be serious to come to the table and speak about their nuclear program in a constructive way.

And that doesn't even get to all of the other countries around the world throughout Europe, throughout Asia, throughout Latin America and elsewhere, that have played an important role in sending a very clear and broad-based message to the Iranians that it is incumbent upon them to take steps to give confidence to the international community, steps that they simply haven't taken so far.

MS. JENSEN: All right. Well, thank you. That's all the time we have for today. I would like to thank all of you for joining us and all of your amazing questions you put forward. I'm sorry we couldn't get to all of your questions in the 45 minutes we have, but I am assured that Jake will be back.

There will be a full audio and video copy of today's webchat available for download shortly after the conclusion of today's program. And if you'd like to get the latest information from the State Department, you can do so on any of our 10 in-language Twitter feeds that you've seen scrolling across the bottom of your screen today or at our official @StateDept Twitter feed. And if you'd like to continue this conversation, you can do so by using the hashtag #JakeSullivan.

We look forward to doing this again, and have a great day.

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