

America’s New Secretary of State Talks Foreign Policy



Figure 1 Secretary of State John Kerry Speaking at the University of Virginia

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS in Special English. Secretary of State John Kerry made it clear this week that American foreign policy decisions affect the lives of Americans. Mr. Kerry spoke during a visit to the University of Virginia. The school was established by the country’s first Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson.

The visit came at a time when Congress and President Obama are debating federal spending. Secretary Kerry used his speech to call attention to the importance of diplomacy. And he explained why the international affairs budget should not be cut.

Mr. Kerry said foreign policy matters do not just include threats to the United States. He said they include “the products Americans buy, the goods they sell, the jobs they create, and the opportunity we provide for economic growth and vitality.”

“I’m here because our lives as Americans are more intertwined than ever before with the lives of people in parts of the world we’ve never visited. In

the global challenges of diplomacy, development, economic security, and environmental security, you will feel our success or failure just as strongly as those people in those other countries that you'll never meet.”

Secretary Kerry said one study found that most Americans thought the international affairs budget was 25 percent of the national budget. Many of those questioned wanted to reduce foreign affairs spending to 10 percent. He noted that such spending represents, in fact, just over 1 percent of the national budget.

Mr. Kerry praised the State Department and USAID, the United States Agency for International Development. He said their good work is measured not only in the value of the dollar, but in American values. He noted that it is less costly to deploy diplomats today than troops tomorrow.

Secretary Kerry said the State Department and USAID have provided assistance to democracy and human rights programs in several countries.

Mr. Kerry will make his first foreign trip as Secretary of State beginning this Sunday. He plans to visit nine countries in Europe and the Middle East.

He also spoke about globalization and the spread of information. The Arab Spring is a good example of how social media like Facebook and Twitter can influence foreign policies and even change governments.

The political unrest started over two years ago in Tunisia. This week, events made it clear that political reforms and change do not happen overnight. Tunisia's Islamist supported prime minister resigned after failing to form a new government. Hamadi Jebali left office after saying his own Ennahada party had rejected his government plans.

Mr. Jebali announced his desire to form a non-partisan government on February 6th. The announcement came just after opposition leader Chokri Belaid was shot and killed in the capital, Tunis. Large protests followed the shooting. Supporters accused the prime minister of being involved.

On Friday, Interior Minister Ali Larayedh was nominated as Mr. Ennadha's choice for Prime Minister. He will have two weeks to form a government.