

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Promoting Human Rights Worldwide

President Bush marks Human Rights Day, anniversary of Universal Declaration

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Fact Sheet

Promoting Human Rights Worldwide

President Bush Meets With Dissident Bloggers And New Media Users To Commemorate Human Rights Day And The 60th Anniversary Of the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights

"Expanding freedom is more than a moral imperative – it is the only realistic way to protect our people in the long run. ... Governments accountable to their people do not attack each other. Democracies address problems through the political process, instead of blaming outside scapegoats. Young people who can disagree openly with their leaders are less likely to adopt violent ideologies. And nations that commit to freedom for their people will not support extremists – they will join in defeating them."

– President George W. Bush, 6/5/07

Today, President Bush will commemorate Human Rights Day and the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. To honor the day, President Bush is meeting with activists who use Internet blogs and new-media technologies to promote freedom in countries with restricted media environments – six in person and two via videoconference – including individuals from Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, and Venezuela. President Bush will discuss with them the challenges they confront in overcoming censorship.

- Today, Mrs. Laura Bush highlighted Human Rights Day by delivering remarks at the Council of Foreign Relations in New York City. She discussed efforts by the United States to help women in Afghanistan and Burma overcome oppression to secure basic rights.

Defending The Rights Of Independent Journalists And New-Media Users Fighting For Freedom Across The Globe

The Administration has helped users of new media to overcome censorship, report abuses, and advocate for freedom. U.S. international broadcasters funded by the

Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) are overcoming censorship by gathering news from citizen journalists with cell phones, reporting the facts via SMS feeds and targeted e-mails, and encouraging citizens living in repressive regimes to join the information revolution with open discussions on radio and TV call-in shows and blogs. The BBG now offers diverse Internet products in all 60 broadcast languages, ranging from basic text to complex video and audio and live streaming.

- The BBG works with a network of non-governmental organizations to develop anti-web-censorship software and technical tools. These media freedom tools are available free of charge in English, Farsi, Kazakh, Mandarin, and Vietnamese at the websites of BBG's language services which are accessible through www.bbg.gov. The BBG supports broadcasting by radio, television, Internet and other new media by the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks – Radio Sawa and Alhurra Television.

- The Administration has increased funding for the BBG from \$441 million in FY 2001 to more than \$670 million in FY 2008. BBG's commitment to using new media to defend freedom of expression has helped increase the combined audience for all its broadcasts from 100 million to more than 175 million weekly since September 11, 2001.

Advancing The Freedom Agenda

President Bush has made advancing human rights around the world central to his presidency. Under President Bush's Freedom Agenda, the United States has stepped up efforts to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights worldwide. It is in our interest to continue liberty's advance – because we know from history that the advance of freedom is necessary for our security and peace. Some of the Administration's efforts to support this goal include:

- Nearly doubling funding for democracy projects since 2001. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests more than \$1.7 billion in funding for Democracy, Governance, and Human Rights – up from less than \$700 million in 2001. In addition, the FY 2009 Budget requests \$80 million for the National Endowment for Democracy up from \$31 million in 2001.

- Applied tough sanctions on oppressive regimes. Over the past seven years, the Administration has spoken out and enacted tough measures against human rights abuses by tyrannical regimes like those in Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Iran, Sudan, Syria, and Zimbabwe. The Administration has also

spoken candidly about human rights with nations with whom America has good relations, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and China. President Bush has consistently called for the release of all prisoners of conscience worldwide.

- Establishing policies and practices to promote freedom worldwide. In July, the President issued National Security Presidential Directive 58: Institutionalizing the Freedom Agenda to offer a guidepost to future Administrations, setting out many of the policies and practices he has put in place to promote freedom worldwide.

- Shown solidarity with civil society activists: The President has personally met with more than 180 democratic and human rights activists, and independent journalists and their family from more than 35 countries. In 2007, the President awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet of Cuba, in recognition of Dr. Biscet's advocacy of non-violent democratic change in Cuba. Starting last year, the Secretary of State began presenting two awards annually to recognize those striving to advance human dignity:

-- Freedom Defenders Award: This award recognizes a foreign activist or non-governmental organization that has demonstrated courage and an outstanding commitment to advancing liberty in the face of adversity. This year's recipient is Russian journalist Yulia Latynina.

-- Diplomacy For Freedom Award: This award honors the U.S. Ambassador who best advances freedom by working to end tyranny and promote democracy using the full array of political, economic, diplomatic, and other tools. This year's recipient is U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe James McGee.

Gates Discusses Security Challenges Facing Obama

Decision to remain in office reflects bipartisanship in U.S. foreign policy

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington - Days after the November elections, President-elect Barack Obama toured the White House with President Bush, then quietly met with Defense Secretary Robert Gates at the fire station next to the runway of Washington's Reagan National Airport to ask Gates if he would consider staying on the job.

"They pulled the trucks out so that our cars could go in," Gates told reporters December 2 about the confidential meeting.

By accepting Obama's offer, Gates is poised to become the first secretary of defense in U.S. history to continue in office under a new administration, an occurrence unprecedented even when a newly elected president was from the same political party as the outgoing president.

"If a president asks me to help, there's no way I can say no," says Gates.

Historically, the president's relationship with his defense secretary is one of the most important factors in sustaining successful security policy. Even though Gates has said he considers himself philosophically a Republican, he said that he never declared his political affiliation until after leaving Washington in 1993 to serve as president of Texas A&M University. That reticence reflected his belief that domestic political differences should be set aside in conducting foreign policy.

"I felt when I was at CIA, that as a professional intelligence officer, like a military officer, I should be apolitical, and so I didn't register with a party," Gates said.

Secretary Gates joined the CIA in 1966 as an analyst and spent nearly 27 years serving five presidents of both political parties, a career he describes in detail in his 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insiders Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*.

Placing pragmatic solutions above partisan differences in foreign policy is a traditional American ideal many experts also see at play in President-elect Obama's decision to assemble a philosophically diverse national security team — one that crosses party lines with Gates — and inviting Hillary Rodham Clinton, his rival for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, to serve as secretary of state.

"I think the president-elect has made it pretty clear that he wanted a team of people around him who would tell him what they thought and give him their best advice," Gates said. "There will no doubt be differences among the team, and it will be up to the president to make the decisions."

Political and security progress in Iraq, as reflected in the conclusion of a new security agreement between Iraq and the United States, Gates said, has fundamentally changed conditions on the ground and is setting the stage to start reducing U.S. forces in the country — a top priority for Obama's incoming administration.

Under the terms of the U.S.-Iraqi Status of Forces Agreement, U.S.-led coalition forces will redeploy to bases

outside Iraqi towns by June 2009, with a full withdrawal by 2011 — a timetable that Obama would like to complete within 16 months of taking office by April 2010.

“So the question is how do we do this in a responsible way? Nobody wants to put at risk the gains that have been achieved, with so much sacrifice, on the part of our soldiers and the Iraqis,” Gates said. “We just have to work with the commanders and make our best recommendation to the president.”

Helping the people of Afghanistan to secure and rebuild their country is another top priority, says Gates, one that will require intensified training to strengthen Afghan security forces and expanded partnerships with Pakistani authorities who are struggling to confront extremists operating in the border region between the two South Asian nations.

Another high-priority policy challenge will be closing the detainee center at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, which Gates says may require legislative support from Congress.

“The president-elect will be the eighth president I’ve worked for,” Gates said. “All I can say is, I look forward to it.”

Song by Iranian Star Strikes Chord at Obama Victory Celebration

Chance meeting inspired Persian singer Farshid Amin to write “Pray with Me”

By Sonya Weakley
Staff Writer

Washington — When singer-songwriter Farshid Amin stepped off the stage at the Orange County, California, Democratic election night party in Costa Mesa, he heard comments he didn’t expect.

“They didn’t believe I was really Iranian,” he said of some reporters and others who interviewed him. “I answered that question over and over.”

The skepticism may have been in response to his slight British accent, but he believes some may doubt that a person from Iran — or any other country — would have a compelling perspective on American social and political issues.

To Amin, who came to the United States by way of England in 1988, that presumption misses the point of “Pray with

Me,” the song he wrote and sang at the victory party for President-elect Obama: The prayer for peace is universal.

“I am not a political person. It was not about taking sides. Since Obama was talking about change, they thought [the song] was a good fit.”

“Pray with Me” reflects on the personal toll of war but projects optimism that “change will come.” The accompanying video displays the word “change” several times and ends with a series of culturally diverse smiling faces. On some Web sites, the video is labeled “Obama Song.”

Melihat Rafiei, executive director of the Democratic Party of Orange County, an area of more than 3 million people, said the song was perfect for the victory party.

“So many people here had poured their hearts into this campaign for 20 to 22 months, and this [victory] was the change we were hoping for and praying for,” Rafiei said. “That was the message the song exemplified to us.”

Rafiei heard the song after Amin performed it at a private fundraiser in Los Angeles in October. When she booked him for her event, media inquiries went up noticeably. “We had press here from Dubai,” she said.

INADVERTENT INSPIRATION

Amin said he wrote the song about six months before the U.S. presidential election, after a chance meeting on a flight to the United States from the Middle East. “We stopped in Frankfurt [Germany] and picked up an American [military] officer who was a doctor at a hospital in Iraq,” he said.

Comments about sitting next to each other in an exit row led to a deeper conversation. “He took out all these pictures of himself operating on people. It was eye-opening” to see the wounded soldiers, some of them young, he said.

One of the stories that stuck with Amin was about how U.S. medical staff would treat suicide bombers who survived their own attacks. “They would do surgery on someone who just tried to kill them,” he said.

Amin’s song begins with a soldier’s point of view. “The lyrics start as someone writing a letter,” he said, “but it is the story of people at home — so many families are affected.”

He made one point in particular — that getting a gold star is not always a good thing. In the song, a mother expecting

her son for Christmas instead gets the star, symbolizing her son's death. (A gold star lapel button may be awarded to some relatives of soldiers who died in combat in certain conflicts, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.)

PERSIAN POP STAR

Though "Pray with Me" is Amin's first widely known song in English, he is a successful and high-profile Persian pop musician. He has released five Persian albums since 2000 and is working on another.

His first single, "Nastaran," about a broken-hearted lover, was an immediate hit in the Persian market. The lyrics, he said, are "harsh" compared with most Persian pop. It is also louder and "danceable," he said. "It was so different at the time."

Amin was born in Iran, but his family moved to England when he was about 10 years old, he said. He came to the United States specifically to begin a career as a musician after graduating from college with a degree in math.

He joined a relative in Washington and, using the name Fash Amen, became lead singer of a local rock band called Fear of Man. The band was close to a recording contract in the mid-1990s, he said, but the deal fell through, leaving him disappointed and unsure of what to do next.

Until then, he had written and sung only in English, but, at his wife's suggestion, he started writing Persian songs. After the success of "Nastaran," he moved his family to Los Angeles where the U.S. Persian recording industry is based.

He is working on his first album in English, hoping to release it in February 2009. The songs, which draw on his earlier experience in Western hard rock in an "underground" style, comment on universally common themes and ideas, such as the theme of "Pray with Me."

"It is about people," he said. "It is a human issue, not a political one."

United States Committed to Worldwide Cultural Preservation

Cultural heritage honored through U.S. grant support

By Yvette Ridenour

Special Correspondent

Washington — On virtually every continent, treasures from ancient civilizations are being conserved and restored

through a U.S. program dedicated to the preservation of cultural heritage in countries around the globe.

Since 2001, the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) has provided grant support to cultural heritage projects in 120 countries. To date, the Ambassadors Fund — administered by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs — has supported more than 500 projects, totaling more than \$13.4 million, sending a strong message about the importance the United States places on the conservation of the culture of nations from every world region. In 2008, the fund supported projects in 60 countries.

"We look for well-crafted proposals for projects that meet the AFCP funding mandate and project criteria, and also make the case for cultural significance, urgency, sustainability, among other things," said Martin Perschler, AFCP program coordinator. Funded projects have included technical support for the restoration of historic buildings, assessment and conservation of museum collections, archaeological site preservation, documentation to save traditional crafts, improved storage conditions for archives and manuscripts, and documentation of indigenous languages, music and dance.

A recent project supported by the Ambassadors Fund was the preservation of a mosque in Gao, Mali. The project helped support preservation of the remaining fragments of a mosque built in 1324 by Emperor Kankou Moussa, following his pilgrimage to Mecca. Designed by an Andalusian architect, the mosque bears witness to the exchange between the Sudan and the Mediterranean regions. The project included the construction of a protective shelter, the installation of interpretive site information and publication of a brochure on the history of the site.

"One of the most important impacts of this project was to raise local awareness and pride in Malian cultural heritage," said Stephanie Syptak, a U.S. public affairs officer in Mali.

The Ambassadors Fund also supported preservation of traditional courtyards in northern Togo in 2006. "This project supported the preservation and documentation of ancient floor pavements in the north of Togo," said Perschler. "Courtyards of housing compounds were traditionally paved with pottery shards, creating a mosaic. Samples dating to the 14th century were once found in Nigeria, Benin and Togo. Sites in Togo are the only remaining examples of this tradition, and only a few elderly women hold knowledge of this craft."

One fascinating project from 2007 was the collection and cataloguing of 30 traditional Cambodian folk tales, as part of the Prasat Han Chey Conservation and Restoration Project, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The last effort to collect Khmer folk tales took place more than 50 years ago. Most of the current storytellers are more than 90 years old, making the preservation of these fables extremely urgent. Thanks to help from the Ambassadors Fund, the stories will reach a wider audience because they will be published in both English and Khmer.

Two mosques dating from the mid-17th to early 18th centuries on the island of Pemba in Tanzania were restored through a grant from the Ambassadors Fund in 2006. The mosques contain unique features combining Swahili and Persian architecture, and had fallen into disrepair from the harsh climate and lack of maintenance.

An important archaeological project supported by the Ambassadors Fund was the preservation and exhibition of artifacts from the Hepu Temple (circa 200 B.C.-A.D. 200) in China. So far, the Ambassadors Fund has helped support nine projects in China. The Hepu Tombs, from the Han Dynasty, are in Guangxi province. Not only were the artifacts preserved, but the fund helped provide assistance with site protection to prevent looting. Hepu became an urban center in 111 B.C. This ancient port city was a key link on the so-called Silk Road of the Sea, which enabled maritime trade to flourish along the coastal areas of South China, reaching to Vietnam and beyond.

In 2005, the Ambassadors Fund helped restore and preserve precious historic architecture in Turkmenistan. The Ak-Sray-Ding Tower is located in the northern Turkmenistan town of Kunya Urgench and has become an important Sunni Muslim pilgrimage site. Located near the tower is a saints' cemetery, where Turkmen say that God receives their prayers.

According to Turkmen legend, the tower represents the gift of a rich man to his daughter, who died as a young woman. Legend says that the daughter appeared to her father in a dream, asking him to build her a kejebe, or saddle with a canopy, which is traditionally placed atop a bride's camel during Turkmen wedding processions. Her father built the tower, which resembles a kejebe, over her grave.

During the 1950s, however, the Khorezm Expedition inspected the site and determined that it could be the top of a watchtower for a long-buried city. The tower is located in Dashoguz, the northernmost region of Turkmenistan. Although Russian architects included the tower in a listing of unique historical building sites in 1947, archaeologists

never researched the site properly until the Ambassadors Fund offered help. The tower probably dates from A.D. 11-12.

The Ambassadors Fund was established by Congress in 2001 to assist countries in preserving their cultural heritage. U.S. ambassadors from eligible countries submit proposals for an annual competition. Organizations interested in the program may contact the public affairs section of the U.S. Embassy in eligible countries. "Proposals are submitted in the fall, and the awards are granted in the spring," said Perschler.

The AFCP also has helped to reinforce each participating nation's cultural identity and strengthen community solidarity. Through a wide range of cultural preservation projects, the Ambassadors Fund promotes cooperation with other countries, reducing the threat of pillage of irreplaceable cultural artifacts and developing educational initiatives as well as long-term strategies for preserving cultural property.

International Community Focuses on Combating Piracy

Chorus of voices advocate addressing root causes in Somalia

By Jacquelyn S. Porth

Staff Writer

Washington — The United States — along with other nations and international bodies such as the United Nations, the Arab League, the European Union and NATO — is searching for ways to stop piracy of merchant ships, oil supertankers, tourist-packed cruise liners and private yachts off the coast of East Africa.

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports that 40 ships were seized in 2008 and pirates hold hundreds of crew members. The IMB's December 4 Piracy Alert reports some Somali pirates operate closer to Kenya now and use "mother ships" to assist smaller attack boats.

U.S. Navy ships and those from a number of other countries have quarantined a pirate-occupied Ukrainian ship called the MV Faina to prevent its cargo of 30 Soviet-era tanks, weapons and ammunition from reaching African shores while ransom negotiations are under way. An estimated 14 ships now are held by pirates.

In a December 3 communiqué, NATO highlights its commitment to fight the "scourge" of piracy off the Horn of Africa. NATO members' ships — including vessels from Italy, Turkey and the United Kingdom — recently escorted World Food Programme (WFP) relief supplies to Somalia.

NATO began such escorts, officially called Operation Allied Provider, after it became too dangerous for WFP-chartered ships to sail through the Gulf of Aden. The mission has enabled WFP to deliver tons of humanitarian aid.

The U.S. Navy already had ships in the area to deter terrorism and train with African navies. U.S. Vice Admiral William Gortney, who leads the Combined Maritime Forces, said that although pirate attacks pose a threat to global commerce, commercial liners need to realize that navies cannot fully protect the more than 1 million square kilometers of navigable water.

U.S. Navy ships received new help December 8 when the European Union stationed six ships and three aircraft in the region. The EU's Naval Force Somalia (also known as Operation Atalanta) is now escorting WFP shipments.

The EU ships deployed in support of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on piracy. Specifically, on December 2, the UNSC extended the U.S.-sponsored Resolution 1846, which allows navies to combat piracy in Somali waters. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said Resolution 1846 "is the beginning for setting a comprehensive approach for dealing with piracy in that region."

U.S. officials, in addition to efforts in the United Nations, are working bilaterally with various European countries. DiCarlo said it is important for countries engaged in stopping piracy to focus on how to handle captured pirates. She said an existing U.N. convention provides sufficient means to prosecute pirates, but that other legal authority could be considered.

Although less than 1 percent of ships passing through the Gulf of Aden have been upset by pirate actions, specialists predict a worsening problem. For example, Dominick Donald of Aegis Defense, a London-based security and risk management company, told the Heritage Foundation November 24 that the pirates have figured out gaps in naval capabilities.

J. Peter Pham, a James Madison University professor who writes about piracy, told America.gov that attacks are proliferating "because piracy is a crime of opportunity." A weak government in Somalia is unable to restrain pirate gangs, he said, and ship owners are paying huge ransoms.

Pham said an expanded naval presence will not necessarily work. While the various navies have exchanged standard courtesies, he said, they have yet to integrate their actions.

The international organizations are moving toward a more aggressive and coordinated stance. Rules of engagement to guide the EU's naval task force when Operation Atalanta enters pirate-infested waters are being made final. And NATO officials said they would consider additional counterpiracy missions.

SEEKING ONSHORE SOLUTIONS

U.S. Navy Lieutenant Nathan Christensen, who works for the U.S. Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain, said the real solutions to piracy are on land. He told Time magazine that the pirates have to go ashore eventually and that lawlessness in Somalia, which allows the pirates to thrive there, is at the root of the problem and must be treated.

Pham assessed it this way: "Ultimately, an end to the lawlessness at sea will not be seen until the statelessness onshore in Somalia is addressed." However, he advocates mitigating the problem by having ships invest more in security and refuse to pay ransoms. Promoting forceful actions by navies and raising the costs to the pirates will "make their predations less attractive," he said.

While it will take a long-term commitment from the international community, restoring the rule of law is a solution favored by DiCarlo as well. "We need to provide a safe and secure environment [in Somalia] to allow the transitional government to function," she said.

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