

The following is a translation of the VOA TV Persian program "News and Views," which was broadcast via satellite on August 2, 2007 at 1530 UTC.

TRANSLATION BEGINS HERE

[Opening theme song]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

...in Washington, this is Setareh Derakhshesh with tonight's edition of News and Views.

[Intro music]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

- Condoleezza Rice's expressed optimism about the upcoming Middle East peace conference during her trip to the Gaza Strip
- Efforts by Egypt and France to solve the Palestinian problem
- Increasing objection by US lawmakers against a major arms sale to Saudi Arabia and Egypt

[Video clip] [Spoken in English]

[Music ends]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Greetings. This is the Thursday night edition of News and Views coming to you from Washington on August 2, 2007, or the 11<sup>th</sup> of Mordad, 1386. I continue tonight's program with a few more headlines from the newsroom. Investigators from the US Congress have announced that the Department of Defense has sold sensitive military surplus equipment destined for demolition to the public. Hundreds of F-14 spare parts that are used by Iran have been among those items. Iran is the only country that still flies the aging fighter jets. Reports indicate Iran aggressively seeks spare parts to keep the planes in the air.

The US and Great Britain have been passing a newly-drafted resolution around the UN Security Council to expand the role of the UN in Iraq. Iraqi police say a suicide car bombing at a police station north of Baghdad has killed at least 13 people and wounded 15 others.

Iranian state media say Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki will make his second official visit to Tehran next week for talks with Iranian leaders. Iraq has not confirmed the trip.

Following the collapse of a bridge on the main highway of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the US, officials are now searching for victims who may have fallen into the river below.

[Music]

[On-screen graphic: Washington News]

The State Department says the international peace conference proposed by President Bush could play a positive role in the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Condoleezza Rice expressed this view during a press conference after meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian leader, in the West Bank.

The US Secretary of State says in her view Israel and the Palestinians must engage in deeper discussions in all areas of common interest. We go directly to the State Department for a report by Gita Arian. Hi there.

[Gita Arian]

Greetings Ms. Derakhshesh. The US Secretary of State is trying to revive the Middle East peace process. She has asked the warring parties to take advantage of the international peace conference proposed by President Bush.

Ms. Rice met today with Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President, and yesterday with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and other high-level officials in Jerusalem. The Secretary of State's visit to Mr. Abbas is the sign of her support for the Palestinian government which has replaced the Hamas government.

In June, Hamas militants soundly defeated Fatah forces loyal to President Abbas in the Gaza Strip, taking over the territory and dividing the Palestinian territories in two. Following that event, Israel and Western countries condemned Hamas and focused their support on Mr. Abbas's government with headquarters at Ramallah in the West Bank.

Ms. Rice has announced that unless Hamas denounces violence, recognizes the government of Israel, and honors the previously-signed

agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, it cannot be recognized as the legal representative of the Palestinians.

The US Secretary of State today met separately with the newly appointed Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, in Ramallah. She was then introduced to the other ministers. Secretary Rice met with this group of Palestinians in the permanent room of the cabinet. She then met with Mahmoud Abbas who was in a nearby location.

Palestinian officials say that the international peace conference has been the focus of Ms. Rice. These officials have stated that they hope this conference results in substantive gains and not just agreements for future meetings.

Palestinians have been looking for a conference to address the “final status.” But so far Israel has been reluctant to do so, and the Israeli Prime Minister has only met with Mahmoud Abbas to discuss the generalities of creation of a Palestinian state.

Palestinian officials say that they will ask Secretary Rice to have Israel withdraw its forces out of West Bank cities and hand over the security of those areas to a Palestinian security force. In previous discussions, Abbas and Olmert had agreed on this point in principle. But Israel is afraid that after withdrawal militants’ attacks would resume.

Today the US Secretary of State in a press conference after meeting with Mr. Abbas said Ehud Olmert, Israeli Prime Minister, had told her that he was ready to discuss fundamental issues that could lead to the creation of a Palestinian state.

[Video clip of Secretary Rice]

[Gita Arian]

Secretary Rice emphasized that Israel is in agreement with the US that the international peace conference proposed by President Bush has to be a substantive meeting with the creation of two independent states as its goal. The head of the Palestinian Authority also said that the fundamental issues to discuss with Israel are clear. He believes that the Roadmap has two basic fundamentals: President Bush’s plan, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

He added, "The focus of the discussions will be the Roadmap which is also being supported by the UN." Meanwhile the Hamas spokesman criticized the meeting between Secretary Rice and Mahmoud Abbas.

[Video clip]

[Gita Arian]

He said, "The US Secretary of State has come to the region in order to take advantage of the division between the Palestinians." He is also surprised at Mahmoud Abbas for his support of isolating Hamas. Secretary Rice had previously met in Jerusalem with high-ranking Israeli officials. Tzipi Livni, Secretary Rice's Israeli counterpart, has said that her country is seeking a quick resolution of the crisis in the West Bank.

[Video clip]

Ms. Livni said, "Israel will not squander the opportunity to sit down to talk with Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinians." Israeli officials say Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, has told Secretary Rice that Hamas should not be allowed to participate in this process. As mentioned previously, Secretary Rice met with both Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, and Shimon Peres, President of Israel. Mr. Peres praised the US effort and said that such a policy would bring the two sides closer together and move the Middle East peace negotiations forward.

Secretary Rice has stated the goal of her trip has been consultation with allies such as Israel, the Palestinians, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region, Egypt, and Jordan. This is to make sure that all participating countries are going to be clear about the objectives of the international peace conference.

I would like to add that Secretary Rice, during her meeting with Mr. Abbas, signed an \$80 million arms aid package aimed at strengthening the security forces loyal to the Palestinian Authority.

Back to you, Ms. Derakhshesh.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Have the next steps been decided yet? Will Secretary Rice meet with the Israeli and Palestinian officials again?

[Gita Arian]

Yes, last week, the Prime Minister of Israel had proposed both Israeli and Palestinian sides sign an Agreement of Principles between them. Mr. Abbas had left that proposal unanswered up to this date, but he announced today that he would be willing to consider this proposal. This Agreement is supposed to identify the boundaries of a Palestinian state. But final borders and the future of Palestinian refugees will be decided at a later stage.

According to the latest news, Mr. Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas are supposed to meet next week and discuss this matter. Regarding Secretary Rice I must say there is a good chance that she will return to the region before the conference in the fall.  
Back to you, Ms. Derakhshesh.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Thank you to Gita Arian for her report from the US State Department in Washington, DC.

Meanwhile Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in his visit to France announced that finding a solution to the Palestinian problem was vital and commitment to its resolution should remain unremitting. Mr. Mubarak in his visit met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy. According to an official French spokesperson, leaders of the two countries discussed Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Hosni Mubarak said the Palestinian problem was the highest item on the agenda. Since mid-June, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, discussions about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians have increased. Mahmoud Abbas has created an independent government on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Western powers and their Arab allies have increased their support for Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate leader of Fatah.

Mr. Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union was kept informed of these discussions too. The goal of the Mediterranean Union project is to bring together the countries around the Mediterranean Sea to find solutions to such issues as illegal immigration and the environment through discussion and negotiation.

[Music]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Now continuing with news from around the world.

While Seoul and Washington have ruled out using force to release the remaining South Korean hostages, a delegation of South Korean lawmakers is in Washington to meet with American officials.

Meanwhile an independent medical team of male and female doctors in Kabul that have prepared to meet with the hostages have traveled to Ghazni province. This is the area where 23 South Korean men and women who had traveled to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes have been taken hostage.

Nader Vakili has prepared this report.

[Start video clip]

[Nader Vakili]

Today several South Korean lawmakers left Seoul for Washington to meet with US officials to discuss the release of the Korean hostages in Afghanistan. This mission by South Korean diplomats is aimed at encouraging Washington to reconsider its policy of non-negotiation with the Taliban and make an exception.

The Taliban abducted 23 South Korean citizens on their way from Kabul to Kandahar on the 19<sup>th</sup> of last month, and they have so far killed two of them. Taliban militants have threatened to kill the hostages one by one if some of their members are not released. Cheon Ho-seon, a Labor Party representative [sic] in the Korean parliament who is in opposition to the ruling party, before leaving Seoul said:

[Cheon Ho-seon video clip]

[Nader Vakili]

“We sincerely request that the US take up meaningful measures to resolve this crisis.” Chang Young-dal, a representative from the ruling party in the South Korean parliament, said, “The delegation to Washington consists of four [sic] lawmakers who, in the spirit of nonpartisanship, each belong to one of the main political parties in South Korea.”

Kim Hee-jung, another member of this political party, said he and his delegation are hoping that their efforts will secure the release of the hostages.

[Video clip of Kim Hee-jung]

[Nader Vakili]

“We all have a common goal. Without a doubt, our visit to Washington will help with the release of the hostages.”

Meanwhile, previous political efforts such as the dispatch of a special envoy by the South Korean President to Kabul and telephone negotiation between Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and Afghan President Hamid Karzai have not produced any tangible results.

Previously and in the beginning of the year, when the Afghan government traded several Taliban prisoners for the release of an Italian civilian, Kabul faced severe criticism by the US and several other governments.

Seoul confirmed the other day that its options in trying to convince Kabul are limited, and only Washington can persuade or encourage the Afghan government to help with the release of the hostages.

In the meantime, memorial services for Shim Sung-Min, the second hostage killed by the Taliban, were held in Seoul. Qari Yousef Ahmadi, the alleged Taliban spokesman, said, “The Taliban leadership decided to kill the second hostage when the Afghan government did not provide a clear response to their demands.”

Additionally, nearly 50 South Korean students and anti-American activists there held a demonstration in front of the US Embassy in Seoul and demanded the US arrange for the release of the remaining hostages. The demonstrators also condemned any use of force to release the hostages.

[End video clip]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

The annual security meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) emphasizing the importance of the North Korean nuclear program, terrorism, and the need to cultivate trust among the member nations and reduction in differences among them concluded today.

I would like to draw your attention to the following report about this subject.

[Female voice]

During the annual security meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) the subjects that were discussed focused on the need for member nations to unite on such issues as climate change, shortage of energy sources, and the dangers of nuclear proliferation.

The ASEAN regional conference is held each year and is comprised of its 10 main member nations, along with representatives from 27 others, including China, Australia, Japan, the European Union, Russia, and the two Koreas.

Foreign ministers present at the conference, during their preliminary meetings this week, for the most part focused on the nuclear problem with North Korea. They hope that by closing down that country's main nuclear reactor last month, the road will be paved for even more unified successes in member nations' areas of interest.

The Southeast Asia region has always faced the threat of terrorism and separatist movements in the Philippines. Members and participants including Australia signed an agreement on closer cross-border cooperation on various matters such as terrorism. This is because both sides have been the target of terrorist attacks by separatist groups related to al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, Song Min-soon, South Korean Foreign Minister, took advantage of the gathering to thank his colleagues for the efforts their countries demonstrated in helping with the release of the South Korean hostages in Afghanistan.

US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, representing US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in this gathering, earlier said, "From the US point of view, having relations with ASEAN in dealing with the Middle East plays a sensitive role." Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer declared his country's support for South Korea in its efforts to find a solution to the crisis of its 21 hostages in Afghanistan.

In that regard, he said:

[Video clip of Alexander Downer]



[Female voice – interpreting]

“I support the South Korean government in the crisis of abduction of its citizens in Afghanistan. I have told the Foreign Ministers of South Korea and Australia that we will spare no effort to help them in this crisis.”

[Female voice]

The ASEAN conference concluded by a ceremony in which Foreign Affairs Secretary of the Philippines Alberto Romulo handed off next meeting’s agenda to Singapore’s Foreign Minister George Yeo. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (formerly Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are the main members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Meanwhile, during the ASEAN conference hundreds of demonstrators carrying signs condemning US policies in the Middle East marched towards the location of the conference at the Philippines International Convention Center.

[Music]

[Graphic reads: News From Congress]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

As the time nears for the Bush Administration to submit its proposal for a \$33 billion advanced weapons sale to Saudi Arabia, five Persian Gulf emirates, and Egypt, the number of critics of this plan is increasing in the US Congress.

We now go directly to the US Congress where Siamak Dehghanpour has conducted an exclusive interview with Jerrold Nadler who is one of the Democratic leaders.

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Greetings to you Ms. Derakhshesh. Mr. Nadler is a powerful Democrat member of the Congress from New York. He is the one who, after hearing the news about the arms sales to Saudi Arabia, participated in a demonstration in front of the Saudi embassy pledging to pass a bill against the sale to that country.

Mr. Nadler told VOA that he was aware that President Bush would veto such a bill, but he hoped that the large majority of lawmakers voting for the bill would override the President's veto.

[Video clip of Mr. Nadler]

Jerrold Nadler, Democratic member of the House of Representatives, says "President Bush's Republican supporters will wait for the general opposition against the weapons sale plan to Saudi Arabia and Egypt which is to come up in September. They will not voluntarily oppose that plan."

However, Mike Ferguson, one of the Republicans supporting the bill, has said the number of Republican opponents is not low. From the time the administration officially presents the plan of weapons sale to Saudi Arabia and Egypt to Congress, Congress then has 30 days to trigger a review and pass a Joint Resolution of Disapproval. Passage of the bill only requires a majority in the House and the Senate.

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrold Nadler says, "If President Bush vetoes the bipartisan resolution—and I think he will—then we will need two-thirds of votes in Congress to override the veto."

On April 8, 1986, Ronald Reagan proposed a similar plan to sell arms to Saudi Arabia. That plan included thousands of Sidewinder and Stinger missiles. Congress was against the sale of the missiles and managed to pass a disapproval bill with an absolute majority. President Reagan vetoed the resolution. To resolve the issue, the sale of Stingers was dropped from the plan in order to let Congress pass the plan.

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrold Nadler believes that history could repeat itself. He says, "We are putting \$20 billion worth of advanced weaponry in the hands of the Saudis. Then in order to calm the concerns of Israel, we are giving Israel \$30 billion worth of arms in order to maintain the military balance in the region. The

only result of this approach is that if war breaks out in that region, there will be more people killed on both sides.”

The Bush Administration has emphasized that the goal is to block Iran’s hegemony in the region.

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrold Nadler says, “Who really believes that if there were a major military clash, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and Qatar would stand up to Iran?”

He says, “We must learn from history. We need to remember that the advanced arms we provided the Shah of Iran in the ‘70s fell into the hands of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Can anyone give assurance that the advanced arms we are giving the Saudis will not fall into the hands of terrorists or a terrorist regime? Is Saudi Arabia the most stable regime in the world?”

The Islamic Republic has described the goal of this arms sale to be creating fear in the region. Jerrold Nadler says, “Certainly it is the administration’s goal to curb the Iranian influence, but I do not believe it will work.”

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

As he puts it, “Iraq was always a major balance of power to Iran regardless of what regime was running it. And unfortunately the United States eliminated that balance of power. Now the Bush Administration is planning to re-establish that balance of power by selling arms to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But it will not succeed.”

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrold Nadler believes that similar arms sales to Iran by Russia and China will start a proxy arms race in that region similar to the Cold War era.

Jerrold Nadler says, “Several years ago I proposed a bill to use the money used to sell arms to Egypt and build schools and agricultural centers in that country instead.”

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrod Nadler says, "The other thing is that the danger to the regime in Saudi Arabia, the danger to the regime in Egypt, is not that Libya is going to attack them or that Iran is going to attack them. The danger is internal subversion. And F-15s are not very helpful with internal subversion."

Jerrod Nadler is one of the sponsors of the bill to strengthen sanctions against Iran, which was passed unanimously in the House of Representatives. He considers heavy economic sanctions to be an effective tool in restraining the political desires of the Islamic regime. Although he calls Ahmadinejad a psychopath, he does not see the characteristics of a dictator in him.

Expressing his admiration of the Iranian people, he hopes that through internal dissension a new regime can take hold which will serve the Iranian people instead of escalating conflicts with other countries of the world.

[Video clip]

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Jerrod Nadler believes that US economic and educational aid to the countries of that region can be a stabilizing factor by eradicating illiteracy and poverty in the Middle East. He has no objection to selling defensive weapons. He objects to the sale of satellite-guided bombs.

Generally there is a negative feeling in Congress towards the role of Saudi Arabia in the war against terrorism, and there have been reports on the subject that lawmakers referred to during their argument. One of these, as Mr. Nadler mentioned, is that 40% of terrorists cross into Iraq from Saudi Arabia.

By the time this arms sale plan is presented to Congress in September, it will have turned into a controversial subject to yet again highlight the division between Congress and the White House. This will also coincide with the mid-September report by the Pentagon on the status of Iraq which will result in increasing pressure on the White House.

Back to you Ms. Derakhshesh.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

You brought up the Iraq analysis report. Before the start of its summer recess, Congress is planning to discuss a bill about Iraq within the review of annual budget of the Defense Department. Is this what you are hearing too?

[Siamak Dehghanpour]

Yes, that is actually going to begin this evening. After discussing internal issues, the bill is going to address the plan to bring back home those soldiers who are serving in battle zones. That could negatively impact the number of soldiers serving in Iraq today and put limits on the size of that force. It may not be easy to maintain the same number of troops in Iraq for the coming months.

Although the Democrats were planning to introduce other bills during the time left before summer vacation, they decided not to give Republicans enough time to find ways to oppose the plan for troop reduction and to escape the increasing anti-war pressure from their constituents.

They want Republicans to remain under pressure so the Democrats can introduce legislation to draw down the number of troops after the summer recess is over, and when the mid-September report on Iraq is due to come out.

As I am speaking to you, in the Senate Armed Services Committee, Pentagon officials including Mr. Eric Edelman, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for the Department of Defense, are attending a private hearing. The goal of this meeting is to review a plan by Congress to draw down the number of troops in Iraq, or to move them to other countries in the region.

Back to you Ms. Derakhshesh.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

With thanks to Siamak Dehghanpour reporting from the United States Congress.

[Music]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

One of the al-Qaeda commanders who calls himself Abu Yahya al-Libi and has fled an American prison, in his recent video has asked for the people of

Pakistan to overthrow General Pervez Musharraf in revenge for the death of Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the pro-Taliban cleric, and for the attack on the Red Mosque in Islamabad.

Abu Yahya in his 21-minute tape which was distributed on Tuesday, addressed the people of Pakistan saying, "For what God has asked you to do you must rise."

In 2005, Abu Yahya fled the prison at Bagram Airport north of Kabul. According to both American and Afghan terrorism experts, he now lives in one of the terrorist camps in eastern Afghanistan training suicide bombers. His video showed pictures of Pervez Musharraf and Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the cleric who was killed. Ghazi, the Pakistani clergyman, along with 102 others, was killed during the attack by Pakistani security forces on the Red Mosque. Since the end of the Red Mosque crisis, Pakistani Islamists have held several demonstrations, and attacks against the army by militants in the tribal areas have increased considerably.

This video tape was broadcast from an Islamic website where al-Qaeda and other militant groups broadcast their messages. The authenticity of the tape has not been verified yet.

In other news, Pakistani security forces caught and killed an Islamic militant in Punjab who was trying to penetrate and blow up a police training station. During the fight with the suspect, one police officer was also killed. Officials say that the suspect was wearing a vest full of explosives but was unable to detonate it during the fight.

In other news, Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama said the US would be willing to send US troops into Pakistan to hunt down terrorists without permission from the government of Pakistan. Senator Obama made the comments the other day in a foreign policy speech in Washington describing what he would do if he became President.

[Video clip]

[Male voice]

Democratic Senator Barack Obama says, "As President, I will work with our friends and our allies. But I will not outsource our diplomacy in Tehran to the Europeans." Nor will he do so when it comes to Pyongyang and China.

In describing his policies, Mr. Obama said that he would dispatch US forces to capture al-Qaeda terrorists in the mountainous regions of northwest Pakistan.

[Video clip]

[Male voice]

“There are terrorists in those mountains who murdered 3,000 Americans. They are plotting to strike again.”

The Democratic Senator adds, “The US committed an enormous mistake in 2005 which was not to target the meeting of al-Qaeda leadership.” This refers to the news that the US, in order not to anger Pakistan, refrained from attacking that gathering from the air.

The other day at the White House, in response to Senator Obama’s comments, presidential spokesman Tony Snow said:

[Video clip]

[Male voice]

“We think that our approach to Pakistan is one that not only respects the sovereignty of Pakistan, as a sovereign government, but is also designed to work in a way where we are working in cooperation with the local government.” The White House spokesman adds, “Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is doing his best in fighting al-Qaeda militants and the Taliban. The US is committed to help him in this struggle.”

Obama's foreign policy speech came one week after a [heated] back and forth public debate with his main rival, Senator Hillary Clinton, about the use of diplomacy to deal with US adversaries abroad. Clinton said Obama was irresponsible and naïve to offer to meet with leaders of countries hostile to the US like Iran, Cuba, and North Korea without preconditions. Obama said President Bush has confused the US mission against terrorists by focusing too much on the war in Iraq and plunging the US into the middle of a civil war. Senator Obama says that as US President he will put the return of US forces from Iraq at the top of his priority list.

On the other hand Joseph Biden, another Democratic presidential candidate, without ruling out following al-Qaeda terrorists into Pakistan, said:

[Video clip]

[Male voice]

“The question of how to deal with it is not to announce it; to do it.” The latest plans offered by the Bush Administration talk about the possibility of attacking inside Pakistan if need be. However, analysts believe that such an attack could result in destabilization of Pervez Musharraf’s government. Daniel Marki, one of the experts with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called Mr. Obama’s comments undiplomatic. He says:

[Video clip]

[Male voice]

“This was not a diplomatic speech. This was not a speech written with Pakistani citizens in mind.”

In the latest national poll, Clinton has extended her lead over Obama for the Democratic party's presidential nomination. The Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll found Clinton leading Obama by a margin of 43 to 22 percent.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

This is News and Views coming to you from Washington, DC. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon traveled to Haiti yesterday for an official visit to review the performance of the 8,800-person UN peacekeeping mission there which has helped with relative peace there. This trip is taking place when the UN is preparing to review an extension of the peacekeeping force there in the month of October. It is believed that Mr. Ban is going to request that the UN assign a special force to protect Haiti’s borders to prevent smuggling of guns and drugs.

The UN sent peacekeepers to Haiti in 2004 after a revolt toppled former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Haiti's President Rene Preval welcomed Mr. Ban. This is the first trip by Mr. Ban to Haiti since becoming the UN Secretary-General. The trip is taking place as the UN is changing the role of the military peacekeeping force there to a police role. This is a step that officials believe is necessary to rebuild and recover that poverty-stricken country. The peacekeeping force presently provides over 85% of the security needs in the country. However, the government is trying to eventually take over the security role for the country completely.



The National Police Academy of Haiti has begun training hundreds of new cadets with the goal of producing over 6,000 police officers. Haiti, after a century of colonial rule and 29 years of the Duvalier family's dictatorship, is still facing various difficulties. Efforts to create a capable police force have been neutralized by disruptions caused by Duvalier's supporters and the officers who are still faithful to Aristide.

Aid groups also say that help to the impoverished areas of Port-Au-Prince has just now begun due to logistical obstacles and red tape. Preval, who became Haiti's President in 2006, allowed the peacekeeping forces to be stationed there. He also told armed groups to either disarm or be prepared to be killed. In order to wipe out these groups, he had dozens of armed fighters arrested or killed.

In other news, after resisting the presence of UN peacekeepers in his country for months, Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir finally welcomed the recent UN resolution to send them there. He said that the resolution had been prepared with the independence and sovereignty of Sudan in mind. While welcoming these comments, the aid organization and humanitarian groups believe that the Sudanese people still need protection till the peacekeeping force is stationed in that country. They demanded an immediate cease-fire be announced in the region. Here is a report of these recent developments:

[Male voice]

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir, after having rejected the presence of UN peacekeeping forces in this country, finally last June accepted to allow a force of African Union and UN peacekeepers enter the country to stop the violence and war in Darfur. Following the Sudanese President's agreement, the UN, after four years of war, 200,000 killed and over two million refugees, finally on Tuesday passed a resolution to send a UN force of 26,000 peacekeepers to be stationed in the Darfur region of Sudan. Sudan's President hailed the UN resolution for a Darfur mission as a diplomatic victory, saying that he believed the resolution was prepared with the independence and sovereignty of Sudan in mind. In that regard, Lam Akol Ajawin, Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, said, "We agree with the principles of this resolution and will sincerely try to implement them." Political experts believe acceptance of this resolution is a new phase for the people of this region. The UN Security Council had passed a previous resolution last August to send peacekeepers to Darfur, but Khartoum

declared it to be another attempt to exploit that country. However, Sudan has welcomed the present resolution which includes military warnings and possibility of economic sanctions.

Omer Siddig, Sudan's ambassador to the UK, said in London, "Sudan's demands and expectations have been taken into consideration, and threats and sensational statements have been taken out of the resolution." International humanitarian and charity institutions in Darfur which are helping over 2,000,000 Sudanese refugees, while welcoming this latest resolution, said that the people of Sudan still need protection and called for an immediate cease-fire in that region.

[Promo clip]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Now I would like to draw your attention to some news about Iran. Majid and Hossein Kavousi[-Far], who had confessed to the murder of Tehran magistrate Judge Hassan Moqaddas, were publicly hanged in Tehran.

One of the two had escaped to the United Arab Emirates after murdering the judge and sought political asylum at the US Embassy there. However, the embassy staff turned him in to the local police and then to the Interpol and he was returned to Iran.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Circuit Revolutionary Court in Iran has sentenced Bahman Ahmadi-Amui, an Iranian journalist, to six months in prison. Faride Ghirat, his attorney, believes this is a suspended judgment as her client has not been officially informed of it. Mr. Amui was arrested on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Khordad [June 12] of last year while covering the demonstration against legal discrimination against women held at the 7<sup>th</sup> of Tir Square. He was then sent to Evin prison but was released after a week.

He was then charged with activities against national security, anti-establishment promotion, conspiracy and participation in an illegal gathering, and disturbing the peace. According to his attorney, Mr. Amui was convicted of anti-establishment activities and was acquitted of the remaining charges. His attorney said that she would appeal the ruling.

The Iranian Writers Association has published a statement regarding the recent executions. The statement says:

“There has recently been much news of torture and execution, imprisonment and stoning, and arrest and persecution. The latest news, as of the release of this statement, is the death sentence for two newspaper reporters and social activists, Adnan Hassanpour and Abdolvahed (Hiva) Botimar.”

“Should the result of speech, literature, and poetry in our country be execution? How can people be sentenced to death under the accusation of anti-regime activities when their only crime has been expression of their views? We warn that there is nothing more damaging to the existence of the nation than elimination of the popular forces of freedom and progress.” The Iranian Writers Association has called for cancellation of all such death sentences specially those issued against Adnan Hassanpour and Abdolvahed (Hiva) Botimar.

In other news, the Bahá'í International Community reports additional incidents of discrimination against the education of Bahá'í students in Iran. For further information, we now go to New York for a report by our international affairs correspondent Nazi Biglari. Greetings.

[Nazi Biglari]

Hi Setareh. The Bahá'í International Community, in a statement a copy of which was sent to the Voice of America (VOA), reports that the entrance application for the National Scholastic Aptitude Exam of Iran has been prepared in such a way that it makes Bahá'í students deny their beliefs. Diane Alai, the Bahá'í International Community's representative to the UN in Geneva, talks about this subject during a telephone call from Geneva.

[Diane Alai]

The Bahá'í International Community has received a document recently about the application form for higher institutes of technology and vocation. The section on the application which deals with religion of the applicant has been set up in a peculiar way. It instructs applicants to write down if they are Jewish, Zoroastrian, or Christian. It mandates that if nothing is written down it would mean the applicant must have been Muslim.

Therefore, there is not way for Bahá'í students to apply for the exam. As you may recall, several years ago, the old National Exam had a column for

religion on its application. Again, it was not possible for Bahá'í students to sit for that exam. Later the testing organization changed that so Bahá'í students were able to participate in the exam.

[Nazi Biglari]

Diane Alai, the Bahá'í International Community's UN representative in Geneva also told the VOA that over 200 Bahá'í students who last year had passed the exam and entered universities in Iran were gradually expelled later. According to the office of the Bahá'í International Community's representatives to the UN, of the 200 who were accepted to Iranian universities, 128 were expelled. They were openly told that they were being barred for being Bahá'í.

Bani Dugal, the principal representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations in New York, in a statement has said that such a denial of access to education violates the internationally established right to education, to which the government of Iran has agreed, and reflects yet another facet of Iran's continuing persecution of its Bahá'í community. Human Rights Watch reports the total number of Bahá'ís around the world to be around six million. Of this number, between 300 and 350 thousand live in Iran, which comprises the largest number of Bahá'ís in a single country.

Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, had visited Iran in 1995, and met with Iranian officials. He reported then that Iranian officials had told him that as far as they were concerned, Bahá'ís were considered a political sect who were historically related to the Shah of Iran, and were therefore considered anti-revolutionary.

Human Rights Watch in its reports has also described government-sponsored discrimination against other Iranian minorities such as Azeris, Baluchis, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and religious minorities. Iran is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International, with headquarters in London, has reported that 65 Bahá'ís were arrested in 2006, and the followers of that faith are not permitted to exercise their religious ceremonies in public.

According to reports by Human Rights Watch and the Bahá'í International Community, since October 2005 Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei has ordered governmental organizations, all internal security forces and the Ministry of Intelligence to be placed at all activities of the Bahá'í community in Iran.

Back to you Setareh.

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Thank you, Nazi Biglari, for your live report from New York.

The account of charges against Adnan Hassanpour, the Kurdish reporter sentenced to death, depicted through his attorney Saleh Nikbakht, has created strong reactions among various human rights organizations.

Mr. Nikbakht, who has also undertaken the defense for Hiva Botimar, another Kurdish advocate, claims that neither of his clients was tried and sentenced to death because of his press-related activities. The attorney for these two Kurdish reporters emphasizes that his clients are not reporters per se. Azad Rostami, the Managing Director of the Kurdish Writers Association of Iran and a member of the group to save the lives of Adnan and Hiva, in an interview with the VOA has called all the charges against Adnan Hassanpour, who is a member of the Kurdish Writers Society of Iran, and his so-called confessions to be baseless.

[Azad Rostami]

In our view, Mr. Hassanpour is a newspaper reporter, and the accusations against him are all unfounded. These are the sort of nonsense that all reporters and independent thinkers have been accused of for the past 25 years. However, in this specific case where his defense attorney suddenly changes his position and becomes a member of the public prosecutor's team requires a great deal more analysis and inspection.

We believe that the first angle here is that the defense attorney wants to appear to be a legal scholar saying that the accusations are justified and the defendant has already confessed to those charges. He actually claims that Mr. Hassanpour himself has acknowledged all of this during their conversation.

The claim about political parties and connection with the US Embassy, even if these claims happen to be true, what we want is a free court of law where these claims can be examined before the public opinion. We believe that taking down such confessions orally or in written format cannot have any credibility due to similar fabrications previously aimed at dissidents in Kurdistan.

[Music]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

We now move to our next topic and interview.

Dr. Jasser of the [American] Islamic Forum for Democracy in New York in an interview with Ladan Yazdian has discussed secularism, separation of church and state, and the subject of Hijab.

[Ladan Yazdian]

Zuhdi Jasser, a US Navy medical doctor whose ancestors fled persecution at the hands of political figures of Syria in the 1960s and emigrated to the US, after many years of service in the Navy, founded the American [Islamic] Forum for Democracy in 2002.

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser says, “We believe as American Muslims that Islamists or those who seek to put into place Islamic government or Islamic states are in fact hijacking our faith.” I asked this Syrian-born medical doctor about secularism and separation of church and state.

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser says, “The question of secularism is not anti-religion. It is a question of not having theologians or the people who are experts in religion also write law for society. According to the Koran, every person is in charge of his own affairs, and God has not created everyone a Muslim. Therefore, government should not have any involvement in people’s relationship with their God. Otherwise, the government will replace God, and we do not worship governments. Governments must serve as executive forces to provide protection and implement human rights. If not, what is going to be the fate of non-Muslims in the society?”

According to Dr. Jasser, in Islam *Imam* stands for “teacher,” not “politician.” Therefore, if we want to have a true Islamic society, religion and politics must be kept separate.

[Video clip]

[Spoken in English] “So if you really want an Islamic society, I believe you need to get Islam out of the government. Because the most free [*sic*] society where I can practice my faith is where you separate religion and politics.”

[Ladan Yazdian]

I asked this Syrian-born Muslim, as we witness a new cycle of violence in the world, what is the reason for Islamic leaders’ lack of outright condemnation of terrorism?

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser says, “As far as the condemnation of terrorism is concerned, it is interesting. I think in some ways there has been a lot of denial. But I must mention that the enigma of terrorism, along with its inner wickedness of killing civilians and women and children, is a barbaric manifestation derived from a fundamentalist version of Islam. The source of terrorism is from those who have hijacked my faith for their own personal gain.”

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser states, “Terrorism is a new phenomenon. Islamic history did not have this. It has revealed itself only in the past 20 or 30 years. The way to confront terrorists is not merely to fight al-Qaeda or Hezbollah or the Islamic Jihad or the Jama al-Islamiyah. On the contrary, we must let the world know that some have taken advantage of our faith for their personal gain, and we must take Islam out of their hands. We must act responsibly in doing so.”

I tell Dr. Jasser that in the past few months we have witnessed unprecedented movements in Iran. Iranian women are demanding complete equality of their legal rights with men. Additionally, in recent days we have witnessed a crackdown by the Iranian government on women’s apparel and even men’s. As a Muslim, how do you feel about that?

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser says, “I do not believe the government can interfere in such matters. This is a personal choice. My own wife wears covered attire, but no one forces her to do so. Once that decision is not hers, it is not an Islamic belief. It becomes a forced, robotic function that the government makes her perform.

[Video clip]

[Ladan Yazdian]

Dr. Jasser adds, “The Islamic Prophet has said there should be *lah ikraha fid'deen* [spoken in Arabic]—there is no compulsion in religion.” According to Dr. Jasser, “In Islam people should not even be forced to have any faith, let alone forcing them to wear special clothing. Islam is a religion of freedom, therefore, in my view, the onslaught by the Islamic Republic government on people’s attire is a sign of a larger illness showing that they do not have faith in people.”

“They look at people as sinners. I believe that the Iranian regime is fearful, and that is why it resorts to such acts. The fact that my wife wears covered attire in the open US society is more Islamic than having to do it by force. Our capacity as Muslims depends on the liberties that our country affords us. Freedom is the most important part of our lives, in order to be able to exercise our religion. “

[Music]

[Onscreen graphic reads: World of Commerce]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas monopoly, has announced that starting Friday it will cut off gas exports to Belarus. Gazprom is the world’s largest producer and exporter of natural gas and is owned by the Russian government. According to the company spokesperson, Gazprom says Belarus has failed to make full payments for previous shipments.

[Male voice]

Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas monopoly, is the largest producer and exporter of natural gas in the world. With over 16 percent of all the natural gas reserves in the world, it plays a majority role in supplying Europe with



natural gas. The company has announced that it will cut off natural gas exports to Belarus.

Vladimir Putin's decision to establish the company in order to increase Russia's wealth has brought in over \$30 billion to that country so far. In January of this year Gazprom notified the government of Belarus of its intent to increase the price of natural gas from \$47 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters. That caused the government of Belarus to request a loan in the amount of \$1.5 billion with a lower rate than offered on the market. However, this request was not accepted by Russian banks. As a result, Belarus was not successful in meeting its financial obligations. Consequently a spokesperson of Gazprom announced that the company would cut off its natural gas exports worth 21 million cubic meters to Belarus. This amount comprises 46% of the country's total natural gas consumption.

On Monday in Minsk, the Prime Minister of Belarus, Sergei Sidorsky, said that he would travel to Moscow in order to obtain the loan. The people of Belarus are dependent on natural gas from Russia for their daily life. They are worried about the rapid natural gas price increase. A Belarusian resident says, "We cannot live without natural gas."

In January of this year, the government of Belarus sold half of its pipelines to Gazprom for \$2.5 billion in order to be able to pay its natural gas bill. The Russian natural gas crisis has begun to worry other European countries that use Russian natural gas. It was last year when the same company, in order to increase the price of its natural gas exports, cut off the flow of its natural gas to Ukraine and other countries of western Europe. European countries, in order to stop their dependence on Russian natural gas, are looking to find alternative sources of this substance in the world.

[Music]

[VOA promo video clip]

[Host Setareh Derakhshesh]

We continue News and Views with:

The Taliban's desire to negotiate directly with South Korea over the release of that country's hostages in Afghanistan;

[Music]

Robert Gates' visit of American military bases in Kuwait.

[Music]

And the investigation to discover the causes of the bridge collapse in Minnesota.

TRANSLATION ENDS HERE