

August 2007

INTERNATIONAL

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Aug. 18—Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah party fires dozens of government employees affiliated with the militant group Hamas. The firings eliminate 1 of the last traces of a Fatah-Hamas power-sharing agreement.

AFGHANISTAN

Aug. 29—After negotiations with the South Korean government, the Taliban begin releasing 19 South Korean hostages that the militant group has held since the middle of July. South Korea pledges to follow through on its existing plan to remove its 200 troops from Afghanistan, and also to prevent its citizens from carrying out Christian missionary work in the country. Previously, 2 hostages were killed and 2 released.

CANADA

Aug. 10—The government announces plans to build 2 new military bases in the country's far north. The aim is to strengthen Canada's claims to fuel and mineral deposits in the arctic region, as well as its claims to the Northwest Passage, which may open up to ship travel as climate change causes ice to melt.

CHINA

Aug. 14—Toymaker Mattel, Inc., recalls 18 million Chinese-made toys, some because they are coated in lead paint but most because they contain magnets that could be harmful if swallowed.

Aug. 15—Officials announce that beginning Sept. 1, every shipment of food for export will be checked for quality.

IRAQ

Aug. 1—Members of the country's largest Sunni political bloc resign from the cabinet of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, demanding militias be disbanded, prisoners held without charges be released, and Sunni leaders be more closely involved in decision-making on security matters. The desertions are a blow to Maliki's claims that his is a unity government.

Aug. 6—Five members of a secular coalition suspend their participation in cabinet proceedings. Nearly half the cabinet has now fully or partially withdrawn.

Aug. 14—Truck bombs explode in 2 towns near the Syrian border. Deaths according to some reports exceed 500 and injuries 1,500. Most of the victims are Yazidis, Kurdish-speakers whose religion combines Islamic elements with aspects of an ancient Persian faith. It is the largest coordinated attack since the US-led invasion.

Aug. 23—The National Intelligence Estimate, a consensus report presenting the views of 16 US intelligence agencies, portrays the Iraqi government as "unable to govern effectively" or to take advantage of security gains it says US troops have achieved over recent months.

Aug. 26—Maliki and other top leaders agree on a deal allowing the return to government of one-time members of former President Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. Former Baathists have been shut out of government jobs since the US-led invasion in 2003. Sunni leaders welcome the agreement but say it is not enough to entice Sunnis back to the cabinet.

PAKISTAN

Aug. 3—The Supreme Court votes to parole opposition politician Javed Hashmi, in prison for treason and inciting mutiny in the armed forces. It is the court's 1st significant ruling since Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry was reinstated after President Pervez Musharraf had suspended him.

Aug. 23—The Supreme Court rules Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister who was overthrown by Musharraf in a 1999 military coup, may return to the country. Sharif is seen as a potential rival for Musharraf's power—as is another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, who is also said to be close to returning to the country to take part in elections.

RUSSIA

Aug. 1—Two submarines descend 2 miles beneath the polar ice cap to plant Russian flags on the ocean floor beneath the North Pole. The exercise is meant to buttress Russia's territorial claims in the region.

Aug. 17—President Vladimir Putin announces Russia has resumed sending long-range, nuclear-capable bombers on sorties over the world's oceans, a practice it ceased for 15 years after the end of the cold war.

SUDAN

Aug. 6—The UN announces 6 rebel groups from the Darfur region have agreed on a common platform for peace negotiations with the government. The UN and the African Union say they hope talks can begin within 2 or 3 months.

THAILAND

Aug. 19—Voters endorse a new constitution that is supposed to pave the way for a return to democracy after a military coup deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in September 2006. The new constitution gives more power to bureaucrats and soldiers than did the previous charter.

TURKEY

Aug. 28—Abdullah Gul, an observant Muslim, is elected president by parliament. The presidency is much less powerful than the prime minister's position, but Gul's election is seen as a defeat for the country's secular establishment, which includes the military.

UNITED STATES

Aug. 27—US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales resigns, ending a troubled tenure during which he was accused of putting loyalty to President Bush above the application of the law. The Justice Department has been embroiled in legal controversies over, among other things, domestic electronic surveillance, detention of terror suspects without trial, the firing of US attorneys allegedly for political reasons, and the sanctioning of torture. ■

Correction

The September 2007 issue of *Current History* included an incorrect volume number. It should have been 106.