

Bush vetoes interrogation limits

AFP, AP, Washington

President Bush is poised to veto legislation that would bar the CIA from using waterboarding, a technique that simulates drowning and other harsh interrogation methods on terror suspects.

The president planned to talk about the veto in his Saturday radio address.

Bush has said the bill would harm the government's ability to prevent future attacks. Supporters of the legislation argue that it preserves the United States' right to collect critical intelligence while boosting the country's moral standing abroad.

"The bill would take away one of the most valuable tools on the war on terror, the CIA program to detain and question key terrorist leaders and operatives," deputy White House press secretary Tony Fratto said Friday.

The bill would restrict the CIA to using only the 19 interrogation techniques listed in the Army field manual.

"The bill Congress sent me would not simply ban one particular interrogation method, as some have implied," said Bush, challenging the portrayal of the legislation as banning waterboarding.

Hillari, Obama face off in Wyoming

AFP, Wyoming

Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama face off in the western state of Wyoming yesterday as the campaign took a nasty turn following the resignation of a key Obama foreign policy aide.

Samantha Power quit Friday after calling Clinton a "monster" and sparking a new Iraq war policy row.

The episode suggested the frustration in the Obama camp after the former first lady's comeback wins in Ohio and Texas on Tuesday revived her campaign.

Power afterward issued a statement through the Obama campaign saying she was sorry, but Clinton's backers pounced in a conference call, and her resignation came within two hours.

Power, author of the acclaimed book "A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide," also caused a stir in an interview with the BBC in which she appeared to suggest Obama might water down a vow to get US combat troops out of Iraq within 16 months of becoming president.

"He will of course, not rely on some plan that he's crafted as a presidential candidate or a US senator," said Power in the inter-

view.

Former US State Department spokesman and Clinton advisor James Rubin said Power had been exposed by inadequacies in the Illinois senator's foreign policy apparatus.

"I feel sorry for her, that she has been put in a position where he can't run a foreign policy team," Rubin said on a conference call organized by the Clinton campaign.

The latest nasty twist to the campaign came as a new poll showed the two deadlocked in their epic battle to represent the party in the November 4 presidential election.

A national Newsweek poll released Friday showed the two in a virtual tie among Democratic voters, with Obama with 45 percent support against Clinton's 44 percent.

The two were also virtually equal in voters' eyes on the issue voters see most important: the sagging economy.

Wyoming offers Democrats only 12 delegates -- a candidate needs 2,025 to clinch the party's nod. On Tuesday, they hold a more significant primary in Mississippi, with 33 delegates at stake.

Roadside bombs kill five in Iraq

AFP, Baquba

Two roadside bombs killed four people while one US soldier was killed and another wounded in an explosion while conducting operations in the confessionally divided province of Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, on Friday, police said.

A woman and her daughter and son were killed when their vehicle was struck by a bomb in Al-Sinliya village, east of the provincial capital Baquba, police Major Mohammed al-Karkhi told AFP.

The woman's husband was wounded in the 7:45 am (0445 GMT) attack.

The second bomb went off as rescuers were transporting the victims of the first attack to hospital.

One person was killed and two wounded in that bombing, Karkhi said.

The US soldiers death brings to 3,975 the number of US troops killed in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, according to an AFP tally.

100 bodies found in Iraq mass grave

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi security forces have found a mass grave containing around 100 decomposed bodies in the restive province of Diyala, in one of the biggest such finds in several months, the US military said yesterday.

The grave was found north of the town of Khalis in Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, and appeared to be of people killed several years ago, US military spokesman Major Winfield Danielson told AFP.

"The bodies are decomposed to the point that they are just skeletal remains, indicating that they have been there for a long time," Danielson said.

He said the grave was uncovered by Iraqi forces on Friday.

"The site of the grave is still being investigated. The grave contains approximately 100 bodies," Danielson said.

Human rights groups believe there are hundreds of mass graves in Iraq of people killed during the regime of deposed president Saddam Hussein.

Nato soldier killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A road-side bomb similar to those used by Taliban insurgents hit a Nato-led patrol in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, killing one soldier and injuring another one, the alliance force said.

The names and nationalities of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) soldiers were not provided, but most troops were deployed in the restive region near the Pakistan border are Americans.

"Two ISAF soldiers were wounded and evacuated to an ISAF hospital for medical treatment. After arrival, one of the two soldiers died of wounds sustained from the explosion," ISAF said in a statement.

The troops were on a routine patrol when they hit a bomb on a road in Pakia province's Waza Khwa district, ISAF added.

The last casualty brought to 24 the number of western troops killed this year. Most were slain in Taliban-led violence.

Four die as oil tanker capsizes in Vietnam

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnamese rescue workers had recovered four bodies from a capsize oil tanker yesterday and were trying to contain an oil spill that hit beaches at a southern resort, officials said.

About 30 tonnes of oil had escaped from the overturned vessel, blackening the coastline at the resort town of Vung Tau and raising fears the rest of the 1,700 tonnes of crude oil could leak from the ship's 10 tanks.

Divers had recovered four of the 14 sailors missing since the Duc Tri capsized in rough seas late last Sunday off southern Vietnam.

A sole survivor, a 50-year-old man, was plucked from the South China Sea by a passing fishing boat two days after the shipwreck.

"We have to date found four bodies inside the shipwreck and brought them back to shore," Nguyen Tam Hung, head of the military command operations department in Ba Ria Vung Tau province, told AFP by telephone.

Emergency workers had fixed the ship with ropes and anchors about one nautical mile (1.1 miles, 1.8 kilometres) off Ba Kiem Head.



A supporter of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) sets an Israeli flag on fire during a protest in the West Bank city of Jenin against the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip yesterday. Two Palestinian militants were injured, including one in serious condition, late yesterday in an Israeli strike in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, medical sources and witnesses said.

Peace talks with Israel must continue: Abbas

AP, West Bank

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas yesterday said peace efforts with Israel must move forward despite an especially bloody spate of violence capped by a deadly attack on a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem.

Abbas also reiterated his support for Egypt's efforts to mediate a truce between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

"Despite all the circumstances we're living through and all the attacks we're experiencing, we insist on peace. There is no other path," Abbas said in a speech marking International Women's Day.

Israel has sent mixed signals since Thursday night's shooting, in which a gunman burst into a prestigious Jerusalem seminary and killed eight students, many of whom were studying religious holy texts in the building's library.

Officials have indicated a willingness to move ahead with peace talks with Abbas, launched last November at a U.S.-hosted summit

in Annapolis, Md. The sides hoped to reach a final agreement by the end of the year. The Egyptian-backed truce efforts remain more cloudy, especially if it turns out that Hamas

Two injured as Israel strikes Gaza again

AFP, Gaza

Two Palestinian militants were injured, including one in serious condition, late on Friday in an Israeli strike in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, medical sources and witnesses said.

The two members of the armed wing of the Islamist Hamas movement, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, were injured after Israeli forces fired at them east of Gaza City, the sources said.

An Israeli army spokeswoman told AFP that ground forces fired a missile at a "group of armed men approaching the security fence near Nahal Oz" on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

was behind the seminary shooting.

Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said Israel "remains committed to the Annapolis framework." But he said there were no decisions on when talks would resume.

"We believe in historic reconciliation with the Palestinians. One of the foundations of Annapolis was no tolerance of terrorism. The best way to move forward is for the Palestinian side to be a real partner, not only in talks, but in helping to fight this sort of hateful extremism we saw this week," he said.

The U.S. has said extremist violence should not be allowed to derail peace talks.

Earlier this week, Abbas suspended the talks to protest an Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip that killed more than 120 Palestinians, including dozens of civilians. Israel launched the offensive to halt intensifying rocket fire from Gaza, which is controlled by the Hamas militant group, but later agreed to continue peace talks.

New UN envoy to Afghanistan

AP, United Nations

Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide has been appointed the latest U.N. "super envoy" to coordinate military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's office said Friday.

Ban wrote the Security Council that the appointment would take "immediate effect," unless the council, whose approval is required, had any objections, according to a copy of the letter that his office distributed to reporters.

Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, who is president of the council this month, responded that Eide's appointment had "the assurances of my highest consideration," according to a letter also released to reporters.

Serving as Ban's special representative for Afghanistan is a politically sensitive job with responsibilities for beefing up public support for both the Afghan government and for NATO's fight against the Taliban.

Eide, a career diplomat with the Norwegian foreign service, served previously as Norwegian ambassador to NATO and as a U.N. envoy in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997-98 and in Kosovo in 2005.

Russian arms dealer sent to Thai prison

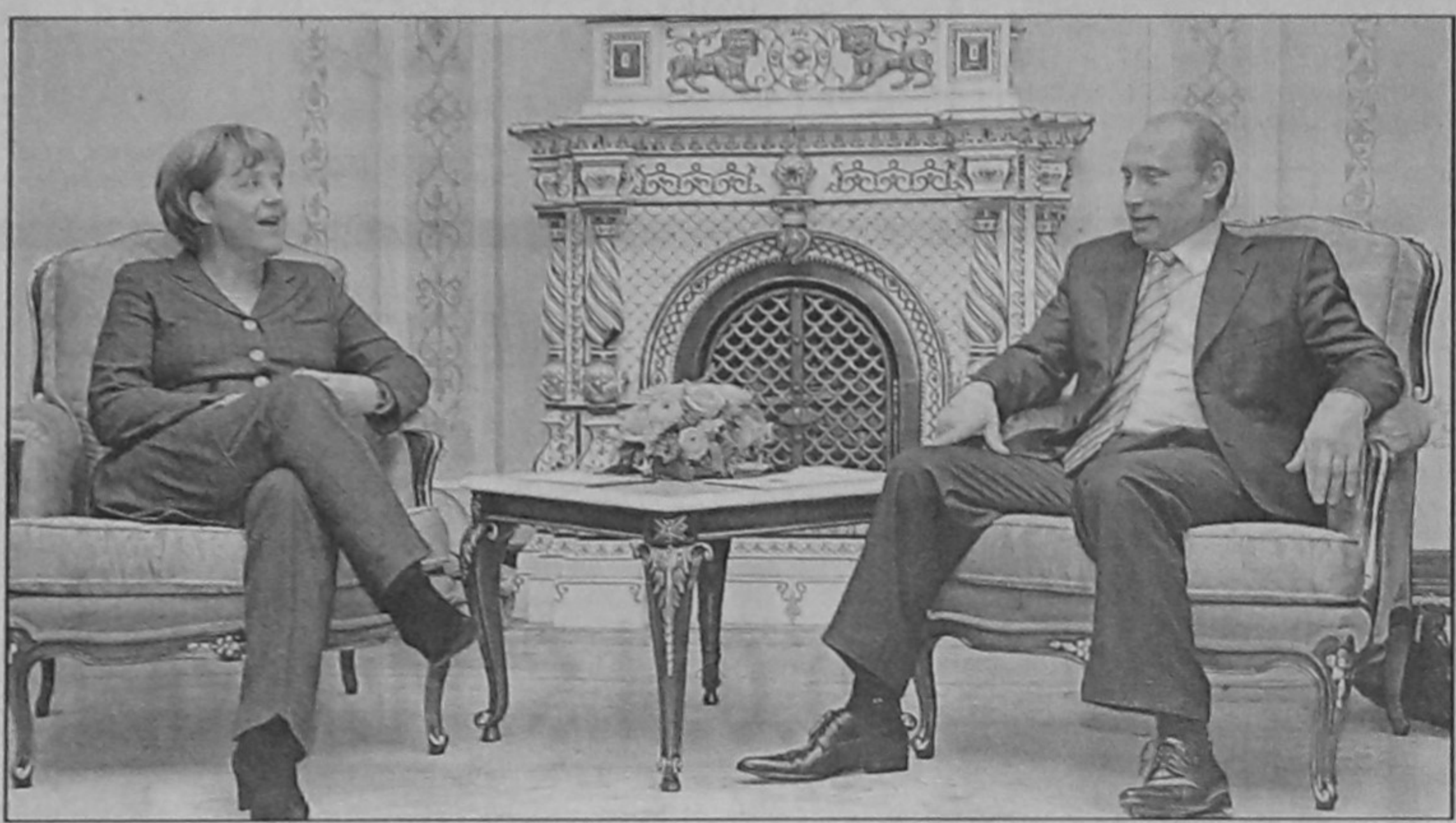
AFP, Bangkok

A Thai court yesterday sent Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout to a maximum security prison, as his lawyer denied that the man known as the "Merchant of Death" was supplying arms to Colombian rebels.

Bout, wearing a red polo shirt and khaki shorts, appeared in a Bangkok criminal court for a remand hearing, and was fingerprinted in front of the media.

Over the years, the former Soviet air force officer is said to have supplied arms to Afghanistan's hardline Taliban militia, Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda terror network, Marxist rebels in South America and former Liberian leader Charles Taylor.

The United States, however, is also determined to extradite him on charges of conspiring to sell millions of dollars in weapons to Colombian FARC rebels.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel (L) and Russian President Vladimir Putin take place for a meeting in Novogoryovo residence outside Moscow yesterday. Merkel arrived yesterday in Moscow, becoming the first foreign leader to meet with Dmitry Medvedev since his controversial presidential election this week.

Spain set to vote with ETA in spotlight

AFP, Madrid

Spain votes in a general election today, two days after the Socialist government's record in battling ETA was thrust into the spotlight when a gunman believed to belong to the Basque separatist group shot dead a former city councilman.

All political parties called off campaigning on Friday just hours before it was officially due to close at midnight after Isaias Carrasco, a Socialist, was shot several times at close range in the Basque town of Mondragon.

He died shortly after in hospital. There has been no claims of responsibility for the attack but the government swiftly blamed ETA, which has killed over 800 people in bombings and shootings in its nearly 40-year campaign for an independent Basque homeland.

Zapatero, tipped to win a second mandate in Sunday's vote, accused ETA of seeking to upset the electoral process and appealed for national unity.

Latin American leaders end bitter feud

AFP, Santo Domingo, Caracas

The presidents of Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, with a simple handshake, settled a bitter feud here Friday that had raised fears of a military confrontation between the South American neighbors.

After trading verbal blows at the Rio Group summit of Latin American nations in Santo Domingo, Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Colombia's Alvaro Uribe agreed to end the crisis over Colombia's cross-border, anti-rebel raid last weekend.

The leaders of Ecuador and Venezuela, who sent military reinforcements to their borders with Colombia, shook hands with their Colombian counterpart to seal the end of the dispute, at a Rio Group summit meeting in Santo Domingo.

"With the commitment of never attacking a brother country again and by asking forgiveness, we can consider this very serious incident resolved," Correa said before shaking hands with Uribe as other Latin American presidents applauded.

Meanwhile Colombia's FARC rebels have provided "proof of life" of 10 more hostages in a hint of a possible new release, but French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt is not one of them. Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez said Friday.

Iraq, Turkey vow to face Kurdish rebels

AFP, Ankara

The leaders of Iraq and Turkey pledged Friday to take measures against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq during talks to soothe tensions following a Turkish cross-border offensive against the militants.

"The aim of this visit is to be able to establish strategic and solid relations with Turkey," Iraq's President Jalal Talabani said after talks with his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul.

"We want our cooperation to be a model relationship for the Middle East," Talabani said through an interpreter, adding that Baghdad wanted closer energy, economic, cultural and political ties.

Welcoming Talabani to Ankara for his first visit as head of state, Gul made a similar call and said both countries would hold further talks to work out the detail of what he said was the common vision for bilateral ties.

"I believe that if we tap into the great potential between Turkey and Iraq, we will produce a great neighborhood relationship," he said.

The warm messages followed recent tensions between the neighbors over a week-long ground incursion by the Turkish army into northern Iraq to hunt rebels from Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),

which ended last week.

Meanwhile Baghdad will block any contracts signed by foreign oil companies with Iraqi Kurdish regional authorities, Iraq's Oil Minister Hussein Chahristani said yesterday.

"All contracts will be handled by the central government," he told a joint press conference in Ankara with his Turkish counterpart Hilmi Guler.

"No contracts signed by any regions in Iraq will be recognised by the government of Iraq. Companies will not be allowed to work on Iraqi territory unless their contract is approved by the central government in Baghdad."

The government in Baghdad and authorities in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq have been at loggerheads over the issue for months.

In November the minister announced he had cancelled around 15 oil contracts signed by the authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In response, Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzan insisted the contracts would be honoured, saying "nobody can cancel contracts signed by Kurdistan", as his government approved the signature of seven more oil contracts.



A TV grab taken from Venezuelan broadcast TELESUR on March 7, 2008, showing a proof of life video of policeman Walter Lozano Guarino, currently in the hands of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Venezuelan Interior minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin presented a series of videos sent by the FARC as proof of life of 10 police officers and soldiers it holds hostage.

Medical Services Officer



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