

## Spain's separatist group Eta declares ceasefire

BBC ONLINE

Armed Basque separatist group Eta says it will not "carry out armed actions" in its campaign for independence.

In a video obtained exclusively by the BBC, the group said it took the decision several months ago "to put in motion a democratic process".

The Spanish government has not responded. In the past it has said it will only negotiate with Eta if it renounces violence and disarms.

Eta's violent campaign has led to more than 820 deaths over the past 40 years.

It has called two ceasefires in the past, but abandoned them both.

**UNDER PRESSURE**  
It is unclear whether Eta is declaring a permanent or temporary ceasefire.

In the video obtained by the BBC, three hooded Eta fighters are shown sitting behind a desk with the Eta flag pinned up behind them.

The figure in the middle reads out a prepared statement defending Eta's campaign of violence, but towards the end she says the group now wants to achieve its aims by peaceful, democratic means.

"Eta confirms its commitment to finding a democratic solution to the conflict," the statement says.

"In its commitment to a democratic process to decide freely and democratically our future, through dialogue and negotiations, Eta is prepared today as yesterday to agree to the minimum democratic conditions necessary to put in motion a democratic process, if the Spanish government is willing," it adds.

"We call on all Basque citizens to continue in the struggle, each in their own field, with whatever degree of commitment they have, so that we can all cast down the wall of denial and make irreversible moves forward on the road to freedom."

Founded in 1959, Eta has since then waged a bloody campaign for independence for the seven regions in northern Spain and south-west France that Basque separatists claim as their own.

This latest announcement comes after the arrests of numerous Eta leaders and during an unprecedented period of debate within the Basque nationalist community over the future direction of policy, says the BBC's Clive Myrie in San Sebastian.

Eta has been coming under increasing pressure to lay down its weapons, our correspondent adds.



A weapon dealer displays illegal weapons at a black market in Iraq's northern province of Arbil on last Wednesday. Traders in the black market weapons trade in semi-autonomous Kurdistan region can earn between \$100 - \$200 per day, a dealer said.

## Assault on Iraqi military HQ kills 12

AP, Baghdad

Suicide bombers hit a Baghdad military headquarters yesterday and killed 12 people, two weeks after an attack on the same site pointed to the failure of Iraqi forces to plug even the most obvious holes in their security.

Baghdad has been on high alert as the US declared an official end to its combat operations in Iraq last week, yet the militants still managed to attack an obvious target in the centre of the city that has been struck very recently.

On Aug 17, al-Qaeda linked suicide bomber blew himself up at the same east Baghdad military headquarters and killed 61 army recruits last in the deadliest act of violence in Baghdad in months.

Iraqi military spokesman Maj Gen Qassim al-Moussawi said in a statement that 12 people were killed in Sunday's attack and 36 were injured. Five soldiers were among the dead.

In Sunday's attack a car bomb charged the building and exploded and then gunmen assaulted the headquarters, battling the building's guards in a 15 minute firefight in the middle of downtown Baghdad, according to police officials who said at least three militants were wearing explosives belts.

## No ME peacetalks if no building freeze: Abbas

AP, Ramallah

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says he has warned Israel's prime minister that he'll quit peace talks unless Israel extends a curb on settlement construction.

Abbas and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched negotiations at a summit in Washington last week.

A 10-month freeze on settlement housing ends Sept. 26, and Netanyahu is under pressure from hardline allies to resume construction.

Netanyahu has not said what he will do. He told his Cabinet on Sunday that creative solutions are needed to make the talks succeed.

However, Abbas told PLO activists in Libya late Saturday that "if the freeze period is not extended by the end of the month, there will be no negotiations." Abbas says he made that clear to Netanyahu.



## 2 killed in Israel's Gaza strike

AFP, Gaza City

The body of a second Palestinian killed in Israeli air strikes on southern Gaza was recovered yesterday, according to Palestinian medics and witnesses.

The two Palestinians were killed and another three were wounded in the strikes carried out Saturday after a rocket attack from Gaza in the first exchange of fire since the relaunch of Middle East peace talks last week.

Two raids targeted smuggling tunnels along the border with Egypt, causing a tunnel to collapse on the two men, and a third struck a former base used by the militant Hamas movement, which has ruled Gaza since June 2007.

An Israeli military spokesman confirmed the three raids, saying that one was aimed at "a tunnel dug in the direction of Israeli territory" for attacks across the border.

The air strikes came after the firing of a makeshift rocket from Gaza into Israel by Palestinian militants on Saturday, which caused no casualties or damage, according to the Israeli military.

On Thursday, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu relaunched direct peace talks in Washington following a 20-month hiatus.

## US likely to keep troops in Iraq after 2011

AFP, Washington

The United States likely will need to keep thousands of troops in Iraq beyond 2011 to keep a lid on sectarian tensions and to bolster Baghdad's fledgling military, experts and former officers say.

American officials privately acknowledge that the US military presence in Iraq will almost certainly be extended, even though a security agreement in force requires all US forces to depart by the end of 2011.

The US military will be needed not only for technical tasks to keep the Iraqi armed forces afloat, but as a reassuring presence for Iraqis fearing a revival of sectarian and ethnic bloodshed, analysts said.

Baghdad's military remains heavily dependent on US logistical support, air power, equipment and expertise, while most Baghdad politicians are anxious to retain American troops as a peacekeeping force in reserve.

"The more pressing requirement is less teaching them how to use weapons and more providing reassurance to threatened internal communities that they won't be expelled by their erstwhile internal rivals," said Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations.

"What you're trying to do is make the size of the troop presence proportional to the residual fear that the groups feel towards each other," Biddle said.

Delivering technical help while playing a limited peacekeeping role would require a relatively modest number of troops, perhaps as few as three brigades or roughly 10,000 troops, several former military officers said.

"I think it could get down to even less than 10,000 and still be viable," John Ballard, a professor at National Defense University and a retired army officer, told AFP.

Nearly 50,000 US troops are now in Iraq under an "advise and assist" role, after

President Barack Obama on Tuesday declared a formal end to the US combat mission.

The White House, keen to wind down the US role in Iraq, has played down the possibility of a large US force. Vice President Joe Biden's national security advisor, Anthony Blinken, has said only "dozens or maybe hundreds" of troops could remain.

But Iraqi army chief of staff General Babaker Zebari told AFP last month that his country's forces would require US support for another decade, while some analysts in Washington argue for keeping about half of the current force after 2011.

Iraq's "leaders are likely to ask that tens of thousands of American troops stay on for an extended period," Richard Haas, a top diplomat during George W. Bush's presidency, wrote Thursday.

Beyond 2011, the US military would be needed to provide badly-needed logistical support for an army that has been designed mainly as a counter-insurgency force.

The United States would provide some fire power, helicopters, fighter jets to defend a country with virtually no air force, naval defences for ports and coveted intelligence collected from unmanned robotic planes.

The mission likely would include US Special Forces assisting Iraqis in manhunts of al-Qaeda figures, according to James Danly of the Institute for the Study of War, who served in Iraq as an officer.

Apart from operational and tactical support, a US force also would have to be prepared for possible worst-case scenarios, Danly and other analysts said.

If relations between the country's Sunnis, Shais and Kurds threatened to spiral out of control, or if vital oil or other infrastructure came under threat from within or outside Iraq, Baghdad could turn to the US force for help, he said.

## Hubble telescope re-shoots '87 supernova

BBC ONLINE

The Hubble space telescope has returned to view one of its favourite subjects - a giant stellar explosion that was first seen on Earth in 1987.

The famous supernova is one of the most studied objects in the southern sky.

The new image of SN 1987A is the observatory's first picture of the explosion since its systems were repaired and upgraded last year.

It has given astronomers the chance to catch up on the progress of all the material blasted into space.

Their research is reported in a paper published in the journal Science.

SN 1987A is sited in the nearby Large Magellanic Cloud, a dwarf galaxy adjacent to our own Milky Way Galaxy.

Being just 168,000 light-years from Earth, the supernova has given scientists a detailed view of what happens when big stars end their days.

The explosion spewed out colossal amounts of gas and dust, including many of the heavy elements like sulphur, silicon and iron expected to be forged in supernovas.

This debris is now crashing into matter shed by the dying star just prior to its collapse and heating it, causing it to glow.

## Peace deal requires new approach: Netanyahu

REUTERS, Jerusalem

A peace deal with the Palestinians will require a creative, new approach to issues that have defied resolution in past negotiations, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday.

Netanyahu, back from a Washington peace summit with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at which they agreed to try to reach a framework accord within a year, gave no hint in public remarks to his cabinet about any new ideas he may have in mind.

The talks, relaunched on Thursday amid scepticism in Israel and the Palestinian territories, face an early hurdle when a partial Israeli moratorium on housing starts in West Bank settlements expires on Sept 26.



## Iran stoning woman 'to be lashed over photograph'

BBC ONLINE

An Iranian woman sentenced to death by stoning for adultery now faces being whipped for indecency, her son says.

Iranian authorities sentenced Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani to 99 lashes after the Times newspaper published a picture purportedly of her without a headscarf.

The Times later published a correction, saying the photograph was of a different Iranian woman.

After an international outcry, Iranian officials temporarily halted Ms Ashtiani's stoning sentence in July.

There are fears the death sentence could still be carried out by hanging.

Contested confessions  
Ms Ashtiani's son has given several interviews saying he was told of the new sentence of 99 lashes by people who have recently been released from the prison in Tabriz where his mother is being held.

On 28 August, the Times published a picture it said was of Ms Ashtiani that it had obtained from one of her lawyers.

The lawyer, Mohammad Mostafaei, who has fled Iran, said he received the picture from her son, Sajad Ghaderzadeh - a claim Ghaderzadeh denies.

## 'Get ready for break-up'

Says top Belgian minister

AFP, BRUSSELS

One of Belgium's top politicians warned the country's citizens yesterday to "get ready for the break-up of Belgium," as King Albert II seeks to relaunch knife-edge coalition talks.

Leading francophone Socialist Laurette Onkelinx, considered a potential successor to party chief Elio Di Rupo, who gave up on negotiations with separatist Flemish leaders on Friday, gave her prognosis in a newspaper interview.

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that because if we split, it will be the weakest who will pay the heaviest price," she told La Dernière Heure. "On the other hand, we can no longer ignore that among a large part of the Flemish population, it's their wish."

"So yes, we have to get ready for the break-up of Belgium. Otherwise we're cooked."

"When I look at the letters I receive, loads of people think it's possible. (Our) politicians have to be prepared," underlined the current caretaker minister for the federal state, by way of contrast with the rapid evolution of Flemish political thinking.

Albert II tasked late on Saturday the respective speakers of the French-speaking Wallonia and Dutch-speaking Flanders state parliaments to try once more to navigate seven-party talks aimed at securing some form of government, other than the existing day-to-day formation.

That came after seven weeks of efforts by Di Rupo, who says that the biggest Flemish party, the independence-minded N-VA, rejected the widest set of concessions towards full autonomy in francophone Belgium's tortured recent history.

Belgium, which holds the administrative chair of the European Union until the end of the year, adding a further layer to the pressure on the sovereign, has not been able to point to a stable government since June 2007.

## Five killed in Dagestan suicide blast

AFP, Makhachkala

A suicide bomber rammed into a Russian firing range killing five people and wounding scores yesterday in the volatile North Caucasus region of Dagestan, law enforcement sources said.

The explosives-packed car attacked a military base used by the motor rifle brigade in Dalny near the city of Buynaksk, some 40 kilometres (30 miles) west of the local capital Makhachkala, said the sources, who refused to be identified.

"Five people are dead. Three of them died on the spot and another two in hospital," a law enforcement source told AFP, adding that the blast had hurt at least another 35 people, two of whom were in critical condition.

Russia's defence ministry promptly imposed a state of heightened security at military installations in its Southern Military District -- made up of the mainly Muslim regions along Russia's southern flank.

However, it put the death toll from the blast at three and said 33 people were wounded.

"A heightened security regime has been ordered for the duty officers and guards at all the military installations in the district," ministry spokesman Colonel Alexei Kuznetsov said, quoted by Russian news agencies.



Military bands from different countries stand at the Red Square during the International Military Music Festival near the "Spasskaya Tower" in Moscow on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS