



Peace Negotiations Watch

Thursday, August 30, 2007

Volume VI, Number 26

In this issue:

Afghanistan

Europe may cut military role in Afghanistan

P. Parameswaran, *Agence France Presse*, 8/26/07

Afghan Elders and U.S. Differ On Who Killed 12 Civilians

David Rohde, *New York Times*, 8/27/07

UN says record Afghan opium production fueled by Taliban insurgency, government corruption

Fisnik Abrashi, *Associated Press*, 8/28/07

Armenia

Commander of Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army: Azerbaijan is not ready to start military actions today

ARMINFO News Agency, 8/21/2007

[Learn about PILPG's work in Armenia](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Report: Bosnia revokes citizenship of 500 people naturalized during and after the Bosnian war

Associated Press, 8/22/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

Burma

Exiled Myanmar dissidents may get rare recognition from Southeast Asian lawmakers' group

Associated Press, 8/24/07

Myanmar official defends fuel price hikes that sparked protests

Jim Gomez, *Associated Press*, 8/26/07

Fresh fuel protests held in Burma

Jonathan Head, *BBC News*, 8/28/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Burma](#)

Burundi

Burundian police raid home of opposition politician

Gervais Abayeho, *Associated Press*, 8/22/07

Burundi president holds peace talks with opposition

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

UN, AU condemn Burundi grenade attacks

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

Chechnya

2 police and Chechen rebel killed in shootout in Chechen capital

Associated Press, 8/24/07

Cyprus

Leaders of Cyprus' two communities to meet early September

Xinhua General News Service, 8/21/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Cyprus](#)

[Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

South Africa pledges to aid Congo with reconstruction

Eddy Isango, *Associated Press*, 8/21/07

Uganda, DR Congo leaders to meet in two weeks over tensions

Agence France Presse, 8/25/07

Africa's Great Lakes nations in new bid to end insecurity

Agence France Presse, 8/27/07

[Access the DR Congo Negotiation Simulation prepared by PILPG](#)

[Georgia](#)

Abkhazia confirms Georgian report of crashed plane

Ruslan Khashig, *Associated Press*, 8/26/07

Georgia plays risky power game with Russia

Jean Raffaelli, *Agence France Presse*, 8/26/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Georgia](#)

[Indonesia](#)

Suspect in Indonesian activist's poisoning death implicates intelligence agency

Irwan Firdaus, *Associated Press*, 8/23/07

[Access the Indonesia/Aceh Negotiation Simulation prepared by PILPG](#)

[Kosovo](#)

Impatient Kosovo Albanians Press For a Declaration of Independence

Jonathan Finer, *The Washington Post*, 8/21/07

US hits out at Serbian minister over Kosovo remarks

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

Kosovo Talks to Start Anew, But Parties Express Doubt

Nicholas Wood, *The New York Times*, 8/28/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Kosovo](#)

[Morocco](#)

U.N. appoints first Chinese commander of a U.N. mission in Western Sahara

Associated Press, 8/27/07

[Nepal](#)

Minority groups lead strike in Nepal's capital in fight for more rights

Yuvraj Acharya, *Associated Press*, 8/22/07

Nepal nationalizes king's palaces

Agence France Presse, 8/23/07

Nepal Maoists plan protests to push for king's exit

Agence France Presse, 8/24/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Nepal](#)

[Philippines](#)

Philippines suspends peace talks with Muslim rebels

Agence France Presse, 8/21/07

Arroyo visits southern Philippines to meet troops battling al-Qaida-linked militants

Teresa Cerrojano, *Associated Press*, 8/23/07

Philippines asks truce monitors to stay on

Agence France Presse, 8/28/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in the Philippines](#)

[Somalia](#)

Somali forces poorly trained and equipped, and receive no pay, says minister

Tom Maliti, *Associated Press*, 8/22/07

Gunmen kill Somali radio journalist in latest media killing

Associated Press, 8/24/07

Two Somali peace delegates injured amid threat of stronger insurgency

Mustafa Haji Abdinur, *Agence France Presse*, 8/25/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Somalia](#)

[Sri Lanka](#)

Five killed amid heavy shelling in Sri Lanka's Jaffna

Agence France Presse, 8/21/07

Ease emergency laws, media rights group tells Sri Lanka

Agence France Presse, 8/24/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Sri Lanka](#)

[Sudan](#)

Darfur rebel faction threatens to pull out of peace talks over refugee camp raid

Associated Press, 8/23/07

Arabs Seek Role With Darfur Rebels; Little-Known Group May Reflect Widening Disaffection With Sudan's Leaders

Stephanie McCrummen, *The Washington Post*, 8/22/07

UN chief calls on Sudanese military to remove all remaining troops from southern Sudan

Edith M. Lederer, *Associated Press*, 8/24/07

[Learn about PILPG's work in Sudan](#)

Peace Negotiations Watch is a weekly publication detailing current events relating to conflict and peace processes in selected countries. It is prepared by the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG) and made possible by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ploughshares Fund.

Afghanistan

Europe may cut military role in Afghanistan

P. Parameswaran, *Agence France Presse*, 8/26/07

The United States is worried about weakening Italian and German military commitments in Afghanistan as casualties increase in the fight to stem the bloody Taliban insurgency, officials said.

Debate is raging in Italy and Germany, and to a lesser extent the Netherlands and Denmark, on whether they should remain in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), already grappling with a shortage of troops in the face of one of the most intense military engagements in decades.

"There is a good prospect that we are going to lose some" contributions from certain countries, a US administration official told AFP, as European nations face upcoming votes at home on their reconstruction, military and training commitments in Afghanistan.

The NATO-led 37-nation ISAF and a separate US-led coalition, in total about 50,000 foreign soldiers, are together with Afghan security forces fighting to block the return to power of the Taliban after the hardline Islamic militia was ousted in late 2001.

But with the fighting now at its toughest since then, and more deaths among ISAF forces -- including the friendly fire" incident Friday that killed three British soldiers -- Washington is deeply worried about eroding support for the effort.

"It will be disappointing if there are fewer NATO partners that are involved in this mission," the US official said.

"Italy and Germany are the ones that are of serious concern," the official added, citing Italy as "one that we are really concerned about."

With 2,500 troops, Italy heads NATO's Herat-based regional command in western Afghanistan.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema recently blamed a lack of coordination between US and ISAF forces for hundreds of Afghan civilian deaths, which he called "morally unacceptable."

"The Italians can be proud of what they are doing but at the end of the day it's not so much a referendum on 'are we making a difference?' but really a referendum about how closely do you want to be associated with the US administration," the US official said.

In Germany, where polls show a strong 64 percent majority calling for withdrawal, parliament would have to vote on whether to continue with commitments for reconstruction, military deployment and training of Afghan forces.

The United States is particularly worried about the military commitment.

"As the issue of civilian casualties becomes more and more an issue in German politics, that is another one that is of real concern," said the US official.

"And if the concerns are really high, that might spill over into the training of security forces." Germany has lost 25 soldiers, three police officers and four civilians in Afghanistan since 2002.

The past month has been particularly grim with the abduction by the Taliban of two German engineers, one of whom was shot dead. The other is reportedly ill and begging for his life. Germany has contributed some 3,000 troops to the NATO mission and has six Tornado reconnaissance planes helping to spot Taliban hideouts.

About 100 elite troops have a mandate to participate in the US-led anti-Taliban Operation Enduring Freedom but are not currently deployed against insurgents in the south.

In the Netherlands, there is some unease about how long the Afghanistan effort will continue but US officials believe cuts in the military deployment will be spared.

Similar concerns face Denmark but officials say its deployment is not on the US radar screen as one that is really in danger.

Other key countries like Canada and Britain remain committed despite their own losses. On Friday three British soldiers were killed while fighting Taliban forces near Kajaki Dam in Helmand Province after being hit by a bomb dropped by a US fighter jet.

Two other soldiers were injured in the incident. The United States and British military and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, under which the troops were serving, have all said they will investigate.

The blunder was the latest in a string of "friendly fire" deaths involving US planes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Kurt Volker, the principal US deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs, is expected to travel to Europe in early September to prod countries to maintain their Afghan presence.

"I think he is going to make some public remarks illustrating how important Afghanistan is and some of the things the European countries can be particularly proud of, in terms of achievements in Afghanistan," the US official said. "We are hoping that can help."

The British army and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, under which the troops were serving, also announced immediate investigations.

Afghan Elders and U.S. Differ On Who Killed 12 Civilians

David Rohde, *New York Times*, 8/27/07

Afghan elders said Sunday that airstrikes had killed 12 civilians in the southern province of Helmand on Saturday night, but an American military spokesman blamed Taliban militants for the civilian deaths.

Exactly what occurred in the remote area was unclear, with local elders and American military officials giving conflicting accounts. But the charges and countercharges reflected growing tensions in Afghanistan over civilian deaths.

Hajji Agha Muhammad, an Afghan elder, said airstrikes had killed 12 civilians and wounded 12 others in Kobar, a village in the volatile Musa Qala district, on Saturday night. Mr. Muhammad said the dead included six children ages 3 to 6 and two women.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Muhammad said foreign patrols had entered the area in the early evening and faced no opposition. Several hours later, airstrikes destroyed two houses, he said.

American military officials said that Afghan and American troops had clashed with Taliban fighters who were guarding a large heroin lab. Helmand produces more opium than any other province in Afghanistan, and Taliban militants are believed to have struck an alliance with drug traffickers in the Musa Qala area.

After American and Afghan forces destroyed the lab, they were ambushed by Taliban fighters, American officials said. During the battle, the Taliban fired 82-millimeter mortars. NATO responded with airstrikes, they said, but no bombs fell on houses.

"We didn't target any buildings or any structures," said Lt. Col. David Accetta, a spokesman for the American forces in Afghanistan. "My guess would be that if any houses were destroyed, it would have been the result of Taliban fire."

An official at the main hospital in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, said two men, two women and one child arrived from Musa Qala on Sunday with shrapnel wounds. Additional wounded people were taken to nearby hospitals, he said, but he had no exact figures.

The issue of civilian deaths is causing rising anger in Afghanistan this year.

More than 300 Afghan civilians have died in NATO airstrikes, according to one international report. Under growing public criticism, President Hamid Karzai has repeatedly called for NATO to use restraint and to better coordinate its attacks with Afghan forces.

NATO officials say they make every effort to avoid civilian casualties, and they accuse the Taliban of basing their fighters in houses and using civilians as human shields. They also say the Taliban exaggerate the number of civilian deaths for propaganda purposes.

At the main hospital in Lashkar Gah, a relative of the wounded, Hajji Saeed Mohammad, told Reuters, "We can't do anything, can't stay in our villages and can't go anywhere." He added, "It is best for us to be killed all at once than being killed every day."

UN says record Afghan opium production fueled by Taliban insurgency, government corruption

Fisnik Abrashi, *Associated Press*, 8/28/07

Afghan opium poppy cultivation has exploded to a new record high this year, with the multibillion dollar trade now fueled by Taliban militants and corrupt officials in President Hamid Karzai's government, a U.N. report said.

Afghanistan has opium growing on 193,000 hectares (477,000 acres) of land, a 17 percent increase from last year's record 165,000 hectares (408,000 acres), according to an annual survey by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

The country now accounts for 93 percent of the global production of opium, the raw material for heroin, and has doubled its output over the last two years, the report, released Monday, said.

"The situation is dramatic and getting worse by the day," said Antonio Maria Costa, the UNODC's executive director.

"No other country in the world has ever had such a large amount of farmland used for illegal activity, beside China 100 years ago," when it was a major opium producer, Costa said in an interview in Kabul.

The burgeoning drug business casts doubt on the effectiveness of projects funded by the United States and other Western donors to battle the illicit trade.

It also adds pressure on Karzai to consider new ways of curbing an expansion that threatens to turn Afghanistan into a 'narco-state' where some observers warn that groups such as al-Qaida could once again find sanctuary.

Karzai last year rejected U.S. offers to spray this year's crop, after Afghans said the herbicide could affect livestock, crops and water supplies fears the U.S. calls unfounded.

Costa said the U.N. supports the government's position, but added that crop eradication was a key element of any strategy to combat its growth.

Afghanistan is on course to produce 8,200 metric tons (9,000 tons) of opium this year, up 34 percent from 6,100 metric tons (6,724 tons) in 2006, Costa said.

The farm-gate value of Afghanistan's annual crop is about US\$1 billion (euro730 million), the U.N. survey said. The street value of the heroin produced from it is many times higher.

While the number of poppy-free provinces in the country's north has increased from six in 2006 to 13 in 2007, production in the insurgency-hit southern provinces has exploded to unprecedented levels.

The southern province of Helmand alone, with 102,770 hectares (253,944 acres) under cultivation, now accounts for over half of the national total.

Gen. Khodaidad, Afghanistan's acting counternarcotics minister, acknowledged that the drugs strategy had failed in the country's south and west, which he blamed on inept local officials and poor policing, but also to open borders with Iran to the west and Pakistan to the east.

Khodaidad, who like many Afghans goes by only one name, said the government needed to review its strategy, and threatened to sack inefficient and corrupt officials and reward those that curbed the production and trade at a national conference scheduled for Wednesday.

Costa linked the booming trade primarily to the rise of insurgent activity in the south.

"The government has lost control of this territory because of the presence of the insurgents, because of the presence of the terrorists, whether Taliban or splinter al-Qaida groups," Costa said.

"It is clearly documented now that insurgents actively promote or allow and then take advantage of the cultivation, refining, and the trafficking of opium," he said.

Taliban militants levy a tax on farmers and also provide protection for convoys smuggling opium into neighboring countries, Costa said.

Some 3.3 million of Afghanistan's estimated 25 million people are now involved in producing opium, according to the report.

Costa said there was a "tremendous amount of collusion" between traffickers and government officials.

"The government's benign tolerance of corruption is undermining the future: no country has ever built prosperity on crime," Costa said in a summary of the report.

While urging NATO to stay clear of eradication efforts, Costa said the link between the insurgency and the trade meant the alliance had a direct interest in supporting counternarcotics operations by destroying opium labs, targeting traffickers and closing opium markets.

"The opium economy of Afghanistan can be bankrupted by blocking the two-way flow of imported chemicals and exported drugs," Costa said. "In both instances materials are being moved across the southern border and nobody seems to take notice," he said. Refiners need chemicals to turn opium into heroin.

The report did not say how much of the opium gets made into heroin in Afghanistan before being smuggled out.

Costa also urged Afghanistan's government to submit the names of about a dozen known traffickers whom he did not name to the U.N. Security Council for inclusion alongside al-Qaida and Taliban members on a list of individuals who are barred from traveling, have their assets seized and face extradition.

"The Afghan opium situation looks grim, but it is not yet hopeless," Costa said. "It will take time, money and determination worthwhile investments to spare Afghanistan and the rest of the world more tragedies."

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Armenia

Commander of Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army: Azerbaijan is not ready to start military actions today

ARMINFO News Agency, 8/21/2007

At the August 21 press-conference, Lieutenant-General Movses Hakobyan, Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Minister, said that Azerbaijan is not ready to start military actions today, ArmInfo own correspondent in Stepanakert reports. This was an answer to the question concerning high assessments of the NKR Defense Army's combativity by foreign experts. According to M.Hakobyan, if the opposing side realizes today that it is ready to solve the problem in a military way, it will start a war tomorrow.

At the same time, the Minister noted: "We have created the army not for the experts and politicians to assess it, moreover, most of these assessments are subjective. We work not to please anybody. We should assess ourselves, and others' assessment is not so important for us".

Asked about the purchase of a great quantity of weapons by Azerbaijan and possible impact of this fact on the NKR defensive potential, M.Hakobyan emphasized that intensive arming of the Azeri army causes the NKR military command's concern, however, if Azerbaijan were sure that it could solve the problem by means of arms, it would try to do it immediately. In this context, the Minister said that Karabakh has also purchased some new weapons, particularly, in the sphere of anti-aircraft defense. "Great progress is being observed in the anti-aircraft defense sphere. The whole air territory of Nagorno-Karabakh is safely defended. Today it is impossible to bomb Stepanakert," he noted.

Touching upon criminality in the army, M.Hakobyan stressed that the number of crimes and emergencies in the NKR Defense Army has recently decreased abruptly. "There is no humiliating treatment of juniors in our army. Our problems are connected with non-manual relations," M.Hakobyan said.

According to the Minister, there will be no serious changes in the structure and personnel of the NKR Defense Army in the near future.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Armenia](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Report: Bosnia revokes citizenship of 500 people naturalized during and after the Bosnian war
Associated Press, 8/22/07

Bosnia's government has revoked the citizenship of 500 people after a special commission found that naturalization procedures were ignored in the cases of people from several countries, an official was quoted Wednesday as saying.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Bosnia was accused of granting citizenship to people who had links to international terrorism networks. Many foreign Islamic fighters came to Bosnia during the war to fight beside the Muslims here. Some married local women, obtained citizenship and remained in the country after the war.

After Sept. 11, such people were under particular scrutiny, and investigations revealed that a number of them had a dubious past and links to people suspected of being members in international terrorist networks. This prompted the government in 2001 to set up a commission to review the cases of everyone who was naturalized after Bosnia became independent in 1992.

The special commission checked more than 1,300 naturalizations. It makes recommendations to the government, which has the final say in whether to revoke citizenship.

The head of the government's review commission, Vjekoslav Vukovic, was quoted Wednesday by the Sarajevo daily Dnevni Avaz as saying the government revoked 500 citizenships and was double-checking a further 60. He said 330 of the people losing their citizenship have not lived in Bosnia for several years, according to the newspaper.

The commission did not say whether any of the people were suspected of involvement in terrorism, the report said. It was not immediately possible to confirm the report.

The latest round of reviews reportedly revealed that procedures were ignored in granting citizenship to people from several countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Tunisia, Sudan and Russia.

Vukovic was quoted as saying that in the second phase of the process, some 15,000 naturalizations of people from former Yugoslav republics now countries will also be checked.

The government said in April that individuals or institutions who had worked on the naturalization process at the time may face charges for bypassing regular procedures when granting citizenship.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Burma

Exiled Myanmar dissidents may get rare recognition from Southeast Asian lawmakers' group

Associated Press, 8/24/07

Southeast Asia's main lawmakers' group may let the victors of Myanmar's 1990 election join its annual congress, officials said Friday a rare recognition of pro-democracy politicians exiled from the military-ruled country.

Nearly 100 dissident leaders, mainly members of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, recently sought "special observer" status at the general assembly of the lawmakers' group known by its acronym, AIPA.

AIPA, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, said in a statement that it agreed at its congress in Kuala Lumpur this week to refer the matter to its top committee for a decision by next year. AIPA comprises legislators from eight Southeast Asian countries.

"This is a big and long-overdue move," said Sann Aung, who was elected to Myanmar's parliament in 1990 and now lives in neighboring Thailand. "We look forward to a positive and progressive decision by AIPA to grant us our rightful place among them."

The National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in Myanmar's 1990 election, the first freely contested poll in nearly three decades. But the ruling military refused to hand over power, insisting that a new constitution was needed before it could do so.

Activists say at least 33 of those elected to the parliament now live in exile, while more than 80 are considered "stateless" and their whereabouts are uncertain.

The military's continued rule has left Myanmar, also known as Burma, isolated from much of the world community, which wants power handed to a democratically elected government.

AIPA has members from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Two other ASEAN member nations Myanmar and Brunei are "special observer" countries. Myanmar's junta usually sends diplomats to AIPA's congress.

Another group of ASEAN lawmakers who have been pushing for democratic reforms in Myanmar expressed hopes that AIPA will "decide favorably and grant Burma's elected MPs observer status, if not full participatory presence."

Myanmar's elected parliamentarians "have long awaited recognition from AIPA and other regional parliamentary groupings," the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus said in a statement Friday.

Myanmar official defends fuel price hikes that sparked protests

Jim Gomez, Associated Press, 8/26/07

A recent increase in fuel prices that sparked a series of rare protests in Myanmar was triggered by spiraling global oil prices and was not a political move, a diplomat from the impoverished Southeast

Asian nation said Sunday.

Myanmar could no longer afford to subsidize fuel so heavily because of the steep increases in oil prices worldwide, Thaug Tun, Myanmar's ambassador to Manila, told The Associated Press on the sidelines of a regional ministers meeting in the Philippine capital.

Myanmar activists have speculated that the slashed subsidies leading to a doubling of prices at the gas pumps was needed to remedy a government cash shortage. Independent magazine Irrawaddy said the move could be a prelude to privatization, or that it may even reflect internal conflict within the junta a deliberate move to provoke unrest, further stall the approval of a long-awaited constitution and embarrass military ruler Gen. Than Shwe.

But Thaug Tun said it was purely an economic issue the number of cars and motorists on the streets of Myanmar has increased in recent years, bolstering fuel consumption and subsidy costs.

"The government has no recourse but to remove the subsidies," he said. "If you won't do that, it'll be very costly to the government ... It's not politics."

Fuel prices in Myanmar remain among the lowest in Southeast Asia, despite the subsidy cut, Thaug Tun said.

Economic ministers from the 10-members Association of Southeast Asian Nations declined to comment on the protests in Myanmar at a press conference in Manila.

Myanmar's chief representative at the Manila meetings, National Planning and Economic Development Minister U Soe Tha, declined to comment when approached directly.

The 10-member bloc, which includes Myanmar, has a bedrock policy of not interfering in each other's domestic affairs, although some liberal members have become more vocal with their criticisms over the military-ruled nation's spotty human rights record.

Earlier this month, Myanmar's military junta cut state subsidies that have kept domestic oil prices low for years. The move triggered a number of small, peaceful protests last week, mainly in the city of Yangon, and police subsequently detained at least 65 activists, including several leaders of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement.

Thaug Tun said people would naturally feel bad about any price increase but that the low turnout at the rallies indicated the public understood the government's decision.

"I think the protests are not that widespread," he said. "People are making a mountain out of a molehill."

"The problem is the people, they feel the pinch now because ... they did not have to pay so much before," he said, adding Myanmar's military leaders would not reverse the move.

Fresh fuel protests held in Burma

Jonathan Head, *BBC News*, 8/28/07

Further protests have been held in Burma over fuel price rises, despite the arrest of more than 60 activists by the military since last week.

The low-key demonstrations involved some 30 people in Rangoon and up to 200 monks in the western port of Sittwe.

But analysts say it is remarkable they are happening at all, given the army's crackdown on last week's protests.

The fuel price rise, in the case of cooking gas by 500%, has enraged a population already living in poverty.

In addition to deploying soldiers and armed police, the government has sent gangs of thugs, some allegedly recently released criminals, to attack the protestors and drag away their leaders.

The dozens of activists now thought to be in custody include some of Burma's best known dissidents.

The mainly novice monks in Sittwe were not stopped from protesting, according to local residents.

Their involvement must worry the government, echoing the widespread involvement of monks in the 1988 uprising that came close to overthrowing military rule.

Some Burmese are speculating that the fuel price rise was a deliberate move to provoke a crisis, perhaps reflecting disagreements within the ruling military council.

But with such a heavy security presence now on the streets of all the main towns, it will be difficult for any activists to keep their protest movement going.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Burma](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Burundi

Burundian police raid home of opposition politician

Gervais Abayeho, *Associated Press*, 8/22/07

Police seized documents and a computer from the house of an opposition politician Wednesday, his brother said, three days after grenade blasts targeted the homes of five other opposition officials.

Police spokesman Pierre Chanel Ntarabaganyi confirmed the raid on Pancrace Cimpaye's home but declined to provide details about the search.

Cimpaye's younger brother, Parfait Karikumutima, said police arrived at dawn, broke down the bedroom doors and seized a computer, audio and video cassettes and documents.

"They broke his (Cimpaye's) bedroom door with a drilling machine," he said.

Cimpaye, a member of the opposition Front for Democracy in Burundi, or Frodebu, was not in the house at the time and could not be reached for comment, but police could be seen moving around his house for much of the day.

On Sunday night, five simultaneous grenade attacks targeted the houses of five opposition lawmakers. Two bystanders were wounded.

For two years, Burundi has been relatively peaceful following a 12-year civil war that left hundreds of thousands of people dead.

The conflict in the tiny, central African nation erupted in 1993 after paratroopers from the Tutsi ethnic minority assassinated the country's first democratically elected president, who was from the Hutu majority.

Burundi's ruling party is currently in the grip of a power struggle after jailing its powerful chairman for trying to destabilize the country.

That split the party into two factions, one of which has allied itself to the opposition.

Burundi president holds peace talks with opposition

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

Burundi's president has begun talks with main opposition parties to end a crisis that last weekend saw grenade attacks staged on critical politicians, officials said Wednesday.

Leaders of the main opposition Frodebu party, who have accused President Pierre Nkurunziza of orchestrating Sunday's grenade attacks, and the opposition Uprona party both met with him this week, officials from the two parties said.

"The atmosphere was good and we found a willingness to advance on his side. It remains to be seen if there are other forces (in his camp) who want to disrupt the process," Uprona Vice-President Frederic Banvuginyuvira told AFP.

The talks were confirmed by a representative of the European Union, Roland van de Geer, who has been in Burundi for four days to hold talks with the parties involved in the constitutional crisis.

"I found an extremely constructive and positive atmosphere among all those I met," he told a news conference.

"The political parties have shown their willingness to find solutions through dialogue, and President Nkurunziza highlighted that he was responsible... for unblocking this institutional crisis."

The government has denied any involvement in Sunday's attacks, which came two days after Frodebu and dozens of other MPs signed an open letter urging the government to open dialogue with all the opposition parties.

Burundi, which is slowly emerging from 14 years of civil war, has been locked in a political crisis for several months. The president has lost his majority in the national assembly and cannot pass any more laws.

The crisis and last month's walkout from peace talks by senior officials of Burundi's last active rebel group have raised fears of a resurgence of violence.

UN, AU condemn Burundi grenade attacks

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

The United Nations and the African Union on Wednesday condemned weekend grenade attacks on the homes of five Burundian politicians who recently criticized the government.

In a joint statement, the UN integrated office in Burundi and the AU Mission in the small central African nation "firmly condemn this blind violence that cannot be justified by anything."

They said "now was the time for the concretization of what people have agreed on as dialogue, and not acts of intimidation and blind violence."

The main opposition party Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) has blamed the government for Sunday's attacks that came two days after they -- with 62 other MPs -- signed an open letter urging the government to open dialogue with all the opposition parties.

But President Pierre Nkurunziza's National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party denied the accusations Wednesday.

"The CNDD-FDD party condemn the terrorism acts that only tarnish Burundi's image," party spokesman Onesime Nduwimana told AFP. "No sensible government can organize such acts of terrorism."

Dozens of police surrounded the home of FRODEBU spokesman Pancrace Cimpaye to arrest him.

"We have an arrest warrant for Cimpaye for offending the head of state," a police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"He accused the president, among other things, of orchestrating grenade attacks against the several opponents, which is inadmissible," he said.

Other sources said Cimpaye managed to slip away.

The current political crisis and last month's walkout from peace talks by senior officials of the country's last active rebel group have raised fears of a resurgence of conflict in the country emerging from years of civil unrest.

The rebels have said they would only resume talks on the implementation of an ailing September 2006 ceasefire if mediators convene a regional summit to resolve outstanding issues.

Since being elected in 2005, Burundi's power-sharing government has faced numerous political hurdles, not least of which came an ill-defined coup attempt that saw the arrest of the former president last year and sparked howls of protest.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Chechnya

2 police and Chechen rebel killed in shootout in Chechen capital

Associated Press, 8/24/07

A shootout in Chechnya's capital left two policemen and a rebel dead, the Chechen Interior Ministry said Friday.

The ministry said officers stopped a suspicious man on a street in Grozny on Thursday night to check his documents and that the man opened fire with a pistol and then fled to a nearby apartment.

Police surrounded the apartment building and, in the subsequent shooting, two officers and the suspect were killed, the ministry said.

It later identified the man as a high-placed comrade of Doku Umarov, the leader of Chechnya's separatist rebels.

Also Thursday, a group of about 30 camouflage-clad gunmen set fire to the houses of two police officers and the local administration building in the Chechen village of Yandi, the ministry said.

Chechen separatists have fought two wars with Russian forces since 1994. Large-scale fighting faded away early in the decade, but small attacks on police and military patrols continue. Russian forces apparently have strong control of the republic's northern flatlands, but have been unable to drive the rebels out of the mountainous southern sector or purge them from the capital.

In neighboring Ingushetia, gunmen opened fire on Interior Ministry troops Friday near the republic's

main city, Nazran, killing one serviceman, the ministry said.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Cyprus

Leaders of Cyprus' two communities to meet early September

Xinhua General News Service, 8/21/07

Leaders of Cyprus' two communities will meet on Sept. 5 in a bid to resume the reunification process of the Mediterranean island, a UN spokesman in Cyprus said Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the Greek Cypriot side expressed that they are not expecting any breakthrough at the planned meeting.

The date of the meeting, which will be the first between the two sides since July last year, was agreed by representatives of Cypriot President and Greek Cypriot leader Tassos Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot community leader Mehmet Ali Talat.

"The two leaders will meet in the afternoon of Sept. 5 at the UN Special Representative's official residence," UN spokesman on the island Brian Kelly told reporters.

According to a press release from Cyprus' government, the meeting will be attended by Michael Moller, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on the island.

However, government spokesman Vasilis Palmas warned against holding high expectations.

"We should maintain a down-to-earth approach, taking always into consideration the past as far as various meetings are concerned," he was quoted by the Cyprus News Agency as saying.

Papadopoulos and Talat had consented on July 8, 2006, to launch two-layer negotiations, with technical committees to deal with day-to-day issues and working groups to discuss substantive questions.

However, little progress has been made due to a lack of trust between the two sides, who have blamed each other for the impasse.

Papadopoulos had turned down proposals from Talat for new talks, arguing that they should not merely have a meeting for the sake of having one, or for public relations purposes.

But Papadopoulos, who is seeking a second term in the presidential elections scheduled next February, has recently become the one to take the initiative.

The United Nations and the European Union have made continuous efforts to persuade the two communities to work out a viable solution to the decades-long Cyprus problem.

In a referendum held in April 2004, Greek Cypriots rejected a settlement plan by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for fear that it would legalize the ethnic divides on the island, while Turkish Cypriots approved it.

New UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in July this year urged the two leaders in Cyprus to build on progress achieved to date, by showing the necessary imagination and political courage to move from talks about procedure to real engagement in substance.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey militarily intervened and occupied the north of the island following a coup by a group of Greek officers who pushed for union with Greece.

In 1983, the Turkish Cypriot authorities declared a breakaway region and set up "the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," which is recognized only by Turkey.

The Cyprus problem has been one of the main obstacles to Turkey's accession to the European Union, which the Republic of Cyprus joined in May 2004.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Cyprus](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo

South Africa pledges to aid Congo with reconstruction

Eddy Isango, *Associated Press*, 8/21/07

South Africa's president pledged Tuesday to help Congo with advisers and aid a move to transform the Central African nation that has so long been a nexus for conflict into a peacemaker.

"We come to this work because of the necessity that Congo succeeds at playing its role on the continent. Congo must take its place in the process of regenerating Africa," South African President Thabo Mbeki told reporters.

Mbeki and Congo President Joseph Kabila signed a series of deals for the improvement of economic, military and political institutions, Congo Foreign Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi said. He did not provide details or say if specific sums of money or other contributions had been promised.

As part of the agreements, South Africa will greatly expand its role in training Congo's army an unwieldy force that has been plagued by infighting as it attempts to integrate former militia fighters, Defense Minister Diemu Chikez said. He did not provide further details.

The reform of the army has been one of Congo's biggest stumbling blocks as it tries to establish a functioning state for the first time in decades.

Since President Kabila was installed nearly a year ago, government soldiers have fought those loyal to former warlords in the capital and skirmished have continued in the country's lawless east.

Most recently, Uganda has charged that Congo fighters either government soldiers or militiamen have crossed over a shared border to attack villages.

"The situation in the east of the country is relatively calm ... there are few problems. I'm dealing thoroughly with these problems," Kabila said.

"Total peace and security is a question of time," he added.

The accords also provided for visits by top South African finance officials to Congo and aid in updating country's decrepit hospitals.

Mineral-rich Congo emerged from back-to-back regional wars in 2002, but much of the country still operates outside government control. Roads are few in the nation the size of Western Europe, and electricity and running water are erratic even in large cities.

The U.N. continues to keep about 18,000 peacekeepers in Congo to maintain security.

Uganda, DR Congo leaders to meet in two weeks over tensions

Agence France Presse, 8/25/07

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni will meet his Democratic Republic of Congo counterpart Joseph Kabila in a fortnight for talks to defuse tension resulting from a border row, an official said Saturday.

The two leaders will sit down in the Tanzanian town of Arusha for the summit that will also discuss other bilateral issues, said Ugandan foreign ministry's permanent secretary James Mugume.

The summit was agreed during a meeting Saturday between Museveni and DRC Foreign Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi, who arrived in Kampala on Friday.

"They have agreed for the two presidents to meet in Arusha in two weeks time," Mugume told AFP.

Tension between the two Great Lakes nations has shot up since August 1 when Uganda accused DRC troops of killing a British engineer exploring for oil on the Ugandan side of Lake Albert.

Kampala also accused its neighbour of capturing four Ugandan soldiers from a zone clearly under Ugandan control.

On August 9, Uganda threatened to deploy troops into DRC after gunmen crossed the border and shot dead people, looted shops and raped women, further escalating tension.

Africa's Great Lakes nations in new bid to end insecurity

Agence France Presse, 8/27/07

Africa's Great Lakes nations on Monday launched a fresh attempt to end widespread insecurity spurred by rebel groups operating in their territories, an army official said.

Army commanders from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo gathered for a two-day meeting here, during which Kigali was to propose the formation of a joint force to combat the rebels mainly in DRC's volatile eastern region.

"Rwanda will present its plan for a future operation to neutralize the genocide forces operating from the Democratic Republic of Congo," said Rwanda's army spokesman Jill Rutaremara told AFP.

"We are going to express our wish to collaborate with the Congolese army to fight the genocide force threatening Rwanda from eastern DRC," Rutaremara added.

Kinshasa has already rejected the proposal, which was first agreed upon in April during a similar meeting in Burundi.

The presence of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels in eastern DRC has caused a long-drawn tussle between the two nations.

Kigali accuses the FDLR of having actively participated in the 1994 genocide that killed some 800,000 people.

The DRC has hardly known peace since its independence in 1960; in Rwanda, the 1994 genocide caused repercussions still felt to this day; Burundi is struggling to emerge from 14 years of civil conflict; and in Uganda, the north has been ravaged by a rebel conflict since the mid-1980s.

Georgia

Abkhazia confirms Georgian report of crashed plane

Ruslan Khashig, *Associated Press*, 8/26/07

A plane of uncertain origin has gone down over Abkhazia, a senior official of the separatist region said a day after Georgia reported that its forces fired on a plane believed to be Russian that had violated the country's airspace.

Georgia's claim Friday further escalated tensions with Russia, which had soared earlier in the month when Georgia said a Russian bomber dropped a missile on a Georgian village; the missile did not explode. In both cases, Russia denied that its planes had violated Georgian air space.

If Georgia did shoot down a Russian plane, it would be the most serious incident in years between the countries.

In the latest claim, Georgia said it fired Wednesday at a plane over Upper Abkhazia, a remote and ruggedly mountainous area adjacent to separatist-controlled Abkhazia. Authorities said the plane was believed to have crashed.

On Saturday, the chief of staff of separatist Abkhazia's military, Anatoly Zaitsev, told reporters that a plane or its fragments definitely had crashed Wednesday and that he had seen the plane himself.

"The aircraft was going down, a volley of blueish smoke was coming after it and there were two large fragments flying behind its tail from inertia for a while. One of them is believed to have fallen in the lower part of the Kodori Gorge," he said. The gorge runs from Georgian territory into separatist-controlled territory.

He did not specify what kind of plane it was. But Sergei Shamba, the foreign minister of Abkhazia's internationally unrecognized government, said the plane "most likely" belonged to Georgia, the RIA-Novosti news agency reported.

A Russian air force spokesman, Col. Alexander Drobyshevsky, said on Russia's Channel 1 TV Saturday that Georgia's claim Friday was "the latest provocation aimed against us."

Russia earlier said the Georgian claim of the dropped missile was a fabrication aimed at ratcheting up tensions over the status of South Ossetia, another rebellious region that like Abkhazia seeks to become either independent or to be incorporated into Russia.

President Mikhail Saakashvili has vowed to bring the regions back under his government's control and has further irritated Moscow by pushing for Georgia to become a NATO member. The United States and other NATO countries have given substantial military aid to Georgia which Russians widely regard as an attempt to establish a beachhead in territory that historically has been under Russian control or influence.

Two groups of independent experts that investigated the missile-dropping incident agreed that Georgian airspace was violated three times that day by aircraft flying from Russian airspace. The first team was from the U.S., Sweden, Latvia and Lithuania. The second team was from Estonia, Poland and Britain.

Russia has rejected those reports.

AP correspondent Jim Heintz in Moscow contributed to this report.

Georgia plays risky power game with Russia

Jean Raffaelli, *Agence France Presse*, 8/26/07

Georgia's attempts to score points in a tense diplomatic stand-off with Russia are aimed at accelerating its bid to join NATO but could stretch Moscow's patience too far, observers said.

"There is a threat" that rising tensions between the two former Soviet republics could provoke a confrontation, said Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent Russian defense analyst.

Over the past month, Georgia has accused Russia of dropping a missile on its territory and making a series of incursions into its airspace. Georgian authorities have also announced imminent radar integration with NATO.

In the latest incident, Georgian authorities on Friday said that they had fired on a military plane believed to be Russian and that there were signs the aircraft had been downed in a remote forest.

Russia has denied all these allegations and has in turn accused the Georgian government of "provocation." Meanwhile, Russian newspapers said Georgia's allegations were bringing the country closer to the Western military alliance.

"NATO joins Georgia," ran a headline in the independent *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* newspaper on Friday, while the *Kommersant* daily declared: "NATO takes Georgia under its radar."

Western countries, analysts said, can only look on with growing concern. "No one wants a Georgian-Russian confrontation.... The world doesn't want to provoke Russia," Felgenhauer said.

NATO's reaction to the finding of the alleged Russian missile near Tbilisi on August 6 was measured. A NATO spokesman said a few days after the incident that the alliance would be in close contact with Georgia over the incident.

"Georgia risks... not benefiting from complete credibility at a time when it will need Western partners," Salome Zurbishvili, a Georgian opposition leader and the country's former foreign minister, said earlier.

Russia for its part has been making life hard for Georgia in a bid to rein in pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili, who has been actively supported by Washington since coming to power in 2004.

During a bout of extremely cold winter weather in 2006, Russian gas supplies to Georgia were cut off for prolonged repairs on a pipeline. A few months later, Russia banned the import of wine and mineral water from Georgia.

Then, in September 2006, Georgia arrested four Russian officers on charges of spying. This prompted Russia to suspend all direct transport and postal links, as well as to deport hundreds of Georgian immigrants from Russia.

Russia has also given political and economic backing to Abkhazia, a separatist region on the shores of the Black Sea in northwest Georgia that broke off in a fierce conflict in the early 1990s.

South Ossetia, another breakaway region, also enjoys Moscow's backing.

Perhaps most sensitive of all, Russia still has soldiers and military hardware stationed in Georgia from Soviet times, even though it has vowed to withdraw them by 2008.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Georgia](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Indonesia

Suspect in Indonesian activist's poisoning death implicates intelligence agency

Irwan Firdaus, Associated Press, 8/23/07

A key suspect in the poisoning death of Indonesia's most prominent rights activist implicated the state intelligence agency in a secretly taped phone conversation played before a packed courtroom.

Pollycarpus Priyanto, a former pilot facing retrial in the activist's Sept. 7, 2004, death on a Garuda Indonesia flight from Jakarta to Amsterdam, sat quietly as the recording was played on Wednesday.

He was heard saying a document linking him to the State Intelligence Agency's former deputy chief had "disappeared" or "been destroyed" and that there was no danger the evidence would resurface.

"I would never acknowledge (the existence) of the letter ... not only me ... almost 90 percent of the state officials are on our side, sir," Priyanto, 46, told Indra Setiawan, Garuda's former executive director in the May phone conversation.

The wiretap, introduced by prosecutors Wednesday, was recorded by police shortly after Setiawan was detained as a suspect and jailed in April. It was the first evidence presented in open court supporting allegations of state-involvement in Munir Said Thalib's death.

The investigation into Thalib's death is seen as a test of how much Indonesia has changed since Suharto's 32-year dictatorship, when state-sponsored killings were common and security officers were largely above the law. The United States, the European Union and the United Nations have pressed Jakarta to find justice for the tireless rights campaigner.

Priyanto has been accused of putting a fatal dose of arsenic in Thalib's food or drink a claim he has repeatedly denied halfway through the journey. He was an off-duty pilot at the time and, according to Wednesday's testimonies, had been ordered by the intelligence agency to board the plane as a "security officer."

The Supreme Court acquitted Priyanto of murder charges last year after a lower tribunal found him guilty, but judges at the Central Jakarta District Court were in the process of reviewing the case following prosecutors demand of a retrial saying they had new evidence.

Thalib, 38, rose to prominence toward the end of Suharto's dictatorship, for exposing Indonesian military abuses in East Timor's bloody struggle for independence, and to separatist movements in Papua and Aceh provinces. He said he received numerous death threats.

Suharto was ousted following pro-democracy street protests in 1998.

[Access the Indonesia/Aceh Negotiation Simulation prepared by PILPG](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Kosovo

Impatient Kosovo Albanians Press For a Declaration of Independence

Jonathan Finer, *The Washington Post*, 8/21/07

Past cornfields and gentle hills in hard-luck corners of Kosovo that politicians rarely see, Veton Surroi was mobilizing support for independence. On foot. The time to negotiate is nearly through, he repeated in ethnic Albanian homes that still bore battle scars.

Independence is never freely given. It must be claimed.

In the farming village of Medevce, mile nine on a recent dawn-to-dusk hike, he made his pitch to a few local men on the cushioned floor of a small stone house. With the electricity out, they sipped mud-black coffee by the soft light of a curtained window. Sweat soaked their shirts in the 90-degree heat.

"We are giving politics a chance, but nothing seems to be changing," said Surroi, who hopes to spur his government to break a long deadlock and make Kosovo Europe's newest sovereign state. "There is a lot we have to do. If we got independence tomorrow, what is most important to you?"

"We need independence to develop the country," said Bajram Kastrati, 70, a gourd farmer. "I'm not talking about politics, I'm talking about everyday life. We can't get a good price for our vegetables. Our factory closed. We don't have electricity. I ask you this, on all your journey, did you meet anyone happy with how we are being governed?"

Surroi silently shook his head. No.

Kosovo, the last territory of the former Yugoslavia to seek statehood, has been a U.N. protectorate since 1999, when 78 days of NATO bombing drove out Slobodan Milosevic's Serb-dominated Yugoslav army. The territory is still technically a province of Serbia.

This summer, after years of negotiations, Kosovo's roughly 2 million residents -- mostly ethnic Albanians with a 10 percent Serb minority -- are again in limbo. The ethnic Albanian political leadership, anxious for independence, has reluctantly agreed to 120 more days of bargaining with Serbia, creating a new deadline in December.

Surroi, an Albanian who is part of the team of local officials negotiating the province's future, wants Kosovo to declare independence when the deadline expires, with or without an agreement. Such a move, which is gaining advocates among Albanians as the standoff continues, could inflame Kosovo's Serbs and the government in Belgrade, capital of Serbia, which sees Kosovo as part of its historical and religious heritage.

At stake, Surroi says, is escape from foreign rule and from the economic stagnation that has prevailed since Serb troops departed. "No one wants to invest in a country with an uncertain future," he said. "And no country was ever given independence without taking it."

But the territory's Serbs bitterly oppose any separation from Serbia. "I'd rather leave in a coffin than live in an Albanian state, and everyone I know feels this way," said Boris Drobac, 33, a bank employee in a cowboy hat, who sipped beer one recent afternoon at a cafe in Mitrovica, where the Ibar River forms a natural Berlin Wall between the two communities.

"They say World War I started because of the Serbs. Well, World War III might start the same way, if the Albanians are not careful."

Officials here dismiss such statements as posturing. But none express optimism that the impasse will soon be overcome.

"The people of Kosovo have been mature throughout this process, and they will conclude the process with maturity," Fatmir Sejdiu, an Albanian and president of Kosovo's provisional government, said in a recent interview in the capital, Pristina. "That said, the Serbs have tried their best to drag out the process. We will not accept anything short of independence with the full territory of Kosovo intact."

But in one scenario, Kosovo's Serbs would respond to a declaration of independence by carving off enclaves to remain part of Serbia. This in turn might cause Kosovo's Albanians to take up arms to keep the territory intact. Minority communities in neighboring countries could find inspiration for breakaway actions of their own.

If the Serbs secede, "there is certainly potential for violence, even beyond Kosovo," said one Western diplomat in Pristina, who declined to be quoted by name because of the sensitivity of ongoing talks. The United States and European Union have urged patience to let the talks run their course.

But patience is wearing thin in the smoke-filled Pristina office of the Kosovo Liberation Army's veterans association. The ethnic Albanian militia officially disbanded after the war, but claims to maintain a network of 25,000 former fighters. If independence does not come soon, some members say, they'll be forced to fight again.

"For eight years we have stood back and given the political process time and space to unfold, but the door is open to a new escalation," said Faik Fazliu, 30, the group's president. "People died for independence and still we are waiting. This country is a room full of gas, and it only takes a spark."

Fazliu said the ex-soldiers' frustration is fueled by poverty and unemployment. Kosovo's languishing economy has emerged as a dominant theme in the independence debate and led to growing frustration with the international presence here.

Despite more than \$2.5 billion in foreign aid to Kosovo, unemployment runs as high as 50 percent territory-wide, and many of the best jobs are tied to international organizations whose presence here will not be permanent.

Electricity, a focus of postwar reconstruction efforts, is available less than 12 hours a day in much of the province. In Europe, only Moldova has a higher infant mortality rate.

Judged by the numbers, Kosovo "is on par with some of Africa's poorest countries," a top U.N. development official wrote this summer.

International officials, however, warn that becoming a country is not a panacea.

"Independence is sold as manna from heaven. It isn't. They are setting people up to be disappointed and furious," said Ranjit Nayak, resident representative of the World Bank.

"They're all fixated on the goal of independence. That's what they fought for. But you ask what are your plans for after that and they don't have a clue."

Serb leaders say that independence would bring instability, not prosperity. Deeply segregated from the Albanian majority, Serbs fly a different flag (the red-white-and-blue Serbian national banner), spend a different currency (Serbian dinars), speak a different language (Serbian) and take their cues from a different government (Serbia's).

"If independence comes, the Albanians will shoot in the air to celebrate for the next three weeks, but it won't make their lives better," said Milan Ivanovic, who heads Kosovo's Serbian National Council, a political organization allied with Belgrade. As for the prospect of Serbia responding militarily, or local Serbs seceding, he said: "Everything is on the table."

Kosovo's Serbs, many of whom subsist on stipends paid by Belgrade, also fear they will be targets of violence if Albanians get greater control over Kosovo's affairs. In March 2004, Albanian mobs attacked Serb villages, burning several hundred homes and churches. At least 19 people died.

Milan Duncic, 48, the white-haired chief of the tiny Serb village of Binci, said its 50 residents are already renting apartments elsewhere in Serbia in case they need to flee. "If we stay, the Albanians will make Kosovo a concentration camp for Serbs."

Others are staying put but taking precautions. For centuries, the Serbian Orthodox Church has crowned its patriarch at the Patrijarsija Monastery in Peja, at the base of the Kurst Mountains. Last month, work began to build an eight-foot wall around the grounds.

For now, the leading proposal for Kosovo's future is a controversial plan, backed by the United States and the European Union, that falls short of full independence. It would invoke U.N. authority to formally separate Kosovo from Serbia, accord substantial minority rights to Serbs and give an E.U. representative power to annul legislation and fire officials.

Kosovo's assembly approved the package in April, but it is strongly opposed by Serbia and Russia, Serbia's traditional ally, which has blocked the U.N. Security Council from adopting the proposal. The result was a new round of talks, most recently in Pristina, among representatives of Kosovo, Serbia, the United States, the E.U. and Russia. Little progress has been made.

"I asked the Russian representative, 'If you will always veto any independence proposal that Serbia doesn't want, then why are we even negotiating?' He didn't answer," said Surroi, who took a break from his cross-country trek to attend recent talks in Pristina. "We won't change, Belgrade won't change. Moscow won't change. It's time to move on."

To prepare the residents for that possibility, throughout August the affable Surroi, the foreign-educated son of a former Yugoslav diplomat, has swapped his suit for hiking clothes and walked 12 miles a day on a campaign trail a world apart from the coffeehouse politicking of the capital.

On a sweltering evening, he came to Little Krusha, known in whispers as the "widow's village." One April afternoon during the war, Serb forces rounded up local men and boys and shot them dead.

Surroi asked women wearing mourners' robes for their thoughts on independence.

"The Serbs killed us physically. But since then we've been killed by having no government that cares for us," said Ayshe Shehu, 58, who lost her husband and four sons that day. "So, I am begging you. I have one son left and I don't want him to die in a place like this."

US hits out at Serbian minister over Kosovo remarks

Agence France Presse, 8/22/07

The United States on Wednesday slammed as "baseless" a Serbian minister's accusation that Washington wanted to create a "NATO state" in Kosovo.

A plan drawn up by UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari -- which envisaged a supervised independence for Kosovo -- has been backed by the United States, the European Union and most Western countries.

"Calling the Ahtisaari plan for Kosovo a NATO state is quite a stretch," US State Department spokesman Gonzo Gallegos said, commenting on the reported remarks by Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardzic last week.

"We do not consider this statement to represent the official view of the Serbian government," Gallegos said.

"Baseless and unhelpful rhetoric will not bring us closer to what we feel is the common desired position for peace and stability in the region," he said.

Samardzic had asked the United States to give up independence plans for the breakaway province.

"When we are at the start of new talks on Kosovo status it is crucial that NATO and the US give up a project to create a satellite state, their military barracks in Kosovo," Samardzic was reported saying by Beta news agency.

"The world can now see what were the real goals of the NATO bombing campaign -- to create its own NATO state in a shape of independent Kosovo," Samardzic was quoted saying.

An international troika -- composed of representatives of the United States, the European Union and Russia -- has launched a new round of negotiations on the final status of the UN-run Serbian province.

Kosovo has been run by the UN since NATO bombing ended Serbian forces' brutal crackdown on Kosovo Albanian separatists in June 1999.

Gallegos said the United States hoped that the Serbian government would concentrate on working with the Kosovar leadership and the troika to find a mutually acceptable resolution to Kosovo's final status.

He stressed that the Ahtisaari plan would be the basis for the new talks.

"We share, with most Serbian citizens, the same vision for Serbia: peace, prosperity, and ties to transatlantic and European institutions," he said.

Some 16,000 NATO-led troops are stationed in Kosovo. Serbia became a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program last December, a first step toward membership of the alliance.

Kosovo Talks to Start Anew, But Parties Express Doubt

Nicholas Wood, *The New York Times*, 8/28/07

The political deadlock over Kosovo's future is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon despite the start of new negotiations on the province this week, according to two leading politicians involved in the talks.

Agim Ceku, Kosovo's prime minister, and Vuk Jeremic, Serbia's foreign minister, leading members of the opposing delegations in the talks that begin Wednesday in Vienna, said in recent days that they doubted that a compromise could be reached over the disputed region during the discussions.

The new round of talks follows months of unsuccessful deliberations between Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, who make up the province's majority and seek independence, and Serbia, which considers Kosovo an integral part of its territory. Western governments, Russia and the United Nations have also been involved, and the coming negotiations are seen by many diplomats as a last chance to reach a negotiated settlement, thereby sparing the international community the task of imposing one.

Kosovo has been administered by a United Nations mission since June 1999, when Serbian-dominated Yugoslav security forces, who committed widespread atrocities, were forced by NATO airstrikes to withdraw from the region. Kosovo's Albanian leadership is now seeking full independence from Serbia, but the Serbian government is willing to let the region run only its own internal affairs, not a defense and foreign policy.

In April, 14 months of talks came to an end without an agreement. In July, Russia rejected a United Nations plan that would have granted Kosovo independence with supervision from an international mission.

The United States has indicated that it is ready to recognize Kosovo by the end of this year without a negotiated settlement or a Security Council resolution. But European Union nations are divided.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Kosovo](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Morocco

U.N. appoints first Chinese commander of a U.N. mission in Western Sahara

Associated Press, 8/27/07

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed the first Chinese commander of a U.N. peacekeeping mission, who will take responsibility in the disputed Western Sahara, the United Nations announced Monday.

The appointment of Maj. Gen. Zhao Jingmin to replace Gen. Kurt Mosgaard of Denmark, who completes his tour on Monday, is subject to approval by the U.N. Security Council, which is virtually certain.

"This will be the first time the U.N. has had a Chinese force commander heading one of its missions," U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

Zhao, who speaks fluent English and French, has held senior appointments in the Chinese defense ministry's Office of Peacekeeping Affairs since October 2003. From 2002-2003, he was a senior colonel at the National Defense University and prior to that he was a military attaché in Tunisia.

Zhao served in the U.N. Iraq-Kuwait observer mission in 1996-97 and in the U.N. mission in Western Sahara as a military observer from September 1991 until June 1992.

Morocco and Mauritania split Western Sahara after its Spanish colonizers left the territory in 1975. Full-scale war broke out the following year, and Morocco took over the whole of Western Sahara after Mauritania pulled out in 1979.

The fighting, which pitted 15,000 Polisario guerrillas against Morocco's U.S.-equipped army, ended in 1991 with a U.N.-negotiated cease-fire that called for a referendum on the region's future. But the vote has never happened.

The U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara currently has about 225 military observers, troops and civilians.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Nepal

Minority groups lead strike in Nepal's capital in fight for more rights

Yuvraj Acharya, Associated Press, 8/22/07

Ethnic and low-caste minority groups held strikes in the Nepalese capital Wednesday, shutting down schools and businesses as they called for more rights and political power, officials said.

The Tamang Liberation National Front called for a strike in Katmandu and the surrounding valleys, an area populated by ethnic Tamangs. Tamangs make up about 5 percent of Nepal's population.

The strike was meant to pressure the government to recognize Tamang as an official language and to declare Nepal a republic before the November elections, said Hit Bahadur Tamang, a member of Parliament and the Tamang activist group.

The roads were mostly deserted Wednesday, though government offices were not affected by the strike, said Home Ministry spokesman Baman Neupane.

The Tamang Liberation Front is affiliated with the former Maoist rebels who last year abandoned their decade-old armed revolt to join a peace process.

The strike was called in collaboration with the United Dalit Republican Front, a minority group fighting for equal status for low-caste minorities in Nepal's Hindu society. Dalits, once called "untouchables," make up about 13 percent of Nepal's population.

The government is set to hold elections to a special assembly in November that will choose a political system for Nepal, currently a constitutional monarchy, and rewrite the constitution.

Nepal nationalizes king's palaces

Agence France Presse, 8/23/07

Nepal's government nationalized on Thursday seven palaces owned by King Gyanendra as a first step in seizing all of his royal property, a minister said.

The blow was the latest for the monarch who has been already stripped of most of his powers, including his position as head of state and army chief, in the wake of an historic peace pact with rebel Maoists and political parties.

"The cabinet meeting decided to nationalize seven palaces being used by the king. The process of registering those palaces under the name of the government of Nepal will proceed soon," culture minister Prithvi Subba Gurung told AFP.

But Gyanendra -- viewed by supporters as the living incarnation of a Hindu deity -- will be allowed to keep those properties that he owned before ascending the throne in 2001, Gurung said.

He took the throne after the massacre of his brother and most of the royal family by a drunken crown prince who later killed himself.

The nationalized palaces include the sprawling Narayahiti Royal Palace in the heart of Kathmandu where the monarch and his family live.

The fiercely republican Maoists ended a bitter civil war with a peace deal in November 2006 that saw them emerge from the hills and enter government to challenge royal privilege, including the king's control of the army.

The fate of the 238-year-old royal Shah dynasty is to be decided in November in elections to vote for a body to rewrite Nepal's constitution.

Nepal Maoists plan protests to push for king's exit

Agence France Presse, 8/24/07

Nepal's Maoist leader said Friday the former rebels planned to launch protests next month to push for the immediate ouster of King Gyanendra before crucial polls set for November.

The former guerrillas, now in government after signing a landmark peace deal last year with mainstream political parties, had agreed to wait until after the polls that will decide whether the country becomes a republic.

But Maoist leader Prachanda said they now want Gyanendra to go right away.

"To push for a republic, it's imperative to launch protests from inside government, in parliament and on the streets," Prachanda told business leaders, human rights activists and journalists at a meeting organized by the party.

Nepal is due to go to the polls to vote for a body that will rewrite the country's constitution and decide on the fate of the 238-year-old monarchy.

Parliament was suspended for two months on Friday to allow members to begin campaigning for the constituent assembly elections.

"Monarchist and regressive forces are still active in conspiring against the constituent assembly election," said Prachanda.

He said the protests by the fiercely republican Maoists would be peaceful.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Nepal](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Philippines

Philippines suspends peace talks with Muslim rebels

Agence France Presse, 8/21/07

The Philippine government said Tuesday it had suspended peace talks with Muslim insurgents, saying it needed more time, and insisting the move was not linked to a military operation in the restive south.

The talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has been waging an insurgency for decades in the southern Philippines, had been due to resume in Malaysia on Wednesday.

"I need more time to clarify some things," said government negotiator Rodolfo Garcia, who requested the delay.

He expressed hope that the talks could resume by the second week of September after the government had "finalized its negotiating position."

Garcia said his request had nothing to do with the current military offensive against Muslim extremists in the south of the country, which was launched in response to the killing of 14 Marines in an ambush last month.

MILF negotiator Mohagher Iqbal said Tuesday that his group was ready for the talks but had been told by the Malaysian facilitator that Garcia had "not been given clear guidelines on how to proceed with the peace process."

"That means we cannot resume the talks because the government is not prepared to concede anything,"

Iqbal told ABS-CBN television in an interview, claiming that Manila had put off the talks once before in May.

The 12,000-strong MILF late last year said the talks were on the brink of collapse over its demands for economic control of ancestral lands on the southern island of Mindanao.

Last month, MILF guerrillas backed by members of the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf killed 14 Marines in an ambush in the island of Basilan, despite a three-year-old ceasefire with the government.

The MILF has admitted it was behind the ambush but said it only launched the attack because the military had crossed into its territory.

The military launched an offensive on August 13 against the Abu Sayyaf on the southern islands of Jolo and Basilan, but President Gloria Arroyo said troops should respect the "ceasefire guidelines" with the MILF.

Military officials say they are coordinating with the MILF to ensure their forces do not get caught up in the operation but sources have charged that MILF fighters are helping the Abu Sayyaf.

Arroyo visits southern Philippines to meet troops battling al-Qaida-linked militants

Teresa Cerojano, *Associated Press*, 8/23/07

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo flew to a restive southern Philippine island amid tight security Thursday to confer with the military's top brass and boost the morale of troops pursuing al-Qaida-linked militants.

Arriving at a marine camp on Basilan island, 900 kilometers (560 miles) south of Manila, she thanked and shook hands with troops, announcing a possible raise in combat pay. She then joined soldiers in an outdoor lunch.

Arroyo arrived with the chiefs of the military, police and other officials after a closed-door command conference that included Cabinet members at the military's Western Mindanao Command headquarters in nearby Zamboanga city.

She handed cash assistance to families of slain soldiers before the start of the conference.

Arroyo warned Tuesday the military offensives on Basilan and nearby Jolo island may prompt al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf militants to sow terror elsewhere in the country. She said she ordered the military and police to bolster security.

But hours later, a bomb exploded in a crowded square in Zamboanga, wounding 14 people. The bombing, carried out amid already-tight security in the city, may have been set off by the Abu Sayyaf to divert the military's focus from the offensives, officials say.

The government will not ease off the campaign, Arroyo said. She also ordered officials to launch a "humanitarian offensive" on Basilan and Jolo to balance the military assault.

U.S.-backed troops bombarded Muslim militant strongholds on the island on Sunday, a day after 15 marines and 40 militants were killed in fierce fighting, officials said.

The marines were killed when their unit attacked a jungle hide-out of the Abu Sayyaf near Basilan's remote Ungkaya Pukan township, sparking a daylong clash during which an air force pilot also died when his helicopter crashed at sea, the military said.

The military claimed about 40 insurgents were killed, including two commanders who allegedly took part in last month's beheadings of 10 marines on Basilan.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro told reporters Arroyo was briefed Thursday on the security situation in Basilan and Sulu.

She praised troops for their heroism and reminded the military and police to be vigilant to thwart any attempt by terrorists to exploit the situation further, he added.

Police forces have been placed on full alert in the capital, Manila, and the southern Mindanao region, beefing up security in public areas and transport hubs.

The U.S. government has blacklisted the Abu Sayyaf notorious for deadly bombings, beheadings and ransom kidnappings as a terrorist organization.

Philippines asks truce monitors to stay on

Agence France Presse, 8/28/07

Philippine authorities and rebel negotiators have asked a Malaysian-led truce monitoring team to extend its mission in the troubled south while they work out more talks, they said Tuesday.

In a joint statement, they said the monitoring team had made a "substantial contribution" in stabilizing the situation in the Mindanao region, as well as in boosting international confidence in the peace process.

The truce between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a 12,000-strong separatist group, was agreed three years ago.

Last week however President Gloria Arroyo called off the planned resumption of formal peace talks amid a major military offensive against other Islamic militants.

Officials expect the talks to resume in Malaysia in mid-September.

After a meeting Monday in Malaysia, the two sides "reached a consensus to request Malaysia, Brunei, Libya and Japan to extend the tour of duty of their respective contingents... for another 12 months ending August 2008."

They also agreed to allow the monitors to observe the truce in Basilan and Palawan as well as in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi archipelagoes.

The ongoing military offensive is centered in Basilan and on the island of Jolo, which is in Sulu.

The statement said the next round of talks would look at whether to expand the truce monitoring team to include other countries.

The current team comprises some 60 soldiers, mainly from Malaysia and with token contributions from Brunei and Libya, plus a Japanese aid worker.

They first deployed in October 2004 under Malaysian command and carry small arms.

[Learn about PILPG's work in the Philippines](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Somalia

Somali forces poorly trained and equipped, and receive no pay, says minister

Tom Maliti, *Associated Press*, 8/22/07

Somali forces fighting a bloody insurgency in the capital are poorly trained and equipped and receive no pay, the country's interior minister said on Wednesday.

The government, however, is not relying on a military strategy to defeat the insurgents, Somali Interior Minister Mohamed Mohamoud Guled told journalists in the capital of neighboring Kenya. The government uses clan elders as mediators to negotiate with insurgents to stop fighting, said Guled. Violence has gripped the Somali capital, Mogadishu, for the past eight months and thousands of civilians have been killed.

In the latest incident, a grenade attack on the convoy of the government's Ethiopian allies killed two civilians and wounded five others in north Mogadishu. One of the dead and three of the wounded were women, said witness Abdi-shakur Ga'al, a local garage owner.

"We cannot deny that there are difficulties. We have got a lot of challenges ahead," said Guled, adding that the government was confident it will defeat the insurgents. In the past, Somali officials have said they have defeated the insurgents in Mogadishu, only for more fighting to begin.

Somalia's government has fewer than 10,000 soldiers and 5,000 policemen, Guled said. He said the U.N. Development Program used to pay the salary of 1,800 policemen but stopped payments in July.

"The rest are not paid because the government has no local revenue," said Guled, without elaborating on how the soldiers and policemen survive.

But a U.N. Development Program official said the organization only pays 50 percent of stipends to 1,010 policemen, and not 1,800. There has been a delay in payments because of checks to make sure the right policemen are paid, but the program has not been stopped, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

In the past, businessmen in Mogadishu's largest market, Bakara, have accused soldiers and policemen searching for arms of looting their premises.

In December, Ethiopian troops and Somalia government forces toppled Islamic fighters who controlled most of southern Somalia. The militants vowed to conduct an Iraq-style insurgency.

Somalia has been mired in chaos since 1991, when warlords overthrew dictator Mohamed Siad Barre and then turned on each other. A U.N.-backed transitional government was formed in 2004, but it has been unable to assert its authority.

Gunmen kill Somali radio journalist in latest media killing

Associated Press, 8/24/07

Gunmen shot and killed a teenage Somali radio journalist in the south of the country Friday, a colleague said, in the third violent death of a journalist in two weeks.

Abdulkadir Moallim Kaskey, who worked for a local station called Benadir, died and a woman traveling with him was wounded in an attack on their minibus in southwestern Gedo province, said a colleague, Mohamed Sanweyn.

"Abdulkadir Mahad Moallim Kaskey was a young talented journalist, and we are deeply concerned by his killing," another colleague, Mohamed Mo'allin, told the *Associated Press* by phone. He did not know why Kaskey had been killed or whether the attack had been an assassination or banditry.

Kaskey was a relatively new journalist, and had just finished training in the capital of Mogadishu two days before. He was traveling back to his province when he was shot.

On Aug. 11, two journalists from Mogadishu-based HornAfrik were murdered, the first man by gunmen and the second in an explosion when he returned from his colleague's funeral.

Vincent Broffel, a spokesman for Reporters Without Borders said that at least seven Somali journalists have been killed this year, making it one of the most dangerous places in the world to work.

"What is very worrying is that people now are targeted. It's not clear whether Mr. Kaskey was targeted...but the other two radio journalists killed two weeks ago were definitely targeted," he said. As well as assassinations, Somali journalists have to worry about bandits and stray gunfire and roadside bombs.

"Somalia is dangerous for everybody. The security is worsening," he said.

The lawless country in the Horn of Africa is riven by fighting between an Islamist insurgency and the Somali government and its Ethiopian allies, who toppled the Islamists from power last December.

Somalia has been mired in chaos since 1991, when warlords overthrew dictator Mohamed Siad Barre and then turned on each other. A U.N.-backed transitional government was formed in 2004, but has been unable to assert its authority.

Two Somali peace delegates injured amid threat of stronger insurgency

Mustafa Haji Abdinur, *Agence France Presse*, 8/25/07

Two Somali peace delegates were injured in an attack on a Mogadishu hotel, police said Saturday, as Islamists vowed to wage a stronger insurgency to drive Ethiopian forces out of Somalia.

The insurgents overnight hurled three grenades at Hotel Lafweyn where delegates attending the Somali National Reconciliation Congress are staying, injuring the pair, said police spokesman Abduwahid Mohamed.

"They suffered small injuries, but police are investigating the incident," Mohamed told reporters.

A delegate staying at the hotel, Mohamud Haji Mohamed, said one grenade exploded inside the building while the rest detonated outside.

"We were woken by a heavy explosion inside the hotel and minutes later, I realized it was an insurgent attack that left two delegates wounded," he told AFP.

A hotel security guard said the insurgents escaped after the attack.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, chief of the executive arm of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), said insurgents would step up their fight until all Ethiopian forces deployed in Mogadishu to bolster the feeble Somali government are withdrawn.

"They will be pushed out from Somalia and we will take back our freedom by force," Ahmed told AFP in the Eritrean capital Asmara, the base of the Somali government foes.

"We have a right to live in peace and in freedom and a right to manage our affairs ourselves.... Until we get that point, we will continue the fighting," Ahmed said.

The Mogadishu hotel attack came a week after insurgents killed Moalim Harun, a respected Somali elder participating in the laborious government-sponsored clan reconciliation parley in the capital.

While the process has been supported by the international community, it has been boycotted by the top Islamist militants and a large part of the capital's dominant Hawiye clan.

The Islamists are planning parallel peace talks in Asmara on September 1, an event that analysts warn would further polarize efforts to normalize the Horn of Africa nation of 10 million.

Although Ahmed urged the United Nations and Western powers to support the Islamist initiative, he renewed salvos against the United States, which backed Ethiopia in its moves to drive Islamists from Somalia.

"The US is a large government, but they are supporting Ethiopia, supporting the dictator (Ethiopian prime minister) Meles Zenawi, who is killing our people."

"Instead, we appeal to European countries, to the US, to the UN, to support us," he added, apparently acknowledging the weight of Washington's backing in global peace bids.

Mogadishu -- the epicenter of recent violence -- had experienced a short period of relative respite following a tough security crackdown coinciding with the July 15 opening of the talks.

The fitful talks have barely made progress despite huge backing from the UN and several Western powers, who fear that an unstable Somalia could be a safe haven for terrorists and extremist groups.

An Islamist militia that had briefly taken control of large parts of Somalia in 2006 were defeated by Ethiopian troops fighting alongside government forces.

Since the Ethiopian-Somali alliance wrested back control of Mogadishu in April, the Islamist-led insurgency has reverted to guerrilla-style tactics, launching daily hit-and-run attacks against government targets.

Somalia, wounded by its long colonial past, was throttled after the 1960 liberation from the British and the Italians by years of a devastating civil war, leading to the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

This touched off a bloody power struggle that has defied numerous peace initiatives, effectively cementing Somalia as an archetypal "failed state", and prompted botched military and humanitarian intervention by the UN and the US in the early 1990s.

Overnight Thursday, eight people were killed in Mogadishu, the latest in a string of fatalities in the bloody contest for the seaside capital.

The countryside, which has been relatively calm, has seen a surge of interclan fighting over access to dwindling water and pasture land, with the latest clash last week killing 20 people in central Somalia.

A combined Somalia-Ethiopia forces and at least 1,500 African Union peacekeepers have failed to stem the bloodletting in Mogadishu.

Several African nations that pledged to contribute peacekeepers have balked in the face of the escalating insurgency and the country's unnerving hostility towards peacekeepers.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Somalia](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Sri Lanka

Five killed amid heavy shelling in Sri Lanka's Jaffna

Agence France Presse, 8/21/07

Government forces and Tamil Tiger rebels exchanged artillery fire in northern Sri Lanka Tuesday as five people were killed in other violence, military officials and rebels said.

Security forces were firing multi-barrel rocket launchers towards positions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Jaffna peninsula, officials said.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website said there had been long-range attacks on Monday night too, but there were no reports of casualties.

Elsewhere, three soldiers were killed and several others injured Tuesday when the LTTE launched a mortar attack on troops in the northeastern district of Vavuniya, the defense ministry said.

Further north in Jaffna, suspected rebels fired at two local aid workers, killing one and injuring the other on Monday, Tamilnet.com said.

Unidentified gunmen also shot dead a parliamentarian's brother in the eastern district of Batticaloa late Monday, the defense ministry said, blaming the killing on the LTTE.

There was no immediate comment from the LTTE which is fighting for a separate homeland for the island's Tamil minority.

More than 5,200 people have been killed in renewed fighting since December 2005.

Ease emergency laws, media rights group tells Sri Lanka

Agence France Presse, 8/24/07

A media rights group Friday urged Sri Lanka to ease emergency laws that curtail freedom of expression and warned of worsening conditions in one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists.

Working conditions have deteriorated in the Tamil-populated northern district of Jaffna since fighting erupted there between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels, the Free Media Movement (FMM) said in a statement.

"At least seven media workers including two reporters have been killed since May 2006," the statement said, adding that one journalist was missing and the offices of three media outlets had been physically attacked.

"Murders, kidnappings, threats and censorship have made Jaffna one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists to work," the FMM said, referring to the government-controlled peninsula.

Dozens of reporters have also fled or abandoned their work due to a climate of fear, the rights group said.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has also led to abductions and extra-judicial killings, rights groups say.

At least 835 civilians were kidnapped in Jaffna district between December 2005 and May 2007, according to Sri Lanka's independent Human Rights Commission.

Local media in Jaffna report the kidnappings, but journalists confined to their offices cannot investigate

the alleged involvement of the security forces in the abductions, the FMM said.

"Death squads moving around in unmarked white vans have become the symbol of the 'dirty war' and instill terror in the population, including journalists in Jaffna and Colombo," the media rights group said.

"Journalists are caught in the crossfire between the security forces, the paramilitaries and the LTTE and live in fear of reprisals for any article, commentary, photo or cartoon they produce," the FMM statement said.

Over the past year, army officers have summoned Tamil media chiefs at least four times to order censorship, the FMM said.

Both local and international rights groups have said that the situation for journalists has worsened as Sri Lanka presses for a military victory over the rebels in a 35-year-old conflict that has claimed more than 60,000 lives.

A wave of tit-for-tat clashes has left heavy casualties on both sides.

Over 5,200 people have been killed since December 2005, according to official figures, while human rights groups alleged that over 1,000 people have "disappeared" in the past year.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Sri Lanka](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Sudan

Darfur rebel faction threatens to pull out of peace talks over refugee camp raid

Associated Press, 8/23/07

One of the main rebel factions battling the Sudanese government in the war torn western Darfur region threatened Thursday to reconsider its participation in peace talks following a raid by government forces on a refugee camp.

Police entered the Kalma refugee camp in South Darfur province on Tuesday following an attack two days earlier on a nearby security post, the official Sudanese News Agency reported. Authorities arrested at least nine people and seized drugs and weapons, it added.

The Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army faction, led by Ahmed Abdel Shafi, said in a statement that 1,000 Sudanese troops were involved in the raid, which he claimed resulted in 40 arrests and five deaths.

"In light of this senseless act ... the SLM/A is currently reconsidering its commitment made during the Arusha Consultative Meeting early this month with regard to re-energizing the political peace process," the group said.

Sudanese security forces rarely enter the camps, and there were large demonstrations on Wednesday by Kalma refugees to release their compatriots, reported local media.

The U.N. and Africa Union sponsored a Darfur rebel conference in Arusha, Tanzania, earlier this month to re-launch talks with the government after a May 2006 peace agreement between Khartoum and one rebel faction last year proved largely ineffective.

The peace agreement was signed by only one of the rebel movements, which promptly splintered into

several warring factions that continue to battle government forces.

More than 200,000 people have died in Darfur since ethnic African rebels took up arms against the Arab-dominated central government in 2003, accusing it of discrimination.

Khartoum is accused of retaliating by unleashing janjaweed militias, which are blamed for the worst atrocities against civilians in a conflict that has displaced more than 2.5 million people.

Arabs Seek Role With Darfur Rebels; Little-Known Group May Reflect Widening Disaffection With Sudan's Leaders

Stephanie McCrummen, *The Washington Post*, 8/22/07

To the dozen or so Darfur rebel groups attempting to unite ahead of possible negotiations with the Sudanese government, add one more: the United Revolutionary Force Front, a nascent movement that says it represents nomadic Arab tribes that have been unfairly associated with the conflict's notorious government-backed militias known as the Janjaweed.

"We want to make an agreement between Arab and non-Arab people to be one," the movement's spokesman, al-Hadi Agabeldour, said in an interview here. "If negotiations begin and our group is not participating, the negotiations are not completed."

The four-year-old conflict between the Sudanese government and rebels in the country's western region of Darfur has killed at least 400,000 people and displaced 2.5 million more, international experts say.

In the dominant pattern of the violence, Sudan's Arab-led government has armed the region's nomadic Arab tribes to carry out attacks against non-Arab farming communities, which form the popular base of the rebellion.

But the conflict has always been far more intricate than that. Plenty of nomadic tribal leaders have refused to take part in the Janjaweed militias, in many cases becoming victims themselves, as traditional migration routes have been cut off, economic relationships severed and tribal conflicts heightened by the proliferation of weapons.

In that context, the United Revolutionary Force Front represents what experts say is growing disillusionment with the Sudanese government among Darfur's Arab communities, a development that is potentially damaging for the Khartoum government, which has relied on Arab support, or at least neutrality, in the conflict.

"Over the last year there have been various developments indicating that Arab groups are becoming less and less happy with Khartoum," said Eric Reeves, a professor at Smith College in Northampton, Mass., who has written extensively on the conflict. "Because what has Khartoum given the Arab people as a whole? They've given Janjaweed money and weapons. But that does not really benefit the Arab population as a whole."

It is not surprising, Reeves said, that a group such as the United Revolutionary Force Front has emerged to stake a claim to that sort of disaffection, particularly given recent developments in the conflict.

Sudan recently agreed to the deployment of a 26,000-strong joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping force, which will absorb a 7,000-member A.U. force that has failed to stop the violence.

That impending deployment, along with signals that the Sudanese government and the rebels could enter into negotiations soon, has set off jockeying for position among Darfur's various rebel groups.

The rebels have been accused of contributing to widespread banditry across the largely roadless region, where power is often measured by the number of Land Cruisers in one's possession.

The Sudanese government, meanwhile, has continued its campaign to crush them. On Tuesday, government forces surrounded one of Darfur's most volatile camps, Kalma, to force out rebels that government officials contend are behind a spate of attacks on police there, the Reuters news agency reported.

Agabeldour declined to comment on the strength of his group's force on the ground, but he listed several military campaigns in recent months against the Sudanese government.

He said the group was founded by students at the University of Khartoum in 1999 and tried to join one of Darfur's main rebel groups in recent years, but was rejected because rebel leaders suspected its members might be spies.

"We decided if we don't take up weapons, the government will not listen," he said. "We are a new generation, and we know our rights. The government has fabricated this conflict between groups. This should not be an Arab versus non-Arab conflict."

Agabeldour said the group, whose logo is a sword crossed with a ballpoint pen, has written letters to the United Nations, the European Union and the U.S. government explaining its cause.

He said that he is in the Chadian capital because it is easier to get the word out about the movement here than in the bush.

The violence in Darfur has spilled across the border into eastern Chad, complicating a conflict here in which several rebel groups are seeking to overthrow the government of President Idriss Deby.

UN chief calls on Sudanese military to remove all remaining troops from southern Sudan

Edith M. Lederer, *Associated Press*, 8/24/07

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the Sudanese military to remove all remaining troops from southern Sudan, expressing disappointment that a July 9 deadline was not met as called for in a 2005 peace deal that ended the 21-year civil war between the mostly Muslim north and mainly Christian south.

In a report to the U.N. Security Council circulated Thursday, Ban said the formation of joint military units comprising government soldiers from the north and former rebels from the south is also significantly behind schedule and he lamented that supposedly integrated units are operating separately, under different chains of command.

One result, Ban said, has been continuing instability in some areas.

"In southern Sudan, the activities of some regular armed forces and local militias, the exploitation of oil resources and tribal insecurity continue to pose challenges for the protection of civilians," he said, singling out a May 5 attack by one tribe that left 54 members of another tribe dead, mainly women.

Forming a fully integrated professional army, Ban said, "remains one of the key challenges ahead."

According to the timelines in the 2005 agreement, formation of the joint units is a prerequisite for the full redeployment of rebel forces from Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States, Ban said. The joint units are also mandated to protect Sudan's oilfields, while oil installations are to be demilitarized under the agreement, he said.

Ban, who is expected to visit Sudan next month, strongly urged the two parties to complete the assignment of troops to the joint units, "which is already some nine months overdue."

While much of the redeployment of Sudanese troops has been carried out as required, Ban said, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) acknowledge that some 3,600 troops remain in the south, though some

southern civilian sources, including the governor of Unity State, contend the figure is much higher.

The Sudanese military claims the troops are needed to protect the oilfields until the joint units are fully deployed, but the rebels do not agree, he said.

"I call upon SAF immediately to remove all remaining regular military elements from southern Sudan, with the exception of those earmarked for joint integration units," Ban said.

Under the 2005 peace deal, former rebels from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement were given some key positions in the northern government, and both sides agreed to share oil revenues and mark the border between the north and the south.

But Ban said there has been only "incremental progress" on the border issue, an agreement on arrangements for developing a disputed oil concession in Jonglei state is in question because one company involved is dissatisfied, and an agreement on Abeyei, a disputed oil-rich area between northern Sudan's Kordufan region and the Bahar Ghazal region of southern Sudan, has unraveled.

Despite these setbacks, the secretary-general welcomed recent progress by the Sudanese military and the rebels in reintegrating former members of other armed groups and in trying to resolve disputes over wealth sharing.

Ban also praised the intensive contacts and negotiations by the two sides in their joint executive institution, calling the dialogue "a welcome reaffirmation of their commitment to address critical issues related to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to strengthen partnership and to overcome mistrust."

Ban also addressed two other conflicts elsewhere in Sudan.

In western Darfur, he said, the United Nations and others were redoubling efforts to strengthen peacekeeping and to promote a political settlement of the four-year conflict that has left more than 200,000 people dead and displaced 2.5 million.

In the east, Ban said, after a long period of stagnation, steps have been taken to begin implementing an Oct. 14 peace agreement between the Eastern Rebel Front and the government, ending an intermittent war that lasted for 10 years.

[Learn about PILPG's work in Sudan](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Prepared by Tracy Martin