

VOA BREAKING NEWS

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INTRODUCTION

VOA Breaking News is a listening text for intermediate to advanced levels of English learners. It contains the latest news occurred in the first six months of the year 2007. We have done our best to put under one cover a wide range of latest news that is interesting and motivates the English learners.

It's good to know that in order to improve your listening ability you need to spend more time on listening to English materials. It's quite clear that reading will improve your vocabulary but that's too difficult to empower listening skill just through visually-based materials.

Reading a sentence, you could know all the words and phrases; however, if you only listen to the same sentence in regular speed you won't catch the meaning. Why is this? we hear a lot of English learners complaining that **“the spoken English is too fast”**. Unfortunately, **native English speakers** are not going to change the speed they speak. You should instead boost yourself up and look where the problem lies.

When native speakers are listening to English spoken naturally, they don't listen to every word and think about the meaning of each word. That would take much too long and at the same time they won't be able to understand the whole idea. In other words, their brains are good at listening to only the important words and getting a feel for the general meaning. It's very hard to explain how to do that. If you are really good at a sport or a musical instrument, it's hard to explain how you do that so fast, but one thing is for sure: **You need to practice a lot before you will be good at listening as they say “Practice Makes Perfect.”**

It's important to listen to things that are challenging for you. **VOA Breaking News** helps you improve your listening. It's good to read the reports in the book as well as listen to reporters so that you know what are being reported. If you have a chance, it's better read and listen again from time to time, or listen to the recorded reports on the CD without reading the texts to get to know how much you have improved your listening ability. **Keep practicing and don't give up.** You will certainly improve your English listening this way. We wish you the best of luck.

Mohammad Sharif - Safar Rezapour

Summer 2007



Pentagon Will Study Senate Report on Detainee Torture

The report by the Senate committee that oversees the military said senior officials, including former Secretary Rumsfeld, authorized "aggressive interrogation techniques," resulting directly in the abuse of detainees and sending a message to U.S. forces worldwide that mistreatment was allowed.



The technique is harsh, even when simulated. Some say it is torture, others [say it is] necessary in the war on terror. It is called waterboarding and it feels like drowning

It said the abuse included putting detainees in stress positions, taking away their clothing, using dogs to scare the detainees, depriving them of sleep and using a simulated drowning technique known as waterboarding.

A spokesman for Rumsfeld called the allegation he condoned such abuse "unfounded," and said the report is "unencumbered by the preponderance of the facts."

The Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Carl Levin, said in a news release it is "unconscionable" for senior officials to blame low-ranking troops for the abuse at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad and other locations. The Democratic Party senator said the 18-month investigation "is an effort to set the record straight," in

the hope that admitting America's mistakes will help "rebuild some of the good will" it has lost.

The top Republican on the committee is Senator John McCain, the former presidential candidate who was tortured as a prisoner of war in Vietnam 35 years ago. In the joint release with Senator Levin, he said it was "inexcusable" for the United States to use the kind of "abusive interrogation techniques" used by its enemies, in violation of the Geneva Conventions. He said, "These policies are wrong and must never be repeated."

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman reacted to the report Friday.

"There have been 12 major reviews conducted of detention operations, none of which found that there was any policy that ever condoned or tolerated abuse," he said.

But past reports have criticized permissive and contradictory orders coming from the Pentagon about the treatment of detainees. Whitman said the Defense Department cooperated with the senate investigators and will take a close look at their report.

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"We'll look at the report in detail. If there is any new information in there that we feel we need to address, we will certainly act upon it," he said.

Whitman also noted that the U.S. military has taken extensive steps in recent years to end abuse and ensure that all detainees are treated humanely.



A photo that shows abuse of inmates in US custody at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq

Still, the abuses of the past have hurt the U.S. reputation in the world, and have also made it more difficult to prosecute detainees. Officials said information obtained through torture or other abuse may not be admissible in U.S. courts. That is a main reason the Bush administration established a system of military commissions at the Guantanamo facility.

But critics like Anne Marie Brennan of Amnesty International said the system is unfair and the detainees should be moved to regular U.S. prisons and tried in regular U.S. courts.

"If trials are able to go forward, then trials can go forward. Obviously, evidence obtained by torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment should be excluded," she said.

It will soon fall to the administration of President-elect Barack Obama to decide how to respond to the Senate report, and how to proceed with the detention, trial and possible release of the 250 men still held at Guantanamo.

BLAIR HOLDS TALKS WITH IRAQI PRESIDENT IN LONDON

Tony Blair meets with Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, London, 11 May 2007

The most important factor that will define the legacy of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's decade-long premiership will be Iraq.

Repeated polls show that the majority here believes it was wrong for Britain to get involved.

On Thursday, Blair acknowledged he may have gotten some things wrong while in office, but he added it would be for others to decide.

The prime minister was asked at a joint news conference Friday if he had any

regrets about the issue.

"People can debate over the years what may have happened differently but you know, you only have to talk to someone like President Talabani to realize what Iraq was like under Saddam and his sons and realize how important it is that it is able to have a different future," said Blair.

"And if these terrorists try to stop them having that future, our job is to be with him and to fight the terrorism," he continued.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani thanked Blair for the British involvement in his country and he blamed the media for dwelling on negative images of his country that he says has swayed public opinion in Britain.

"It is something normal that when British boys and girls are killed in Iraq that we are very sorry for this that also people here who feel that what Iraqi[s] are doing they need to show them some tangible achievements, which we are now doing," he said.

"I hope within coming weeks and month we are able to show the public opinion of Great Britain that our and you were on the right direction and we are now getting the right results of what you have done," he added.

The Talabani visit has come at the end of another week of deadly attacks in Iraq, including a bombing in Irbil, the normally peaceful capital of the country's self-governing Kurdish region.

Critics says attacks like that only serve as a reminder that no corner of Iraq is immune from the bloodshed.

BLAIR PROMISES BRITAIN WILL REMAIN STAUNCH ALLY OF US



President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair talk outside the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, 17 May 2007

The president and prime minister took advantage of their final official meeting to hold a secure video conference from the White House with U.S. and British commanders in Iraq.

Prime Minister Blair says there are genuine signs of progress toward political reconciliation between Sunni and Shi'ites. But he says al-Qaida terrorists and Iranian-backed elements are equally determined to disrupt that progress.

"This extremism is rearing its head, is trying to dislodge the prospects of stability and progress in so many difference countries," he said. "There is no alternative for us but to fight it wherever it exists. And that is true whether it is in our own countries, which have both suffered from terrorism, or in Iraq or Afghanistan."

Prime Minister Blair has long been the president's biggest ally in Iraq with British troops second only to the American contingent in the multi-national force.

The unpopular war has hurt approval ratings for both men and is seen in Britain as one of the reasons the prime minister is stepping down.

Asked if he is to blame for the prime minister leaving office, the president said he does not know, then laughed and said, "could be."

In a Rose Garden news conference, Mr. Bush said he has enjoyed working with Mr. Blair more than he could have possible imagined.

"You know, I don't regret things about what may or may not have happened over the past five years. I honor a relationship that I truly believe has been laying the foundation for peace," he said.

Prime Minister Blair says he has tried to do what is right and would ally himself with the president again if he had it to do over.

"I've admired him as a president and I regard him as a friend," he said. "I have taken the view that Britain should stand shoulder-to-shoulder with America after September the 11th. I have never deviated from that view. I do not regret that view. I am proud of the relationship we have had. I am proud of the relationship between our two countries."

While it was likely their last White House meeting, the two men will meet again as heads of government at next months G8 summit in Germany.



BLAIR TO STEP DOWN AS LABOUR PARTY LEADER; HAND OVER POWER JUNE 27

Tony Blair chose the town of Sedgefield, the heart of his constituency in northeast England, to make his long-awaited announcement.

"Today, I announce my decision to stand down from the leadership of the Labour Party," he said. "The party will now select a new leader. On the 27th of June I will tender my resignation from the office of prime minister to the Queen."

With these words, Mr. Blair began the transition of power. The Labour Party is expected to select current treasury chief, chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, as its new leader, paving the way for him to become prime minister on June 27.

Speaking to party members in Sedgefield, Mr. Blair said that after a decade in power it was time to go.

"I've been prime minister of this country for just over 10 years," he added. "In this job in the world of today, I think that's long enough for me, but more especially for the country."

Mr. Blair recounted some of his government's successes, including Britain's booming economy, improvements in health care, employment and social benefits. He also talked of foreign successes: intervention in the civil conflicts in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. He spoke of Britain's part in the fight against terrorism, in toppling the Taleban in Afghanistan and in ousting Saddam Hussein from Iraq, although acknowledging Britain's involvement in Iraq remains a deeply controversial issue.

Mr. Blair admitted not everyone agrees with the decisions he made over the past 10 years.

"I did what I thought was right," he said. "I may have been wrong; that's your call. But, believe one thing if nothing else, I did what I thought was right for our country."

Mr. Blair acknowledged that not all expectations he had come into office with had been fulfilled. He said some people might say the expectations were too high, but he said he would not have wanted it any other way.

BRITAIN'S NEXT PM PROMISES DIFFERENT KIND OF GOVERNMENT



Gordon Brown has been confirmed as the Labour Party's leader-in-waiting and next prime minister

Having secured the backing of the vast majority of Labour politicians in parliament, Gordon Brown will become the next British prime minister, without a runoff party election.

He will simply succeed Tony Blair on June 27 when, after a decade in office, Mr. Blair will step down.

Speaking in London, Mr. Brown, the country's long-serving finance minister, said he it will be an honor to lead the nation.

"I am truly humbled that so many of my colleagues have nominated me for the leadership of the Labour Party and I formally accept the nomination, the responsibility it brings and the opportunity to serve the people of Britain," he said.

A lot has happened during the last 10 years under Mr. Blair's leadership, and Gordon Brown will inherit a demoralized and unpopular Labour Party lagging far behind the opposition Conservatives in the polls.

But Mr. Brown promises change and a new approach.

"I will lead a new government with new priorities," he said. "I believe government only works when it is dedicated to serving the people. I will always try to put your concerns and aspirations at the heart of what I do. I will work hard for you. This is who I am."

Brown said he will not announce any shift in London's relationship with Washington, despite widespread public disquiet in Britain over Mr. Blair's unwavering support for the president on Iraq.

In Washington, Prime Minister Blair met with President Bush at the White House where they later held a joint news conference.

Mr. Blair congratulated Gordon Brown on his landslide victory in Labour Party backing.

"Having signed Gordon's nomination forms and nominated him as leader, of course I wish him well and I believe he will make a great prime minister, and I know he believes in the relationship with America too," he said.

Asked about what kind of relationship he might have with Mr. Brown, President Bush said he expects a smooth transition.

"I hope to help him in office the way Tony Blair helped me," he said. "Newly-elected president, Tony Blair came over, he reached out, he was gracious and was able to converse in a way where our shared interests were the most important aspect of the relationship. I would hope I would provide the same opportunities for Gordon Brown. I met him. Thought he was a good fellow."

Gordon Brown says he will tour the country during the next six weeks to better understand the challenges that lie ahead. During much of that time, Mr. Blair will be traveling overseas.

6

Bush Pushes Plan to Reduce Auto Emissions



George Bush

The president is coming under increasing pressure to tackle America's energy woes. The Supreme Court has ruled that carbon dioxide emissions from cars and trucks must be regulated by the government. At the same time, gasoline prices are rising to record levels across the country and consumers are demanding action.

The president says his administration has already proposed a plan to cut America's dependence on foreign fuels by 20 percent in 10 years by setting fuel efficiency standards for certain vehicles and

promoting alternatives to gasoline. He says he is stepping up the process by ordering all government agencies involved in energy policy to work together to come up with new regulations.

"We now have reached a pivotal moment where advances in technology are creating new ways to improve energy security, strengthen national security and protect the environment," he said.

But the president cautions that change will not come overnight.

"This is a complicated legal and technical matter and it is going to take time to fully resolve," he said. "Yet it is important to move forward, so I have directed members of my administration to complete the process by the end of 2008."

That means the new regulations will not be ready until the end of the president's term in office

Democrats seeking their party's 2008 presidential nomination are already making the president's record on the environment an election issue.

Leading Democrats have criticized President Bush for his refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol - an international agreement that calls for mandatory controls on emissions that trap heat in the atmosphere. These gases have been labeled by many scientists as the primary cause of the climate change phenomenon known as global warming.

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Bush Repeats Promise to Veto Iraq Spending



President Bush makes a statement on Iraq 24 Apr 2007

President Bush says he will block \$124 billion of emergency war spending, because it calls for U.S. troops to start withdrawing from Iraq by October of this year.

"They know I am going to veto a bill containing these provisions, and they know my veto will be sustained," said Mr. Bush. "But instead of fashioning a bill I could sign, the Democratic leaders chose to further delay funding our troops, and

they chose to make a political statement. That's their right, but it is wrong for our troops and it is wrong for our country.

President Bush says accepting a timetable for troop withdrawal would be accepting a policy that directly contradicts the judgment of military commanders. He says the Democratic proposal would undermine U.S. troops and threaten the safety of Americans at home because terrorists would use Iraq to plan further attacks.

Democrats say a timetable for withdrawal will force Iraq's government to take greater responsibility for its own security and will stop the president from continuing what they say is an open-ended commitment in Iraq.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said last week that as long as Americans follow the president's path in Iraq, the war is lost.

Vice President Dick Cheney Tuesday called the Senator's comments uninformed and misleading.

"It is cynical to declare that the war is lost, because you believe it gives you political advantage," said Mr. Cheney. "Leaders should make decisions based on the security interest of our country, not on the interest of their political party."

Shortly after the vice president's comments on Capitol Hill, Senator Reid said the Democratic spending bill is good for the troops and good for the country as it provides more funding than the president asked for.

"We do [budget] more money for Iraq and Afghanistan," he noted. "We do [budget] money for military medicine and veterans, and so I am not going to get into a name-calling match with the administration's chief attack dog."

Democrats passed their spending bills in close votes, making it highly unlikely they can find the two-thirds majority needed to override the president's veto.

Almost six months after elections that gave them power in the House and Senate, congressional Democrats say they have an obligation to fix what they see as a misguided Iraq policy.

They say the American people voted for change. But President Bush, in his brief statement on the White House lawn, said they did not vote for failure.



Bush Says America Shocked by University Shooting



SWAT team members head to Norris Hall, the site of a shooting on campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 Apr 2007

A blustery spring morning turned into a living nightmare at Virginia Tech.

A gunman opened fire in a dormitory. Two hours later, he struck again in a classroom.

Students fled in panic as police rushed in. Buildings across the sprawling rural campus were locked down. And the nation mourned as the death toll increased over and over again.

"Our nation is shocked and saddened by the news of the shooting at Virginia Tech today," the president said.

President Bush gave a voice to the thoughts of the American people.

"Today, our nation grieves with those who lost loved ones at Virginia Tech," he said. "We hold the victims in our hearts, we lift them up in our prayers, and we ask a loving God to comfort those who are suffering today."

Across Washington, in the halls of Congress, political foes joined in a moment of silence for the dead - first in the Senate and then in the House.

The top Democrat in the Senate - Harry Reid - spoke of the senselessness of the shootings. He said many questions remain unanswered.

"What we do know breaks our hearts and shakes us to our very core," he said. "So for now all we can do is offer our thoughts and our prayers in a very individual way."

For members of Virginia's congressional delegation, the shootings literally struck close to home. Virginia Tech is the largest university in the state with roughly 25,000 students. Virginia's long-time senior Senator - Republican John Warner - spoke of the loss in personal terms.

"This tragedy is an incomprehensible situation," he said. "It is an incomprehensible, senseless act of violence."

The federal government has offered to help Virginia with its investigation of the tragedy. Officials at Virginia Tech - which is state-owned and run - have defended their handling of the crisis. Students have complained the school was slow to get out information about the first shooting and that a general warning might have prevented further loss of life.

Until Monday, the worst campus shooting in U.S. history was the 1966 massacre at the University of Texas, where a student killed 16 people. Eight years ago, two teenagers murdered 13 people at their high school in Colorado before committing suicide. And just last year, a gunman killed five young girls at an Amish school in Pennsylvania.

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Bush Says Iraq Policy Not Hurt by British Transition of Power



President Bush, 10 May 2007

Prime Minister Blair has stood with the United States throughout the Iraq conflict, and has worked closely with President Bush.

"I'll miss Tony Blair," said President Bush. "He is a political figure who is capable of thinking over the horizon. He's a long-term thinker. I have found him to be a man who's kept his word, which sometimes is rare in the political circles I run in."

Mr. Blair's decision to step down comes at a time when some public opinion surveys in Britain put support for the war at under 30 percent. But President Bush - speaking to reporters after a briefing at the Pentagon - indicated he is optimistic there will be no change in British policy on Iraq.

"I believe that the relationship between Great Britain and America is a vital relationship," he said. "It is a relationship that has stood the test of time, and when America and Great Britain work together, we can accomplish important objectives."

The president predicted he will be able to work well with the new prime minister. All indications are the ruling Labor Party will choose treasury chief Gordon Brown. Mr. Bush said Brown well understands all that is at stake in Iraq.

"I believe he understand the consequences of failure," admitted Mr. Bush.

President Bush was also asked about the change of power in France, and prospects for improved ties under President-elect Nicholas Sarkozy.

"We will have our differences, and we will have our agreements," he said.

"And I am looking forward to working with him."

Next month, Mr. Sarkozy will represent France for the first time at the Group of Eight summit in Germany. It will also be the last such gathering for Tony Blair, who leaves office officially on June 27.

10

Bush Urges Patience on Iraq

While Congress is wrestling with how to fund the Iraq war at a time of growing public opposition, Republican lawmakers are letting the president know their patience with his approach is wearing thin.

Eleven congressional Republicans - all of them considered political moderates - came to the White House Wednesday for a private meeting to share their concerns with the president.

The meeting was not on Mr. Bush's published schedule, and did not become public until congressional participants decided to speak to the media. Among them was Congressman Tom Davis of Virginia.

"The president listened," he said. "He was engaged. This was not a suck-up session [an attempt to curry favor], but this was very, very candid."

The 11 lawmakers delivered what they called a blunt warning to the president. They said while they would support the administration in the



President Bush (center) seated between Defense Secretary Robert Gates (l) and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley,

current fight over war funding, their long term support for the war is in question.

They said there must be progress in Iraq soon, and expressed frustration not only with the continued high level of violence, but with the slow pace of action by the Iraqi government.

The White House initially declined to respond to questions about Wednesday's meeting. But the president did comment early Thursday during a visit to the Pentagon.

"They expressed their opinions," he said. "They are obviously concerned about the Iraq war."

Mr. Bush said he had a good exchange with the Republican delegation. He said he told them to be patient, and give his new Iraq strategy time to be implemented.

"I said why don't we wait and see what happens," he said. "Let's give this plan a chance to work, and stop playing politics."

The president noted that sectarian killings have declined since U.S. troops stepped up their presence in Baghdad and al-Anbar province. But he said attacks by al-Qaida in Iraq are likely to rise because the terrorists feel threatened.

"As we have surged our forces, al-Qaida is responding with their own surge," the president said. "Al-Qaida is ratcheting up its campaign of high-profile attacks, including deadly suicide bombings carried out by foreign terrorists."

The president said U.S. and coalition forces will strike back. He said despite the bloodshed, he remains convinced the war is necessary, and noble.