

Broadcasting Board of Governor's translation of the VOA Persian TV program "State of the Union Address."

Three segments were translated: 1) the opening of the program, including the host and two guests and their preliminary comments; 2) a conversation between the host and two guests following the President's speech; and, 3) a conversation between the host and two guests following the Democratic Response to the President's speech by Sen. James Webb (D-VA).

The host of the special program was Setareh Derakhshesh, the regular anchor for VOA Persian TV's *News & Views* broadcast (designated **Anchor**.) The two invited guests in studio were Dr. Mansour Farhang, Professor of International Relations at Bennington College (designated **MF**), and Dr. Hormuz Hekmat, Editor of Iran Nameh and political analyst (designated **HH**.)

TRANSLATION BEGINS HERE

SEGMENT #1

Anchor

This year, President Bush finds himself in an entirely different set of circumstances. True?

MF

Yes entirely. This year the US Congress is controlled by the Democrats. They are in the majority and Mr. Bush will be addressing them this year.

Anchor

What about Iran? Do you think he will talk about Iran, Dr. Hekmat?

HH

He will very likely speak about Iran because - along with Iraq, which appears to be Mr. Bush's area of weakness - Iran and the possibilities it presents in terms of U.S. foreign policy are of keen interest to the American people and Congressional Democrats.

Anchor

Security issues were the main focus of President Bush's speech last year. This year apparently President Bush will be applying a different perspective to security issues. And his comments regarding Iraq will encompass dimensions that are part of a broader ideology. What is your perspective on the Iraq issue, Dr. Farhang?

MF

I believe Mr. Bush's perspective will be a narrower one. In the past establishing and spreading democracy in Iraq was the framework used in analyzing and discussing issues

related to Iraq. In the past year, democracy has moved to one side, while stability and the establishment of a government that can ensure security for the people of Iraq now frame the analysis. I believe this aspect of U.S. foreign policy has priority over issues related to democracy and its spread in the Middle East.

Anchor

What do you think, Dr. Hekmat?

HH

I am of the same opinion because Mr. Bush is in an entirely defensive mode regarding Iraq and must justify the presence of U.S. troops there regardless of what the long range plans were at the beginning of the war. Therefore, very likely he will stress the issue of U.S. long-term interests in Iraq.

Anchor

Some of the decisions President Bush must make do not require Congressional approval, for example, the sending of troops to Iraq. The Democrats have, however, voiced their opposition. To what extent can they oppose this plan in practice Dr. Farhang?

MF

Based on previous experience, when a party holds the majority in Congress and opposes the policy of a President one approach is to limit funds available for military action and limit the length of time such funds are available. In the case of both Vietnam and Nicaragua, the U.S. Congress ended the funding for war. The President could order mobilization of troops, but funds were not legally available to carry out the order.

Anchor

One question the Democrats will no doubt have is regarding the budget for this war and the provision of funds required for what needs to be continued there.

HH

What is interesting is not that Democrats are opposed to the continuation of the war and desire the exit of U.S. forces from Iraq, but that there are some very influential Republican senators who have joined these Democrats and do not have a positive view on continuing the war and increasing U.S. troop levels.

SD

How much will this speech have an effect on the American people? We know that President Bush's popularity has plummeted.

HH

I believe if he simply repeats statements he has made before regarding Iraq and other U.S. foreign policy issues, it will not have a significant impact on American public opinion. The American public is interested in what is happening in the war arena and unfortunately; right up until yesterday, the number of U.S. fatalities has been high. They, therefore, conclude that continuing the war does not benefit the U.S. Now, what the

President can say that is new and will gain the confidence of the American people that continuing the war is a necessity, I personally cannot foresee.

Anchor

Of course, Democrats favor the gradual reduction of U.S. forces in Iraq but I do not believe they have offered any other alternatives, Mr. Farhang.

MF

If by an alternative we mean an option requiring no political capital or diminishment of the reputation of U.S. power in the region, no. Things have gotten such that, using their own expression, the egg is broken. If we expect those who opposed the policies that have brought us to this point to have a solution that will address the underlying concerns, no. But this is a problem for the American political system. In the end, Democrats are faced with this crisis just as much as Mr. Bush is.

Anchor

In a few minutes, President Bush will be giving his State of the Union address. This year, a woman is presiding over the U.S. Congress for the first time in the history of the United States: Ms. Pelosi, who stood in staunch opposition to the war, to President Bush's policies on Iraq. Tonight's speech will be more difficult than in the past.

HH

The President will be discussing domestic policies, as well. I have heard that President Bush is at his lowest point of popularity, according to the latest polls in the Washington Post. After September 11, in 2002, he was at 82% and now he is at 33%. Something to know about Ms. Pelosi is that she is the third in line to the Presidency.

President Bush's State of the Union Address

SEGMENT #2

Anchor

We now ask our guests this evening who viewed the address, Dr. Hekmat, could you please summarize the address and talk about what some of the highlights were and how it differed from last year's address.

HH

Contrary to what was expected and what I think is important to your Farsi speaking audience, especially our compatriots in Iran, is that he mentioned Iran perhaps more often than Iraq. If I am not mistaken, he mentioned Iran six or seven times, each time in a context that was not very positive. As you said earlier, he stated that Iran is helping terrorists and insurgents in Iraq, is interfering in the affairs of Lebanon, and is pursuing nuclear weapons. Therefore, we might be able to say that he is not paying much attention to the Democrats' call for rapprochement with Iran, and is in effect passing on opening discussions with Iran. I think this is the most important point that he brought up in his address.

Anchor

Dr. Farhang, what was the difference between this year's speech and last year's? Dr. Hekmat pointed out that Iran's support of terrorism was mentioned. In 2006, President Bush made reference to it as well. In 2005, Iran was named the biggest supporter of terrorism in the world. How was this year's address different?

MF

There was not much of a difference between this year's speech and the last speech. However, given how this speech is received by listeners in the Middle East, the [enormous]¹ gap between the claims made in the speech and the truths that exist in the Middle East is much wider than existed last year. For example, Mr. Bush talked about the spreading and advancement of democracy in Iraq while in the past four years two million Iraqis have left their country, more than 500,000 Iraqis have been killed, and more than 500,000 Iraqi lives have been disrupted and they have been forced to move. In addition, the country has become divided along ethnic and religious lines. So, there was talk about democracy and other values everyone respects, but [in the view of the Iraqi people and those who observe the war in Iraq]² these statements have no connection to reality.

Anchor

Of course, he was addressing the American people and Congress, rather than people of other nations.

MF

Certainly, the speech is geared for national consumption as well, but the U.S. is a country whose decisions have global ramifications. Therefore, when President Bush analyzes American and world issues and announces the US government's positions, the effects are widespread on the world community. Therefore the perspective, assessment, and feelings of the world community are a part of the analysis we do on these types of speeches.

Anchor

What do you think of Dr. Farhang's opinion? Do you think this speech addressed the concerns the American people have regarding this war, especially considering that [public opinion in the U.S. opposes increasing troops level in Iraq and are opposed to overall U.S. policy in Iraq].³

HH

I don't think a convincing response was given to the American people concerning their worries regarding the war and its continuation. In all fairness, if we look at his six years

¹ Our independent translation suggests the Farsi term is "enormous gap."

² The original BBG translation says "in the context of the emotions and experiences of the war in Iraq" but our independent translation of the phrase suggests it is more correctly translated "in the view of the Iraqi people and those who observe the war in Iraq"

³ The original BBG translation says "most are opposed to increasing the troops level in Iraq and are generally opposed to the policy toward Iraq" but our independent translation suggests it is more correctly translated "public opinion in the U.S. opposes increasing troops level in Iraq and are opposed to overall U.S. policy in Iraq."

of presidency and the involvement of the government and people of the United States in this, as of now, endless war, there is no choice but for him to warn the American people against the results of pulling U.S. and coalition forces out of Iraq. Potentially it would lead to more violence and killings and the breaking apart of Iraq. Also, other Middle Eastern and Arab countries and Iran would be pulled into a widespread conflict. Given these realities, he had no choice but to try to convince the American people that war must continue until some political stability is achieved.

Anchor

The Democrats are for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. The Baker-Hamilton study proposes another strategy. What President Bush spoke about tonight is also a new strategy, or the only strategy for victory in Iraq. What is your opinion?

MF

First of all, his proposal does not constitute a new strategy. Adding 20,000 troops to a civil war is not a new strategy. The Baker-Hamilton study proposed a new strategy. Their report states that we must look at this problem as a political challenge, involve the countries in the region in dealing with the challenge, and find a peaceful solution. According to the Baker-Hamilton report the continued presence of U.S. troops in Iraq and U.S. entanglement in this civil war adds to the instability and violence there.

This is not the first time that a super-power has become entangled in a civil war, then realizes its mistakes but, in order not to lose its international clout, continues and expands the war. This was the tragedy that the U.S. experienced in Vietnam, and France in Algeria and Indochina. The truth is if a big and important country like the U.S. makes a mistake, just as Hamilton and Baker explained, it must admit its mistake and search for wise solutions. Unfortunately, Mr. Bush has rejected this wise diplomatic solution and what he is calling a new strategy is the continuation of an old one.

Anchor

In any case, in the path for Iraq, which President Bush set forth two weeks ago, one of its purposes is to further isolate Iran and to create a polarity. The “axis of evil” was defined in 2002, but also defining a camp of moderate, Arab states which oppose more extremist Shiite countries like Iran. What are your thoughts on this kind of classification? Do you believe these distinctions have been exaggerated to an extent or do they really exist in the Middle East?

HH

I believe the divisions and tensions that exist and have recently increased between Shiite countries, led by Iran and followed by Iraq on the one hand, and those of Sunni persuasion including Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia on the other, are a reality. Its roots are not only the war in Iraq but also the beginning of the Islamic Republic and Iran’s attempts to unite and increase the influence of Shiites. In recent years, Mr. Ahmadinejad has emphasized the notion of uniting Muslims against the Western world. This is a reality. Of course, the U.S. intervention in Iraq and the way the war has been executed has increased this rift and duality.

One point must be noted – and that is, there is a large distinction between Iran, Korea and Vietnam as far as Western interests are concerned. Iran is in the largest oil rich region of the world and if Iraq is divided up and the battle between Sunnis and Shiites continues and expands, I believe the interests of the U.S. and the Western world will be greatly endangered. This is a reality that cannot be denied or disregarded.

Anchor

Dr. Hekmat, Dr. Farhang stated that President Bush did not put forth a new strategy on Iraq two weeks ago, and that perhaps the increase in troop levels in Iraq is to boost the U.S. reputation internationally. What are your thoughts on this?

HH

I am in total agreement. By proposing more troop deployments to Iraq, he has not brought forth a new strategy. However, it does not appear he has any other options or alternatives. Even the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops has its own repercussions. In his remarks, he makes frequent references to those dangers.

Anchor

We are awaiting the Democratic response. Could you please address some of the U.S. domestic issues and the President's remarks surrounding them. Part of his speech tonight discussed domestic issues such as immigration and immigration laws. Dr. Farhang was anything new presented this evening?

MF

Both parties are divided internally when it comes to immigration concerns. It is very interesting that in regards to immigration and immigration reform, there is common ground between Mr. Bush and liberal Democrats. While parts of the Democratic and Republican parties share the same views on this issue. The question of immigration in America goes beyond ideological and party lines.

Anchor

I am sorry to interrupt you, Dr. Farhang, as I mentioned earlier, Jim Webb delivers the Democratic response.

Democratic Response by Jim Webb

SEGMENT #3

Anchor

We heard the response from Jim Webb, Democratic Senator from Virginia who, as expected, pointed out weaknesses in President Bush's administration, namely U.S. foreign policy in Iraq. Dr. Hekmat, what is your opinion about the Democratic response? Did they offer any alternatives? He talked about the weaknesses in American foreign policy and the U.S. economy, as expected.

HH

I believe he said that the gap between the rich and the poor in the U.S. has reached a crisis level and a dangerous point. He said the U.S. Congress, under control of the Democrats, would try to solve the problem of the distribution of wealth. In regards to U.S. dependence on oil, especially oil from the Middle East, Webb said that, though Bush has been talking about reducing this dependence, it has not come to pass. He hopes the U.S. Congress will be able to help in this regard. His most important statements concerned Iraq; he did not really offer an alternative except for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops. He held the Bush administration responsible, and the beginning battle between the Democrats in Congress and Mr. Bush over how the war is continued and what the exit strategy might be is as important as the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Anchor

I am sorry that I interrupted you when you were speaking on the immigration issue, Dr. Farhang. But let's please talk about the Democratic response.

MF

Yes, the fact is that this difference between the Republicans and the Democrats has always been visible. Regarding domestic issues, it can be said that the Republican Party has always been a supporter of industrialists and multi-national corporations. In terms of increased wealth, it has some success but in terms of the distribution of wealth, they are operated unfairly. The best example of this is that it had been ten years since the minimum wage had been increased. Ten years during which the Republicans were in the majority. There is no doubt that there has been a significant difference between the two parties when it comes to social expenditures and the fair distribution of wealth among the population. Mr. Webb pointed out some of these differences.

I think when it comes to the Iraq war Jim Webb put forth an option endorsed not only by the Baker-Hamilton report but also by a number of experts in U.S. foreign policy. The Iraqi government itself opposes the U.S. proposal of sending more troops to Baghdad. What Mr. Bush is proposing as a new strategy is an imposition on the current government in Iraq. Iraq's neighboring countries must be included in the search for a diplomatic solution. As Mr. Hekmat stated, the battle between Shiites and Sunnis – the fratricide – must be stopped. The question is not whether it should be stemmed, but what is the best way of avoiding this tragedy. Mr. Bush sees the solution in increasing U.S. forces and expanding violence, while Mr. Webb sees the solution as diplomacy and cooperation with neighboring countries.

Anchor

Therefore, you yourself agree with the Baker-Hamilton report, which recommends discussions with Syria and Iran.

MF

We know that Mr. Ahmadinejad has made many ignorant statements. We know that the Islamic Republic's human rights report card is a tragedy. We know the Islamic Republic

does not represent the wishes and values of the Iranian people. But when it comes to war and peace, we must try to avoid the entanglement of war. The people of Iran will pay the tragic price of war if there is, for example, an attack on Iran. The elements of the regime such as Ahmadinejad will use this attack for their own purposes.

Anchor

Of course many different points of view exist on this matter. Some are not in agreement with what the Baker-Hamilton report has recommended. They believe that a regime which itself creates crisis in the region, especially in Iraq and among Palestinians and in Lebanon, that it would legitimize the regime if discussions are held with it. It is a long discussion. We hope that you can come back to our program and discuss these issues. Unfortunately, our time for this special program has come to an end.

END OF TRANSLATION