

C

NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
(through Mr. Mulet)

DPI Weekly Press Review

This week's press review examines the serious regional fallout as a result of the row between Saudi Arabia and Iran after the former's execution of a high-profile Shiite cleric. It also looks at the global response to the mid-week announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that it had conducted a hydrogen bomb test. In both stories, the reaction of the United Nations featured heavily in the coverage.

The Saudi-Iranian dispute dominated front pages around the world for much of the week. Many commentators immediately speculated on the impact on the peace processes for two conflicts in the region: Syria and Yemen. The overwhelming tone was pessimistic, and there was widespread concern among analysts about the potential for lasting damage to Sunni-Shiite relations.

There was uniform condemnation of Pyongyang's announcement, although tempered by scepticism that the test was not of the scale that the country had claimed. The UN's strong reaction – whether via your public remarks, the Security Council's stern response or the views expressed by entities such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency – helped depict the Organization as being at the centre of a united international community.

Commentators nevertheless questioned the ability of either the Council or key individual Member States such as China and the United States to restrain the DPRK.

Turning to social media, both the Saudi-Iranian row and the DPRK test generated significant engagement from followers of UN accounts. There was even greater interest in the conflict in Syria, with many users sharing graphic images of death and starvation among the residents of the besieged town of Madaya.

Meanwhile, as the Sustainable Development Goals take effect this month, the Department of Public Information is working with other UN departments and offices to help promote the Goals to audiences worldwide. Your upcoming travels to the United Arab Emirates, Davos and the African Union summit in Addis Ababa offer rich opportunities to spotlight this agenda.

Thank you.

PR: Kept by SG. 76



Cristina Gallach  
8 January 2016

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Feltman / Mr. Khare / Mr. Kim / Mr. Lutsious / Mr. Nabarro / Mr. O'Brien / Mr. Andur / Mr. Dujarric

16-00194

COPIES/05/000

FILED

0011 2016

DSG/cdc/DN/PA/AG/RA/CWJ (P.i.)

NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
(through Mr. Mulet)

DPI Weekly Press Review

This week's press review examines the serious regional fallout as a result of the row between Saudi Arabia and Iran after the former's execution of a high-profile Shiite cleric. It also looks at the global response to the mid-week announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that it had conducted a hydrogen bomb test. In both stories, the reaction of the United Nations featured heavily in the coverage.

The Saudi-Iranian dispute dominated front pages around the world for much of the week. Many commentators immediately speculated on the impact on the peace processes for two conflicts in the region: Syria and Yemen. The overwhelming tone was pessimistic, and there was widespread concern among analysts about the potential for lasting damage to Sunni-Shiite relations.

There was uniform condemnation of Pyongyang's announcement, although tempered by scepticism that the test was not of the scale that the country had claimed. The UN's strong reaction – whether via your public remarks, the Security Council's stern response or the views expressed by entities such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency – helped depict the Organization as being at the centre of a united international community.

Commentators nevertheless questioned the ability of either the Council or key individual Member States such as China and the United States to restrain the DPRK.

Turning to social media, both the Saudi-Iranian row and the DPRK test generated significant engagement from followers of UN accounts. There was even greater interest in the conflict in Syria, with many users sharing graphic images of death and starvation among the residents of the besieged town of Madaya.

Meanwhile, as the Sustainable Development Goals take effect this month, the Department of Public Information is working with other UN departments and offices to help promote the Goals to audiences worldwide. Your upcoming travels to the United Arab Emirates, Davos and the African Union summit in Addis Ababa offer rich opportunities to spotlight this agenda.

Thank you.



Cristina Gallach  
8 January 2016

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Feltman / Mr. Khare / Mr. Kim / Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Nabarro / Mr. O'Brien /  
Mr. Andur / Mr. Dujarric

RECEIVED

JAN - 8 2016

16-00134

EOSG/CENTRAL

FILED

JAN 12 2016

EOSG/CENTRAL

057/051002





## PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 8 January 2016

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

### **SAUDI-IRANIAN RIFT: TENSIONS SPILL INTO REGIONAL CONFLICTS**

An already tense Middle East worsened this week after Saudi Arabia executed 47 prisoners last Saturday – including a senior Shiite cleric, Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr – and Iranians responded by storming the Saudi embassy in Tehran. Riyadh responded by cutting diplomatic relations with Iran, a move followed by several of its allies. Many commentators and analysts noted and discussed the impact that the Saudi-Iranian rift will have on conflicts or crises in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon, to name a few. The United Nations' response to these developments was a clear element in the ensuing media coverage, which reverberated all week.

#### ***UN at centre of global reaction***

While several senior UN officials spoke out on the executions and their ramifications, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's response – encapsulated in his remark that he was “deeply dismayed” – drew the most attention. Ban's stakeout on Monday was covered by international newswires and a range of other outlets. Egypt's **Daily News** and UPI highlighted the reference noting that the Saudi convictions had followed trials that raised serious questions about “the nature of the charges and the fairness of the process.” Brussels-based weekly **New Europe** reported that Ban had urged Saudi Arabia to “commute all death sentences imposed in the Kingdom.” **Voice of America** stated that the Saudis rejected that comment, saying that the convicted had fair and public trials with the right to appeal – and quoted Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the UN as telling reporters that the Secretary-General was “very much misinformed.”

**Sputnik** (Moscow) said Ban also deplored the violence outside the Saudi embassy in Tehran and called for “calm and restraint.” **The Daily Mail** (UK) reported that he urged “all regional leaders to work to avoid the exacerbation of sectarian tensions.” According to **CNBC**, the UN chief phoned Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, telling both he was extremely troubled by the break in their bilateral ties. India's **Business Standard** said that he urged both to “avoid any actions that could further exacerbate the situation.” The **Manila Times** reported that when speaking with Al-Jubeir, Ban reiterated his strong opposition to capital punishment and his disappointment at the execution of al-Nimr, whose case he had raised with the Saudis several times.

The response of other UN officials drew attention. Italy's **ANSA** news agency reported that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini expressed deep dismay over the executions. **Press Trust of India** noted that he called on the Kingdom to impose a moratorium on executions. The **Prague Post** carried the High Commissioner's statement in which he said that under international human rights law, “the death penalty may only be imposed...if a strict set of substantive and procedural requirements are met.” Iran's **Press TV** said Zeid labelled the cleric's death a “disturbing development” since he had not committed a crime regarded “as most serious” under international law. The **Bahrain News Agency** reported that the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Jan Kubiš, condemned attacks against three Sunni mosques, featuring his quote: “These attacks are an attempt to stoke sectarian tensions in Iraq and the region.” According to Iran's **Mehr News Agency**, Kubiš said they ultimately served the interests of ISIL terrorists.

The **BBC** reported that in response to a Saudi letter, the Security Council strongly condemned the embassy attack in Tehran and called on Iran “to protect diplomatic and consular property and personnel,



and to respect fully their international obligations," **Newsweek** pointed out that the Council "did not mention the cleric, nor the 46 other people executed alongside him for terror-related offences." According to India's **New Kerala** and Azerbaijan's **APA** press agency, the Council said the attack "resulted in intrusions into the diplomatic and consular premises, causing serious damage." **AFP**, the **Wall Street Journal** and the **Tehran Times** reported that Council members urged both sides to "maintain dialogue and take steps to reduce tensions in the region."

#### *Adding fuel to the fire in a 'powderkeg' region*

Away from the UN response, the media focused on what the executions meant for already high sectarian tensions across the Middle East. The **Washington Post** reported that it slid "dangerously closer to regional conflict" after Saudi Arabia rallied its Sunni allies to sever diplomatic ties with Iran, "prompting alarmed appeals for restraint from powers across the globe." Dubai's **Gulf News** reported that Bahrain and Sudan severed diplomatic relations with Iran, while the US military newspaper **Stars and Stripes** said that UAE, a key Iranian trading partner, had recalled its ambassador from Tehran. **Reuters** reported that Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority said it was suspending all flights to Iran, which the **Washington Post** noted as a move that raised uncertainties about the ability of Iranian pilgrims to visit Mecca, and of Saudi Shiites to visit shrines in Iran.

**CNBC** reported that analysts reckoned the conflicts were likely to escalate given that Saudi accusations against Iran would close off diplomatic avenues, adding "the growing sectarian polarization across the region will primarily benefit Islamic State." **NPR** said "the deep sectarian divide in the region... has grown to fever pitch" as Saudi Arabia, and Iran support opposing sides in Yemen and Syria. According to **Mashable** and **Foreign Affairs**, the rupture in ties between the two countries would worsen the wars and complicate efforts to end them. In Singapore's **Straits Times**, Mohamad Bazzi opined that both countries "see their rivalry as a winner-takes-all conflict. And as long as this rivalry endures, the scourge of sectarian warfare will not end."

Meanwhile, **Reuters** reported that Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, concerned about possible "wide-ranging repercussions," offered to help with mediation efforts. **AFP** carried remarks by Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in which he said that Ankara would try to help in order to avoid escalating problems in the "powderkeg" region.

#### *Implications for Syria and Yemen*

The **Christian Science Monitor** noted that diplomatic efforts to preserve the "staggering" Syrian peace process had gone into overdrive amid the Saudi-Iranian tensions. Several former US officials told **CNN** that the animosity between the two powers diminished the chances of their working together to end the violence in Syria and increased the likelihood of more regional instability. **Reuters** reported that the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, met with Al-Jubeir and the High Negotiation Commission of the Revolutionary Forces and the Syrian opposition. The **Christian Science Monitor** said that de Mistura's visits to Saudi Arabia and Iran were aimed to prevent their tensions from damaging peace efforts in Syria. Saudi Arabia's **Al Arabiya** reported that de Mistura saw the crisis in Saudi-Iranian relations as "a very worrisome development" and stressed "the need to ensure it does not cause a chain of adverse consequences in the region." The news agency **Rudaw** (Iraqi Kurdistan) prominently featured his assertion: "We cannot afford to lose this momentum, despite what is going on in the region." **Stars and Stripes** feared the face-off could become an unwelcome distraction for Washington and its Western allies in their fight against ISIL.

Turning to Yemen, **Emirates 24/7** reported that the Security Council called for a new ceasefire there and a return to peace talks despite the crisis between Riyadh and Tehran. **Voice of America** quoted analysts saying that one of the biggest losers in the rivalry was Yemen given its status as a proxy war for



Saudi Arabia and Iran. **AP** reported "The Saudi-Iran rupture has raised concerns about peace prospects in Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country." **AFP** and **IRNA** news agency (Tehran) reported that Iran said Saudi jets "deliberately" struck Iran's embassy in Sana'a. **Reuters**, **AP** and the **BBC** each ran dispatches in which they said that a wire reporter at the site observed that the embassy was still standing and had no visible damage.

#### **NOT WELCOME: DPRK'S HYDROGEN BOMB TEST ANNOUNCEMENT**

Wednesday's announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) that it had conducted an underground hydrogen bomb test immediately became a top news story. Within the extensive news reporting, there was widespread coverage of the response of the United Nations, including the statement of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the reaction of UN entities working directly on nuclear issues, and the Security Council after it held an emergency meeting.

#### ***Unequivocal condemnation***

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's response was picked up widely. According to **Reuters**, the **Washington Examiner**, **The Daily Telegraph** (UK) and Bulgarian news agency **Novinite**, he called the reported test "deeply troubling" and a violation of numerous Council resolutions, "despite the united call by the international community to cease such activities." **China Radio International** and Turkey's **Anadolu Agency** were among others that flagged the following from Ban: "This act is profoundly destabilizing for regional security and seriously undermines international non-proliferation efforts. I condemn it unequivocally." **AP** highlighted the Secretary-General's demand that Pyongyang cease further nuclear activities and meet its obligations for "verifiable denuclearization." Kuwait's **KUNA** news agency said that the UN was assessing developments with the concerned international organizations – including the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

CTBTO's response garnered a tranche of coverage, including in Japanese outlets **Nikkei Shimbun**, **NHK** and **Mainichi**. According to **The Guardian** (UK) and Turkey's **Cihan** news agency, the organization's preparatory commission detected and reported a seismic shock from the test. **Reuters** carried CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo's briefing by video link to the UN press corps, quoting him as saying that the test appeared to have been a "slight down in terms of magnitude" compared with one in 2013. According to **Wired**, "the smoking gun can only really come by detecting radioactive material."

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) denunciation of the test was covered by **Reuters** and the **Manila Times**, among many others. **EFE** and **Xinhua** both reported that Director-General Yukiya Amano called it "deeply regrettable." **AP** reported that Amano issued a statement urging the DPRK to fully implement all relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the IAEA. According to Brussels-based weekly **New Europe**, Amano said the IAEA remained ready to resume "its nuclear verification activities in the DPRK once a political agreement is reached among countries concerned."

#### ***Security Council weighs in***

The Security Council's emergency meeting provided another strand to the coverage. Japan's **Kyodo News** said the Council "blasted North Korea... and vowed to step up measures against the country." **NPR** quoted Council President, Uruguayan Ambassador Elbio Rosselli, as saying that members "strongly condemn this test, which is a clear violation of Security Council resolutions." **AP** reported that the Council "pledged to take 'further significant measures' – UN code for sanctions – in the event of another test and would begin work immediately on a new sanctions resolution in light of 'the gravity of this violation'." **The Daily Telegraph** (UK) reported that world leaders urged that "strong action" be taken against Pyongyang. The **Los Angeles Times** said UN diplomats told **AP** that a new resolution



could add more people to the censure list and impose travel limits on senior DPRK officials, adding that "the measures will be will depend largely on China, the DPRK's traditional ally on the Security Council." The **New York Times** reported that the two-hour closed session ended with a pledge to "begin to work immediately."

At the same time, **NBC News** reported that analysts had warned further economic measures from the West would have little bite. Similarly, a **Financial Times** editorial asserted that new Council penalties make it even harder "to come up with an effective reply to its [DPRK] action this week." On the **Council of Foreign Relations** blog site, Scott A. Snyder noted that "Kim Jong Un has issued a challenge to the international community," underscoring the magnitude of the danger posed by Pyongyang's increasing nuclear capabilities "despite past UN Security Council resolutions."

### ***Strong global reaction***

Away from the UN, there was strong coverage of the international reaction, with many news reports centred around whether Pyongyang had made exaggerations in its announcement. **Yonhap** news agency reported that President Park Geun-hye said that Seoul would "make sure that the DPRK pays the corresponding price for the nuclear test." A separate **Yonhap** dispatch reported that the Republic of Korea's Defence Minister Han Min-koo spoke with his United States counterpart, Ashton Carter, on tightening security collaboration, including "all kinds of extended deterrence assets," and they agreed that "North Korea should pay a price that is proportional to the provocation." The **BBC** reported that the RoK resumed loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts into the DPRK. The **Japan Times** pointed out that Tokyo was currently serving on the Council as it reported on a phone conversation in which Shinzo Abe told Barack Obama that the test posed a "grave security threat," and that the international community must take action to prevent further provocation. **ITV** (London) reported that the UK called the move a "provocation."

**AFP** picked up the Russian Foreign Ministry statement condemning the test as "a flagrant violation of international law and existing UN Security Council resolutions." **AP** reported that while the White House could not confirm the test, the US would condemn any violations of Council resolutions. The **International Business Times** carried the statement from the European Union's Federica Mogherini that, if confirmed, the test was a grave violation of "DPRK's international obligations not to produce or test nuclear weapons, as determined by several United Nations Security Council resolutions." The **Guardian** reported that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the test undermined regional and international security, "in clear breach of UN Security Council resolutions."

China's reaction and bilateral relations with the DPRK provided its own line of coverage. According to **NK News** (RoK), the nuclear test took China, as well as Japan, by surprise, "with Beijing telling reporters that Pyongyang did not provide them any advance notice." The **Guardian** described China's reaction as "the most significant," referring to its formal protest and concern over radioactive fallout in areas bordering the DPRK, as well as its indication that it would support new, punitive Council action. **NBC News** reported that China had issued strong statements condemning the test, and State-owned media published several editorials criticizing the DPRK. The **Wall Street Journal** described Beijing's stance as "a sign of a further crack in relations that have grown increasingly strained under President Kim Jong Un." **Newsday** reported that Beijing's influence over the DPRK "appears to have diminished since Kim came to power in 2012," although it remained its key trading partner.

**CNN** reported that a spokesperson for the Chinese authorities said that while Beijing supported UN sanctions, it had not rigorously enforced them. The channel also included a comment from journalist Mike Chinoy, who has written a book on the DPRK's nuclear situation: "My guess is China will do something tough and nasty but it won't be tough and nasty enough to make a difference." In a **Los**



**Angeles Times** analysis, Bonnie S. Glaser of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies asserted that China "would be loath to embrace tougher sanctions and abandon its strategy of promoting economic engagement... because that could create instability on its border."

Some outlets wrapped Iran into their coverage. US-based news website **Business Insider** said that "Tehran is surely noting the remarkable global non-reaction to the North Korean test." The **Daily Beast** noted that Iranians have been presented in the DPRK for such tests and floated the idea that if Iran had a nuclear weapons programme in the DPRK, it could build and store weapons beyond the reach of international inspectors.

#### *Concern from commentators*

Many commentators speculated on the motives of the DPRK authorities in conducting the test. Kim Yong-hyun argued in a column carried by **Yonhap** that the detonation was an attempt by Pyongyang "at eliciting loyalty from its people." In the **Wall Street Journal**, Yang Moo-jin saw the test as helping "to persuade North Koreans of the need for the impoverished country to pour a large amount of its limited resources into military spending." CNN reported that according to experts, the DPRK's dated conventional weaponry has led it to seek nuclear arms "to project power internationally."

Several US commentators worried about failed international attempts to rein in the DPRK's nuclear activities. A **New York Times** editorial asserted that in spite of "vigorous condemnation, followed by promises never to accept the North as a nuclear weapons state, followed by chest-thumping demands for more sanctions," the US and its partners "failed miserably" at finding an effective solution. A **Washington Post** editorial called it "an unambiguous demonstration" that the US, China and the DPRK's other neighbours were failing to restrain the regime in Pyongyang. The **Wall Street Journal** said that by doing little more than denouncing the nuclear test and bribing Kim Jong Un for disarmament promises, this week represented "another giant step toward a dangerous new era of nuclear proliferation that the world ignores at its peril." In a blog for the **American Enterprise Institute** website, Marc A. Thiessen wrote: "Pyongyang reminds us how bad nuclear deals go awry."

\* \* \*