Date and Time: Saturday, May 4, 2024 2:29:00AM EEST

Job Number: 223498569

Documents (52)

1. *Moderate Muslims Seek Foothold in U.S.*

   Client/Matter: -None-

   Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

   Search Type: Terms and Connectors

   Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

2. *What did Tessa Jowell know?*

   Client/Matter: -None-

   Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

   Search Type: Terms and Connectors

   Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

3. *Chill Karo, Masti Karo*

   Client/Matter: -None-

   Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

   Search Type: Terms and Connectors

   Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

4. *International Briefs*

   Client/Matter: -None-

   Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

   Search Type: Terms and Connectors

   Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

5. *1.1. THREE, FOUR, ACE[]*

   Client/Matter: -None-

   Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

6. *Executions a sad reminder of home for Iranian author: Human rights activist says hanging of two gay teens shows Canada must get tough with Iran 's regime, which she describes as 'a cancer,' writes Aron Heller.*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

7. *Film & Music: Film: The banality of murder: Beirut is being shaken by a new film that tracks down the killers - not the victims - of the notorious massacre of Palestinian refugees by Lebanese gunmen*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

8. *Abbas orders forces to prevent attacks against Israel*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

9. *1.5 THREE, FOUR, ACE[]*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

10. *ABBAS DECLARES VICTORY IN VOTE BY PALESTINIANS*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

11. *Seattle Muslim shoots 6 at Jewish Centre*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

12. *Food relief team warns of catastrophe for Lebanon*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

13. *Talking heads*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

14. *Secret diary of Rikki Brown aged 49 1/4*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

15. *Food relief team warns of catastrophe for Lebanon*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

16. *The Week:22-28 July*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

17. *The Week: 8-14 July*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

18. *Unhealthy bedfellows*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

19. *Eats meets west*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

20. *Shiites see secular leadership for Iraq ; They hope religion goes to background in new government*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

21. *Faking it for fashion's sake*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

22. *From Modesto , California , a window on the Arab world: BLOGGER I Arab- American news junkie As'ad AbuKhalil goes under the radar to serve up an angry mix of news, commentary and entertainment*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

23. *Habib flies into danger zone to help refugees*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

24. *Teetering towards stability*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

25. *Poll shock has region reeling*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

26. *Sunnis and Shiites: Who are they?*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

27. *Book 'em in May; PARVATHI NAYAR and MINDY TAN look at the offerings for this month*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

28. *SHIITES IN IRAQ SAY GOVERNMENT WILL BE SECULAR*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

29. *LETTERS TO THE EDITOR*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

30. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

31. *Africa's peace seekers: Betty Bigombe*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

32. *By George, now we're talking politics*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

33. *Hamas Presses Fatah in Palestinian Vote, Surveys Say*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

34. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

35. *LETTERS*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

36. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

37. *The battle for Baghdad , again Bush, al-Maliki to send troops; 'control Baghdad, control Iraq '*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

38. *'Please do whatever they want': The ransom being asked by Iraqi kidnappers for U.S. journalist Jill Carroll's life is the release of six female prisoners. The deadline is tomorrow. Should the U.S. government stand firm on its policy of not negotiating with terrorists?*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

39. *As black as oil, but not half so slick*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

40. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

41. *GREENTIDERISING*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

42. *Gunning for Israel*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

43. *The week*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

44. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

45. *In Tiny Arab State, Web Takes On Ruling Elite*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

46. *Closing in on Zarqawi; We go inside the search for the ringleader of al-Qaida in Iraq*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by

News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

47. *The roundup*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

48. *The Enigma of Damascus*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

49. *No Headline In Original*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

50. *Bordering on What?*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

51. *The War Inside the Arab Newsroom*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

52. *The Interregnum*

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type	Narrowed by
News	Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 01, 2005 to Jul 31, 2006

Moderate Muslims Seek Foothold in U.S.

The Forward

June 17, 2005

Section: News; Pg. 7

Length: 1536 words

Byline: Daniel Treiman

Body

What happens when you call a mass demonstration and only a few dozen people show up? That's more or less what happened when Free Muslims Against Terrorism organized a Washington rally last month.

The group's founder, Bethlehem-born Kamal Nawash, had hoped that the May 14 rally would send "a very clear message to the Arab and Muslim world that we don't support this madness, we don't support the use of terror." But, according to The Washington Times, the rally only drew about 50 people.

Nawash's outfit is just one group in an increasingly crowded field of new American Muslim organizations that call themselves "moderate," "pluralist" or "progressive." A number have sprung up since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks - many in the past year - and are now working to find a foothold on the American Muslim scene. Some are stressing the need to condemn terrorism, while others are more focused on pressing internal religious reforms. Several of the new groups are reaching out to the Jewish community, a development that stands in stark relief against the backdrop of long-standing hostility between established American Jewish and Muslim organizations.

Leaders of the new groups bill them as alternatives to the established national Muslim organizations, to which they give various criticisms such as out of touch, overly conservative and even extremist. Some echo the criticisms made by Jewish organizations, which often have had a hostile relationship to the existing Muslim groups, accusing them of being cozy with anti-Israel extremists or of failing to condemn Palestinian terrorism.

While their rhetoric is impassioned, it remains to be seen how large a constituency any of these new groups represents - or whether they have any grass-roots appeal whatsoever. None yet have the capacity, nor necessarily the ambition, to take on the work that more established groups, such as the widely criticized Council on American-Islamic Relations, do on public policy, civil liberties and anti-defamation issues - work that observers say has won the established groups respect in the larger American Muslim community. And while these new Muslim groups share a professed commitment to pluralism, moderation and communal critique, some of their leaders are sniping at each other already.

The Progressive Muslim Union of North America, started last fall by several veteran community activists, is already causing a stir with its liberal religious and political orientation. But it still has no paid staff. That lack of organizational infrastructure is about the only thing it has in common with the Washington-based Center for Islamic Pluralism, launched in March by Stephen Schwartz, a journalist who writes on Islamic extremism for conservative media outlets such as The Weekly Standard. Schwartz, the author of "The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Sa'ud From

Tradition to Terror," is set to address next week's Washington gathering of the Zionist Organization of America, a group that fiercely opposes Israeli concessions to the Palestinians (see accompanying story).

Schwartz, who embraced the mystical Sufi stream of Islam while working as a journalist in war-torn Bosnia during the 1990s, is an outspoken critic of what he describes as the domination of American Muslim institutions by the Saudi-supported Wahhabi stream of Islam.

Schwartz and Free Muslims Against Terrorism's Nawash already have come under attack by the the PMU's pugnacious vice-chair, Hussein Ibish, who called them "malevolent figures" in a recent article he penned for a Muslim Web site.

Ibish told the Forward that, unlike Schwartz's and Nawash's groups, the PMU is "an authentic grass-roots effort." He also criticized Schwartz's relationship to scholar Daniel Pipes, a hawkish Jewish scholar whom Muslim groups have accused of being anti-Islam. Pipes has insisted he is a critic of extremism and not of Islam in general.

"The so-called Center for Islamic Pluralism is basically a creature of Daniel Pipes," Ibish said.

Schwartz was equally eager to attack Ibish, who previously worked as the communications director for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. "No organization that has Hussein Ibish involved in it at all could be called progressive or Muslim," Schwartz said. He said that Pipes's Middle East Forum had agreed to allow his center to use its nonprofit certification while its own was pending but that ultimately no money was raised though the forum. And Schwartz vehemently rejected Ibish's assertion that Pipes was responsible for his center's founding. "It was conceived by me alone, and all of the organizational work has been done by me alone," he said.

Ahmed al-Rahim, a founder of the Boston-based American Islamic Congress, attributed the infighting to the different political orientations of the new organizations, as well as to the greater willingness of some to speak out against the established Muslim groups. Still, he said, "any group that condemns violence, that is trying to be part of the American mainstream - forget Muslim American, just being American - I think is a good thing."

Started by a handful of Muslim intellectuals after the September 11 attacks, the American Islamic Congress has maintained a low domestic profile after an initial burst of publicity. The group, with several Iraqi American leaders, shifted its focus after the American invasion of Iraq to education and ***women***'s empowerment projects in that country. Now, however, the congress is beginning to turn its attention back to domestic issues with initiatives on hate crimes.

The Iraqi Shiite head of the American Islamic Congress, Zainab Al-Suwaij, was a vocal supporter of the Iraq War and spoke at the 2004 Republican National Convention. In contrast, the PMU's leaders include fierce critics of U.S. foreign policy and American support for Israel.

The new groups also differ in the nature of their critiques of the established Muslim community. Schwartz, Nawash and al-Rahim have been full throated in their respective criticisms of established Muslim groups. In a November 2003 lecture, al-Rahim accused established Muslim groups of promoting hate against America, Jews, Christians and Hindus.

The PMU, for its part, is arguably the ground-breaking of the new groups in its religious and social stances. Last month it co-sponsored a historic woman-led Islamic Friday prayer session, an event that sparked debate throughout the Muslim world and drew harsh condemnations from some overseas clerics. It recently launched a new initiative to encourage more ***women***-led prayer sessions. But some of its leaders - while eager to attack Schwartz - are more restrained in their criticisms of established Muslim groups.

"At PMU we want to challenge the mainstream groups, and we want to provide an alternative to their discourse," Ibish said. "We have a different, much less conservative take on religion and society, but we're not going to gain advantage, lie and say that the mainstream groups are supporters of terrorism when we know, and they know, and I dare say pretty well everyone knows that really they're not."

Presented with the example of the American Muslim Council's founder, Abdurahman Alamoudi, a self-declared supporter of Hamas and ***Hezbollah*** who was sentenced in 2004 to 23 years in prison in connection with a terrorism-financing case, Ibish backtracked. "Obviously there are a lot of people in the community who have come to realize that some of the attitudes that existed in the leadership and the groups that were established in the early 1990s is not sufficient and sometimes, as in the case of Alamoudi, it could be disastrous," he said.

While they disagree with each other on several fronts, the new groups seem to be of one mind in their willingness to work with Jewish organizations.

The American Islamic Congress's statement of principles calls for a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and specifically extends a "hand of friendship" to the Jewish community. The congress seems to echo many supporters of Israel when it calls for "a proportional focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the greater context of problems that Muslims and Arabs face in their individual countries." The group joined the Anti-Defamation League in co-sponsoring a 2003 memorial service for slain journalist Daniel Pearl, and now the two organizations are working on an initiative to improve hate-crimes reporting in Massachusetts.

Even the PMU, despite having a board that includes outspoken critics of Israel, has demonstrated an eagerness to engage Jews.

On a Web site he edits, the PMU's executive director, Ahmed Nassef, inaugurated a regular feature called "Hug a Jew" as a rejoinder to antisemitism. Some skeptics have noted that the list of honorees consists largely of fierce foes of Israel, such as far-left scholars Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein. But Nassef also has reached out to mainstream elements of the Jewish community.

Nassef was criticized by some Muslims for speaking at a policy conference sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. In response to critics, he wrote that Muslims cannot rule out talking with the "99.5% of American Jews" who support Israel's existence.

Graphic

IMAGE

Load-Date: June 14, 2006

What did Tessa Jowell know?

Guardian.com

February 28, 2006

Length: 1432 words
Highlight: Welcome to the Wrap, Guardian Unlimited's roundup of the best of the day's papers.

Body

PRESSURE ON JOWELL INCREASES

Steve Bell's Magritte pastiche aptly sums up the mood of the press. "Ceci n'est pas un bung," runs the caption underneath a picture of a grinning David Mills surmounting a free-floating cork. In other words: Come off it.

The difficulty of Mr Mills's position - and now that of his wife, Tessa Jowell - was neatly summarised in an Economist article on Friday, which concluded that the lawyer was "either a knave or a fool". Mr Mills's explanations, the Independent says today, "have seemed bizarre and implausible in the extreme".

The Times's editorial describes it as "at best embarrassing" for the culture secretary, who signed a mortgage application that acted as a conduit for a large sum of money from abroad - allegedly a bribe from Silvio Berlusconi after Mr Mills had testified to the Italian prime minister's advantage in a trial.

"Ms Jowell may have reason to gripe at the way that her household accounts are being tied suggestively to the murky Berlusconi business empire," says the paper. "But she provided the link with her own hand. ... The question for Ms Jowell, no less comfortable for being familiar, has thus become: what did she know, and when did she know it?"

True, the Times says, she appears to have done nothing that undermined her role as culture secretary. But the ministerial code of conduct is rather more demanding. It requires ministers "to behave according to the highest standards of constitutional and personal conduct in the performance of their duties" and also to provide a list of their spouse or partner's business interests. "Did she do so?" asks the paper. "When?"

The irony of Miss Jowell's position - she is currently launching a government report on ***women***'s work and pay - is not lost in the Independent, whose cartoonist depicts her urging ***women*** to "demand the right not to bother your pretty heads about money ... just let your hubbies manage the finances!"

The Mail heaps further suspicion on the Jowell-Mills financial affairs by revealing that the couple have had eight mortgages on their two homes, and that the one allegedly paid off with a bribe was not the only loan to have been repaid within weeks.

* Jowell fails to quell bribe claims

* Times: On the dotted line* Mail: Speculation munts over Jowell's finances

CAMERON SETS OUT TORY GOALS

Newly returned from paternity leave, David Cameron throws down the gauntlet to his rightwing critics with the publication of a new Conservative mission statement today. It will be put to a vote by the party's membership this summer.

The document - which the Mail describes as "an early draft of the manifesto he will present to voters" and a "move away from Thatcherism" - sets out eight aims the party is "fighting for".

Tomorrow's papers will doubtless pore over its wording, but the pledges include: "It is our moral obligation to make poverty history," "The more we trust people, the stronger they and society become," "The right test for our policies is how they help the most disadvantaged in society, not the rich" and, in a deliberate reworking of Baroness Thatcher's infamous phrase, "There is such a thing as society; it's just not the same thing as the state."

* Cameron redefines Tory goals

FLABBY APPROACH TO TACKLING OBESITY

The Times splashes with one of those now-familiar pictures of an obese juvenile belly enclosed by a tape measure. Accompanying the flab is a jumble of boxes and interconnecting arrows showing the "delivery chain" for tackling childhood obesity. The implication - simple problem, over-complex solution - is clear.

"It has already taken 31 experts 18 months simply to agree how obesity should be measured, the National Audit Office, the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission found," says the paper. "That delay means it is likely to be 2007 before children are routinely weighed and measured for obesity, just three years before the target [to reduce their number] is due to be met."

* Times: Children fatter, experts dither

GAZ DE FRANCE MERGER 'IS PROTECTIONISM'

There are loud grumbles from the FT and the Telegraph at what the French PM calls "economic patriotism" and the papers call protectionism. The French PM, Dominique de Villepin, has engineered a merger between Gaz de France and Suez, a Franco-Belgian power and water company, to thwart a possible hostile bid from Italy's Enel.

"In his eight months in the Hotel Matignon, Mr de Villepin has systematically erected barriers against foreign capital as the core of his bid for the presidency in 2007," complains the Telegraph.

"The prime minister is leading his country down a blind alley. At the European level, he and his imitators should be pursued by the commission. At home, it is [Nicolas] Sarkozy's job to prevent him from ever holding elected office."

The FT says holding on to national energy firms is tempting in an era of rising fuel prices, but warns that the eurozone will never prosper unless capital is allowed to flow freely within it.

* FT: Suez and Gaz de France set to merge

* Telegraph: The single market and Gallic delusions

HAMZA'S SON RAPS OUT MESSAGE

"I was born to be a soldier, Kalashnikov in my shoulder, peace to Hamas and ***Hezbollah***, that's the way of the lord Allah . . . we're jihad through, defend my religion with the holy sword." Not, perhaps, the top-selling download on iTunes, but the Sun reveals that the Islamic rap group Lionz of Da Dezert is fronted by Mohammed Kamel Mostafa, the son of the jailed cleric Abu Hamza.

The paper can't resist using the headline "Son of a preacher man" for its editorial: "His rap lyrics spurt bile and export terror." Odd, then, that the paper invites readers to "watch vile Hamza's rap at www.thesun.co.uk from 10am." Wasn't it just this kind of religious hatred that the Sun deplored when Hamza senior broadcast sermons online?

* Sun: Chip off the old hook

FLINTOFF TO MISS BIRTH OF CHILD

Should a cricketer on tour fly home for the birth of his child? No, if half the rest of the team are crocked and you've been appointed as the stand-in captain. That was Freddie Flintoff's decision, and the Mail ("Would Botham have missed a Test for a birth?") approves.

Flintoff said his wife, Rachael - whose baby is due during the third Test in India - supported him.

"The dashes back home have always dismayed old-timers," says the Telegraph. "They used to set off by ocean liner for Australia with no more than a wave of a well-laundered handkerchief, returning six months later to any number of new children."

Michael Vaughan has already flown home with a knee injury, Marcus Trescothick returned for "personal reasons", and the Guardian pictures Simon Jones - his face twisted in agony - as he suffered a knee injury in the nets yesterday. He, too, is on his way back to England for tests.

* Jones leaves England in disarray

* Telegraph: Country before family

DA VINCI CODE COURT BATTLE BEGINS

Your Wrap writer is one of the eight people in Britain who have never read The Da Vinci Code, so please forgive her if this item has been given less prominence than it deserves.

Briefly, the authors of a 1982 book called The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail allege that the Da Vinci Code author, Dan Brown, stole their "Jesus theory" for the plot of his own novel.

This theory posits that Jesus did not die on the cross but married Mary Magdalene, had a child by her and emigrated to the south of France, where they founded a dynasty that enjoyed the protection of the Knights Templar. (If that has, by any chance, spoiled it for you, take comfort from the Times's initial review, reprinted today - "the silliest, most inaccurate, ill-informed, stereotype-driven, cloth-eared, cardboard-cutout-populated piece of pulp fiction that I have read".)

Brown says the similarity is incidental.

The Guardian's Maev Kennedy files the most entertaining report from the copyright action in the high court. "Every now and then, in a day of tortuous legal argument about what constitutes "the architecture" of a book, of how plagiarism can be proved in the era of instant information, and of whether a single phrase about the Emperor Constantine being baptised on his deathbed could have copyright, the softly-spoken judge, Mr Justice Peter Smith, threw a remark or question into the proceedings that fell like the clonk of a concrete boot."

* New twist in Da Vinci code tale

COMING UP ON GUARDIAN UNLIMITED TODAY

Details of the government's flagship education reforms will become clearer today with the long-awaited publication of the schools bill.

David Cameron will set out his blueprint for modernising the Conservatives with an official "statement of values".

Load-Date: February 28, 2006

End of Document

Chill Karo, Masti Karo

The Nation (AsiaNet)

July 27, 2006 Thursday

Section: NATIONWIDE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Length: 1460 words

Body

By M. A. NIAZI: Chill Karo-Mango Masti Karo. Its author, presumably a copywriter in an advertising agency, did not intend this slogan to send any sort of political message. It has been designed solely to promote the sales of a mango ice-cream confection, which a multinational fast-food franchise has added to its menu. However, it encapsulates the message that the Bush administration would love to send to the Third World in general, and the Muslim world in particular. In addition, it would delight the Musharraf government if Pakistanis were also to follow this slogan.

'Chill' is the new 'cool'. A previous generation told each other to 'cool it', whenever someone seemed to get impassioned about something else, whether it be a perceived insult from a fellow collegian, or the plight of the world. Now, they are telling one another to 'chill.' Coolness is the result of sitting under a fan; chilliness comes only in an air-conditioned room. Coolness might be taken as keeping things in perspective; chilling means total indifference. To be cool, youngsters used to smoke; to chill, they need charas in their cigarettes. Remember, their parents were cool (or thought they were), so to be different, they have to chill.

In addition, which meaning of masti are we to follow? Masti has two meanings. One is the masti of a bull elephant, which is its state when in heat. This applies to the behaviour of young people, who might not be in heat in the technical sense, but whose behaviour is driven more by hormones rampaging through the blood rather than rational thought. This is the time when loud music, energetic physical movement (dancing, jogging, fighting, swimming) and general letting off of high spirits, helps deal with the masti, to the extent of becoming a new meaning of the word.

Then there is the masti of the Sufi, which is supposed to be for the select few a state of spiritual enhancement, but which for too many is drug-induced. The true Sufi's masti is achieved only by a highly disciplined spiritual progression, attained after much prolonged effort. The shortcut, or instant version, is licence to do anything. Those who think that head banging to Pappu Sain's dhol or Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's qawalis are spiritual experiences have lost the plot.

That is emotional self-indulgence. However, both the higher Sufi experience and its ersatz version both lead to the same practical result: the practitioner detaches himself from the evils of this world, and is absolved of the responsibility to do anything about what the unenlightened are doing.

It is interesting that chilling and masti (of the second type) both involve acceptance of everything and indifference to the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', even if that requires the use of drugs. At one level, this is attractive. It means that the individual accepts with calmness whatever is happening, and does not get into a bother about anything.

The message of the slogan is therefore twofold in its strength, multiple in its application for the target of the communication. (My congratulations, by the way, to the copywriter: it is a very communicative jingle, not just in its meaning, but in its euphony, both spoken and sung.) It says that you should turn away from the mess around you, the heat and dust, the problems and the issues, and just have fun ('chill'). It also says that you should let loose, get moving, burn off some energy ('masti').

The positive parts of the message is that instead of achieving this effect by doing drugs and attending a rave, do it by having their mango ice-cream confection, at one of their restaurants. As a teenager, I could not think of anything duller or more boring, but as a middleaged parent, it sounds like positive and healthy activity for my offspring, much more than many publicly available activities that come to mind.

I am sure the copywriter and the multinational behind the slogan did not think of it that way, but this is the message: Chill Karo, and forget about the dead babies in Lebanon. Masti Karo, and forget about how the USA is backing Israel in killing them. Chill Karo, and ignore the hypocrisy that lets the USA send Israel precision-guided bombs to 'defend itself against ***Hezbollah***'s Cold-War vintage Katyusha rockets. Masti Karo, and don't bother about the massive disparity in casualties, 10 Lebanese for every Israeli.

Chill Karo, and remember that this isn't Pakistan, which is being bombed. Masti Karo, and if you can be bothered to think about any country, think of Pakistan First. Chill Karo, and stop getting emotional about the ummah and such outmoded concepts. Masti, Karo and concentrate on getting ahead in life, making money, building up property and living the good life as defined by Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. Chill Karo, and don't worry about anything except yourself. Masti Karo, and you will still go to heaven, because you at least are a good person who hasn't killed any Israeli babies (or was it Palestinian old ***women***? Whoever. Whatever.)

Chill Karo, and don't bother about what Pakistan is doing at this juncture. Masti Karo, and pay no attention to how the national interest is being promoted. Chill Karo, because we know what is the national interest, and you don't. (Why don't you? Because you're too busy doing masti, which is actually OK, because you're not asking too many questions.).

Chill Karo, and don't think about what is happening in Balochistan or Waziristan. Hey, but isn't it Pakistan First, and aren't these parts of Pakistan? Masti Karo, and don't ask stupid questions like that. Chill Karo, and don't pay any attention to how Pakistan is being governed, how its Constitution is being undermined, how its President is also a serving general, and the Chief of Army Staff to boot. Masti Karo, and leave these issues to those who are better than you, more intelligent, more mature, wiser, better trained. In addition, they don't chill, nor do they do masti.

Guantanamo: chill. Abu Ghuraib: Masti. Iraq's 100,000 dead: chill. Afghanistan's tens of thousands killed: Masti. Hamas: chill. Occupation of sovereign states: Masti. Double standards on democracy: chill. Kashmir: chill. Palestine: Masti. Chill. Masti. I am being so unfair to this slogan that at this point I should perhaps apologise, but I am about to place yet another burden on it. Here goes: this slogan actually stands for the method by which the capitalist corporate elite rules its workforce, for it is all a work force.

Remember, those 3000 American servicemen who have died doing their duty in Afghanistan and Iraq is like a factory workforce for the chicken hawks in the bush administration. They too are being fooled into behaving inhumanly, for inhuman ends, fighting wars which will not bring their people prosperity or security, but which will fatten the treasuries of many corporations.

Corporations are no longer sub-national entities. They can be supra national, and are certainly extra-national. The fast food franchise I have been talking about is seen as a symbol of the USA the world over. Yet, in Pakistan, it is staffed by Pakistanis, and is owned by Pakistanis. This corporation, which is powerful in the USA as a taxpayer, if nothing else, has branches in 61 markets worldwide, making it an international entity.

A senior executive of this corporation, sitting in its US HQ, has more common interests (as an executive) with a Russian executive of the same corporation, than with his own government, and vice versa. This is replicated in corporations all over the capitalist system (which has achieved 100 percent coverage of the globe, except perhaps parts of Myanmar and Cuba).

They desire to pursue their supra-national interests worldwide to maximize profits. The only restraints on them are the guardians of the people's interests. However, if one realizes how easily such organizations can influence, and even control, elected legislatures and office bearers, through the power of capital, then this safeguard becomes fragile and porous. It is marginally better than dictatorships or monarchies, because there is less need to pay attention to public opinion, and instead of a majority of legislators, the corporation needs only buy one or two members of the ruler's inner circle. However, this is faint praise for democracy.

Are there any alternatives? Is there a better way of doing things, which is more humane, less suspect to the power of capital? We could look to our Islamic roots to find much that is different, much that is definite, and much that is never discussed by Maulvi or moderate, Jihadi or Islamist, fundo or liberal, almost as if there is a conspiracy of silence. However, who is bothered? Chill Karo, Masti Karo. E-mail queries and comments to: maniazi@nation. Com. Pk

Load-Date: July 28, 2006

International Briefs

Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)

December 15, 2005 Thursday

Section: National/World; Pg. a6

Length: 1445 words

Byline: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: BOGOTA, Colombia

Body

Navy ends search for 3 sailors

The U.S. Navy called off its search Wednesday for three sailors whose helicopter crashed into the Pacific Ocean off Colombia during anti-drug operations the day before.

The SH-60B Seahawk helicopter went down early Tuesday while flying within sight of the frigate USS DeWert, which was its floating base, said Bill Austin, spokesman for the U.S. Naval Station at Mayport, Fla., the crew's home port.

The search ended Tuesday night, and the crew members' names were not released, the Navy said in a statement. The crew members were assigned to the Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light 48, the U.S. Navy said in a statement.

Fuel depot explosion under investigation

LONDON - Police are talking to a tanker driver who might have accidentally ignited a fuel depot explosion that darkened skies across Britain and affected more than 20,000 workers, fire investigators said Wednesday.

Investigators say the fire still appeared to be accidental but they were looking into several possible causes, including a tanker driver whose engine may have ignited fumes at the Buncefield depot in Hemel Hempstead, northwest of London, early Sunday.

"We're speaking to this driver," Hertfordshire Police Assistant Chief Constable Simon Parr said as firefighters continued to battle one of the remaining blazes at the depot.

Airstrikes kill 4 Palestinian militants

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip - Israeli missiles fired from the air ripped apart two cars in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, killing four Palestinian militants and wounding five other people, including the spokesman for Islamic Jihad, the military and Palestinians said.

The Israeli military said the first airstrike targeted operatives from the small Popular Resistance Committees who were on their way to carry out an attack against Israel. The vehicle was loaded with explosives, it added.

The military would not say where it believed the car was headed, but it was struck near Karni, Gaza's main cargo passage with Israel, a site of past attacks.

After nightfall, a missile fired at a car in Gaza City wounded Islamic Jihad spokesman Khader Habib, group official Omar Shallah said, pledging to continue the struggle against Israel.

Habib was taken to a safe house for treatment and was in stable condition, Islamic Jihad officials said.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Lebanese mourn anti-Syrian editor

BEIRUT, Lebanon - Tens of thousands of flag-waving Lebanese - both Christian and Muslim - poured into the streets Wednesday to mourn an anti-Syrian critic slain in a car bombing, marching behind his coffin and blaming Damascus for his death.

Some shouted "Syria out!" as they marched in memory of Gibran Tueni, a relentless anti-Syrian lawmaker and leading newspaper editor, and a general strike called in his honor shut down many banks, businesses and schools.

Hundreds of Lebanese troops and police took up positions in a central square - the site where on March 14 about 1 million people heard Tueni call for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

"Everyone who takes to the street is saying 'Enough killing,'" said fellow legislator Ghenwa Jalloul.

"We are here to say no matter how many of us they kill, there will always be others to speak out," said 23-year-old Hiyam Dayekh, a Muslim student in blue jeans and a black T-shirt. "We are not afraid."

Tueni was killed Monday by a car bomb as he was being driven to work through an industrial suburb of Beirut - the fourth anti-Syrian figure slain since a series of bombings began Feb. 14 with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

A previously unknown group has claimed responsibility for the blast that killed Tueni and two of his bodyguards, and wounded 30 other people. Colleagues and political allies have blamed Syria, which has denied involvement.

Anti-Syrian groups here are counting on public anger at Tueni's killing to push for ridding the government of remnants of the Syrian era in Lebanon - including intelligence operatives - and to close ranks over internal political divisions and confront the government in Damascus.

But their choices are limited. The anti-Syrian groups are divided and, although they hold a majority in Parliament and Cabinet and control the police, they have not been able to stop the bombing campaign that has been killing their leaders one by one.

Pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud has rejected their calls to resign after Syria withdrew its army from Lebanon in April, and efforts to remove him have been stymied by disagreements.

Syria has already been accused of involvement in Hariri's murder, although Damascus denies this. A U.N. investigative team said it had evidence that Syrian and Lebanese intelligence played a role in the killing and said Syria has been slow to cooperate in the probe.

Wednesday's protest and funeral was by far the largest gathering since the massive March 14 rally to demand Syria give up its hold on Lebanon, at the peak of the drive to end Syria's influence.

Police, who wouldn't give their names because of the political sensitivity of the protests, put the crowd estimate at more than 100,000 people. But some other witnesses - and police speaking in an unofficial capacity - said they thought it could be twice that number.

In Tueni's parliamentary district of Ashrafieh, several thousand people marched behind his coffin and coffins of his bodyguards, wrapped in the national flag of red and white stripes with a green cedar tree. Some marchers carried olive branches.

The pallbearers rocked the coffin, a traditional sign of deep grief, as they walked slowly along several miles of streets lined with mourners. The procession passed through Gibran Tueni Square, named after his grandfather, who founded the An-Nahar newspaper in 1933.

Some people lit fireworks and others applauded as the marchers passed. Others climbed lampposts to get a better view. At An-Nahar's offices, a giant portrait of Tueni hung on the side of the building. Thousands of men, ***women*** and children waved Lebanese flags and held Tueni's picture, or those of Hariri and another An-Nahar journalist killed in a June bombing.

Many shouted slogans against Lahoud and Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"It is shameful not to take part," said Imad Abu Shaqra, 44, who added he did not belong to any political group. "To lose a symbol like Gibran is a lot, not only for us but for future generations. … We are not ready to continue to be the victims."

Anti-Syrian sentiment was running high in the crowd. Shouts of "Syria out" mixed with patriotic music and the national anthem.

Asked who was behind Tueni's killing, Dayekh, the university student, replied: "Do you need to ask this question? It's 100 percent the Syrians."

Several thousands more gathered at Nejmeh Square outside the Parliament and the St. George Eastern Orthodox Cathedral, applauding and blowing whistles as the coffins made their way through the crowd.

Prime Minister Fuad Saniora and former presidents, politicians and dignitaries filed into the church, its bells tolling. Those inside broke into applause as Tueni's father, An-Nahar publisher Ghassan Tueni, called for "no to revenge, no to hatred and no to bloodletting."

He urged Muslims and Christians to unite, saying: "Let us bury with Gibran all the hatred."

Tueni's daughter, Nayla, borrowed from her father's call in March on Muslims and Christians to stay united to serve Lebanon. "An-Nahar will not die. Lebanon will not die. Freedom will not die. This is the pledge of loyalty to Gibran."

While pictures from the funeral were shown on CNN and other international broadcasters, Syrian state television ignored it.

In a special session of parliament, even Tueni's political opponents paid tribute. The leader of the ***Hezbollah*** bloc, Mohammed Raad, said Tueni was a man of "courageous word and uncompromising position."

Tueni's uncle, Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh, lashed out at Syrian intelligence services, implicitly blaming them for a string of political assassinations during the 1975-90 civil war. "How can we continue silence or in covering up the criminals?" he said.

Legislative ally Akram Shehayeb told the assembly: "The equation is clear. He who gives orders is in Damascus. The executioner is here in Beirut."

The general strike also was also observed in the southern provincial capital of Sidon and in the mountains of central Lebanon. But in eastern Lebanon, where pro-Syrian groups are dominant, it was ignored.

Meanwhile, seven Israeli warplanes flew over southern, central and northern Lebanon on reconnaissance flights Wednesday, the Lebanese army command said. Lebanon and the United Nations have frequently criticized Israel for the flights.

Load-Date: December 15, 2005

End of Document

1.1. THREE, FOUR, ACE[]

DEFENSE and SECURITY (Russia)

March 16, 2005, Wednesday

Section: TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Length: 1579 words

Byline: Valeria Sycheva
Highlight: SECURITY

Body

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is getting a special gift for March 8, International ***Women***'s Day. At least, her gallant counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, has definitely prepared something for her: a collection of recorded Russian television programs. Firstly, Rice the Russia specialist could always do with some help in keeping up her knowledge of the Russian language. Secondly, it's just a nice thought. Then again, there are no coincidences in big-time diplomacy. The US State Department recently released another report on the state of democracy around the world; this contained harsh criticism of Russia's policies, especially those related to media freedom. Foreign Minister Lavrov has chosen to provide some evidence for his counter-arguments: the recordings include some "seditious quotes" from Russian television programs - in Lavrov's view, these refute the State Department's conclusions.

Russia's foreign policy seems to have taken on a new style, and to all appearances, other countries are responding well. The essence of it is simple: all ideology aside, resolving serious regional problems has to be based on a mutual awareness that in many cases, excluding Russia would make solutions extremely difficult to achieve. This observation is supported by the talks Lavrov held last week in Luxembourg with the European Union's "top three," and a meeting of the international "quartet" in London at a conference on the Middle East. These meetings showed that Russia's deck of cards has enough aces to succeed in this foreign policy game.
Itogi, No. 10, March 7-13, 2005, p. 30

Negotiations between Russia and the European Union in Luxembourg frustrated some observers, who expected a serious debate between European officials and their counterparts from Russia: first of all, about the policy of Russia in the CIS, Russian-Iranian nuclear agreement and Russia's armament supplies to Syria. Contrary to expectations the parties were in a perfect mood being obviously happy with each other. No objections to supplies of Russia's fuel for nuclear reactors of the Iranian nuclear power station in Bushehr were heard in Luxembourg. (According to our sources, there were no such objections from Condoleezza Rice either. The publicity stunt of certain US Congress members regarding this contract is a different story, having nothing to do with big-time politics.)

The West cannot do without Russia in solving the problems of the so-called Greater Middle East, from which terrorist threats for the whole world originate. We need to say that Moscow uses this interest of the partners very successfully. Along with this, Middle Eastern regulation costs Russia relatively cheap, unlike for the West.

In London representatives of 23 countries discussed assistance to the new Palestinian authorities. As a result, Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas undertook written obligations to accelerate economic reforms and to ensure control over situation in Gaza and in the Western Bank of Jordan after withdrawal of Israeli forces from there.

International community sick and tired of these quarrels, undertook allocation of $1 billion for this purpose and comprehensive support to Abbas. Among the main sponsors are the US, which has promised $350 million, and the European Union, which has promised $300 million. Russia's contribution is writing off of the debt of the Palestinian Embassy in Moscow ($1 million), construction of two schools on the Western Bank of Jordan, training and equipment of Palestinian security agencies and arrangement of practice of Palestinian diplomats in Russian higher educational institutions. The issues of participation of Russian companies in economic reanimation of Palestinian territories and restarting of armament supplies to Palestinians were not settled yet.

It is especially interesting that despite such a low budget of Middle Eastern diplomacy Moscow manages to remain in the supreme league of the peacekeepers. The meeting of the "quartet" of international intermediaries was remarkable in this respect. This meeting buried the rumors about the quick death of the tool created according to Russia's initiative together with its "road map," that is the plan of Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation approved by the parties of the conflict, which had not started working yet. For example, many observers presumed that the new US Administration would take the regulation under its personal guardianship and everything would end with separation of Israel from Palestinians done at its own discretion. In any case, this did not happen. The Iraqi experience obviously did not pass unnoticed for the US. The Peacekeepers confirmed that the "road map" remained the only compass for regulation and the "quartet" remained its main curator. It is the "quartet" that will command the work of the international group of assistance to the Palestinian Autonomy and Israel in security and under its control there will be transition to fulfillment of all provisions of the "road map" (its essence being creation of independent and democratic Palestine peacefully neighboring Israel). Moreover, all participants of the conference agreed that the "quartet" was needed today as it had never been before, partially because it represented Russia enjoying confidence of both Arabs and Israelis.

For Russia, such a turn of events is extremely important. A mechanism is being started in the framework of which it has not only unique intermediary opportunities but also a good possibility and good chances to strengthen its positions, primarily economic ones, in the Middle East.

Syrian gambit

Syria became the anti-hero of the day. The Anglo-Saxons accused it of all mortal sins from patronage of terrorists to involvement into the murder of former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri and a recent bombing in Tel Aviv. British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that Syria had the last chance left to obey demands of the international community: to close offices of the terrorist organizations HAMAS and Islamic Jihad in Damascus, to disarm ***Hezbollah*** based in Lebanon (Syrian troops are stationed there) and to withdraw troops from Lebanon. Incidentally, it was very funny to hear the calls to close offices of the radical from Blair because there were more than enough of such offices in London.

This way or the other, clouds are rapidly growing thicker above Syria and friendship of Moscow with Damascus against the background of growing accusations of Syria from the main partners of Russia in the antiterrorist coalition look, to put this mild, ambiguous. For example, this is the recent generosity of Russia that wrote off the major part of the Syrian debt to it and decided to sell Strelets close-range air defense missile systems to Syria.

Is it possible that such promotion of Russia's interests harms the cause of peace in the region, international antiterrorist operation and the image of Russia? Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov told us that in general, Russia prefers to take accusations addressed to any country with reservations as long as there is no convincing evidence. The visit of the Syrian President to Russia and his talks with President Putin demonstrated "presence of a serious positive potential in Damascus that needs to be demanded and used in the interests of common goals of the international community regarding achievement of strong peace."

According to Saltanov, decisions on developing military technology cooperation with any particular country are made in Moscow by "very responsible people" who would never transgress certain borders. First of all, Russia develops any military technology cooperation on the basis of stringent observance of the voluntarily undertaken international obligations regarding limitation of supplies of certain kinds of weapons. With regard to Middle East, armament supplies there do not lead to breaking of the current configuration of forces (there is no balance there

and indisputable advantage belongs to Israel). Besides, signing such deals Moscow always takes care that they did not exceed the limits of necessary defense and were not excessive. Finally, last but not least: the Russian authorities will never supply weapons, technologies or dual-use equipment that might be used against Russia's national interests. For example, the Strelets is a stationary air defense missile system, not a portable one. As to the limitations on sale of portable air defense missile systems on which Russia agreed with America in the framework of joint efforts for combating terrorism, Moscow observes them.

We remember how very experienced expert on Middle East Yevgeny Primakov kept repeating: we should not drive to the corner countries with a not irreproachable reputation, infuriating them by sanctions and psychological pressurizing. This only creates additional and more complicated problems: when such regimes have nothing to lose they grow extremely dangerous. It is necessary to develop normal relations with them involving them into a civilized search for compromise solutions. The Russian Foreign Ministry obviously remembers this advice well. Primarily due to such tactics, Russia managed to claim one of the main roles in Mideast peacekeeping: the role of "good cop" for the Arabs. The absence of this would make it very difficult for the international community to solve regional problems. It seems that Europe and the United States now understand this.

Translated by Pavel Pushkin

Load-Date: March 16, 2005

Executions a sad reminder of home for Iranian author: Human rights activist says hanging of two gay teens shows Canada must get tough with Iran's regime, which she describes as 'a cancer,' writes Aron Heller.

Ottawa Citizen

August 2, 2005 Tuesday

Final Edition

Section: NEWS; Pg. A7

Length: 1286 words

Byline: Aron Heller, Citizen News Services

Body

When Ghazal Omid first heard about the public hanging of two gay teenagers in Iran, she instinctively started to cry.

"I was devastated. When I saw those pictures it was like someone putting a hand to my heart and pulling it," said Ms. Omid, 35, a Vancouver-based author and human right advocate from Iran. "That's what the government of Iran does. The government of Iran is about oppression, it's about abusing other people and showing off that 'I can do it, and if you say anything I will kill you, too.'"

On Jul. 19, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni were executed at a public square in Mashad, in northeast Iran. Iranian officials said both were over 18 and were sentenced for kidnapping, rape and homosexual activities. Prior to their execution, the two were also given 228 lashes each for drinking, disturbing the peace and theft, according to Amnesty International Canada.

Gay rights and Iranian opposition groups, though, said the two were only 16 and 18, and have suggested the rape charges against them were meant to undermine public sympathy. The groups have further suggested the boys made their confessions under torture.

Canada's Foreign Affairs Department has warned same-sex married couples to be wary of the law when travelling or moving to foreign countries, like Iran, that do not recognize their marriages.

Iran enforces Islamic Sharia law, which dictates the death penalty for gay sex.

The incident has sparked outrage around the world, with human rights groups saying this is just the latest example of widespread abuse in Iran's Islamic theocracy.

If anyone knows the horrors of living under the Iranian regime, it is Ms. Omid.

She was born in Abadan, Iran, in 1970, the only daughter in a very religious family. At 12, she says she was raped and molested by her older brother, but could never speak about it. Muslim ***women*** who have been sexually abused are often killed by their own relatives, for bringing shame upon the family. In high school, she became active in opposition groups and, as a result, was denied entry to medical school or any public university. Ultimately, she

enrolled at a private university where she continued her resistance, participating in student protests. She was monitored and eventually abducted by the secret police for her activities. She escaped and fled the country, arriving in Canada ten years ago.

Ms. Omid recently published her life story in a book entitled Living in Hell. In an interview, she said it was just that.

"How you live, how you breathe, how you have relationships with other people is for government to monitor. Your nails, your outfit, the colour of your outfit, these are the simple freedoms. If these are taken away from you -- it's a hell," she said.

She said she has also had a "brush" with lesbianism and said "if they would have found out, they would have killed me. It's as simple as that."

But the real issue in Iran, she agreed, is not about gay rights in particular, but human rights in general.

"We can not kill other people just because we feel like it," she said. "It's almost like they are paralyzing people to what they want to do. They say that 'I'll decide who lives and who dies.'"

l

Hopes were high in 1997 when Mohammad Khatami, a seemingly reform-minded and moderate candidate, was elected president on a platform of reform and democratization.

But with only a few weeks left in his presidency, the consensus among analysts and human right groups is that those efforts have failed miserably. Iran is still governed primarily by a group of hard-line conservative mullahs, loyal to the ways of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the 1979 revolution.

In addition to children and homosexuals, ***women***, ethnic minorities and political dissidents are commonly abused and persecuted in Iran, according to human right groups. Aside from its domestic policies, Iran has drawn the ire of the western world, as well, for its aggressive pursuit of development of nuclear weapons and for supporting Islamic terrorist groups such as Hamas and ***Hezbollah***.

Ghazal Omid fears Iran's ideological tyranny will spread, perhaps to next-door neighbour Iraq, and taint the image of Muslims around the world.

She has made the religious pilgrimage to Mecca and still considers herself a devout Muslim despite living a modern, western life.

"Islam is not what the government of Iran does," she says. "The government of Iran says 'you have to cover your head because I say so.' But there is no 'I say so' in Islam."

And she said physical appearance was just the superficial example of this.

"They made Islam look like a bloodshed, look like a monster who wants to eat everybody. What they are doing, the terror and terrorism, is essentially a cancer that is eating the body of Islam," she said.

Canada's interest in the situation in Iran has grown since the case of Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi came to light. Ms. Kazemi, 54, died in an Iranian prison in July 2003, about three weeks after being detained for taking photographs during anti-government protests. She was reportedly beaten to death.

Iran's judiciary charged a low-ranking intelligence official with unintentionally killing her during interrogation. The official was cleared of the charge at a trial last July, and, last week, an Iranian appeals court rejected demands for a new investigation into whether Ms. Kazemi's death was premeditated murder, effectively ending the case. Canada has continued to demand a thorough investigation, but many critics have said the federal government needs to take a tougher stand.

Ms. Omid agreed. "You're talking about a government that does not have any fear of hurting anybody," she said. "How much are we willing to sacrifice for our human rights?"

Canada's policy towards Iran has remained one of "controlled engagement," limited primarily because of human rights concerns.

"Canada is very concerned about Iran's performance -- especially relating to the independence of the judiciary, arbitrary detention, freedom of expression and the treatment of ***women***, inmates and religious minorities," said Marie-Christine Lilkoff, a Foreign Affairs department spokeswoman. "Canada's objective is still to promote and accelerate positive change in Iran. This objective underpins our general approach to Iran's human rights situation."

Ms. Lilkoff said the death sentence for minors violates Iran's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which bans executions of persons who were under 18 years of age at the time of the offence.

"Canada calls on Iran to abolish child executions immediately, and to impose a moratorium on all executions, with a view to abolishing the death penalty," she said.

But Ms. Omid said this tough talk is far from enough and called Canada's soft approach toward Iran a mistake.

"This is not the way to go with governments like Iran," she said.

"Something people in this part of the world don't know is when you are dealing with people like mullahs in Iran you absolutely have to be firm and put your foot down and say 'I don't care what is going to come, you are going to do it my way.' That is the only way they are going to understand. Sometimes you need to speak the language of that person in order for them to understand you," she said.

So far this year, Iran has executed at least four people for crimes committed when they were children, including one who was still a child. Amnesty International has recorded 42 executions so far in 2005, but says the actual number is likely higher.

Ms. Omid called he latest incident "a symbolic execution" meant to intimidate and show power.

"I am very sad and very angry that we have come to this point that two kids are hanged publicly and we sort of stand and do nothing," she said.

Graphic

Colour Photo: Richard Lam, The Vancouver Sun; Ghazal Omid, author of Living in Hell, says she would have been put to death had authorities ever learned that she a 'brush' with lesbianism while living in Iran.;

Colour Photo: The Associated Press; Blindfolded teenagers Mahmoud Asgari, 16, left, and Ayaz Marhoni were executed at a public square in Mashad, in northeast Iran. They were sentenced for kidnapping, rape and homosexual acts, but human rights groups say the rape charges were trumped up.

Load-Date: August 2, 2005

Film & Music: Film: The banality of murder: Beirut is being shaken by a new film that tracks down the killers - not the victims - of the notorious massacre of Palestinian refugees by Lebanese gunmen

The Guardian (London) - Final Edition

November 4, 2005

Section: Guardian Film and Music Pages, Pg. 8

Length: 1400 words

Byline: Rory McCarthy

Body

There is a large district in southern Beirut, not far from the airport, where the streets overflow with people and where ugly, cramped apartment blocks rise high above the snarled traffic. Once it was infamous as a kidnappers' redoubt, and even today the Islamic militia ***Hezbollah*** still holds sway: the party's yellow flags hang from lamp-posts next to portraits of dead guerrilla fighters.

Around one corner, just past the old airport road and halfway between a mosque and a church, is a grand, old house of the sort that once covered the city but have since largely disappeared. Behind its brick walls and tall black-metal gates, trees shade a large garden and an elegant, two-storey whitewashed house. It is the family home of Lokman Slim, a Lebanese writer and publisher, and his German wife Monika Borgmann, a journalist; they have turned the ground floor into a centre for research into the history of Lebanon's brutal civil war. There is little else like it in Beirut, for this was a war the government would rather its people forgot.

Slim and Borgmann set out to challenge that official amnesia. For their first project they have spent the past four years producing a film that strikes through the taboos of postwar Lebanon, where the war often goes unmentioned only 15 years since it ended. Lebanon was locked in a civil war from 1975 to 1990 between dozens of rival militias that were backed in shifting alliances with foreign governments. The Palestine Liberation Organisation, which was by then based in the refugee camps of Beirut and southern Lebanon, soon became involved in the long-running tensions between the Lebanese Muslims and the Maronite community. The rival groups fought against each other and then among themselves, and when the war ended, 15 years later, at least 100,000 were dead and another 100,000 seriously injured.

While others have focused on the victims of the years of killing, the couple hunted down the killers. In their 98-minute documentary they interview six Maronite Christian militiamen who describe in sometimes appalling detail how and why they took part in the infamous killing spree at the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps in September 1982, one of the most controversial moments of the war.

The film, Massacre, is simply done and gives a rare insight into the banality of murder. It won the Fipresci award when it made its debut at the Berlin film festival this year and is slowly being released across Europe.

"It is as important to talk to the victimisers as to the victims if you want the real truth of what happened during the massacre," says Borgmann. "It is really on two levels: first, reconstructing the truth and second, better understanding the phenomenon of violence."

The Palestinian refugee camps were attacked at the height of the Lebanese civil war on September 16 1982, by gunmen from Christian Maronite militias. For the next 48 hours they tore through the camps, which are on the southern edge of Beirut, in an indiscriminate wave of killing of the most horrifying kind. At least 2,000 people died, among them ***women*** and children. The Maronite gunmen were allies of the Israeli army, who were then occupying Beirut, and Israeli soldiers were deployed near the camp at the time of the attack. The gunmen claimed they were looking for members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, whom they blamed for the assassination two days earlier of Bachir Gemayel, the newly elected Lebanese president. An Israeli inquiry later found that Ariel Sharon, then defence minister, bore indirect responsibility for the attack on the camps, and he was forced to resign.

In 2001, Slim and Borgmann set out to find Lebanese who had taken part in the killings. They soon found five men and started meeting them to explain their project. But then the Lebanese security forces discovered what the couple were trying to do. The five men were arrested and later fined, and Slim and Borgmann were taken in for interrogation. Security agents insisted the five had been lying and trying to deceive the couple. It was clear the authorities - who had, several years previously, ensured there would be no formal inquiry into the killings - didn't want the film to be made.

"It collapsed and we had to start again from zero," says Borgmann. The couple found six more men and set out again to talk to them and convince them to take part in the film. They told no one of their plans. "We lived a double life. We were really working underground," she says. In the end, all agreed to talk and each spent sev eral hours in front of the camera. Their identities have been protected: dark shadows cover their faces and the couple have made sure that the men's tattoos, which are singled out for frequent close-ups in the film, have since been removed or altered.

Their intent was to question the men, but to stop short of judging them. "It is a kind of empathy, participative empathy that we used while being convinced that we are not an inquiry commission," says Slim. "We are not doing the work which should have been done by an inquiry commission." "They are human beings, not devils who fell from the sky," adds Borgmann.

An amnesty law means these men and the thousands of others who fought during the war have simply got on with their lives. There has been no process of investigation, no opening of the files, no truth and reconciliation commission. Some believe Lebanon's fragile, deeply sectarian society may not even be ready for it.

In the film it is the precision of the men's accounts that strikes you as most shocking, together with some of the initial orders given. "Young and old, babes in arms, show no mercy. That was our slogan," says one at the start. Some of the six describe in detail the training they received from the Israelis. One still has his Israeli-made uniform. There is the occasional lighter moment: an incongruous burst of song, for instance, and the story one man tells of how he and his fellow fighters were taken to Israel, sent to a nudist beach and ordered by a naked ***female*** Israeli officer to strip for training. But soon the film grows darker and darker as the men grow more and more confident in describing the crimes they committed and their astonishingly limited emotional reaction. The camera studies their body language.

'That was a good war, that was," says one. "After a while, killing gets to be like playing a game of marbles," says another. They are given black and white photographs taken by the first journalists on the scene. They are horrific: images of arms and legs barely recognisable as corpses. In one of the most choking moments, one of the six turns over picture after picture of these dead bodies and then stops at a photograph of two dead horses. He pauses for an age and finally says: "Why kill the horses?" Now you begin to understand how deeply the men have dissociated themselves from the reality of their crimes. Some have not even talked before in such detail about the killings they perpetrated. Astonishingly, not one of the six has asked to see the film since it was finished.

Only one seems touched by guilt, and his muted account is almost more powerful than the vivid descriptions of the others. "I may be just sitting here but I'm boiling up inside," he says. "I still suffer from the battle I'm fighting with myself. We never asked why we did it."

The film offers no resolution. The interviewers do not even ask the men if they feel they deserve to be punished, and instead, the movie ends with ever more detailed and appalling descriptions. Although no violence of any kind is shown, it is still challenging to watch; when the film was first shown in public in Lebanon on last month at a Beirut theatre, at least one person walked out. Others were deeply troubled. In a discussion between the audience and the couple afterwards, there was praise, though some were clearly shocked. One woman described the six as "bastards" and asked calmly: "How did you manage to have a level of calm so as not to commit physical violence against these men?" Another asked why there was not another voice in the film that questioned the twisted values of the six militiamen.

"We took a more radical way," Borgmann replies. "This was a terrible massacre. I don't see the spectator is going to come out with a comfortable feeling. The film is less about giving answers and more about asking questions."

Load-Date: November 4, 2005

Abbas orders forces to prevent attacks against Israel

Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)

January 18, 2005 Tuesday

Section: National/World; Pg. a5

Length: 172 words

Byline: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dateline: RAMALLAH, West Bank

Body

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, under growing pressure to rein in militants, ordered his security forces Monday to prevent attacks on Israel and investigate a deadly shooting of Israeli civilians last week.

But Palestinian security officials were short on details about possible actions against armed groups, and a spokesman for Hamas said his extremist group would continue attacks.

The order by Abbas, approved by his Cabinet, was the Palestinian leadership's first step against militants since six Israelis were slain Thursday at the Karni crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

While Israel's government cautiously welcomed the announcement, it remained unclear how far Abbas was willing to go. He has insisted he will use persuasion, not force, to get militants to halt violence.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes twice bombed suspected ***Hezbollah*** targets along the border in southern Lebanon on Monday, wounding two ***women***, after guerrillas blew up an Israeli bulldozer in a disputed area near the frontier, Lebanese officials said.

Load-Date: January 18, 2005

1.5 THREE, FOUR, ACE[]

What the Papers Say. Part A (Russia)

March 14, 2005, Monday

Length: 1578 words

Byline: Valeria Sycheva

Body

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is getting a special gift for March 8, International ***Women***'s Day. At least, her gallant counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, has definitely prepared something for her: a collection of recorded Russian television programs. Firstly, Rice the Russia specialist could always do with some help in keeping up her knowledge of the Russian language. Secondly, it's just a nice thought. Then again, there are no coincidences in big-time diplomacy. The US State Department recently released another report on the state of democracy around the world; this contained harsh criticism of Russia's policies, especially those related to media freedom. Foreign Minister Lavrov has chosen to provide some evidence for his counter-arguments: the recordings include some "seditious quotes" from Russian television programs - in Lavrov's view, these refute the State Department's conclusions.

Russia's foreign policy seems to have taken on a new style, and to all appearances, other countries are responding well. The essence of it is simple: all ideology aside, resolving serious regional problems has to be based on a mutual awareness that in many cases, excluding Russia would make solutions extremely difficult to achieve. This observation is supported by the talks Lavrov held last week in Luxembourg with the European Union's "top three," and a meeting of the international "quartet" in London at a conference on the Middle East. These meetings showed that Russia's deck of cards has enough aces to succeed in this foreign policy game.
Itogi, No. 10, March 7, 2005, p. 30

Negotiations between Russia and the European Union in Luxembourg frustrated some observers, who expected a serious debate between European officials and their counterparts from Russia: first of all, about the policy of Russia in the CIS, Russian-Iranian nuclear agreement and Russia's armament supplies to Syria. Contrary to expectations the parties were in a perfect mood being obviously happy with each other. No objections to supplies of Russia's fuel for nuclear reactors of the Iranian nuclear power station in Bushehr were heard in Luxembourg. (According to our sources, there were no such objections from Condoleezza Rice either. The publicity stunt of certain US Congress members regarding this contract is a different story, having nothing to do with big-time politics.)

The West cannot do without Russia in solving the problems of the so-called Greater Middle East, from which terrorist threats for the whole world originate. We need to say that Moscow uses this interest of the partners very successfully. Along with this, Middle Eastern regulation costs Russia relatively cheap, unlike for the West.

In London representatives of 23 countries discussed assistance to the new Palestinian authorities. As a result, Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas undertook written obligations to accelerate economic reforms and to ensure control over situation in Gaza and in the Western Bank of Jordan after withdrawal of Israeli forces from there. International community sick and tired of these quarrels, undertook allocation of $1 billion for this purpose and comprehensive support to Abbas. Among the main sponsors are the US, which has promised $350 million, and the

European Union, which has promised $300 million. Russia's contribution is writing off of the debt of the Palestinian Embassy in Moscow ($1 million), construction of two schools on the Western Bank of Jordan, training and equipment of Palestinian security agencies and arrangement of practice of Palestinian diplomats in Russian higher educational institutions. The issues of participation of Russian companies in economic reanimation of Palestinian territories and restarting of armament supplies to Palestinians were not settled yet.

It is especially interesting that despite such a low budget of Middle Eastern diplomacy Moscow manages to remain in the supreme league of the peacekeepers. The meeting of the "quartet" of international intermediaries was remarkable in this respect. This meeting buried the rumors about the quick death of the tool created according to Russia's initiative together with its "road map," that is the plan of Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation approved by the parties of the conflict, which had not started working yet. For example, many observers presumed that the new US Administration would take the regulation under its personal guardianship and everything would end with separation of Israel from Palestinians done at its own discretion. In any case, this did not happen. The Iraqi experience obviously did not pass unnoticed for the US. The Peacekeepers confirmed that the "road map" remained the only compass for regulation and the "quartet" remained its main curator. It is the "quartet" that will command the work of the international group of assistance to the Palestinian Autonomy and Israel in security and under its control there will be transition to fulfillment of all provisions of the "road map" (its essence being creation of independent and democratic Palestine peacefully neighboring Israel). Moreover, all participants of the conference agreed that the "quartet" was needed today as it had never been before, partially because it represented Russia enjoying confidence of both Arabs and Israelis.

For Russia, such a turn of events is extremely important. A mechanism is being started in the framework of which it has not only unique intermediary opportunities but also a good possibility and good chances to strengthen its positions, primarily economic ones, in the Middle East.

Syrian gambit

Syria became the anti-hero of the day. The Anglo-Saxons accused it of all mortal sins from patronage of terrorists to involvement into the murder of former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri and a recent bombing in Tel Aviv. British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that Syria had the last chance left to obey demands of the international community: to close offices of the terrorist organizations HAMAS and Islamic Jihad in Damascus, to disarm ***Hezbollah*** based in Lebanon (Syrian troops are stationed there) and to withdraw troops from Lebanon. Incidentally, it was very funny to hear the calls to close offices of the radical from Blair because there were more than enough of such offices in London.

This way or the other, clouds are rapidly growing thicker above Syria and friendship of Moscow with Damascus against the background of growing accusations of Syria from the main partners of Russia in the antiterrorist coalition look, to put this mild, ambiguous. For example, this is the recent generosity of Russia that wrote off the major part of the Syrian debt to it and decided to sell Strelets close-range air defense missile systems to Syria.

Is it possible that such promotion of Russia's interests harms the cause of peace in the region, international antiterrorist operation and the image of Russia? Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov told us that in general, Russia prefers to take accusations addressed to any country with reservations as long as there is no convincing evidence. The visit of the Syrian President to Russia and his talks with President Putin demonstrated "presence of a serious positive potential in Damascus that needs to be demanded and used in the interests of common goals of the international community regarding achievement of strong peace."

According to Saltanov, decisions on developing military technology cooperation with any particular country are made in Moscow by "very responsible people" who would never transgress certain borders. First of all, Russia develops any military technology cooperation on the basis of stringent observance of the voluntarily undertaken international obligations regarding limitation of supplies of certain kinds of weapons. With regard to Middle East, armament supplies there do not lead to breaking of the current configuration of forces (there is no balance there and indisputable advantage belongs to Israel). Besides, signing such deals Moscow always takes care that they did not exceed the limits of necessary defense and were not excessive. Finally, last but not least: the Russian

authorities will never supply weapons, technologies or dual-use equipment that might be used against Russia's national interests. For example, the Strelets is a stationary air defense missile system, not a portable one. As to the limitations on sale of portable air defense missile systems on which Russia agreed with America in the framework of joint efforts for combating terrorism, Moscow observes them.

We remember how very experienced expert on Middle East Yevgeny Primakov kept repeating: we should not drive to the corner countries with a not irreproachable reputation, infuriating them by sanctions and psychological pressurizing. This only creates additional and more complicated problems: when such regimes have nothing to lose they grow extremely dangerous. It is necessary to develop normal relations with them involving them into a civilized search for compromise solutions. The Russian Foreign Ministry obviously remembers this advice well. Primarily due to such tactics, Russia managed to claim one of the main roles in Mideast peacekeeping: the role of "good cop" for the Arabs. The absence of this would make it very difficult for the international community to solve regional problems. It seems that Europe and the United States now understand this.

Translated by Pavel Pushkin

Load-Date: March 14, 2005

ABBAS DECLARES VICTORY IN VOTE BY PALESTINIANS

The New York Times

January 10, 2005 Monday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section A; Column 6; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1; THE PALESTINIAN ELECTION: THE VOTE

Length: 1319 words

Byline: By STEVEN ERLANGER

Dateline: RAMALLAH, West Bank, Jan. 9

Body

Mahmoud Abbas, who opposes continuing violence against Israel, declared victory Sunday night in the election for president of the Palestinian Authority after two surveys of voters leaving the polls showed him winning by a large margin.

"We offer this victory to the soul of the brother martyr Yasir Arafat and to our people, to our martyrs and to 11,000 prisoners" in Israeli jails, Mr. Abbas, 69, told his supporters here.

Honking horns, waving flags and firing gunshots into the air, supporters celebrated an expected victory. The strong margin, if it is borne out in final results, should help give the quiet, cerebral Mr. Abbas the ability to remake and reinvigorate the Palestinian Authority and to try to put an end to violence.

Based on the voter surveys, released moments after the polls closed at 9 p.m., Mr. Abbas is expected to win election to a five-year term with about 65 percent of the vote, more than 40 percentage points ahead of his nearest challenger in a field of seven. Official results are not expected until Monday.

In Washington, President Bush welcomed the victory of Mr. Abbas, calling it "a historic day for the Palestinian people and the people of the Middle East," as administration officials prepared to increase the tempo of their involvement in the region while cautioning that Israel and the Palestinians must both take concrete steps to capitalize on the election of the new president. [Page A7.]

It was the first presidential election in nine years, made necessary after the death of Mr. Arafat on Nov. 11. The voting was judged by international observers to be generally free and fair, with little interference from Israel, which eased travel curbs on Palestinians and largely halted military activity in the territories.

But there was concern about a turnout that was lower than expected on a chilly but sunny winter's day, and Palestinian election officials decided to keep the polls open two hours longer than originally planned. The election officials first said that Israeli restrictions at checkpoints and confusion at Jerusalem polling stations were the reasons for the extension. But the announcement came after reports of low turnout in some cities, including Ramallah, where election workers at one polling place, Al Qarami School, said that only 30 percent of those registered had voted by 4:30 p.m. The officials then acknowledged that they wanted more people to vote, because only 30 percent of the 1.8 million or so eligible voters had cast their ballots by noon.

The officials also declared during the late afternoon that voters who faced travel difficulties because of security restrictions, and so could not make it to their home polling places to cast their ballots, as was originally required, would be able to vote at any polling place by showing an identity card.

The voting was extended last month for municipal elections and in 1996, too, when the last presidential vote was held. Then, as now, the radical Islamic groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad called on their followers to boycott the vote.

One of the voter surveys estimated turnout at about 65 percent, but actual figures will not be available until Monday. In partial municipal elections last month in 26 towns and villages, turnout was 81 percent.

Mr. Abbas, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the candidate of the main Palestinian faction, Fatah, faced little real competition. His main challenger was an independent, Mustafa Barghouti, 50, a medical doctor and a human-rights campaigner.

Mr. Abbas was looking for a sizable popular mandate to provide him the legitimacy and authority to make difficult internal reforms, to reorganize Palestinian security services and to negotiate with Israel.

Despite their boycott call, Hamas spokesmen made it clear on Sunday that they would work with an elected president. Mahmoud Zahar, a Hamas leader in Gaza, told reporters that Hamas could have run its own candidate if it had really wanted to undermine Mr. Abbas. ''Our view is not to undermine,'' he said, but he insisted that armed resistance to Israel would continue, despite Mr. Abbas's call for a cease-fire.

Mr. Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, called the election a source of pride for Palestinians as he voted in Ramallah. ''This process is taking place in a marvelous fashion and is an illustration of how the Palestinian people aspire to democracy,'' he said. He urged ***women*** in particular to exercise their right to vote.

Dr. Barghouti, while noting some voting irregularities, including complaints that the ink put on voters' thumbs to prevent fraud could be washed off, also praised the election. ''I felt my dream is coming true,'' he said. ''This is a great step for the Palestinian people, a good test of our institutions and proof to the world that we can establish an independent state.'' He called the election ''free, and I hope fair.''

Ekram Quraan, a graphics designer monitoring the vote at a school, called the day historic. ''For us, it happens once in a lifetime'' she said.

Waleed Obeidallah, a Palestinian-American, said: ''This is milestone in our lives, and hopefully the peace process will be reignited. Israelis always say that they have no partner for peace, and now we are electing a president, and there are no excuses anymore.''

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestinian legislature, spoke of a new process of democracy to hold leaders accountable. But she was most struck by the context. ''This is a unique case of a people under occupation being asked to hold free and fair elections when they themselves are not free,'' she said. ''I think it's unique in history. But this is a nation adamant to vote. It's an important internal test, and I think it's a turning point.''

Michel Rocard, leader of the largest group of international observers, from the European Union, said there were few problems with the election despite Dr. Barghouti's complaints. There were some difficulties for voters in East Jerusalem, where Israel required Palestinians to vote in post offices, as if they were casting absentee ballots, given Israel's claim to sovereignty over East Jerusalem. Senators Joseph R. Biden Jr., Democrat of Delaware, and John E. Sununu, Republican of New Hampshire, led a delegation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. Biden said the election was ''an important statement for the Palestinians and their pride and maturity, and it can change the world's attitudes toward the Palestinians after the death of Arafat.''

Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said: ''It has been a very good day. The moment is historic.'' He promised further European aid.

Israeli officials have made it clear in recent days that they support Mr. Abbas and that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his top ministers would like to meet with him as soon as possible. Israeli officials say they are willing to release more Palestinian prisoners and talk to Mr. Abbas about a more permanent easing of security measures.

The Israeli defense minister, Shaul Mofaz, said last week that he was willing to give a newly elected Palestinian leadership responsibility for security in Gaza and the major cities of the West Bank.

But Israel also wants Mr. Abbas to move quickly to reorganize his security services and to crack down in a serious and committed way on Palestinian militants attacking Israel and its civilians, as the Palestinians have promised to do in the first stage of the plan known as the road map for peace. The Israelis have promised to stop new settlement activity.

In a possible sign of solidarity with Palestinians opposed to the vote, the Lebanese group ***Hezbollah*** detonated a bomb under an Israeli jeep on Sunday along Israel's northern border, killing an Israeli officer. Israel responded with artillery fire and an airstrike and was investigating reports that an officer with the United Nations monitoring force was killed.

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: Mahmoud Abbas, above, appeared to be the winner in yesterday's election for president of the Palestinian Authority. In Gaza, below, election workers tallied votes at a polling place. Final results are expected today. (Photos by Top, Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

above, Yuri Cortez/Agence France-Presse--Getty Images)(pg. A1)

Election workers in Ramallah kept warm with a heater yesterday at a polling place where turnout was light.

A carload of Palestinians in Ramallah celebrated the likely victory of Mahmoud Abbas last night. (Photographs by Ruth Fremson/The New York Times)(pg. A7)

Load-Date: January 10, 2005

Seattle Muslim shoots 6 at Jewish Centre

The Vancouver Sun (British Columbia)

July 29, 2006 Saturday

FINAL C Edition

Section: NEWS; Pg. A2

Length: 2993 words

Byline: Phuong Cat Le, Brad Wong and Amy Rolph, Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Dateline: SEATTLE

Body

SEATTLE -- On the eve of the Jewish Sabbath, a man claiming he was upset about "what was going on in Israel" opened fire at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle building.

He killed one person and wounded five ***women***, one of them pregnant. Three were in critical condition with gunshot wounds to the stomach.

The gunman forced his way through the security door at the federation after an employee had punched in her security code.

"He said 'I am a Muslim-American, angry at Israel,' before opening fire on everyone," said Marla Meislin-Dietrich, a database coordinator for the centre. "He was randomly shooting at everyone."

The shootings come just weeks after Jewish leaders told the U.S. Congress there was a "critical threat" to their institutions nationwide because of tensions in the Middle East.

Vancouver's Jewish community was "in a state of shock and disbelief" at the violence targeted at its sister community, said Michael Elterman, chairman of the Canada-Israel Committee for the Pacific Region.

"I think we are going to become far more vigilant than we have been, realizing it has hit very close to home," Elterman said, adding that security around Jewish institutions in Vancouver will most certainly be beefed up.

In Seattle, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has labeled the shootings a "hate crime" based on what the shooter told police in a 911 call.

"I feel sick to my stomach," said Becki Chandler, 35, who has been a volunteer for the Jewish Federation for 7 years. She came to Harborview Medical Center as soon as she heard about the shootings. "It feels like a personal attack."

Police apprehended the lone shooter without incident at 4:15 p.m. after officers talked him out of the building.

The man was arrested outside the Federation building located at the corner of Third Avenue and Virginia Street.

"We believe 5 it's a lone individual acting out his antagonism," said David Gomez, an FBI assistant special agent in charge of counterterrorism in Seattle.

In Seattle, FBI agent Fred Gutt said last night that the agency sent out two generalized warnings to Washington law enforcement on July 21 and 26th listing general scenarios to be alert for. Places of religious significance were included, including mosques, synagogues and churches, but the warning was not specific, he said.

Gutt said the FBI is helping Seattle police assess whether the gunman was a "lone-wolf" or part of a wider plan. If evidence of a terrorist plot evolved, the FBI would become the lead agency, but as of last night the case remained Seattle's, Gutt said.

Authorities did not release any details about the alleged gunman and would not discuss possible motives.

"There's nothing to indicate that it's terrorism related," Gomez said. "But we're monitoring the entire situation."

Harborview spokeswoman Pamela Steele said five victims were taken to the hospital. "I've never seen such a swarm of people," Steele said of the scene as the victims and medics arrived at the trauma center.

The ***women*** ranged in age from the 20s to 40s. Each suffered gunshot wounds to the abdomen, knee, groin or arm. Three were in surgery and in critical condition last night. Two were in satisfactory condition.

A hospital spokesman identified the pregnant woman as Dayna Klein, who She was in satisfactory condition with a gunshot wound in her left forearm and was scheduled for surgery Friday night.

Cheryl Stumbo, director of marketing and communications for the Federation, was also identified as one of the victims.

Kathryn Bush said last night that her daughter, Layla Bush, had been injured in the shooting.

"She's out of surgery, but that's all we know," she said in a call last night from her Florida home. "We're taking it moment by moment. I'm really in shocked right now, but I'm trusting in the Lord to bring me through."

She said her daughter, 23, was "really bright" and always wanted to work for non-profits and foundations. She joined the Federation as the office manager and receptionist about six months ago.Police got the first 911 call of shots fired at the Jewish Federation at 4:03 p.m. Friday just as people were preparing to leave work for the weekend. There were about 10 people left in the building. Witnesses said the shooter indicated he was acting because of Israel's actions.

Fighting has raged in the Middle East since ***Hezbollah***, a Shiite group based in Lebanon, went into Israel and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others. Israel retaliated by striking targets in Lebanon and has sent troops into the southern part of the country. Since the conflict began, more than 400 have been killed in Lebanon and more than 50 soldiers and civilians have been killed in Israel.

Last Sunday, the Jewish Federation held a rally that attracted thousands in support of Israel's right to defend herself. More than 40 community organizations supported the event.

The sight yesterday was quite different. Authorities received a 911 call at 4:03 p.m. with reports of shots fired at the Jewish Federation and a possible hostage situation, Assistant Seattle Police Chief Nick Metz said at an early evening news conference. Police snipers and emergency workers in blue spatter smocks swarmed the building.

Witnesses to the afternoon shooting and people who work at the Jewish Federation described a chaotic, terrifying scene.

Kami Knatt works at the federation's Holocaust center. As he exited the building, she saw a wounded coworker fall down. Knatt took her sweater off and tried to stop the bleeding.

"I asked her 'are you OK'. She said no I've been shot. 'I kept saying it's going to be OK."

The victim told Knatt: "I'm going to black out, I'm going to black out." Knatt replied: "You're going to be alright."

Several workers and victims ran toward a nearby Starbucks. There was a small pool of blood outside the coffee shop.

Nathaniel Mullins, 43, was turning onto Lenora Street with his 19-year-old daughter when he heard police say "get back! get back!"

Mullins said he saw two shooting victims. "They were covered in blood," he said.

"We were scared, heck yeah. It shocked me for a moment."

Rachel Hynes, works in the building. "I was in the back of the building when I heard gun shots. It sounded like balloons, but they were really loud," she said. "I picked up my purse and I walked out of the building."

Zach Carstensen, who is the director of government relations for the Jewish Federation, said he heard shots and screams.

"People started running and I started running with them," Carstensen said.

Asked whether he thought his office had been targeted because of the conflict in the Mideast, Carstensen said he wasn't sure. "We're all a little shaken, he said.

Sam Peterson, 18, who lives in an apartment on Third and Blanchard, said she was walking to the Lenora Apartment Building and cutting through the corner of Sigs Barbershop when she heard at least one gunshot.

She saw a blonde woman "drop to the ground. She screamed."

Jesse Black, general manager of Nyberg Locksmiths on 3rd Ave. diagonally across from the building heard the shots and went to the sidewalk.

The cops yelled at him, "Get off the street because there's a sniper on the roof." He said the first thing that flashed through his mind was "Texas Book Depository." He looked up and saw a figure in a white shirt on the roof top.

Immediately after the shooting, a SWAT team searched the federation building, looking for any other victims, anyone hiding or any other possible shooters, said police spokesman Rich Pruitt.

Police blocked off several city blocks to investigate. The suspect's vehicle was recovered near the shooting scene, Assistant Chief Metz said.Police spent some time checking it for bombs.

Seattle Fire Department spokeswoman Helen Fitzpatrick confirmed one person had died.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle was established 1926. According to its Web site, its mission is to "ensure Jewish survival and to enhance the quality of Jewish life locally, in Israel and worldwide."

Rabbi Daniel Weiner at Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle, said his congregation was planning to meet in Bellevue this evening anyway, but were waiting for police to advise them on whether to go ahead with the services.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle is a fund raising and fund allocation organization.

"It is the Jewish version of the United Way," Weiner said.

He said he is at a loss to understand why people in that building would be attacked.

"To delve into the mind of a clearly troubled and disturbed person is impossible," Weiner said.

"It is heartbreaking to think of what is transpiring."

Early in July, Jewish non-profits organizations received more than half the federal homeland security grants to "harden" such "at-risk" non-profit groups against terrorist threats. Jewish groups received about $14 million of $25 million earmarked by Congress in 2005.

William Dartoff, vice president for public policy of the United Jewish Communities, said "we believe there is a critical threat against Jewish community assets in the United States," according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, an 89-year-old global news service for Jewish people known now simply as JTA.

"It doesn't take a brain surgeon to see that Jewish institutions are near the top of the terrorists list," Dartoff said in lobbying to repeat such security allocations for all non-profits in the 2007 Homeland Security Department budget.

U.S. Sens. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Barbara Mikulski D-Calif. co-sponsored the legislation. "We must help protect our hospitals, schools, community centers, synagogues and churches from terrorist violence," Mikulski said in a letter to JTA.

The Jewish Federation building is known for its security with gates and buzzers, puzzling many who go there as to how the gunman entered.

Jacobs said the federation has an electronic security system that allows it to control access to the office. The shooter could not have simply entered the building unseen, said Anti-Defamation League leader Robert Jacobs.

"The whole thing is an incredibly terrifying thing," said Vicki Robbins-Silverman, a member of Seattle's Jewish community and retired military wife. "It's unbelievable."

Silverman had visited the Jewish Federation only on Wednesday to pick up a friend, and found it "creepy" watching the building known for its community services to be surrounded by turmoil.

The Muslim community of Greater Seattle area watched in horror as news broke of a shooting at the Jewish Federation building.

"We categorically condemn this and any similar acts of violence," the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said in a joint statement with the Ithna-Ashari Muslim Association of the Northwest, the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, the Islamic Educational Center of Seattle, American Muslims of Puget Sound and the Arab American Community Coalition.

"We pray for the safety and health of those injured and offer our heartfelt condolences to the family of the victims of this attack. We refuse to see the violence in the Middle East spill over to our cities and neighborhoods.We reject and categorically condemn any attacks against the Jewish community and stand in solidarity with the Jewish Federation in this tragedy.

The Seattle City Council yesterday issued a statement offering its condolences to the victims, and their families.

"There is too much hate and violence in the world and we do not wish to bring it to Seattle," said Council President Nick Licata in the statement. "We are proud of our vibrant Jewish and Muslim communities in Seattle. The City Council will support the leaders in these communities in whatever dialogue they may wish to pursue to overcome any public doubt as to their peaceful relations."

The Church Council of Greater Seattle also issued a statement condemning the murder and shootings, calling it "a senseless and immoral action in which a sick individual targeted innocent people."

A message left by the federation's interim director, Nancy Geiger, on the answering machine at the office says: "We have an emergency. Many of our employees have been shot. Several have been brought to Harborview Medical Center."

Just hours before the shooting, Jacobs ate lunch with shooting victim Dana Klein.

"She's just a wonderful, ebullient, energetic person," said Jacobs, the ADL's Pacific Northwest regional director. "She heads up major gifts and development for the federation. She's dedicated to making the Jewish community a better place."

He called shooting victim Cheryl Stumbo, a non-Jewish Unitarian, "a warm, good human being. She really brought a tremendous understanding of marketing to the federation."

Iantha Sidell, past board chairman of the federation, went to Harborview after the shootings to lend her support.

"This is just a disaster," she said. "We value every life. I don't know what we're going to do about it. We believe in life."

In Seattle, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has labeled the shootings a "hate crime" based on what the shooter told police.

"I feel sick to my stomach," said Becki Chandler, 35, who has been a volunteer for the Jewish Federation for seven years. She came to Harborview Medical Center as soon as she heard about the shootings. "It feels like a personal attack."

Police apprehended the lone shooter without incident at 4:15 p.m. after he called 911 and officers talked him out of the building. He was arrested outside the Federation building at Third Avenue and Virginia Street.

"We believe it's a lone individual acting out his antagonism," said David Gomez, the FBI assistant special agent in charge of counterterrorism in Seattle.

FBI agent Fred Gutt said late Friday that the agency sent out two generalized warnings to Washington state law enforcement on July 21 and 26, listing general scenarios to be alert for. Places of religious significance were included, including mosques, synagogues and churches, but the warning was not specific, he said.

Gutt said the FBI is helping Seattle police assess whether the gunman was a "lone-wolf" or part of a wider plan. If evidence of a terrorist plot evolved, the FBI would become the lead agency, but as of Friday night the case was Seattle's, Gutt said.

Authorities did not release any details about the alleged gunman and would not discuss possible motives.

"There's nothing to indicate that it's terrorism-related," Gomez said. "But we're monitoring the entire situation."

Harborview spokeswoman Pamela Steele said five victims were taken to the hospital. "I've never seen such a swarm of people," Steele said of the scene as the victims and medics arrived at the trauma centre.

The ***women*** ranged in age from the 20s to 40s. Each suffered gunshot wounds to the abdomen, knee, groin or arm. Three were in surgery and in critical condition last night. Two were in satisfactory condition.

Seattle Fire Department spokeswoman Helen Fitzpatrick confirmed one person had died.

A hospital spokesman identified the wounded pregnant woman as Dayna Klein, who was in satisfactory condition with a gunshot wound in her left arm.

Cheryl Stumbo, director of marketing and communications for the Federation, was also identified as one of the victims.

Kathryn Bush said last night that her daughter, Layla Bush, had been injured in the shooting.

"She's out of surgery, but that's all we know," she said in a call last night from her Florida home. "We're taking it moment by moment. I'm really in shock right now, but I'm trusting in the Lord to bring me through."

Police got the first 911 call of shots fired at the Jewish Federation at 4:03 p.m. Friday just as people were preparing to leave work for the weekend. There were about 10 people left in the building.

The gunman's anger was apparently over fighting has raged in the Middle East since ***Hezbollah***, a Shiite group based in Lebanon, went into Israel and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others. Israel retaliated by striking targets in Lebanon and has sent troops into the southern part of the country. Since the conflict began, more than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon and more than 50 Israeli soldiers and civilians have been killed.

Last Sunday, the Jewish Federation held a rally that attracted thousands in support of Israel's right to defend herself. More than 40 community organizations supported the event.

Witnesses to the shooting and people who work at the Jewish Federation described a chaotic, terrifying scene.

Kami Knatt works at the federation's Holocaust centre. As he left the building, she saw a wounded co-worker fall down. Knatt took her sweater off and tried to stop the bleeding.

"I asked her 'are you OK'. She said no, 'I've been shot.' I kept saying 'it's going to be OK.'"

Zach Carstensen, who is the director of government relations for the Jewish Federation, said he heard shots and screams.

"People started running and I started running with them."

Immediately after the shooting, a SWAT team searched the federation building, looking for any other victims, anyone hiding or any other possible shooters, said police spokesman Rich Pruitt.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle is a fund-raising and fund-allocation organization. "It is the Jewish version of the United Way," Rabbi Daniel Weiner Weiner said.

The Muslim community of Greater Seattle area watched in horror as news broke of the shooting.

"We categorically condemn this and any similar acts of violence," the Council on American-Islamic Relations said in a joint statement with the Ithna-Ashari Muslim Association of the Northwest, the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, the Islamic Educational Center of Seattle, American Muslims of Puget Sound and the Arab American Community Coalition.

"We pray for the safety and health of those injured and offer our heartfelt condolences to the family of the victims of this attack. We refuse to see the violence in the Middle East spill over to our cities and neighbourhoods. We reject and categorically condemn any attacks against the Jewish community and stand in solidarity with the Jewish Federation in this tragedy.

Graphic

Photo: Mark Harrison/The Seattle Times; A police officer runs to take cover at the scene of the Jewish centre shooting Friday afternoon.;

Photo: Mike Urban/Seattle Post-Intelligencer; Ilana Cone Kennedy is comforted by husband Jon Kennedy at the Seattle shooting scene.

Load-Date: July 29, 2006

End of Document

Food relief team warns of catastrophe for Lebanon

Western Mail

July 29, 2006, Saturday

Second Edition

Section: NEWS; Pg. 8

Length: 178 words

Body

One in five Lebanese has been made homeless by the ongoing violence between ***Hezbollah*** and Israel, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said yesterday.

Food shortages and the shelling of residential areas has turned the conflict into a major humanitarian situation.

An estimated 800,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon - 95,000 in and around the capital Beirut.

Yesterday, the WFP sent emergency relief convoys to the cities of Sidon and Jezzine in the south of the country.

Eight convoy trucks loaded with 90 tonnes of wheat flour, 15 tonnes of canned meat, blankets and shelter materials provided by Medicines Sans Frontieres (MSF) were bound for Jezzine.

Ten trucks laden with 18 tons of food and shelter supplies were also heading towards Sidon.

Amer Daoudi, the WFP's emergency co-ordinator in Lebanon, said, 'There are ***women*** and children who face a daily threat not only of shelling and injury, but of having less and less food and water to sustain them.

'We have no time to waste in reaching them. A greater catastrophe is in the making if we don't assist people soon.'

Load-Date: July 31, 2006

Talking heads

The Sunday Times (London)

July 16, 2006

Section: FEATURES; News Review; Pg. 12

Length: 159 words

Body

* Israel's response will be restrained but very, very, very painful

Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, on the conflict with Lebanon-based ***Hezbollah*** fighters

* There will never be a trend for hairy armpits, I can promise you that

Trinny Woodall, style guru, pictured above, who "forgot to shave" for a party

* This only adds to the fin de siecle feel around Tony Blair

Norman Baker, LibDem MP, on the arrest of the prime minister's fundraiser and friend Lord Levy

* I want his balls on a platter

Zinedine Zidane's mother Malika on Marco Materazzi, who allegedly called her a "terrorist whore"

* No one can make India kneel

Manmohan Singh, the Indian prime minister, on the Bombay train bombings, which left more than 200 people dead

* If you leave it to him, you're in for a week of Speedos

Liz Hurley explains why ***women*** should do the holiday packing

* I was out (of the tour) only for six weeks. Not bad for a brain job

Keith Richards on his recovery from surgery

Load-Date: July 16, 2006

Secret diary of Rikki Brown aged 49 1/4

The Sun (England)

July 24, 2006 Monday

Section: OPINION

Length: 181 words

Byline: Rikki Brown

Body

SUNDAY. JADE Goody revealed that she was offered a £ 1m to appear naked in Playboy.

Playboy didn't make the offer, its rivals Penthouse did.

SATURDAY. YANKS in Belgrade complained about a cafe called Osama. They really wanted to go there but as it was called Osama, the Americans couldn't find it.

FRIDAY. POPE Benedict has told the Israelis and ***Hezbollah*** to stop fighting, saying if they don't they'll ultimately have to answer to Jesus. Both factions said "Who?"

THURSDAY. THE CLERK only let socialist ***women*** into the Tommy Sheridan trial after debating whether the "nae dugs allowed in court" rule applied to them.

WEDNESDAY. TO stop teen pregnancies, Durex have made condoms for 13-year-olds. It's called the Durex Love, except in Dundee - it's called the Help Ma Boabie.

TUESDAY.15,000 chickens were roasted alive in a shed in Aberdeenshire. The company involved took immediate action, heading to KFC for 15,000 portions of fries.

MONDAY. GEORGE Bush said "s**t". The words up, creek, without, a paddle weren't included in the phrase he normally uses to describe US policy in the Middle East.

Load-Date: August 18, 2006

Food relief team warns of catastrophe for Lebanon

Western Mail

July 29, 2006, Saturday

First Edition

Section: NEWS; Pg. 9

Length: 179 words

Byline: CAROLINE GAMMELL

Body

One in five Lebanese has been made homeless by the ongoing violence between ***Hezbollah*** and Israel, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said yesterday. Food shortages and the shelling of residential areas has turned the conflict into a major humanitarian situation. An estimated 800,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon - 95,000 in and around the capital Beirut. Yesterday, the WFP sent emergency relief convoys to the cities of Sidon and Jezzine in the south of the country. Eight convoy trucks loaded with 90 tonnes of wheat flour, 15 tonnes of canned meat, blankets and shelter materials provided by Medicins Sans Frontier (MSF) were bound for Jezzine. Ten trucks laden with 18 tons of food and shelter supplies were also heading towards Sidon. Amer Daoudi, the WFP's emergency co-ordinator in Lebanon, said, 'There are ***women*** and children who face a daily threat not only of shelling and injury, but of having less and less food and water to sustain them. 'We have no time to waste in reaching them. A greater catastrophe is in the making if we don't assist people soon.'

Load-Date: July 31, 2006

The Week:22-28 July

The Scotsman

July 29, 2006, Saturday

1 Edition

Section: Pg. 32

Length: 1543 words

Byline: Peter Ranscombe

Body

TIGER Woods retained his title on Sunday by winning the Open at Hoylake, while Floyd Landis won the Tour de France: later in the week, it emerged that Landis had failed a drugs test. Two people died and 13 were injured when a giant, inflatable sculpture came free of its moorings and overturned in Chester-le-Street, County Durham.

Motorists in Aberdeen's city centre spent Monday getting used to the Granite City's new 20mph speed limit. The UK government announced plans to abolish the Child Support Agency and replace it with a "smaller, more focused" organisation. Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, met with Fouad Siniora, the Lebanese prime minister, in Beirut, during her Middle East talks.

Dr Rice's mission continued on Tuesday when she met with first Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, and later Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president. Edinburgh Crystal called in the administrators, putting 400 jobs at risk in its Penicuik head office and 90 shops around the country. Four unarmed United Nations peacekeepers were killed after Israeli troops bombed their outpost in southern Lebanon, provoking international outrage.

Emergency Middle East peace talks began in Rome on Wednesday but the summit ended without agreement. American Brad Gilbert - who has worked with Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick - signed up as Andy Murray's new tennis coach. Scotland's under-19s football team booked their place in today's European Championships final after beating the Czech Republic 1-0.

On Thursday, Scottish Gas announced its second price rise of the year, with gas bills increasing by 12.4 per cent and electricity prices going up by 9.4 per cent. Margaret Beckett, the foreign secretary, protested to the USA after it used Prestwick Airport to transport bombs to Israeli. Haim Ramon, Israel's justice minister, said the lack of a clear message from the Rome summit gave his country carte blanche to continue its attacks on ***Hezbollah*** .

A thanksgiving service was held yesterday for Ellie Russell, a two-year-old girl from South Ayrshire, who died last weekend of what is thought to be E coli 0157. The Royal Bank of Scotland is to put more free cash machines in deprived areas. Tony Blair went to Washington DC to discuss the Middle East crisis with US President George W Bush.

The week in brief...

War of the words

VETERANS of the Second World War could have their words censored as part of the US government's crackdown on indecency on TV. Ken Burns has interviewed Americans who fought during that time as part of The War, a seven-part series for the Public Broadcasting Service.

But Paula Kerger, PBS president, has warned that the swear words used by the veterans to describe their experiences may have to be bleeped out in order to be shown before the 10pm watershed. If the expletives are aired then the networks could face hefty fines, under new laws written after Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" at the Superbowl. Ms Kerger said: "The American people need to know this is not about Janet Jackson."

Using his loaf

WITH his alleged departure from office creeping closer, perhaps Tony Blair should copy Mahathir Mohamad. The former prime minister of Malaysia has set up his own Japanese bakery. The 80-year-old, who resigned in 2003, owns "The Loaf". He told the Star newspaper: "I have always urged people to go into business through joint ventures with foreigners. Now I want to try my hand at both - making bread and a joint venture with the Japanese."

Hot stuff

IT MAY be 60 years old but the bikini is going hi-tech. Canadian company Solestrom has designed a new version of the skimpy garment with a built-in UV meter. The 190 bikini, above, measures the amount of ultra-violet radiation from the sun and sounds a warning bleep when it's time for the wearer to retreat to the shade.

Nuns on the run

TWO Dutch nuns - dressed in their habits - mounted a low-speed chase through the streets of Amsterdam on their bikes after recognising a man who stole hundreds of euros from their church.

"The nuns grabbed their bikes and gave chase," explained Rob van der Veen, a police spokesman. "They tried to grab him, but he managed to escape into a residential neighbourhood and they lost him." Police have still not found the man.

Dial (Porsche) 911

PERHAPS the nuns should have called in the Austrian police, who have a new trick up their sleeves when it comes to chasing criminals. Traffic cops have got a Porsche 911, which is capable of 177mph, and - after its success - they plan to buy more of the GBP 65,000 cars.

"The preventive effect is excellent," said a police spokesman. Drivers just need to see it parked alongside the road and they slam on the brakes.

"The only thing is it's a bit cramped. But there's still enough space for the essential equipment, like the speeding radar and the breathalyser."

Being there for you

JENNIFER Aniston says that she always wanted to be a doctor and that she is "fascinated" by medicine. The former Friends star says: "I would probably do something in the medical community.

"I think I'm obsessed with doctors and what they do. I would sit and watch these shows on surgeries and it blows my mind."

Religious reality TV

PEACHES Geldof - daughter of Boomtown Rats frontman and Live 8 organiser Bob and the late Paula Yates - is going to move in with a Muslim girl in Morocco as part of A Beginner's Guide to Islam, a new Channel 4 documentary. The 17-year-old will live with a devout 18-year-old girl in her family home, go to a "taking the veil" ceremony and be invited along to see a sheep being sacrificed. According to a Channel 4 spokesman, the hour-

long programme will find out "what the Islamic world makes of this precocious London party girl". As part of the same series of documentaries, comedian Hardeep Singh Kohli - creator and star of Meet the Magoons - will explore Scientology, the religion followed by Tom Cruise.

The road to 'ell'

BEFORE the yard, there was the ell. Scotland's old measure of length was used in market towns to judge distances and make sure customers were not sold short when it came to buying cloth. Now the National Trust for Scotland is trying to find our lost ells. The trust has a 300-year-old example on the side of its gift shop in Dunkeld. Its search has already yielded two others - one in Dornoch Cathedral's cemetery and another at the Mercat Cross in Fettercairn.

Love trap

HAIRY caterpillars are causing problems in Belgium. The creepy crawlies have infested woodland around the city of Bree and are giving the locals itchy skin. Sounds like a case for Hercule Poirot? Perhaps not: the resourceful Belgians have invented a trap, coated with ***female*** hormones to lure in the male moths. As Patrick Hermans, head of Bree's environment department, put it bluntly: "We are using a ***female*** sex hormone that makes the males come to the traps. They fall in and die."

Girl with the pearl shell suit

IS THERE no end to Scarlett Johansson's talents? The Lost in Translation actress, below, has signed a deal with Reebok, the sportswear manufacturer. Johansson will become the new "face" for the brand and will also design her own range. Paul Harrington, Reebok's chief executive, says: "Scarlett embodies the pulse points of our brand: individuality, authenticity and a life lived to the fullest in perpetual motion." And I'm sure the fact she is blonde and stunning won't hurt either.

Hoff: The Musical

OH DEAR. David Hasselhoff - star of Baywatch and Knightrider and the man credited with single-handedly bringing down the Berlin Wall - is having a stage show written about his life. David Hasselhoff: The Musical is due to open in Australia and the Hoff is off to star in the show, which he described as "totally campy".

"It's written by the same people who wrote Bette Midler's show and produced by the people who produced Chicago in London," he explains. "I am also doing a heart-rending set on my life and the mistakes I have made. It sounds like a bad joke, but it is really going to be a good show."

No David, you were right the first time, it does sound like a bad joke.

...And the week ahead

Tomorrow: How's about that then? Top of the Pops is due to end, with Sir Jimmy Savile among those presenting the final show. It's exactly 40 years since England won the World Cup - and they still won't let us forget it!

Monday: Gordon Brown is due back at No 11 after his paternity leave, just in time to read "Drug Classification: Making a Hash of it?" - a report from the science and technology select committee.

Tuesday: MTV celebrates its 25th birthday. Student rocker - and Prime Minister - Tony Blair is due to give a "major policy address" in California. The Prince of Wales visits the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso.

Wednesday: Nationwide shares its consumer confidence index.

Thursday: George Bush, the US president, heads off to his ranch in Texas for his summer holiday, while Jack Straw marks his 60th birthday.

The Week:22-28 July

Friday: The 56th Edinburgh Military Tattoo begins. In cricket, England face Pakistan in the third test at Headingley. The Royal Bank of Scotland releases its financial results for the first half of 2006.

Saturday: The National Eisteddfod of Wales begins in a former steelworks in Swansea. The Mey Highland Games - Scotland's smallest - take place in Caithness.

Load-Date: July 29, 2006

End of Document

The Week: 8-14 July

The Scotsman

July 15, 2006, Saturday

1 Edition

Section: Pg. 30

Length: 1528 words

Byline: Peter Ranscombe

Body

THERE were sporting triumphs galore on Sunday as Roger Federer won his fourth Wimbledon title in a row and Italy beat France in a penalty shoot-out to win the World Cup. The match was overshadowed by the French captain Zinedine Zidane being sent off for head-butting Italian defender Marco Materazzi. At least 124 people died when a Russian airliner failed to stop on a runway in Siberia and crashed into a building.

Standard Life was floated on the London stock exchange on Monday, with shares ending the day up 5.6 per cent at 242.6p. The Home Secretary, John Reid, announced that warnings about the threat of a terrorist attack are to be simplified and made public on the Home Office and MI5 websites. Des Browne, the Defence Secretary, committed an extra 900 British troops to operations in Afghanistan.

In Glasgow, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum reopened on Tuesday, following a three-year refit that cost nearly GBP 28 million. At least 200 people died and 700 were injured when a series of seven explosions ripped through trains during the evening rush hour in Mumbai, India. The UK government released its energy review, saying nuclear power should play a key role.

There wasn't just an AGM on Wednesday but a Marks & Spencer AGM, smothered in shareholders and sprinkled with copies of its annual report. Militant group ***Hezbollah*** captured two Israeli soldiers during skirmishes along the Lebanese border. Lord Levy, Labour's chief fundraiser, was arrested in connection with the "cash-for-peerages" inquiry and later released.

Israel retaliated for the kidnapping of its troops by bombing Beirut airport in the early hours of Thursday. It also continued its bombardment of the Gaza strip. The "NatWest three" - including Scot Gary Mulgrew - were extradited to the USA to face fraud charges. Sam Torrance became the first golfer to start 700 European Tour events when he teed off in the Scottish Open at Loch Lomond. Four adults and a three-year-old girl were injured when a cable car fell 30 feet on Aonach Mor, in the Nevis Range.

The G8 summit began yesterday in St Petersburg, Russia. Five Scottish osprey chicks were flown to Spain as part of a reintroduction project. The flag-waving began last night at the first of the BBC Proms in London's Royal Albert Hall.

The Week In Brief.....

Putin's pooch

The Week: 8-14 July

HOSTING the G8 summit in St Petersburg hasn't stopped Russian president Vladimir Putin from concentrating on the important things in life: like his dog. On his website, Mr Putin warned reporters not to feed Koni, his large black labrador. He says: "Sometimes, Koni leaves a room full of journalists with a very pleased expression on her face and biscuit crumbs around her mouth. Therefore, I appeal once again, this time via the internet, to all my visitors. Please. Don't feed my dog."

Summer wonderland

SANTA Claus came to town this week in the Missouri city of Branson. Around 280 Santas and 250 Mrs Clauses attended the first convention of the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas, to hear seminars that included "Dealing with Special Needs Children", "The Art of Storytelling", "Santa Ethics" and "How to get an Agent". A committee of 15 Santas and one Mrs Claus organised the convention for the order, which requires members to have real beards, and now has more than 800 members around the world.

EastEnding

WENDY Richards, below, has announced that she will be putting up her pinny for the last time and leaving EastEnders in a "dramatic storyline" at Christmas. The actress, who has played Pauline Fowler since the soap began 22 years ago, says she loved every minute of the show. But perhaps her departure will help to redress one major imbalance: according to a study by Powergen, EastEnders is way behind its ITV rival, Coronation Street in terms of energy efficiency. The electricity generator claims that EastEnders' Charlie Slater is one of the biggest culprits. His love of tea and baths (though not bathing in tea, I assume) would add GBP 171 to his energy bill. Perhaps Albert Square's energy bill will go down after Pauline stops using those giant tumble driers in the launderette.

Gardeners' world

WELSH gardeners have been accused of stealing more than 4,000 miles worth of rock from dry-stane dykes in the Brecon Beacons National Park. TV gardening programmes are being blamed for the resurgent fashion for rockeries, with a bulldozer even being used in one instance to remove tons of stone from the park. That Alan Titchmarsh, above, has a lot to answer for.

Better than gnomes

MAYBE the Welsh gardeners could be persuaded to stop building rockeries if they could buy sculptures from Simon Willmott. The 52-year-old has given up his 27-year career as a heating engineer to make garden ornaments in the shape of life-sized naked ***women***. Willmott, from Ruthin, Denbighshire, is said to base his designs on two local ***women*** and a model from Nottingham - who hopefully knew about this before the story broke.

Hitting the target

BEECRAIGS Country Park in West Lothian has been named as one of the UK's favourite picnic spots. In a survey, conducted by Warburtons the bakers, the park finished in the top ten and was the only spot in Scotland to make the shortlist. Councillor Wendy Bell, West Lothian Council's spokeswoman for sports and leisure, says: "Visitors to Beecraigs can try numerous outdoor pursuits such as archery, and fly-fishing." I suspect she wouldn't advise having your picnic near the archers, though.

Goody Two Jags

EMBATTLED Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott has found an ally - in the unlikely form of Jade Goody. The former Big Brother star has leaped to Prezza's defence, saying: "Why should you be sacked for having an affair? He'll be in enough trouble from his wife anyway, so why can't we all just leave him alone?"

I'm best man, get me out of here!

DECLAN Donnelly, above right, one half of the TV duo Ant and Dec, is having sleepless nights: over being best man at Ant McPartlin's wedding. "I think I'm more worried than Ant," says 30-year-old Dec, who is reportedly finding his speech a particular problem. "Last night I woke up at 1:30am. I had to turn the house alarm off, go downstairs and write it all down." Ant, 30, is due to marry Lisa Armstrong, 29, at Cliveden House in Berkshire on 22 July. Hopefully, Lisa has learned how to tell which one is Ant and which one is Dec, which is more than most of us can do.

Enduring appeal

YOU can't keep a good man down: even though he died of a heart attack in 2004, DJ John Peel, below, looks set to storm the book charts. A collection of stories from Home Truths, his Saturday morning show on BBC Radio 4, is set to be published. John Murray, the man behind the venture, says: "We're hoping to get John's widow, Sheila, on board to endorse the book. It will be called Home Truths: the Peel Years & Beyond."

Police warning

"WEAR nice pants" is the message Suffolk Police are giving girls as they go out to pubs and clubs. Officers say the message - one of a number that have appeared in a safety campaign magazine - has been written in a tongue-in-cheek style to appeal to younger ***women***.

"If you fall over or pass out, remember your skirt or dress may ride up," the magazine says. "You could show off more than you intended - for all our sakes, please make sure you're wearing nice pants and that you've recently had a wax." Other, more sensible, messages in the magazine include: stick with friends; book a taxi home; watch the amount you drink; and "if you've got it, don't flaunt it".

What's that, Skip?

THE image of kangaroos as cuddly critters was shattered this week after palaeontologists in Queensland unearthed fossils of a "killer kangaroo". The monster roo - which had long fangs and is thought to have eaten meat - is believed to have lived between ten and 20 million years ago. The same dig found evidence of giant carnivorous birds, some of which the researchers dubbed the "demon ducks of doom". So next time you go to see the koalas at Edinburgh Zoo, just remember the trials and tribulations they faced while evolving.

.... And The weeek Ahead

Tomorrow: Australians say G'day to the bard as the Eighth World Shakespeare Congress opens in Brisbane. If you see someone dressed as a gorilla in Edinburgh's Holyrood Park, then it's probably for the Great Gorilla Run, raising money for the Dian Fossey Fund.

Monday: The Farnborough International Air Show takes to the skies. Swan Upping begins on the Thames, a census that began in the 12th century. The G8 summit in St Petersburg, Russia, is due to end.

Tuesday: The nominees for the Mercury music prize are named. British Airways holds its AGM.

Wednesday: Abu Hamza is due to appear via video-link at a court hearing, following an extradition request from the US, where Americans will today celebrate their National Hot Dog Day.

Thursday: Get your engines revving as the British International Motor Show opens at ExCeL in London. The best golfers in the world tee off in the Open Championship at Hoylake.

Friday: Tony Blair celebrates 12 years as Labour leader. The Office for National Statistics releases details of the UK's accounts.

Saturday: Hibs face Danish side Odense in their InterToto Cup third-round, second-leg tie.

Load-Date: July 15, 2006

End of Document

Unhealthy bedfellows

The Weekend Australian

January 8, 2005 Saturday All-round Country Edition

Section: FEATURES; Weekend Inquirer; Pg. 24

Length: 1652 words

Byline: Joshua Kurlantzick

Body

Radical Islamic groups have replaced communist governments as partners for the hard Left in western democracies, writes Joshua Kurlantzick

THE Manhattan lawyer Lynne Stewart has been wedded to activist causes since the 1960s, defending a long train of leftists who have had run-ins with the law. A grandmotherly woman with a wide, jowly pink face and graying hair in a bowl cut, she has represented anti-war demonstrators, ageing yippies and Black Panthers.

When Stewart arrived at a US federal prison hospital in Minnesota in May 2000, however, she met a client from a very different milieu. In the visiting room, Stewart sat across from sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the infamous blind Egyptian cleric imprisoned for life in 1995 for inciting the 1993 World Trade Centre attack and plotting to blow up the FBI's office in Manhattan, as well as the UN and the Holland and Lincoln tunnels linking New York City with New Jersey.
MATP

Though they are roughly the same age, Abdel Rahman seems to have missed out on many of the famously tolerant ideals associated with Stewart's generation of activists. He has called for the slaughter of Jews, and for ***women*** to have little public role in society. Yet, with Abdel Rahman, Stewart allegedly took a step beyond mere legal advice. Videotapes allegedly show that Stewart loudly spoke nonsense words while her client, under the din, instructed a man travelling with Stewart and posing as a translator to execute a new terrorist plot. For this, Stewart has been charged with providing material support for terrorism, since the dangerous sheikh is forbidden from contacting his followers.

At the trial, an Egyptian reporter for Reuters testified that he had received a call from Stewart relaying a message from Abdel Rahman to his followers that they should break their ceasefire with another Islamist group. Allegations of complicity by her with known terrorists left Stewart nonplussed. "We hit if off," she gushed to The Washington Post about her interactions with the sheikh. "He's really an incredible person." Stewart has denied any wrongdoing and says she followed ethical rules. A verdict in the trial is expected soon.

Such seemingly improbable partnerships are the subject of David Horowitz's new book, Unholy Alliance: Radical Islam and the American Left. Calling this alliance the "Hitler-Stalin pact of our times", he warns of its potential impact, especially in undermining the war on terror.

Horowitz, the founder of the online magazine FrontPage and a former radical leftist, is at his best in documenting the intellectual connections between these strange bedfellows. He shows, for instance, how the anti-American

pronouncements of Noam Chomsky have become increasingly indistinguishable from those of the fire-breathing clerics who appear on Arab satellite TV stations.

Horowitz points to the participation of militant Muslims in some of the most publicised antiwar rallies and also provides useful historical context for this unlikely romance. Over the past century, he argues, the radical Left in Europe and the US has come to define itself as a movement against, rather than a movement for. Primarily, of course, its target has been the US, no matter what the US has stood for.

When the US declared war on terror, it was time, once again, for the Left to lionise whomever America opposed. That radical Islamists hold social and cultural values diametrically opposed to those of American leftists is not, Horowitz maintains, as big a problem for either party as it might appear. Today's radicals tend to pay tribute not to al-Qa'ida but to groups such as Hamas, whose extensive social-service network can be invoked to soften the horrors perpetrated by its terror cells. (Interestingly, though, few if any of today's leftists have decamped for Tehran or Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.) For their part, the prophets of radical Islam have not only borrowed from the Left in recent decades, they have learned to appeal to leftist sympathies. The Arab media now constantly condemn the US for victimising the Third World and supporting tyrants.

Horowitz's Unholy Alliance is among the first serious examinations of this troubling and relatively new relationship.

But he scents what is decidedly new in the developments he describes. A decade ago, a red-green (green being the colour of Islam) alliance would have seemed astounding. On campuses in Europe and the US, ***women***'s groups usually avoided Islamist organisations, which often held highly misogynistic beliefs. The primary concerns of hard-leftist groups tended to be labour rights and poverty. Few had ties to any Muslim organisations.

One powerful catalyst that changed all this was the birth of the anti-globalisation movement. The real and imagined evils of globalisation have breathed new life into the international Left, especially among the young. But radicals have not rested content with protesting the policies they dislike. They also sought villains, and they have found familiar ones: the US and the Jews. Despite the youth of many anti-globalisation activists, they have drawn upon and updated venerable tropes of traditional anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism. The Rockefellers and Rothschilds have disappeared as international bogeymen, replaced by theories of Jewish and American intrigue at the World Trade Organisation and other supranational economic agencies.

That such images should have found a ready audience in the Muslim world is no surprise. But their dissemination depended on yet another recent development: the internet. Before the advent of today's computer technology, the hard Left in Europe and the US would have had no idea how to seek out Islamist sympathisers. A generation ago, it would have been necessary for the two groups to occupy the same physical space -- an unlikely prospect. Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of web homepages created by both radical Muslims and anti-globalisation activists.

In early 2003, several British left-wing parties -- Marxists, socialists, Labour radicals -- came together with Islamist groups, including the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, to create a joint steering committee. Its co-chairmen (to give something of its flavour) were Andrew Murray of the British Communist Party and Muhammad Asalm Ijaz of the London Council of Mosques. On the Continent, at roughly the same time, similar alliances were cemented between Islamist organisations and leftist parties such as France's Trotskyist Workers' Struggle.

These links were quickly put to use. Throughout 2003 and 2004, Islamists and anti-globalisation activists in Europe have held a number of joint protests, marches, and conferences. In France, several anti-globalisation groups helped to lead marches protesting the Government's order that headscarves could not be worn in public schools. Islamists and anti-globalisation activists have other pan-European activities planned for 2005.

More worrisome is the fact that the leftist-Islamist partnership has converted its co-operation into votes. In 2004 elections for local offices across Europe and for seats in the European Parliament, Islamic groups worked with leftists on joint lists or helped promote Left candidates in Belgium, Britain and France. The electoral advantages of this united front can only grow as immigration and high birthrates add to Europe's already sizable Muslim population.

Horowitz also singles out International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), a New York-based group founded by former US attorney-general and long-time radical agitator Ramsey Clark (who has also represented the blind sheikh). ANSWER, Horowitz shows, traffics in the same anti-American and anti-Semitic vitriol as the most hateful Islamists.

In December 2003, the group helped to convene the second annual Cairo Conference, an anti-US hate fest attended by a variety of Islamists, including Osama Hamdan, a top leader of Hamas. ANSWER has also given a seat on its steering committee to the Muslim Students Association. This group presents itself as a benign advocate for Muslim college students. But as Jonathan Dowd-Gailey has recently documented in the Middle East Quarterly, the MSA has funnelled money to the Holy Land Foundation and other charities accused of funding Hamas and ***Hezbollah***. MSA leaders have called for the death of all Jews and have spread pro-Taliban propaganda. The group advises its members that their "long-term goal" should be "to Islamicise the politics of their respective universities".

The partnership between Islamists and the international Left poses its most immediate threat to Jews. As Horowitz rightly worries, the anti-Semitic propaganda spread by the red-green alliance stokes violence against Jewish communities and makes Israel an ever more vilified object of rage. Ultimately, too, Islamists may turn some part of the anti-globalisation movement towards violence.

Indeed, many older members of the hard Left have never forsworn such tools. As Stewart told The New York Times there is nothing wrong with using "directed violence" against "the institutions which perpetuate capitalism".

In the longer term, the ideas propagated by the hard Left-Islamist alliance could also seep into the wider political culture, poisoning the mainstream Left and otherwise sane liberals. Praise for suicide bombers, Horowitz notes, can already be heard at times from members of Europe's socialist establishment. In France, Belgium and Great Britain, some parties of the moderate Left have tried to co-opt Muslim groups while sidestepping their extreme rhetoric, hoping thereby to bolster the parties' credibility with dissatisfied radical voters.

*

Joshua Kurlantzick is the foreign editor of The New Republic. This is an edited excerpt of a longer article which appeared in the December 2004 issue of Commentary.

LINKS

www.commentarymagazine.com

www. commentarymagazine.com

Load-Date: January 7, 2005

Eats meets west

South China Morning Post

April 28, 2005

Section: Pg. 5

Length: 1410 words

Byline: He's eaten insects, cobra and almost anything else on offer. Now, culinary doyen Anthony Bourdain tackles Chinese cuisine with Susan Jung

Body

"DID YOU HEAR? He's single," whispers woman after woman at a packed dinner at JW's California in the JW Marriott. They're giggling over a tall, skinny, tough-talking, chain-smoking, heavy drinking, party-hearty former heroin addict. Anthony Bourdain also happens to be a best-selling writer, suave television presenter and amusing public speaker. And he's a respected chef.

Bourdain, executive chef of Brasserie Les Halles in New York, is author of several books, including Kitchen Confidential - Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly, his breakthrough tell-all of a chef's life, and the star of A Cook's Tour: In Search of the Perfect Meal, his series on the Discovery Travel & Living television channel.

The ***women*** would probably have been even more giddy and breathless if they'd heard him speaking before the dinner. "There's a connection between sex and food," he says. "With both, you undergo the same physiological changes. If a person doesn't like food, he or she is not going to like sex."

Anybody who's watched Bourdain's TV show and witnessed his enthusiasm when he tastes something delicious might well be consumed with jealousy over whom he bestows his affections.

And what could the lucky lady expect for a seduction meal? "Well, it would be breakfast," he says. "But it's so easy. You feed someone champagne and caviar and then you sleep with them - that's kind of tacky."

What you should do, Bourdain says, is make them breakfast afterwards. "You've had what you wanted, presumably. If you like them, it's a selfless act, a random act of kindness. There's clearly nothing in it for you. I think it's a nice thing, to wake up in the morning and say, 'I'm going to make you an omelette.' "

But what if she's a vegetarian or a vegan? "I've met some cute vegetarians. That's all I'm saying on that subject." (In Kitchen Confidential, Bourdain writes: "Vegetarians and their ***Hezbollah***-like splinter-faction, the vegans, are a persistent irritant to any chef worth a damn.")

That Bourdain would woo a lover with something as simple as an omelette seems appropriate for a man so passionate about rustic peasant dishes of tripe, bone marrow and other, cheaper cuts of meat, and who's known for tasting everything from insects to a beating cobra's heart. His curiosity and anti-snob attitude about food is enthusiastically received by the audience of 140 guests at JW's California on Monday. They cheer when, after sampling a simple bowl of congee with pig's blood, he says: "That's good, I love it. I want it for breakfast."

They laugh when, later on, he says: "The same engine that drove the French to have a great culinary culture is in many ways the same engine that drove the Chinese culinary culture. The first person to eat a snail wasn't a chef - it was one hungry sonofabitch who thought, 'I'm hungry, maybe if I put on enough garlic butter, I could eat it.'

"Anyone can make a steak, it's simple. The challenge is to make something good out of rabbit or frog or shanks, shoulders, feet and tongue - that's the good stuff; that's what makes a cook. That's what's great about France and a lot of Asian cuisines. If you're smaller than me, slower than me, stupider than me and you taste good, you're my lunch."

And they applaud when he reveals his upcoming plans to live for a year in Vietnam, which he's visited many times. "I'm going to live in a little fishing village on the coast of Vietnam, near Hoi An," he says. "I'm not going with cameras. I'm picking a village where there are no other tourists or expats. I plan to be the lone, freakishly tall white guy. I don't know what I'm doing. I have no plans. The idea is to go and find out what happens."

Bourdain was toiling away in the kitchen of Les Halles and writing in his spare moments what he describes as "unsuccessful crime novels", when, in 1999, a piece he wrote was accepted by The New Yorker. Titled, Don't Eat Before Reading This, the article advised, among other things: don't order the Monday fish specials (the fish is four to five days old); don't eat anything with hollandaise at brunch (it's "held" at a lukewarm temperature for several hours, allowing bacteria to thrive); and don't order steaks well done (you'll be served the worst piece).

The article was a sensation, with the dining public both repelled and fascinated. Bourdain received a contract to expand the article into a book, and Kitchen Confidential was born.

In it, he describes taking a childhood trip from the US to his father's ancestral home, France. The nine-year-old continually ate "steak hache" (hamburger) with ketchup and cola, until he had the sudden epiphany that food is much more than just sustenance - that it "could inspire, astonish, shock, excite, delight and impress. It had the power to please."

Bourdain writes of his aborted academic career, his early days as a kitchen dishwasher and attending the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. He reveals that, after graduating and thinking he'd be the next Auguste Escoffier, he worked in a long line of decreasingly desirable kitchens, addicted to heroin and cocaine, and describes his slow climb out of "the wilderness years".

Writing Kitchen Confidential meant working 17 hours a day. "I'd wake up at 5am, write as long as I could, then I'd go to work," he says. "I didn't see it as any more important than roasting bones, filleting salmon or anything else I did. It was the same work ethic."

Before I meet Bourdain, who says he is "no longer married", a mutual friend in Paris describes him as "the classic sensitive guy with a tough exterior". Bourdain hesitates when asked to comment: "It's not untrue. I can be a bastard. I am capable of harshness, cruelty and insensitivity. It is not untrue."

And the sensitivity part? "I'm the worst person to ask that question. It would be very easy for me to say 'yes' or 'no', but who could tell? I cry at Truffaut films, OK? It depends on who you ask. Someone might say, 'He's an insensitive, self-centred prick'; someone else will say, 'He's a complete softie'. It depends."

Bourdain does come across as surprisingly accommodating - virtues one doesn't see in his descriptions of himself in Kitchen Confidential. While taking a walk through the Central wet market, he signs autographs for passers-by.

During the wet-market tour, Bourdain runs his fingers over rambutans, stops to sniff durians ("I love these") and jokes about his fertility while downing a cup of ginseng tea. He buys a jar of rich, aged soy bean paste at Kowloon Soy - and leaves it behind when we stop somewhere else.

And although he's had a five-course lunch cooked by his friend Donovan Cooke at the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club, he stops to eat, in quick succession, a plate of roast pork and roast suckling pig at Dragon Restaurant on Graham Street, portions of dry noodles with pork and prawn won ton noodles at the famous Mak's Noodles on Wellington Street, and some strong milk tea and Hong Kong-style French toast at a cha chaan teng.

So, what food did he like best on this brief promotional trip to Hong Kong? "That suckling pig," he says enthusiastically. "Oh, my god, that was a religious experience. In the words of Homer Simpson, the pig is a magical animal. I like pig in general and suckling pig is probably the very best example of pork. When it's done brilliantly, I mean, it's all about the skin and that skin was just fantastic."

Given his excitement about the simple, local foods he tastes on this trip, it's a wonder it's taken him so long to pay his first visit to Hong Kong.

"Chinese food is such a major, important 'mother' cuisine," he says. "You'll notice I've also avoided Italy, India and, until recently, France. I've stayed away from subjects that other smarter, more authoritative people have covered.

"I went to places that haven't had much coverage. But I've been nibbling away at the edges for so long now, eating Chinese food in America, Malaysia, Singapore and Taipei, that I don't care if I look like an idiot, I just want to experience it. This is a very exciting place to be. I can't wait to come back and eat everything in sight."

A Cook's Tour, Discovery T&L channel, Tue, 10pm and Wed, 10am. Bourdain's new programme, Decoding Ferran Adria, about the experimental and influential chef whose restaurant in Roses, Spain, has three Michelin stars, starts May 10, 10pm.

Graphic

(Photo: Dickson Lee); Chef and writer Anthony Bourdain samples some Chinese cuisine during a walk though the Central wet market.

Load-Date: April 28, 2005

Shiites see secular leadership for Iraq; They hope religion goes to background in new government

The International Herald Tribune

January 25, 2005 Tuesday

Section: NEWS; Pg. 1

Length: 1529 words

Byline: Dexter Filkins

Dateline: BAGHDAD:

Body

With the Shiites on the brink of capturing power here for the first time, their political leaders say they have decided to relegate Islam to a supporting role as they form the new Iraqi government.

The senior leaders of the United Iraqi Alliance, the coalition of mostly Shiite groups that is expected to capture the most votes in the election Sunday, have agreed that the Iraqi whom they nominate to be the country's next prime minister would be a layperson and not an Islamic cleric. The Shiite leaders say there is a similar but less formal agreement that clerics will also be excluded from running the government ministries.

"There will be no turbans in the government," said Adnan Ali, a senior leader of the Dawa Party, one of the largest Shiite parties. "Everyone agrees on that."
The New York Times

The decision appears to formalize the growing dominance of secular leaders among the Shiite political leadership, and it also reflects an inclination by the country's powerful religious hierarchy to stay out of the day-to-day governing of the country.

Among the Shiite coalition's 228 candidates for the National Assembly on the United Iraqi Alliance slate, fewer than half a dozen are clerics, according to the group's leaders.

The decision to exclude clerics from the government appears to mean that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a cleric who is the chief of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the scion of a prominent religious family and an oft-mentioned candidate for prime minister, would be relegated to the background.

The five Shiites most likely to be named prime minister are well-known secular figures. Shiite leaders say their decision to move away from an Islamist government was largely shaped the fact that the Iraqi people would reject such a model. But they concede that it also reflects certain political realities: U.S. officials, who wield vast influence here, would be troubled by an overtly Islamist government. So would the Kurds, who Iraqi and U.S. officials worry might be tempted to break with the Iraqi state.

The emerging policies appear to be a rejection of an Iranian-style theocracy. Iran has given both moral and material support to the country's two largest Shiite parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. The conviction that the Iranian model should be avoided in Iraq is apparently shared by Iranians.

One Iraqi Shiite leader, who recently traveled to Tehran, said he was warned by the Iranians against putting clerics in the government.

"They said it caused too many problems," the Iraqi said.

The secular tilt comes as Shiite leaders prepare for what they regard as a historic moment: After decades of official repression, the country's largest group now seems likely to take the helm of the Iraqi state. Mindful of that opportunity and of previous opportunities missed, the Shiite leaders running for office say they are determined to exercise power in a moderate way, which would include bringing Sunnis into the government and ignoring some powerful voices in their own ranks that advocate a stronger role for Islam in the new constitution.

Still, for all the expressions of unity, just how much consensus exists within the coalition is unclear, as are the prospects for the coalition's survival beyond the elections. The Shiite leaders, and the rank and file in the Iraqi electorate, represent a wide array of political visions, and these blocs could rise or fall in influence over time.

Important Shiite clerics like Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani already wield considerable influence in the background, although his brand of Islam is thought to be relatively moderate. Shiite leaders like Hakim will probably continue to wield power behind the scenes; his views are thought to be more conservative.

During the drafting of the country's interim constitution last year, Hakim and others pushed for an expansive role for Islam in the new state, as well as restrictions on the rights of ***women***.

Some Iraqis expressed concern that the more radical Shiites, notably the followers of Moktada al-Sadr, would be difficult to control once the election is over.

The challenge, the Shiite leaders say, will be in holding their coalition together after Sunday, when the jockeying for power begins in what is likely to be a coalition government.

"It was very difficult to bring the coalition together," said Ali Faisal al-Lami, a leader of Iraqi ***Hezbollah***, a Shiite party that is part of the United Iraqi Alliance. "There is a good chance that it will fall apart."

If the alliance were to crumble, Shiite leaders fear, they could lose ground to Prime Minister Ayad Allawi or to the Kurdish parties, which are unified on a single slate and which will likely benefit from a large turnout. Already, Kurdish leaders have begun to talk up Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union for Kurdistan, as president, a post that would give him enormous power in shaping the composition of the new government.

The United Iraqi Alliance was pulled together under the leadership of Sistani, the country's most powerful Shiite cleric, who is a native of Iran. Sistani, without formally endorsing any political party, has issued a fatwa calling on all eligible Iraqi Shiites to go the polls.

The Shiite coalition is widely expected to pull in the largest number of votes on Election Day. Shiites make up about 60 percent of the electorate here, and if, as expected, large numbers of Iraqi Sunnis boycott the election, then Shiites could capture an even larger percentage of National Assembly seats.

The decision to exclude clerics from senior positions in the Iraqi government has set off a scramble for the post of prime minister. Under the election rules, the prime minister will be chosen by the party or group that forms a government, presumably by the group that wins the largest number of seats in the 275-member assembly.

Among the Shiites, the leading candidates for prime minister are thought to be Adil Abdul Mahdi, the Iraqi finance minister and a leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq; Ibrahim al-Jaafari, interim vice president and a leader of Dawa; Hussain al-Shahristani, a nuclear scientist; and Ahmad Chalabi, who marshaled support for the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government in the Bush administration and has since become a pariah. All are candidates for the United Iraqi Alliance.

All four candidates are secular-minded leaders who spent much of their lives in exile. They maintain that they would borrow from Islam's tenets in writing the country's constitution, the main task for the new government, but would ensure that the Iraqi state did not have a religious cast to it.

Also a contender for the prime minister's job is Allawi, the current head of the Iraqi government, who was chosen last June by the UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, and the U.S. leadership. Allawi, a secular-minded Shiite, is running as the leader of his own slate of candidates, the Iraqi List.

Allawi's chances to remain as prime minister are thought to depend not just on well his group does at the polls, but on how well the United Iraqi Alliance fares. If Allawi's group performs well and the Shiite coalition less well, then Allawi, Shiite leaders say, could become a leading candidate for prime minister. It was a deadlock between Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq in June that allowed Allawi to take the office.

Some prominent Iraqi Shiite religious leaders note that the Iranian regime, after taking power in 1979, marginalized and persecuted followers of the school of thought in Shiite Islam that rejects a major political role for the clergy in favor of quietism.

"It's a completely different concept of government," Shahristani said, referring to the Iraqi government. "The Iraqi government and the constitution will seek neither an Islamic government nor the participation of Islamic clerics in the government."

Sistani, though an adherent of quietism, has involved himself in every step of the political process here. Though he has stopped short of endorsing political candidates, he has come close to backing the Shiite slate. Earlier this month, some candidates in Allawi's slate protested that the use of Sistani's picture on election posters violated the ban on the use of religious symbols. Some Iraqi Shiite leaders say that Sistani will probably have to hold the coalition together after the election.

Shiite leaders agree that the biggest task facing the next Iraqi government will be mollifying the Sunnis. The Sunnis are a minority in Iraq but a majority in most of the rest of the Islamic world, outside Iran, and some of their leaders have had difficulty reconciling themselves to a subordinate role.

While Shiite leaders say they intend to reach out to Sunnis, they will have to overcome suspicion. Publicly, that suspicion is usually expressed by making allusions to Iran.

"We're not afraid of the Shia or the Kurds governing Iraq," said Sheik Moayad Brahim al-Adhami, leader of the Abu Hanifa Mosque, a Sunni bastion in Baghdad. "But what we're afraid of is a fundamentalist representing a foreign country's interests."

***

Edward Wong contributed reporting.

Load-Date: January 25, 2005

Faking it for fashion's sake

Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia)

March 19, 2005 Saturday

Section: LIFE; Pg. L04

Length: 1468 words

Byline: Sandra McLean

Body

It may look like a bargain to buy fake fashion goods but there can be a catch

'I can't afford the original so that was the main reason why I bought them. They are also good bags and pretty good quality fakes

THE temptation was too hard to resist. There for the taking, at a mere $15, was a Von Dutch hat.

The same trendy hat -- well, the one with the genuine label -- had been seen in a major department store for $100. Surely, it wouldn't hurt to just buy one fake?

If lawyer Stephen Stern was standing with us in that Sydney market he would have tapped us on the shoulder and said: "Just say no."

This might sound like a drug counsellor warning a client not to take a hit but for solicitor Stern the comparison isn't that far off the mark.

As the Australian legal representative for major labels such as Louis Vuitton, Dior, Cartier and Hugo Boss, he deals daily with what has become an international addiction -- the buying of fake designer goods and other counterfeit luxuries. It's an addiction that is not only costing business and governments billions in lost revenue and taxes but recent reports point to a growing human cost of faking it for fashion.

There have been reports of links between the smuggling of fake goods and terrorism, particularly Al-Qaida. Concerns also have been raised about China, where children are reportedly being used to make fake goods.

Stern has heard all these rumours. He believes the Al-Qaida link is true although he has not seen hard evidence of child labour. He knows for sure that more people are addicted to faking it.

Over the past five years Melbourne-based Stern's caseload has multiplied. In 2001, he handled up to 200 cases involving the illegal selling of counterfeit luxury goods in Australia. By 2004 the number of cases had increased to 1600.

"The trade in these goods is just getting so much bigger in Australia and all over the world," says Stern, a partner at Corrs Chambers Westgarth. "Most of the fakes are poor quality but that doesn't seem to matter -- it is just a big, big business with products pouring out of China."

Faking it for fashion's sake

In Europe and the UK the importing of fake goods is out of control. Last month a European Commission report said that British customs was losing the battle against organised criminals smuggling counterfeit goods into the country.

Seizures of such goods had tripled in the past two years, the rise in counterfeiting fuelled by the increasing use of Internet shopping and the sobering fact that counterfeiting has become more profitable than drug smuggling.

Last year the International Chamber of Commerce estimated the worldwide trade in counterfeits to be worth $450 billion. That's an awful lot of black money.

The biggest growth areas are toys and perfumes, but counterfeiters aren't fussy. They will fake anything. As well as looking for the fake Fendi bag, customs officials now need to keep their eyes peeled for fake apples, grown from stolen seeds, and counterfeit thorn-free roses.

In Australia, the Australian Customs Service has confiscated large amounts of counterfeit or pirate goods. During 2003-04 they made more than 5000 separate seizures, finding more than two million items. The types of goods seized included toys, clothing, footwear, handbags, watches, computer games and mobile telephone accessories.

For most of us though, faking it is generally about that Von Dutch experience -- buying a fashion item, tempted by the fact that we'd be wearing the latest trendy label for a fraction of the price of the real thing.

That's how it was for Kristel Glohe, 22, a manager from the Gold Coast. In 2003, Glohe went to Hong Kong, the key reason was to buy fake luxury goods, preferably Louis Vuitton.

She also went across the Chinese border on a special shopping tour to Shenzen. Glohe bought about 20 bags for herself and her sister, Louise, 18.

"I can't afford the original so that was the main reason why I bought them," Glohe says. "They are also good bags and pretty good quality fakes."

Glohe says she chose Louis Vuitton fakes because "they are the most popular at the moment and a bit of a trend".

Glohe says people are fine about fakes and that they "always ask me where I got them from because they look good. There isn't a bad attitude about it -- everyone knows how expensive the originals are".

Indeed the bags Glohe bought in Hong Kong and China for between $30 and $60 would cost several thousand dollars at a Louis Vuitton shop.

Handbags are priced from at least $1000 with the popular multicoloured Alma selling for $US1280.

Glohe says the shopping experience in Shenzen was "a little scary".

"It was a big deal to get the really good fakes in Shenzen," she says. "They don't show them in the store. You have to choose what you want from a catalogue. Then the woman disappeared for about 20 minutes down this hallway which was guarded by two other ***women***."

Glohe says another friend who went shopping for fakes in Shenzen talked about going into secret hidden rooms in shops where the fakes were kept.

Despite the subterfuge, Glohe says she would do it again. Asked how she felt about the links between fakes and sweatshops, she says: "It is not fantastic when you think that someone has slaved away on something for the small amount of money we paid for it."

Glohe is not committing a crime by buying these goods -- it is not illegal to buy counterfeit goods.

And she is probably a lot like millions of others around the world who buy fake goods because it is a cheaper way to get a trendy label. It's an understandable retail decision based on economic logic.

Faking it for fashion's sake

A recent poll by the UK Anti-Counterfeiting Group revealed that a third of ***women*** saw "no harm" in buying counterfeit items if the price and quality were right.

However, the problem is that getting a bargain also means paying a price, maybe not at the counter but in other ways.

"If ***women*** were aware that the profits from counterfeit bags sold at their local market stall are used to fund highly organised international terrorist networks -- groups from the IRA to Hamas and even Al-Qaida -- they would surely think twice before buying them," Ruth Orchard, director of the Anti-Counterfeit Group, says.

"What people don't realise is that the world of counterfeiting is masterminded by highly sophisticated criminals. Laundered profits from the sale of fakes have been traced to bank accounts funding Middle Eastern groups including ***Hezbollah***, Hamas and Al-Qaida.

"It is now widely agreed that the bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993 was funded partly by the sale of counterfeit designer textiles from an illegal outlet in New York's Chinatown. There is also strong evidence that the proceeds of counterfeiting have been used to fund IRA activities."

The cynic might say that this latest link between counterfeiters and terrorism could be a tactic by the luxury labels to make people think twice about buying fakes -- after all no one wants to be party to terrorists.

However, Stern believes the terrorism and organised crimes links are very real.

"I am not suggesting that every cent goes to terrorism, however, there have been reports by American and European organisations that show links to crime and terrorism. People might think, 'oh it is just a handbag', but there is more to it than that."

John Ramsden, chief executive director of Australia's Anti-Counterfeiting Action Group (ACAG) says there are definitely links between counterfeiters and organised crime in Australia.

Ramsden has been working for the past decade to keep the production and import of counterfeit goods at bay in Australia. His company represents 18 companies including fashion labels such as Quiksilver and Country Road. ACAG has private investigators who trawl markets and shops looking for fake goods. They even go to Tupperware parties to pick up hints on where to buy the latest fake Gucci sunglasses.

A lot of the fake clothing is made in Australia and sold at more than 1250 markets around the country. Ramsden estimates it's a business that is worth $5 billion a year.

Overseas, there are claims that many of the fakes come from the same production line as the genuine designer articles. Some factories reportedly have a "day shift" devoted to the production of genuine designer goods, followed by an illegal "night shift" staffed by an entirely new batch of illegal workers and children who produce cheap replicas.

Ramsden says that the laws in place in Australia to prosecute counterfeiters are satisfactory.

Simply, if the general public knew more about the seedier side of faking it they wouldn't buy the goods.

Sounds OK in principle, but fashion can be a demanding beast. And a fickle one.

Who can rely on an industry that one year declares a war on fur and then the next pronounces it a must-have? Only the counterfeiters, who know they have a trend-hungry world by the fake throat.

Load-Date: March 18, 2005

End of Document

From Modesto, California, a window on the Arab world: BLOGGER I Arab-American news junkie As'ad AbuKhalil goes under the radar to serve up an angry mix of news, commentary and entertainment

The Vancouver Sun (British Columbia)

June 25, 2005 Saturday

Final Edition

Section: TRAVEL; Pg. H12

Length: 1418 words

Byline: Robin Abcarian, Los Angeles Times

Dateline: SAN FRANCISCO

Body

SAN FRANCISCO -- It's not exactly true that As'ad AbuKhalil skipped into the meeting room at the World Affairs Council here recently. But there was a definite lilt in his step and a boyish enthusiasm about him that was, it must be said, unexpected.

After all, this jolly moon-faced man with long corkscrew curls is the deeply sarcastic, piquant wit behind the Angry Arab News Service, a popular blog that provides links and edgy leftist commentary about the war in Iraq, Lebanese politics, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and yes, even Saddam Hussein in his skivvies. ("This man deserves all the humiliation that he gets," wrote AbuKhalil.)

But as AbuKhalil happily explained over tea at the corner Starbucks after his lunchtime talk, "I am not an angry Arab. I'm an angry human being!"

Well, sure.

Given the state of the world, what anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian Middle East expert who is also an atheist, anarchist and twice-divorced feminist wouldn't be angry? Yet here, AbuKhalil, who grew up in Beirut, Lebanon, and speaks so fast that a court stenographer recently asked him to slow down, makes a distinction: "I am politically angry, but in my personal life, I am a happy guy. I can't stand these leftists who have to ... mope? Is that the word? When I came to America, I have seen so many elite Arab intellectuals who are alcoholics, miserable, unhappy and obsessed with the Israeli lobby. And I remember early on, I was like, I am not going to live that life!"

That attitude is part of the allure of his blog, which, as more than one reader has pointed out, stands out for its sense of humour in the dour left-wing landscape.

The Angry Arab News Service, which launched in September 2003, receives between 30,000 and 35,000 hits per month, according to AbuKhalil's tracking. Half its readers are in the United States, but fans (and detractors) all over the world read it, including many in Arab countries.

The blog is full of links to news sources often overlooked in the mainstream U.S. media and is known for its sarcastic but knowledgeable commentary. One recurrent feature is "Culprit of the Week" in which AbuKhalil pokes fun at the U.S. government's evolving list of those responsible for the Iraqi insurgency.

He devotes about 2 1/2 hours a day to his blog, reading three Arabic-language newspapers, plus The New York Times, and headlines from the Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post. Sitting on his bed with his computer on a special stand, he monitors the information delivered to his Sony Location Free TV via two satellite dishes that bring the world to his Modesto home. (Which, despite his socialist beliefs, he owns. His house is messy because he thinks it would be exploitative to hire a maid, although he does have a gardener.)

At 45, AbuKhalil is a tenured professor in the politics department of California State University, Stanislaus, located in the town of Turlock. He is sometimes hired as an expert in civil proceedings involving Middle East issues, such as asylum cases.

Starting when he was a doctoral student at Georgetown University, many producers turned to him for what one dubbed the "angry Arab" perspective on events in the Middle East, which is how his blog got its name. He has appeared on PBS's NewsHour and CNN, and for a time was a Middle East consultant for NBC and ABC. (That experience, he wrote on his blog, served only to increase his disdain for mainstream U.S. media.) These days, he is a frequent guest on the Arab news channel Al-Jazeera, which has made him something of a star at home.

"He and I have walked down the streets in Beirut ... People come up to him and recognize him and shake his hand," said Joseph Massad, an assistant professor at Columbia University who is one of AbuKhalil's best friends. "He is well received across the Arab world," said Massad, who noted that AbuKhalil's readership cuts across political lines, from leaders of ***Hezbollah*** to the far Christian right.

AbuKhalil said he is careful to keep his politics out of his classroom, although it's no secret to his blog-savvy students where he stands.

Even people who loathe most of AbuKhalil's opinions find his blog useful. Martin Kramer, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and research associate at the Dayan Center of Tel Aviv University, who is well known for his pro-Israel views, trawls the Angry Arab News Service for links to news sources.

"AbuKhalil speaks for a certain brand of revolutionary, utopian secular Arabism that lost most of its following in the Middle East 20 years ago," wrote Kramer, also a blogger, in an e-mail. "He is against the Arab regimes, against Israel, against U.S. policy, against the Islamists, against the liberals, against the reformists ... He's the perfect example of the supremely principled and supremely irresponsible Arab intellectual. And so he's a luxury only America can afford."

On the relatively conservative Stanislaus campus of 8,000, AbuKhalil is well regarded by his students, said his department chairman, Steve Hughes.

"He has a following," Hughes said. "He is a character, and a lot of students like that. I think the real measure of his impact is that routinely we will have one or two students a year who go off to do graduate work in Middle Eastern studies, and that never happened before his arrival."

But AbuKhalil does not emphasize his U.S. citizenship, which he attained in 1989. "If, as Jean-Paul Sartre said, 'For the purposes of anti-Semites, I am a Jew,' that's how I feel in America. I have to be an Arab. For all those weak, timid Arabs I've seen after Sept. 11, I never say I am an American citizen ... I used to hate when someone I admired and knew like (the late pro-Palestinian intellectual) Edward Said would say, 'As an American ...' I don't want to defuse it. I want to speak to you as the other. I am the other amongst you. If it bothers you, that's your problem, not mine."

His family, although Muslim, was split along sectarian lines; his father's family was Shiite, his mother's Sunni. "I was a very religious dude when I was 8," AbuKhalil said. "I used to say I would never shake hands with ***women***. I was really fanatic."

He abandoned religion after he was stung by one of his grandmothers, who criticized the position of his arms as he prayed. "My Sunni family of my mother taught me how to pray. So I went to show my Shiite grandmother how I pray, and she was like, 'This is not Islam!' I was insulted. I felt bad ... And then I discovered Marxism and leftism by the time I was 13, 14, so ever since I have stayed like that."

After finishing his studies at the American University of Beirut, he left Lebanon for the United States in 1983 and received his doctorate in comparative government from Georgetown University.

Before landing in California's San Joaquin Valley, he taught at a number of universities and colleges, including Tufts, Georgetown and George Washington, and was a scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

He had already been married and divorced (to an American Jewish woman) by the time he arrived in Turlock in 1993 for a two-year visiting appointment. Although he was offered a post at Georgetown at the end of that time, he decided to stay in Turlock because he'd fallen in love with the woman who would become his second ex-wife, and also because Stanislaus changed his appointment to a tenure track job.

As happens with many bloggers who develop loyal followings, he is worried that the Angry Arab News Service is taking over his life.

When (former Lebanese prime minister Rafik) Hariri was assassinated, the blog was down for six or seven days, because of technical problems with his server. "You have no idea how obnoxious it was! I was suffocating! And many of my friends were calling, saying, 'As'ad you have to blog or the people who come there will leave!' I was like, 'What can I do?' So then I came back and I blogged on Hariri and it got good circulation in Lebanon. Now I feel morally obligated. There are people who come every day, and I have to feed the beast."

ANGRY ARAB NEWS SERVICE

All the news that's fit to blog

www.angryarab.blogspot.com

- Launched in September 2003

- 30,000 - 35,000 hits per month

- Among favourite topics are the war in Iraq, Lebanese politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- oh, and Saddam Hussein's skivvies.

BLOGGER AS'AD ABUKHALIL

- Born in Beirut

- Professor of politics at California State University, Stanislaus, in Turlock, Calif.

- Anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian, atheist, anarchist, twice-divorced feminist.

Graphic

Photo: Robert Durell, Los Angeles Times; As'ad AbuKhalil, a professor at the Stanislaus campus of California State University, spends about 21/2 hours a day navigating the Web for news, commentary and links to his website, the Angry Arab News Service.

Load-Date: June 25, 2005

End of Document

Habib flies into danger zone to help refugees

Aberdeen Evening Express

July 26, 2006 Wednesday

Section: Pg. 10

Length: 200 words

Byline: Fiona McWhirter

Body

He's Seen some of the worst natural disasters in recent times.

But now Habib Malik will face man-made atrocities.

The former Evening Express Aberdeen Champion has flown out to Lebanon to help those who have fled their homes to escape Israel's bombs.

The 39-year-old set off yesterday, flying first to Syria, as it is too dangerous to go directly into Lebanon, then heads to Saida, 30 miles (48km) south of Beirut.

The regional manager for national charity Islamic Relief was due to arrive in the city tomorrow where he will be helping the 500,000 evacuees who have lost their homes in the conflict.

Part of his work will involve distributing basic food, water, blankets and medication to injured and displaced men, ***women*** and children.

Dad-of-six Habib, who lives in Hilton, Aberdeen, admitted he was putting himself in the line of fire.

He said: "This is the real stuff. I'm not worried, but my family is worried.

"Somebody's got to go and help, we can't just leave them without help."

Habib, will leave children and wife Badar, 35, behind for his 10-day trip.

Israel has been bombing Lebanon after members of the Islamic ***Hezbollah*** group killed eight Israeli soldiers and captured two others.

fmcwhirter@ajl.co.uk

Load-Date: July 27, 2006

Teetering towards stability

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

December 17, 2005 Saturday

All-round Country Edition

Section: FEATURES; Inquirer; Pg. 21

Length: 1694 words

Byline: Martin Chulov, Additional reporting by Suha Maayeh

Body

MATP

Iraq's elections raise troubling issues at a tipping point in the country's future, Middle East correspondent Martin Chulov writes

IRAQI officials are today busily counting up to 15 million ballots lodged in the most meaningful ballot of the post-Saddam era. But elsewhere in the Middle East, leaders are nervously counting the cost.

Just as the final result of Thursday's watershed poll will take time to play out across Iraq's sectarian strongholds, the full effect of legitimising a sharp shift in domestic power will need time to trickle through to the war-torn nation's neighbours.

Across the region there is a troubling consensus that almost any of the possible electoral outcomes will be unpalatable and destabilising. Results are still a week away at least. But the likeliest outcome is that the Shi'ite Muslim majority, so long Saddam Hussein's whipping boys, will do well out of the poll, potentially ending up with 120 seats in Iraq's new 275-seat parliament.

To form a government, though, the Shi'ites -- who campaigned under the banner of a loose conglomerate called the United Islamic Party -- will need a coalition partner. It's probable that they will turn to the Kurdish groups in a power-sharing deal that would best reflect the ethnic make-up of Iraq but further fuel the implacable Sunni insurgency.

By the time polls closed on Thursday, it was clear the Sunni Arabs had learned from their mistakes during the vote for a transitional government in January, when they boycotted en masse and spent the rest of the year with a dwindling political voice. This time Sunnis showed up at polling stations across the insurgency-ravaged centre of the country, ensuring a stronger presence in Iraq's first four-year parliament. But their lack of numbers means they will never again enjoy absolute control over the levers of authority as they did during Saddam's three-decade rule.

Across the spectrum of post-election scenarios, there are looming nightmares for almost all of Arabia, Israel, the US and Europe. None of the key participants want to see disfranchised Sunni factions escalate their attacks against an already tortured nation, but neither do they want to see the likely spin-off from a second scenario: the Shi'ite groups polling less than a secular bloc led by former prime minister Iyad Allawi.

Teetering towards stability

While the Sunnis revelled under Saddam, the Shi'ites were brutalised. Since their tormentor was toppled, they have patiently organised factions, played ball with the US occupation and sat tight.

"They have waited 30 years for a shot at power," says Middle East project director for the International Crisis Group, Joost Hiltermann. "What are they going to do if someone tries to take it away from them? They may fight."

The nightmare for the Arab world could not get much worse. If Iraq's Shi'ites took to arms, the conflict would inevitably drag in Iran, the only Shi'ite stronghold, backed by a new president not shy about his regime's regional ambitions. If Iran sprang to its Iraqi brethren's rescue, the Sunni Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates would come under enormous pressure to defend their own interests. Saudi Arabia has a large Shi'ite minority of its own and is alarmed about the looming shift in the region's sectarian power balance.

"The Iran-Iraq war is being re-fought," Hiltermann says. "The Saudis are backing the Sunnis and the Iranians are behind the Shi'ites. The forces that could prevent civil war are weakened and those that are clamouring for war are strong."

Israel also would have a strong vested interest in shoring itself against any regional dispute. So far the Middle East's only nuclear power, the Jewish state wields plenty of muscle. Israel has long condemned Iran for backing the ***Hezbollah*** guerillas rallied on its northern border and, with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's three recent challenges to Israel's right to exist, it could easily be tempted to weigh into a conflict.

The Middle East, for 90 years the world's most complex chessboard, is at a crucial phase. Not since the haphazard carve-up that followed the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I has so much been at stake on so many fronts. Nothing in Iraq is happening in isolation.

The giant stride towards self-determination that many Iraqis made on Thursday when they emerged from polling stations sporting emblematic purple paint-stained fingers, will count for little if a unified and stable democracy fails to emerge from the mayhem of the past two years.

"The first step for legislators is to solve the mess of the new constitution and determine whether the country remains as one or splits into autonomous sub-states," says Oraib Al-Rantawi, director of the Al-Quds centre in the Jordanian capital, Amman.

The Balkanisation of Iraq is another option that much of the Middle East would find tough to stomach. The Sunnis would find it too much to bear. Since Iraq was hastily pieced together by Britain after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it has been a patchwork of three disparate religious and ethnic groups: the pious Shi'ites to the south, the Kurds in the north and the Sunni Arabs left to the country's simmering centre.

Fuelling the Sunni rebellion has been the fact that not only did they lose their power base when Saddam was deposed, they also lost access to Iraq's enormous subterranean lakes of oil, which lie at the county's extremities. The Sunnis are convinced that if Iraq is partitioned, the untapped billions in oil wealth will be out of their reach and placed in the clutches of their two ethnic rivals.

After suffering at the brutal hands of Saddam, the Kurds also are looking to collect. One way or another, they are set to become king-makers in the new parliament. They are sure to be courted by Allawi's secular group and the United Islamic Party of the Shi'ites. Whoever they agree to wed, it is likely they will need to make concessions to their oft-stated agenda of an independent homeland in the north. Rantawi says the Kurds may be tempted to put self-interest aside in the short term and align with Allawi. "Most of them are hugely secular and they are worried about the increasing influence of Iran," he says. "Whatever they decide will be pivotal."

A partitioning of Iraq also is likely to deliver an extremist Sunni-Arab mini-state in the centre of the country, again a horror story for most neighbours.

"A break-up of Iraq would be the worst case scenario," Rantawi says. "It would be something Jordan could not live with."

Despite describing the ballot as a ''satanic project'', an alliance of five Sunni insurgent groups led by al-Qa'ida's Abu Musab al-Zarqawi said during the week they would not disrupt the vote with bombs and rifles. The insurgents instead elected to work with the cards they were dealt and gradually rebuild their shrunken power base through the political process.

Zarqawi repeatedly has stated his aim is to make Iraq the centre of a new Islamic caliphate modelled on the traditions of a 7th-century utopian world of the prophet Mohammed. His network has drawn support and financial backing from across the Sunni Arab world. Without trying, Zarqawi has become a regional political player. It is a reality he is content to use as a means to an end, for now.

Across Baghdad, in Ramadi, Kirkuk and even Saddam's home town of Tikrit, the voices of ordinary Iraqis were heard through their ballot papers with minimal fuss.

In Amman, more than 600,000 Iraqis living in self-imposed exile cast their ballots at a primary school in a wealthy suburb on Wednesday and Thursday. Iraqis spoken to by Inquirer cared little for the high-stakes games of Middle Eastern politics. They simply wanted a chance to secure their futures. The mood around polling stations was less emotional than during the vote for a transitional government in January and the constitutional referendum in October.

Lawyer Mahdi Al Rahim, who arrived from Baghdad two days ago, says the election is a crucial step in Iraq's future.

''The elections are fantastic,'' he says. ''It's the first time we practice democracy in the right way. It is a crucial and important time and we hope this parliament will be quite representative of the population. This time we are enthusiastic to vote, and we hope that things will get started and get better. We can see a light at the end of the tunnel. I hope the democratic and liberal forces win.''

Adnan Abdul Hamid Abdali, a Sunni civil engineer, is an electoral newcomer.

''Last year I boycotted the elections,'' he says. ''Those who won the elections the first time did not bring with them security and stability. They brought with them the divisions and sectarian problems. I am here today not because of my conviction in the election process because I do not believe that elections and occupation go together. Rather, I am hoping that there will be security and stability, and maybe people now will start recognising the resistance.''

Mohammad Rida, a Jordanian resident for 19 years, is looking for a reason to return to his homeland. ''Things look good now we can give our opinions. In the past I wouldn't be able to do that. Now I have become free and, God willing, all shall be well and security will be restored. If there's security, why shouldn't I return?''

Watching the ballots come in during the next week and with much more at stake in the short term than any Middle Eastern regime will be the US, where Capitol Hill legislators will face elections of their own in November next year. The war in Iraq and the 2150 dead servicemen and ***women*** are not playing well on the domestic front. Neither is the commitment of 160,000 US soldiers.

The US has tried to manoeuvre a way out of the quagmire through the democracy it has urged on Iraq. An escalating regional crisis, calling for its military to stay longer, could well be too much for many already skittish congressional leaders to deal with.

The best that vested interests can hope for is that somehow the horse-trading of the next few months will lead to a unified and stable democracy. With decades of blighted ambition set against so many cross purposes, it sounds like an Arabian fable.

Load-Date: December 16, 2005

Poll shock has region reeling

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

January 28, 2006 Saturday

All-round Country Edition

Section: FEATURES; Inquirer; Pg. 20

Length: 1713 words

Byline: Martin Chulov

Body

MATP

The world waits to see whether electoral success will change Hamas, reports Middle East correspondent Martin Chulov

THE Israeli cabinet wore black armbands on Thursday to mark the darkest period in the modern history of the Jews. It was a salient metaphor for what now looms as a potential runner-up.

Leaders of the Jewish state had gathered at the national Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, to reflect on the atrocities of more than 60 years ago. But their closed-door discussions quickly turned to the stunning events of early Thursday when Israel's mortal enemy, the radical Hamas movement, swept to power in a landmark Palestinian poll. As one Israeli minister put it: "This is an unmitigated disaster."

Throughout Gaza and the West Bank, the disappointment of Fatah supporters, whose 40-year haphazard reign as their people's leadership had been crushed, was overwhelmed by the euphoria of Hamas voters. Celebratory pastries were the order of the day. Everyone who stopped at traffic lights, Hamas supporter or otherwise, was offered a custard-filled sweet by a flag-waving functionary.

Not for the first time in the region has the US seriously underestimated the effects of urging democracy on a fragile Arab civilisation. Israel had warned that forcing a poll on an anarchistic Palestine was likely to unleash a revolt. Just as Israelis had done during tough times, the neighbours have also lurched hard to the political margins.

By the time counting was completed late on Thursday, the local Islamic movement Israel fears most had won a stronghold on the footsteps of the state it was set up to destroy. The final divvy-up could see it win as many as 76 of the 132-seat legislature, after cleaning up nearly every one of the 16 constituencies. The landslide victory will give Hamas an absolute majority in the Legislative Council for the next four years.

The peace process yet again seems a pipe dream; the party committed to advancing it has been relegated to the obscurity of opposition. Hamas has decided its future lies in ignoring the Jewish state except on the necessities of day-to-day life. Instead, it will look to the Arab world and reach out to Europe. Hamas may be a political novice, but its leaders are savvy enough to realise they need the backing of powerful friends to allow them to govern effectively.

Gaza Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar knows he cannot expect support from the US. President GeorgeW. Bush made that clear when he said in the wake of the poll: "You're getting a sense of how I'm going to deal with Hamas if they end up in positions of responsibility. And the answer is: 'Not until you renounce your desire to destroy Israel will we deal with you.'"

By Friday, Bush appeared to soften his stance, describing the poll as "the power of democracy and a wake-up call to the leadership".

The US had spent close to $2.6 million in recent weeks to advance the interests of the Palestinian Authority, and by extension Fatah, which it had backed to reactivate the road map for peace sponsored by Washington. Australia too was privately backing Fatah, adopting a "best of a bad lot" approach to the poll. Along with the US, Canberra has listed Hamas as a proscribed terrorist organisation and disavows any dealings. Where to from here is a question likely to need years to answer.

If Zahar fears the wrath of the US, he is not showing it. "The F-16 that destroyed my house is American, the Apache helicopter that killed my friends is American and the pressure on Israel to destroy Hamas is largely American too," he says in an interview with Inquirer. "They have to change their policies in the region, not because of Hamas interests, but because of their own interests. They tried to interfere in Egypt, they destroyed the integrity of Lebanon and now they are threatening Syria."

The militant group responsible for a five-year suicide bombing blitz that killed more than 300 Israelis and maimed thousands more has the whip hand in a completely different ballgame -- the internecine world of international politics. If Hamas does decide to come to

the negotiating table, it will bring a reputation for discipline and fiscal restraint, two attributes that will prove handy in the lawless, impoverished territories and which have been acknowledged by the West.

Fatah was turfed out largely because of its inability to deliver on the big picture of peace and the things that matter to ordinary Palestinians; paying workers, protecting families and providing school books and healthcare for their children. It was also an indelible symbol of its founder Yasser Arafat, whose legacy has suffered since his death 18 months ago.

Hamas knows the world wants a peace partner and could be tempted to offer a significant sweetener upfront. Already Zahar has offered to continue a year-long truce if Israel reciprocates -- and has flagged the possibility of an administrative accord to keep the power, water and sewerage working. But when asked whether he would help turn a working relationship into a two-state solution, he curtly replies: "Never."

For now, Hamas appears to have extra short-term priorities in mind -- of the ideological kind. It makes no bones about its determination to introduce Islamic Sharia law into the territories and dispense with the Palestinian rule of law, which was modelled on Western jurisprudence.

The rise of radical Islam in the crucible of the Middle East is unlikely to impress the neighbouring Arab nations of Jordan and Egypt, both of whom regard Islamists as a subversive threat to their statehood. Zahar's support for the Taliban is likely to be just as troubling, although he is at pains to point out that the toppled Afghani militants' persecution of ***women*** is not an approach he agrees with.

"Who is the bigger danger, the Talibanis or the collaborator [Afghanistan President] Karzai," he asks. "Who is worse, the Talibanis or Bush?"

Inside the territories there is also consternation. Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi, who was re-elected on a moderate platform says: "Hamas think they can reformulate Palestinian society. We have to tell them it is not them who gets to reshape society, it is the other way around."

One day before the ballot, Fatah information minister Nabil Sha'ath was confidently predicting voters had swung back his party's way and would return Fatah to government. From his office in downtown Gaza, he warned that to ignore Israel would imperil the welfare of the 1.6 Palestinians. "Every Palestinian knows that every one of these

items is entangled completely with Israeli policies. If you are going to have a government which thinks the way forward is to look the other way, then this is a disaster."

His warning has since taken on fresh impetus. "It could seriously deepen the occupation," he said. "They could decide to finish the wall [Israel is building] to ghettoise every settlement and close down Gaza."

A troubled Israel was yesterday still calibrating its response to what many believe is the biggest threat the Jewish state has faced. Mein Indor, chairman of the Bereaved Families Association, which supports dozens of victims of Hamas bombers, said: "How foolish was the decision to give [the Palestinians] self-rule, which is allowing more territories to turn into terror centres. Whoever continues this will eventually bring ***Hezbollah*** and al-Qa'ida here as well."

With Ariel Sharon still lying comatose, Israelis have no strongman to look to for comfort. But they have one waiting on the sidelines, in the form of the hard right Likud party leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Until this week, Likud was lagging badly in the polls leading up to the March 28 elections, with the centrist party Kadima set up by Sharon before his incapacitation, set to dominate.

The shifting political sands of Middle Eastern politics could now well move Netanyahu's way as confused Israelis seek refuge behind a figure they know. A Netanyahu-elected administration could very likely move to take unilateral steps to define Israel's final borders.

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had attempted to warn Palestinians on the eve of the poll not to unleash Hamas and had offered a timely inducement of further withdrawals from the West Bank. But by then voters' minds were made up. Hamas had spent time with them in the mosques, had delivered on the mandates it won in council elections last year and had demonstrated it could act in the domestic interests of its constituents.

There is a clear split among the Israeli leadership and intelligensia about what to take away from the poll. "The Palestinian people should have their own state, but I don't see it happening in my generation," political scientist Avraham Diskin from the Hebrew University says. "I'm pessimistic today. I think we're going to see a lot of bloodshed among the Palestinians and against us."

Other analysts want to judge Hamas by deeds instead of words. For now it remains committed to its 1987 mandate that calls for Israel's destruction and the liberation of all of greater Palestine. But there is a view among some that the risk of forgoing a future will be enough for Hamas to renounce its past.

There is also the unknown of how the two other main Palestinian militant groups will take the emergence of their sometime rival. Disputes in the occupied territories have a history of being sorted out through bloodshed.

In what it says is a sign of goodwill, Hamas points to the fact it has not sent a suicide bomber to Israel since August 2004. That is of little comfort to Israel, where the wounds of a brutal five-year bombing blitz run deep. Hamas officials know the images of slaughtered ***women*** and children in civilian buses earned deep ire and distrust from the international community. They now privately suggest the terrifying days of commuter carnage are no longer a means to an end.

Hamas officials have another, broader, policy change they are keeping to themselves, for now. The Hamas leadership has scrutinised the synergy between the Irish Republican Army and its now-legitimised political wing Sinn Fein for parallels with its own conflict. The political emergence of the region's most feared Islamic group may yet take on characteristics of the decades-long Catholic nationalist struggle that ended last year in peace.

Load-Date: January 31, 2006

Sunnis and Shiites: Who are they?

Lincoln Journal Star (Nebraska)

April 9, 2005 Saturday

City Edition

Section: C; Pg. 1

Length: 1596 words

Byline: BOB REEVES, Lincoln Journal Star

Body

The news from Iraq and the Middle East these days is filled with references to Sunnis and Shiites, the major divisions of Islam.

For example, we know Shiites won the most votes in the January election in Iraq, and that Shiites, Sunnis and other religious and ethnic minorities are still trying to piece together a government there.

Former dictator Saddam Hussein was a Sunni, and the militants in Fallujah and other Iraqi insurgents are often identified as Sunnis.

We also know that the leaders of Iran are Shiites, while the leaders of most predominantly Muslim countries are Sunni. Both religious groups have a significant presence in Lebanon, where the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, a Sunni, produced widespread demonstrations against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Then ***Hezbollah***, an organization identified as Shiite, led demonstrations in favor of a continued military presence in Lebanon by Syria, a country identified as Sunni.

While the political positions and alliances can get very confusing, it's helpful to know something about both the differences and the similarities between the two groups of Muslims.

In most aspects of belief and practice, Shiites and Sunnis are alike, said Adnan al-Jabiry, imam (prayer leader) at the Nebraska Islamic Foundation, which has a Shiite mosque at 7125 Douglas St.

The main difference between the two, he said, involves the succession of leadership after the prophet Muhammad died in 632. Shiites believe that the prophet designated his cousin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib to take his place as leader of the Muslim community.

Instead, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, a leader of the powerful Quraysh tribe in Arabia, became the first caliph, a position that combined both political and religious authority. Neither Abu Bakr nor the two caliphs that followed him were members of the prophet's family. Finally, in 656, 'Ali became the fourth caliph but his opponents staged a revolt and 'Ali moved the capital from Medina, in Arabia, to Kufah (near modern Najaf) in Iraq, where he had more support.

The followers of 'Ali were known as the shi'a, referring to the party that supported 'Ali as the legitimate successor to Muhammad. They regarded him as the true imam, or leader of the Muslim community.

'Ali was assassinated in 661, and after that the leadership of the growing Muslim empire returned to caliphs who were not of the prophet's family.

Shiites continued to follow the religious leadership of a succession of imams who were of the prophet's bloodline. 'Ali, the First Imam, was succeeded by his oldest son, Hasan, who is believed to have been poisoned. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Husayn, who died in the massacre of his family by the sixth caliph, Yazid, at Karbala in Iraq in 680.

The martyrdom of Husayn became a key event in Shiite history, remembered each year on Ashura, a day when Shiites dress in the black clothes of mourning and grieve over the death of Husayn.

In Iraq and other countries with large Shiite populations, people re-enact the battle of Karbala and some worshippers beat themselves symbolically with their fists to show oneness with the martyr. Some extremists even beat themselves with chains or cut themselves with knives, but that's not condoned by the majority of Shiites, al-Jabiry said.

In Lincoln the members of the Douglas Street mosque, which serves about 2,000 people, mostly Shiite refugees from Iraq, observed Ashura in late February with prayers and readings of the story of Husayn. On Friday, they had another day of prayers, with many participants again wearing black, marking the end of 40 days of mourning for Husayn.

"The blood of Imam Husayn is a volcano in the hearts of Muslims," al-Jabiry said. Husayn is a symbol of a person standing up for justice, and for the true principles of Islam as revealed in the Quran, he said.

The majority of Shiites believe that the succession of imams continued until the 12th Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, who disappeared at age 4 in 874. They believe he went into "occultation," or hiding, and "is still living among us," al-Jabiry said. They believe that someday the 12th Imam will reappear, along with Jesus, to establish a reign of peace and justice on earth.

Sunnis also believe in an ultimate reign of peace and justice, but do not believe in a "hidden imam." All Muslims believe that Muhammad and other prophets, including Jesus, were human beings and not divine. Shiites also believe that while the 12th Imam in some mysterious way has continued to live, he also is only a human being.

Al-Jabiry and other local leaders are volunteers who have other jobs in the community. Al-Jabiry, who taught school in Iraq, studied the Quran and other religious writings on his own and led a study group in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia before coming to the United States.

In terms of practice, both Sunnis and Shiites follow the same Five Pillars of Islam, proclaiming that there is one God (Allah in Arabic) and Muhammad is his prophet; praying five times daily; giving alms to the needy; fasting during the month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca once in a lifetime, if able.

The word Sunni derives from the sunnah, or life example of the prophet Muhammad. Shiites also follow the teachings and example of the imams.

"The two branches are more similar than they are different," said Simon Wood, assistant professor of classics and religious studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who teaches courses about Islam.

He noted that for Sunnis, who make up more than 80 percent of Muslims worldwide, any good Muslim can be leader of the community. For Shiites, while they may have local imams, such as al-Jabiry in Lincoln, the true imam is the human descendant of the prophet.

"Shiites have an intrinsic understanding of authority," Wood said. "They believe authority is received from a previous imam, not delegated by the community."

The concept of the hidden imam gives Shiism a more esoteric character than the Sunni faith, he said. The highest level of religious knowledge is not found in a literal reading of the Quran but in an allegorical meaning that is only fully known by the imams.

Through his martyrdom, Husayn "is champion of the downtrodden, and his experience has been explicitly compared with the passion of Jesus," Wood said. "In a manner that resembles certain Christian themes, suffering becomes, if not a gift from God, a way to God."

Husayn differed from Jesus, however, by dying "with a sword in his hand, so to speak - not the death of a pacifist," Wood said.

According to Hassan al-Jabiry, a board member of the Nebraska Islamic Foundation, Husayn is revered because he was trying to protect Islam from corruption. Today, he inspires Shiites to stand up against oppression wherever they live, he said.

Shiism was originally an Arab movement. Iran, which is not an Arab country, did not become Shiite until the 16th century, under the Safavid dynasty. The current Shiite Islamic state of Iran dates from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolution in 1979.

In Iraq, even though they made up more than 55 percent of the population, Shiites were denied political power under Saddam Hussein, who local Iraqis say played on the differences between Shiites and Sunnis to maintain his own power base.

Osama bin Laden and many of his followers are Wahhabis, inheritors of a Sunni revivalist movement that began in 1700s Saudi Arabia. Wahhabis sought to purge Muslim society of what they considered un-Islamic beliefs and practices and made violent attacks against Shiites. The Taliban in Afghanistan also was mostly Sunni.

Wood will discuss the differences between Sunnis and Shiites in detail in his "Topics in Islam" course next fall.

While Sunnis and Shiites often find themselves on opposite sides in today's conflicts, historically they have been able to live together in peace, said Mohammed al-Bezerji, an Iraqi immigrant now living in Lincoln.

"I lived almost half of my life in Iraq, and I didn't see many differences," he said. "I had both Sunni and Shiite friends. The media have tried to emphasize the differences, and Saddam did as well."

Both Adnan and Hassan al-Jabiry noted that the two groups generally get along well in Lincoln, although many do not feel comfortable worshipping at the others' mosque. The Islamic Foundation of Lincoln mosque, 3636 N. First St., is the Sunni mosque in Lincoln and has members from many national and ethnic backgrounds.

The current leader of Shiite Muslims in Iraq is the Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who supported the recent election and has called on the Iraqi Alliance to include Sunnis and other minority groups in the government.

"Shi'a is not hatred," Hassan al-Jabiry said. "They are a loving, peaceful people, even toward those who have oppressed them for years."

On the wall in the office at the Douglas Street mosque is a large color poster of Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, al-Sistani's predecessor who was killed in 2003 by a terrorist bomb in Najaf, at a site very near the burial place of 'Ali, the first Imam. Al-Hakim was considered a moderate, willing to negotiate with the Americans, but also a staunch supporter of Islam.

He continues the tradition of Shiite martyrs, who died defending their faith, Hassan al-Jabiry said.

Reach Bob Reeves at 473-7212 or at *breeves@journalstar.com*.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Islam and the differences between Shiites and Sunnis, read:

* "Islam: Faith and History," by Mahmoud M. Ayoub ($19.95, Oneworld Publications)

* "Islam: A Short History," by Karen Armstrong ($19.95, Modern Library)

Graphic

1. Sunni Muslims pray at the Um al-Qura mosque in Baghdad. ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO 2. Imam Adnan al-Jabiry leads prayers Thursday at the Nebraska Islamic Foundation in northeast Lincoln. The Shiite mosque is made up almost entirely of Iraqi immigrants. WILLIAM LAUER/Lincoln Journal Star 3. Iraqi ***women*** recite prayers at the holy shrine dedicated to Imam Husayn in Karbala. ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO b/w list of top 10 largest national Shiite populations, SHEILA STORY Lincoln Journal Star, Source: Adherents.com

Load-Date: April 13, 2005

Book 'em in May;
PARVATHI NAYAR and MINDY TAN look at the offerings for this month

The Business Times Singapore

May 27, 2005 Friday

Section: EXECUTIVE LIFESTYLE; Trends

Length: 1653 words

Body

FOX News recently reported that the publishing industry was printing more than the public wanted to buy, based on a survey by the Book Industry Study Group (which said that books sold dropped by nearly 44 million between 2003 and 2004, even as the number of titles published annually approaches 175,000). Not good news for the booksellers of Orhan Pamuk's Istanbul (below), or anyone in the trade generally. While book lovers hope that the positive fallout might be more stringent quality control in what is actually published, they also bemoan the loss of literary territory to pixels and celluloid, though the latter trade can be a two-way one.

Cellulose and Celluloid

The line between the written and spoken word blurs with the book-to-movie and movie-to-book phenomenon. Anyone who hasn't taken time off to meditate on an Outer Rim planet would, of course, know the most famous example of the latter, i.e. Matthew Stover's Revenge of the Sith ($37.95), based on the story and screenplay by George Lucas. The book is best read as an expansion of the more arbitrary shorthand notations of the film's plotline, rather than as literary prose. The film tie-in edition to Douglas Adams' classic, The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy ($15.95), comes with extensive additional material from the film such as cast pictures and interviews. But also - interesting to fans - an afterword by executive producer and close friend of Adams, Robbie Stamp, on why this always-a-pleasure-to-revisit book has taken so long to be cast in celluloid.

Paperback Writer

It's useful to keep an eye on paperback releases especially of series you're hooked on, like Patricia Cornwell's uber cool forensic pathologist Kay Scarpetta. Her latest, CSI-like escapade, Trace ($15.95), has Scarpetta return to her old stomping grounds, Richmond. She cleverly deciphers an unexplained death to be murder, then finds herself personally involved in the murderous mayhem. Cornwell has lost some of her early edge - the ability to mix cold forensics and warm humanity in just the right proportions - but still makes for a good read.

A variant of this format - pieces of a puzzle that come together and into the life of the investigator - is also seen in Mark Billingham's latest, The Burning Girl ($15.95).

Brewed for the Coffee-table

In Beads of Borneo ($45), Heidi Munan, private researcher and honorary curator of beads at the Sarawak Museum, strings together a colourful account of the cultural role, magic, and the stories around beads. Munan's informative account caters to collectors of beads and students of costumes, as well as people with an interest in, but no prior

knowledge of, Borneo history or culture. Well researched and written, Munan allows the flourishes to come from the pictures that display the sheer magnitude of colours, types, and designs of the beads.

In Bloom ($47.50), by Alice Whately, covers the range of home decor florals: feminine, exotic, funky, retro, even vintage. While Whateley does emphasise that the design should be kept simple, here's some friendly advice: before emulating Whateley ensure that you a) adore flowers or b) are wealthy enough to redecorate when the florals begin to wilt. A third option is to pick up Modern Asian Living ($57) by Wongvipa Devahastin na Ayudhya and Sakul Intakul whose approach is sleek-contemporary, yet very 'Asian' with its use of 18th century Chinese figurines, the ubiquitous but still-gorgeous lotus, and of course, lots of wood.

New Fiction

John O'Farrell's May Contain Nuts ($27.70) is a funnily written account on parenting that's reassuring to both parents and kids who think their family's idiosyncrasies are isolated examples of lunacy. The 'punnily' curious title is explained early in the book, as a mother leaps across the room to prevent her son from eating a biscuit which 'may contain nuts'. This despite the parents having no idea whether their son is even allergic to nuts, it's just that the boy has never been exposed to them before. Very warm-fuzzy-making.

The ***Women***'s Murder Club solve crimes together in their home city of San Francisco. Author James Patterson, who has reported on the ladies for some 10 years, teams up with Maxine Paetro to present the fourth in the series, 4th of July ($27). Police Lieutenant Lindsay Boxer makes an instantaneous self-defence decision that triggers a chain of death, shame, trial-by-jury - and another string of murders in the town that Boxer sneaks off to, to keep low profile. The pace is good, but the zippy format of 146 chapters, few longer than a couple of pages, may not be to everyone's taste.

Another ongoing series about ***women*** and crime detection is Alexander McCall Smith's delightful In the Company of Cheerful Ladies, the latest in the No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series. Quirky, whimsical yet brimming with life, the series is set in Botswana, where our heroine, Precious Ramotswe, is more burdened than ever with strange goings-on that include the appearance of a pumpkin and secrets from the past.

Marilynne Robinson's critically acclaimed Gilead ($39.95) - it won this year's Pulitzer and National Book Critics Circle prizes for fiction - is the tale of a dying Iowa preacher, structured as a letter that seeks to explain his life to his young son. The prose is a lyrical delight. 'I told you last night that I might be gone sometime,' the book opens, 'and you said, Where, and I said, To be with the Good Lord, and you said, Why, and I said, Because I'm old, and you said, I don't think you are old. And you put your hand in my hand and you said, You aren't very old, as if that settled it.'

Rising Sun

It's a cute figure that you see without quite noticing it all over Japan - on dishes, textiles, folk art. Described as 'plump and frumpy', yet 'fun and playful and open' this is a figure that has received little analysis - till Otafuku: Joy of Japan ($33), written by Amy Katoh both in English and Japanese. Katoh traces the roots of this mythic figure and shows how she is such an integral part of Japanese culture - right down to the food and Okame Sushi, a dish served in the form of Otafuku's face.

Ningyo: The Art of the Japanese Doll ($120), by Alan Scott Pate, covers more general ground than the specificity of Otafuku, but successfully showcases the delicate beauty and variety of Japan's dolls. If one wanted to nitpick, it would only be with the author's decision to pick most dolls from the 18th and 19th centuries, and from private collections.

In The Modern Japanese Garden ($36), Michiko Rico Nose - with the help of photographer Michael Freeman - invites you to a stroll of aesthetic and meditative pleasure among the contemporary gardens of Japan. The featured gardens are inventive, with clean lines and a perfectly-honed balance.

Non-Fiction

Book 'em in May; PARVATHI NAYAR and MINDY TAN look at the offerings for this month

There's always the danger of being labelled exploitative when the arts respond to news-making tragedies whether as a film, play, or indeed, book. Tsunami: The World's Most Terrifying Natural Disaster ($34.95), by Geoff Tibballs, is no doubt borne of good intentions - some proceeds are listed as going to Care International. While it doesn't reek of exploitation, the exhaustive media coverage of the event makes this compilation feel a bit redundant.

Another disaster area is visited through In Looking for the Afghan ($19.50), where Richard Loseby lucidly recounts his trip back to Afghanistan during the Middle-East turmoil. The seemingly foolhardy trip was undertaken by the author to try discover what befell a young ***Hezbollah*** mujahed who once saved his life. Inside the Wire ($41), written by Erik Saar and Washington correspondent Viveca Novak, describes Saar's six months at the terrorist detention centre at Guantanamo Bay. Theirs is a no-holds-barred approach, probably essential to the recounting of this controversial story.

Orhan Pamuk's fluidly written Istanbul: Memories of a City ($29.95) - translated by Maureen Freely - is both autobiography and portrait of the city of the author's birth. The book is a very personalised account of the city's histories and stories, memories and moods. For example, Pamuk devotes a whole chapter to describing Istanbul as the very essence of huzun, the Turkish word for melancholy.

Help Thyself

You can't really help yourself unless you can laugh about it all - and here Toni Goffe's The One Minute Exercise Book: No Gym, No Leotard, No Sweat! ($15.95) might help. The exercises and the brief timeframes suggested by the title are real, though with the emotive illustrations and easy writing style, it may be the cheek muscles that get the best workout. Another small-sized book, Charlotte Haigh's The Top 100 Immunity Boosters ($14.95) is stacked with useful information to help you pick the immunity boosters you need. Take a typical page, say, on the humble bell pepper. It talks about its usefulness to the immune function; its nutrients; a useful fact (green and yellow peppers have the same level of Vitamin C as red pepper but less beta-carotene); a simple recipe - Stuffed Peppers; and information-at-a-glance symbols that say it is good for the heart, an anti-oxidant and anti-bacterial.

Anti-Ageing Medicines ($30.95) is the fifth book on the subject by Marios Kyriazis, a pioneer in the science and application of anti-ageing medicine. 'My aims are practical and simple,' he declares in the introduction: they are to discuss the actions of the anti-ageing remedies available today, as well as explain the ageing process - both of which he proceeds to do comprehensively. The book is factual and scientific, in contrast to the feel-good aspects of staying young lauded in The 5 Principles of Ageless Living by Dayle Haddon. Filled with inspirational quotes from the literary greats, Haddon's elixir of youth can be broken down into five main principles: looking good, nurturing the spirit, honouring the body, discovering wisdom and staying connected.

The books are available in all major bookstores

Load-Date: May 26, 2005

SHIITES IN IRAQ SAY GOVERNMENT WILL BE SECULAR

The New York Times

January 24, 2005 Monday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section A; Column 6; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1; THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ: POLITICS

Length: 1757 words

Byline: By DEXTER FILKINS; Edward Wong contributed reporting from Baghdad for this article.

Dateline: BAGHDAD, Iraq, Jan. 21

Body

With the Shiites on the brink of capturing power here for the first time, their political leaders say they have decided to put a secular face on the new Iraqi government they plan to form, relegating Islam to a supporting role.

The senior leaders of the United Iraqi Alliance, the coalition of mostly Shiite groups that is poised to capture the most votes in the election next Sunday, have agreed that the Iraqi whom they nominate to be the country's next prime minister would be a lay person, not an Islamic cleric.

The Shiite leaders say there is a similar but less formal agreement that clerics will also be excluded from running the government ministries.

"There will be no turbans in the government," said Adnan Ali, a senior leader of the Dawa Party, one of the largest Shiite parties. "Everyone agrees on that."

The decision appears to formalize the growing dominance of secular leaders among the Shiite political leadership, and it also reflects an inclination by the country's powerful religious hierarchy to stay out of the day-to-day governing of the country. Among the Shiite coalition's 228 candidates for the national assembly, fewer than a half dozen are clerics, according to the group's leaders.

The decision to exclude clerics from the government appears to mean that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a cleric who is the chief of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the scion of a prominent religious family and an oft-mentioned candidate for prime minister, would be relegated to the background. The five Shiites most likely to be picked as prime minister are well-known secular figures.

Shiite leaders say their decision to move away from an Islamist government was largely shaped by the presumption that the Iraqi people would reject such a model. But they concede that it also reflects certain political realities -- American officials, who wield vast influence here, would be troubled by an overtly Islamist government. So would the Kurds, who Iraqi and American officials worry might be tempted to break with the Iraqi state.

The emerging policies appear to be a rejection of an Iranian-style theocracy. Iran has given both moral and material support to the country's two largest Shiite parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

The conviction that the Iranian model should be avoided in Iraq is apparently shared by the Iranians themselves. One Iraqi Shiite leader, who recently traveled to Tehran, the Iranian capital, said he was warned by the Iranians themselves against putting clerics in the government.

"They said it caused too many problems," the Iraqi said.

The secular tilt comes as Shiite leaders prepare for what they regard as a historic moment: after decades of official repression, the country's largest group now seems likely to take the helm of the Iraqi state. Mindful of that opportunity, and of previous opportunities missed, the Shiite leaders running for office say they are determined to exercise power in a moderate way, which would include bringing Sunnis into the government and ignoring some powerful voices in their own ranks that advocate a stronger role for Islam in the new constitution.

Still, for all the expressions of unity, just how much consensus exists within the coalition is unclear, as is the coalition's very survival beyond the elections. The Shiite leaders, and the rank and file in the Iraqi electorate, represent a wide array of political visions, and those blocs could rise or fall in influence over time.

Important Shiite clerics like Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani already exert considerable influence in the background, although his brand of Islam is thought to be relatively moderate. Shiite leaders like Mr. Hakim will probably continue to use their power behind the scenes; his views are thought to be more conservative.

During the drafting of the country's interim constitution last year, Mr. Hakim and others pushed for an expansive role for Islam in the new state, as well as restrictions on the rights of ***women***.

Some Iraqis expressed concern that the more radical Shiites, notably the followers of Moktada al-Sadr, would be difficult to control once the election is over.

Mr. Sadr, a young firebrand who led a series of revolts against American forces in the spring and summer, has been silenced for now, and 14 of his followers are candidates in the Shiite coalition. But in mosques and in more private communications, Mr. Sadr and his supporters continue to express support for armed rebellion and for a boycott of the election.

The challenge, the Shiite leaders say, will be holding their coalition together after Jan. 30, when the jockeying for power, in what is likely to be a coalition government, begins.

"It was very difficult to bring the coalition together," said Ali Faisal, a leader of Iraqi ***Hezbollah***, a Shiite party that is part of the group. "There is a good chance that it will fall apart."

If the Shiite coalition were to crumble, Shiite leaders fear, they could lose ground to the interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, a secular-minded Shiite, or to the Kurdish parties, which are unified on a single slate and which will probably benefit from a large turnout.

Kurdish leaders have already begun to talk up the prospect of Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union for Kurdistan, getting the post of president, which would give him enormous power in shaping the composition of the new government.

The Shiite coalition, known as the United Iraqi Alliance, was pulled together under the leadership of Ayatollah Sistani, the country's most powerful Shiite cleric and a native of Iran. Ayatollah Sistani, without formally endorsing any political party, has issued an Islamic edict calling on all eligible Iraqi Shiites to vote.

The Shiite coalition is widely expected to pull in the largest number of votes on election day. Shiites make up about 60 percent of the electorate here, and if, as expected, large numbers of Iraqi Sunnis boycott the election, then Shiites could capture an even larger percentage of the national assembly seats.

The decision to exclude clerics from the senior positions in the Iraqi government has set off a scramble for the post of prime minister. Under the election rules, the prime minister is to be chosen by the party or group that forms a government, presumably by the group that wins the largest number of seats in the 275-member national assembly.

Among the Shiites, the leading candidates for prime minister are thought to be Adil Abdul Mahdi, the Iraqi finance minister and a leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq; Ibrhaim Jofferey, the head of the Dawa Party; Hussein Shahristani, a nuclear scientist; and Ahmad Chalabi, who marshaled support for the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government in the Bush administration and has since become a pariah. All are candidates for the United Iraqi Alliance.

All four candidates are secular-minded leaders who spent much of their lives in exile. They maintain that they will borrow from Islam's tenets in writing the country's constitution, the main task for the new government, but will ensure that the Iraqi state does not have a religious cast.

Mr. Mahdi, for instance, flirted with communism in his youth, has two master's degrees from French universities and maintains a home in France. Mr. Shahristani was educated in Canada and is married to a Canadian. Mr. Chalabi, the most overtly secular of the group, has a doctorate in mathematics and spent much of the past 30 years in Britain and the United States. Dr. Jofferey is a medical doctor who lived in London.

Also a contender for the prime minister's job is Dr. Allawi, the current head of the Iraqi government, who was chosen last June by the United Nations envoy, Lakdhar Brahimi, and the American leadership. Dr. Allawi is running for the national assembly as the leader of his own slate of candidates, called the Iraqi List.

Dr. Allawi's chances to remain as prime minister are thought to depend not just on how well his group does at the polls, but on how well the United Iraqi Alliance fares. If Dr. Allawi's group performs well, and the Shiite coalition less well, then Dr. Allawi, Shiite leaders say, could become a leading candidate for prime minister. It was a deadlock between Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq last June that allowed Dr. Allawi to become minister.

That principal trend in Iraqi Shiism, known as quietism, rejects the kind of political role for the clergy that it has in Iran. Indeed, some prominent Iraqi Shiite religious leaders note that the Iranian government, after taking power in 1979, marginalized and persecuted Iranian followers of the quietist school in that country.

"It's a completely different concept of government," Mr. Shahristani said, referring to the Iraqi government. "The Iraqi government and the constitution will seek neither an Islamic government nor the participation of Islamic clerics in the government."

The ayatollahs will not be part of the government in any way or express views on day-to-day governance."

Ayatollah Sistani, though an adherent of the quietest school, has involved himself in every step of the political process here. Though he has stopped short of endorsing political candidates, he has come close to backing the Shiite slate. Earlier this month, some candidates in Dr. Allawi's slate protested that the use of Ayatollah Sistani's picture on the United Iraqi Alliance's election posters violated the ban on the use of religious symbols.

Indeed, some Iraqi Shiite leaders say it will probably fall to Ayatollah Sistani to hold the coalition together once the election is over.

Shiite leaders agree that the biggest task facing the next Iraqi government will be mollifying the Sunni Arabs, who they have displaced as Iraq's dominant group. The Sunnis are a minority in Iraq but a majority in the rest of the Arab world, and some of their leaders have had a difficult time reconciling themselves to a subordinate role.

While Shiite leaders say they intend to reach out to the Sunnis, they will have to overcome no small amount of suspicion. Publicly, that suspicion is usually expressed by making reference to Iran, the powerful Shiite-majority neighbor to the east.

"We're not afraid of the Shia or the Kurds governing Iraq," said Sheik Moayad Brahim al-Adhami, leader of the Abu Hanifa mosque, a Sunni bastion in Baghdad. "But what we're afraid of is a fundamentalist representing a foreign country's interests."

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: Iraqis put up a election banner supporting the interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, in Baghdad yesterday. (Photo by Shawn Baldwin for The New York Times)

A Shiite election ad, a sandal and a bloodstain at a Baghdad Shiite mosque after a bomb killed 14 on Friday. (Photo by Joao Silva for The New York Times)(pg. A10)

Load-Date: January 24, 2005

End of Document

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sunday Telegraph (Sydney, Australia) (Sydney, Australia)

February 20, 2005 Sunday

Section: FEATURES; 24/7 News In ReviewLetters; Pg. 100

Length: 1749 words

Body

A torturous path for our defence forces

THE so-called Defence Force torture training of which Simon Kearney wrote (ST, 13/2) is designed to make troops aware of what might be in store for them if captured by the current enemy.

The course has been in operation for at least 40 years.

It was introduced after the Korean war, during which Wilfred Burchett, the darling of the Australian Left, collaborated with Chinese communists in the mental and physical torture of Australian and UN troops.

I have been both a student and an instructor on such courses. That small segment of the course -- usually two days -- of which Kearney writes is only the first

phase, designed to replicate the shock of capture and

the kind of treatment

that hard intelligence informs us is likely.
MATP

The training is carried out by experienced instructors and is carefully monitored and supervised. Any trainee who shows signs of abnormal physical or psychological stress is withdrawn.

Most trainees have a fair idea of the sort of experience they will undergo -- if only because, after 40 years, the nature of the course is so well known in the ADF.

During the second phase, trainees, with the instructors, reflect on the experience and how they might cope in a real-life situation.

Later phases deal with forms of resistance to torture and interrogation.

This course is designed to deal with a world where the enemy has contemptuously rejected the laws of combat binding our own people.

MICHAEL O'CONNOR, AM

East Doncaster, Vic

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Longing for the rule of law

AUSTRALIA is becoming a very violent place, and it's fair to say this is particularly so in places where there are large Middle Eastern communities.

Yet all we hear from the multicultural lobby is that the police are racist or the community feels marginalised.

People who hang around in gangs of 20 at the local Westfield, making sexual comments to young girls as they walk past, don't feel marginalised -- they are grossly over-confident and feel untouchable by the law.

BENJAMIN BURNS

Mardi

We must save the Earth

AUSTRALIA needs to sign the Kyoto Protocol now.

In NSW, we are in the midst of a long-term drought. The rest of Australia is also suffering.

Temperatures keep on rising.

We are destroying our planet in the name of profit.

DOMINIC SCUTELLA

Wattle Grove

Howard thrashed with a feather

THE same old Kim Beazley, thrashing the Government with a feather duster -- one in detention here, another possible terrorist in detention there, and a paltry $1 million rort.

Where is Labor's concern for the 1.5 million Australians below the poverty line? Where is exposure of the facts of deforestation and the degeneration of soil and air -- and what about Kyoto?

Where is Beazley's tax reform, his welfare modification, his infrastructure plans, his Medicare restoration policies, his sounder education management …

He'd rather attack Howardism with jejune matters and picayune affairs. So a week was lost in parliament over an unprovable, $1 million ministerial mis-spend. Maybe Kim has the ticker, but has he got the gumption?

FRANK HAINSWORTH

Burleigh, Qld

Misguided vitriol

WHAT a travesty of freedom of speech to refer to Christians as "besotted followers", as expressed by Bill Priest (Talkback, 13/2).

Even further, to refer to Christians as a "threat to our free will … as anything thrown against us by Islamic fundamentalists," is reprehensible. While it is true that some misguided Christians once persecuted those that did not believe their way, this is not God's way.

I do not consider Bill an enemy. I "love" him and will pray that God will forgive him his vitriol.

WJ STAFFORD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cooranbong

Scrub Scruby from TV screens

WITH the furore over North Sydney Council's decision to impose higher parking permit fees for 4WD vehicles, who do we see but Harold Scruby,

from the so-called Pedestrian Council, on television.

Every time 4WDs are mentioned, we see Scruby commenting on TV or being quoted in a newspaper.

I have no axe to grind about 4WDs; I have no interest in them, nor do I own one. But we should be told more about the Pedestrian Council and Harold Scruby.

What qualifications does Scruby have to comment on the relative dangers of 4WDs? Are there any other members of the council besides Scruby? If so, what are their qualifications?

And how long is Scruby's tenure? It seems it may be indefinite.

GEOFF BUWALDA

Killara

Selective silence

WITH the murder of Lebanon's former prime minister, it's only a question of time in the Arab world when Israel will somehow be blamed.

Israel, however, would not be happy about Rafik Hariri's murder. Hariri was virulently against his country being occupied by Syria, which supports the terrorist group ***Hezbollah***.

The Arab world is so obsessed with Israel's alleged occupation of Palestinethat we have never heard them complain about Syria's occupation of Lebanon.

MICHAEL BURD

Toorak, Vic

Hooray for Habib's courage

CONGRATULATIONS to Mamdouh Habib for courageously speaking outabout the torture and ill-treatment he received at the hands of agents ofAmerica.

Three years of imprisonment without any charge or conviction requires a lot of compensation.

Given the record of the US, Habib is far more credible than the weasel words of our own politicians who lied about the "children overboard" and "weapons of mass destruction".

It's far more likely that Australian citizens will suffer attacks from our paranoid government's "terrorist" squads than from any overseas parties.

DAVID LYONS

Hallidays Point

A tortured process

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IS the investigation into the torture of Mamdouh Habib at Guantanamo Bay going to be like the investigation into the unlawful imprisonment of Cornelia Rau at Baxter?

That is, a whitewash investigation pursued by the same people who imprisoned and tortured Habib?

Will they, in the end, find themselves completely innocent, and the allegations completely baseless?

My guess is yes. They have in the past, and they will again.

The Prime Minister has already found Amanda Vanstone innocent, so why would her secret inquiry find any different?

There will be no justice for Mamdouh Habib and there will be no justice forCornelia Rau unless there

is an independent investigation into both cases.

GAVIN DATE

Marleston, SA

Camilla is not an animal

AS a new arrival in Australia, I have noted the recent publication of a spate of vitriolic letters against Prince Charles, and especially against Camilla Parker Bowles.

These would surely raise questions that would be fascinating to human behaviourists. Just what is it that these people, with their lamentably childish, crass humour, are trying to say?

Among the familiar names we see some new ones who have most probably been trying for years to get their scratching recognised in letters pages, but have now found fame where their level of intelligence can excel.

That is, in trying to outdo one another in insulting another person who is in no position to defend herself.

I can tell you they don't give the image of Australian intelligence any credit whatsoever.

SHEREEN ZAILANEE

Coolbellup, WA

TALKBACK

CAN the Labor Party find no criticism for the Howard Government's apparent acquiescence in torture, other than that it has tainted the evidence?

It has tainted all of us.

SCOTT POYNTING

Newtown

I CALL on you, as the editor of the largest-selling newspaper in Australia, to pull the plug on Piers Akerman's column.

One should reasonably expect your newspaper to present a balanced and objective coverage.

One must wonder if any thinking person could possibly take Akerman's articles seriously. I can assure you that I have wasted my time reading his column for the last time -- unless, that is, it's appropriately moved to the comics section.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I voted for the Liberals at the last election, but I'm not foolish enough to believe they can do no wrong.

WAL SIMMONS

Greta

OKAY, perhaps journalists and simple arithmetic aren't the best of friends, but this isridiculous.

The caption under the photo of a young couple looking at a house for sale (ST, 13/2) read: "Mortgage repayments are expected to increase by 0.25 per cent."

Oh, really? If, as expected, the Reserve Bank jacks up the interest rates by one quarter of a per cent, the rate on the average loan will increase by 0.25 per cent -- but the repayments will go up by about 10 times as much.

ENZO PRATA

North Ryde

AS an avid reader of many years, I would like to know why you insist on wasting pages with the so-called "social set" every Sunday.

Surely to goodness you do not believe that anyone past the Harbour Bridge would be interested in looking at the wannabes buzzing around, living off their parent's expense accounts and lover's credit cards?

SUZANNE ELLIOT

Leumeah

I AM writing to express my utter distaste at the article written by George Pell (ST, 13/2).

Being married to a Catholic, I am aware ofcertain abnormalities in the Church's beliefs, but I cannot understand why people who are notCatholics should notbe allowed to takecommunion.

All people who are Christians have some understanding of what itmeans to take communion. As a member of the Anglican Church, I am a communion-taker and believe it to be an honour and a privilege to take part in this ceremony.

I would like to remind Cardinal Pell that other religions believe Jesus is represented in the wine and bread of the eucharist, and that just because we haven't undergone your tests doesn't mean we have no right to take communion.

Your church, sir, is not theonly representative of Christianity, and you would do well to remember this.

Your views have something to do with the fact that my children have not set foot inside a Catholic church since their baptism.

ANGELA THOMPSON

South Windsor

THREE cheers for Mark Ashcroft's letter (ST, 13/2) about his amazement at the constant exploitation of ***women*** in our society.

When a male is prompted to write to a newspaper on this topic, ithighlights just how

bad the exploitation and degradation of ***women*** is.

I agree with Mark that young ***women*** need to be taught to respect themselves first.

But this task is extremely difficult when the persistent messages given to young ***women***, from Australian society and the media, are that ***females*** must always be attractive, painfully thin and should constantly flaunt their sexuality to be of any use as human beings.

And then we are all so shocked when a high percentage of males blatantly disrespect ***females*** and generally regard them as second-class citizens.

M. JONES

The Entrance

LETTERS TO: The Editor, The Sunday Telegraph, Box 4245, GPO Sydney 2001

* Fax (02) 92882307

* email (include full address) *letters@sundaytelegraph.com.au*

Load-Date: February 19, 2005

No Headline In Original

The Advertiser (Australia)

July 18, 2006 Tuesday

State Edition

Section: OPINION; Pg. 17

Length: 601 words

Body

QUESTION:

What are your views on the escalating Middle East conflict?

Israeli terrorism

THE Israeli army has captured and imprisoned hundreds of Palestinians, including ***women*** and children.

When three of their soldiers are taken (The Advertiser, 13/7/06), then offered for a prisoner exchange, the Israeli Government seizes this situation to aggressively attack Palestine and bomb Lebanon, causing death, destruction and fear to innocent people, including many Australians.

This act is nothing less than Israeli terrorism.

* JOYCE SCOTT,

Urrbrae.

More refugees

PRESUMABLY all those people who are supporting Israel's "right of self-defence" to invade Lebanon and destroy its civilian infrastructure and make it unlivable will be happy to have Australia say "Yes, come here. We'll look after you" when there is the inevitable flood of applications for family reunion and refugee status.

* GORDON DRENNAN,

Burton.

Tragic choice

IT is always a tragedy when civilians become casualties of war. However, a friend of mine who used to live in Lebanon tells me that ***Hezbollah*** deliberately centres its operations in residential areas.

So what choice does Israel have?

* PAUL R. SCOTT,

Wattle Park.

Media language

WITH the latest escalation in Middle East violence, can I make a plea for the media to review their use of language to describe events?

Looking at the language used, it is clear that articles and reports are written on the presumption that Israel is in the right. But surely when it comes to the behaviours so often seen in the Middle East, we must allow for the possibility that all the participants are in the wrong.

The linguistic reinforcement of Israeli righteousness amounts to propaganda and is not appropriate in a free society such as ours.

Do you want an example? "Terrorists kidnap an Israeli soldier", but "Israeli soldiers arrest members of the Palestinian authority".

* ROB SILVA,

Houghton.

Deadly response

THE death toll in Lebanon and Gaza from recent violence is more than 170, including at least 65 civilians.

Aggregate Israeli mortality is about 20. Terrorism is abhorrent, but Israel's response has clearly been excessive.

* BRENT HOWARD,

Rydalmere, NSW.

Terror state

WHY isn't the Australian Government doing something to stop the state terrorism of Israel, rather than just negotiating with them about evacuating Australian citizens?

Australia is apparently fighting a "war on terror". Why isn't state terror included in that fight?

* GAVIN DATE.

Marleston.

Illegal attack

THE Advertiser (15/7/06) reported that United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had something to say about the trouble in the Middle East involving Israel.

She called for "Israel to exercise restraint in its attacks on Lebanon". In the same breath, she "demanded Syria press ***Hezbollah*** to stop attacking Israel". Why the different choice of words, Condy?

If Syria controls ***Hezbollah***, then Israel has illegally attacked Lebanon. Why did Israel not attack Syria, or is it simply that this is Israel's excuse for stealing more land, as it did when it illegally stole Palestinian territory which is still called "the Occupied Territory"?

Israel should go back to the land that the U.S. and Britain, through the United Nations, stole from the Palestinian people and allocated to the then new state of Israel almost 60 years ago.

* ROBERT McCORMICK,

No Headline In Original

Mt Barker.

Self-defence

GIVEN the unrelenting violence that the Israeli and U.S. governments have inflicted on Middle East countries, why wouldn't North Korea and Iran seek to develop missile defence systems to deter future attacks on their own countries?

* ROBERT ANSELL,

Morphett Vale.

Load-Date: July 17, 2006

Africa's peace seekers: Betty Bigombe

Christian Science Monitor (Boston, MA)

September 13, 2005, Tuesday

Section: WORLD; Pg. 01

Length: 2811 words

Byline: By Abraham McLaughlin Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Dateline: GULU, UGANDA

Highlight: Betty Bigombe spends her days talking to rebels and Army officers in Uganda's bush country. She is one of Africa's peace seekers - individuals willing to leave loved ones behind, shrug off personal threats, and even spend significant amounts of their own money to end some of the continent's most intractable conflicts. Part 2 of three.

Body

It was a CNN "breaking news" flash that first caught her eye.

On the chilly morning of Feb. 22, 2004, Betty Bigombe was racing around her cozy condo in Chevy Chase, Md. She was focused on paying bills, packing for a business trip, and hoping to squeeze in a workout.

Walking past her bedroom TV, she suddenly froze. In her native Uganda, the anchor said, the Lord's Resistance Army had just massacred more than 200 villagers. They had forced entire families to stay inside huts - then set the houses alight, shooting anyone who ran out. Ms. Bigombe remembers whispering, "Oh, my God, I can't believe it's still happening."

Her own picture appeared on the screen. The reporter explained that Bigombe, a former government minister in Uganda, was the one person who'd ever gotten the rebels and the government close to peace. But that was back in 1994.

Now the ongoing barbarity in her homeland filled her with shame. Standing there in her nightgown, she was deeply torn. Should she go back to Uganda to help? Could she afford to lose her well-paying job at the World Bank? Could she stand to leave her college-age daughter alone in the US? After hours of pondering, she concluded, "Maybe … maybe I can give it another try."

* * *

That February day marked Bigombe's reluctant reentry into an elite group at the center of efforts to end this continent's most-intractable conflicts. They are Africa's peace seekers. And these days they're increasingly successful: Last year, the number of major conflicts in Africa (six) hit its lowest level since 1997, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks global conflicts. It spiked in 1998 and 1999 to 11, but has since trended downward.

The geopolitical reasons for the shift include the end of the cold war and the proxy conflicts it spawned in Africa, the rise of democracy on the continent, and the new peacemaking strength of African regional organizations. But the

change also springs from individuals such as Bigombe - peace seekers who are willing to leave loved ones behind and strike out on quests others have failed to finish. They often work 20-hour days, endure sleepless nights, and even spend significant amounts of their own money. Some have succeeded. Others, like Bigombe, are pushing hard.

There's been a recent "surge in willingness" of individuals and regional groups in Africa to "be responsible for getting out of the mess" that has long pervaded their continent, says Sharon Wiharta of SIPRI. These people and organizations, she says, "have been more and more successful in negotiating the end of conflicts."

* * *

Little did Bigombe know her initial "maybe" would turn into 18 months of grueling work. She's mostly been camped out at a one-story motel in rural northern Uganda. It's a far cry from Chevy Chase. The sheets are so scratchy that Bigombe swears she'll bring her own set next time. Order chicken in the motel's dining room, and the staff goes out back to kill a squawking bird.

Bigombe says she has spent about $ 8,300 of her own money on the peace effort - on things like calls to rebels' satellite phones. In the past year, she has seen her daughter, Pauline, for only a handful of days - and once nearly had to pull her out of college because money was so tight. Bigombe is on leave from the World Bank - and isn't getting a salary. Sitting in jeans and a white T-shirt at a plastic garden table on the motel lawn, she sighs, and adds with a laugh: "Three weeks - I thought I would be here three weeks" before a peace deal was struck.

When she arrived last year, two months after the February massacre, she began her one-woman peace effort with no official position or outside funding - just a history of trust among all sides. Hopes were high. The rebels seemed desperate - and willing to negotiate. International pressure was building on the government to end the war. But today, 1-1/2 years later, despite some near successes, the 19-year conflict rumbles on between essentially three factions: The rebels who've been branded terrorists by the US, and who've killed more people than Al Qaeda, Hamas, and ***Hizbullah*** combined; Uganda's headstrong president; and profiteering Army officers who apparently manipulate their commander in chief to prolong the war.

To some, her style seems organic, even haphazard. One day, she'll be poring over maps with government soldiers to establish the boundaries of a cease-fire zone. Other days, she'll joke and flirt with a commander to persuade him to delay a counterattack long enough to let her get between the two sides. At times, she's the target of expletives and even death threats.

"Oh, what I have to put up with," Bigombe says with an exasperated smile.

* * *

The thump-thump-thump of a borrowed British helicopter echoed over the scrub-brush of her native land. In December 2004, Bigombe was flying to meet with the rebels. She had a peace offering.

With the wind and dust still swirling after the landing, a sealed, 40-pound bag of rice from the World Food Program was unloaded. Bigombe ordered it deposited in front of the rebel officers, who were standing sternly in their crisp military uniforms. Twenty or so child soldiers in torn T-shirts were nearby, fingers on rifle triggers. They gazed longingly at the rice.

"Take it," Bigombe recalls telling the rebels.

But no one moved in the hot sun. "It might be poisoned," the top officer said.

He ultimately refused the rice. At first, Bigombe thought it was a setback. But her willingness to bring the food - even if they didn't take it that day - turned out to be a breakthrough on one of the most important elements of peacemaking: trust.

The rebels already knew Bigombe as a member of their ethnic group, the Acholi. They knew that in 1994 she got them closer than they'd ever been to peace. And, after the rice-bag offering, they figured they could rely on her for supplies.

"We're hungry," one skinny rebel whispered at a subsequent meeting. With her own money, she bought sugar, coffee, cooking oil, and salt at local markets. Then she began arriving with cartons of soap and other supplies. The more they have, she explains, the fewer deadly raids they make on local villages.

Furthermore, as she brought supplies, the often-elusive rebels began contacting her more regularly, willing to talk peace. Some analysts worry the LRA is just manipulating Bigombe for their own gain. Regardless, outside observers say one of her great talents is building and keeping the trust of the warring parties.

Of that day with the rice, she says, "They were trying to see if they could trust us."

* * *

The LRA is a mystical group led by Joseph Kony, a recluse who claims he's a spirit medium. He reportedly wants a Ugandan government based on the Ten Commandments. In recent years, he's apparently been holed up across the border in southern Sudan - and hasn't issued any formal demands.

The LRA used to enjoy support among northern villagers, who complain of economic marginalization by Uganda's central government. But its brutality has turned villagers against it. Lately, the LRA has just been trying to survive, say analysts.

During village raids, LRA soldiers seek supplies and young recruits. They mutilate civilians who don't cooperate. Captured girls are forced to be sex slaves to LRA commanders. Sometimes boys are made to kill their parents before being turned into LRA soldiers. The UN estimates that 80 percent of LRA soldiers are children.

Independent estimates are that 100,000 people have died in the conflict, 20,000 children have been kidnapped, and 1.6 million people have fled their homes.

As one Western diplomat in Kampala puts it, the LRA represents "a different order of magnitude of evil" than most African rebels.

Bigombe has seen the LRA's brutality first-hand. In 1995, when she was a government minister, she was the first outsider on the scene of one of its bloodiest massacres. Rebels attacked a town and captured about 220 men, ***women***, and children. The villagers were marched several miles to a riverbank and all methodically executed.

Yet sometimes Bigombe sees glimmers of humanity, too. Once, one LRA commander grew pensive during a conversation. He wondered how his fellow northerners would perceive him after all the terrible things the LRA has done. He asked plaintively, "Can I ever go home again?"

* * *

"Do you want to pamper these killers?" shouted Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. It was 6 a.m., the time he often calls Bigombe. On this November morning he was seething.

"Hello, Mr. President," she answered in her gravelly voice.

The tirade continued. Mr. Museveni had declared a unilateral cease-fire to give rebels time to move toward peace. But his patience was wearing thin. Bigombe wanted an extension. He implied he was ready to end the cease-fire and loose the military on the rebels.

At first, Bigombe responded quietly, trying to soothe: "Do you want the killing to stop?"

But he continued, ending with: "Don't you ever ask me again for an extension" of the cease-fire.

So she just remained silent. Bigombe spends hours every day talking on her two cellphones - coaxing, encouraging, and scolding the Army commanders, President Museveni, and rebels. But sometimes one of her most powerful tools is not talking at all. In the ego-heavy circle of guerrilla commanders, Ugandan military officers, and heads of state, she says, silence works wonders.

After a few quiet moments, Museveni said, in a slightly repentant tone, "OK, Betty." Then he began listening. He eventually extended the cease-fire from its original seven days to 47.

This episode "shows the president is patient," says his spokesman, Onapito Ekomoloit, even though he's skeptical the rebels want peace. "They have never been serious," he says. "They have never been sincere."

Rebel commanders also call Bigombe from their satellite phones in fits of rage, she says. They demand, for instance, that Uganda's Army withdraw fully from the north.

Bigombe goes quiet. After a while, the commander often asks, "Are you still there?"

Eventually he barks, "I'll call you back in 30 minutes." When he does, she says with a knowing smile, he's "much more reasonable."

"When I go silent, they know I'm not pleased," she explains. It sends a simple message: "Do you want to blow it all up - or move toward peace?"

* * *

Several recent changes, experts say, have improved the prospects for peace.

* Donor nations are pressuring Museveni to end the war. After largely ignoring the conflict for years, outside powers now worry about the scale of the humanitarian crisis and its destabilizing effects on the region. The US is providing "nonmilitary" support to Uganda's Army. But that's not enough, argues John Prendergast of International Crisis Group in Washington: "The lack of a direct American role - when both sides of the equation care more about the Americans than any other government - tells you the peace process is going to have tremendous limitations" despite Bigombe's efforts. He urges President Bush to appoint a high-level envoy, as he did in Sudan, to support Bigombe.

* The tactics of Uganda's long-ineffective Army have improved, in part because of US help. Fresh battlefield victories make Army commanders, now in a stronger position, more supportive of talks. Yet there's an economic incentive to prolong the war. The Acholi Inn where Bigombe stays, for instance, is owned by a top army commander. The war helps keep the motel full of diplomats, aid workers, and others. Commanders "deliberately misinform the president" to extend the war, says one source who requested anonymity.

* The LRA has lost most support from its long-time patron, the government of neighboring Sudan, whose leaders had long accused Uganda of backing Sudanese rebels in their 21-year civil war. So tit for tat, Sudan supported the LRA. But when Sudan signed a peace deal with its rebels in January, it no longer needed the LRA.

Last December, amid these changes, Bigombe engineered the first face-to-face talks between the government and the LRA in a decade. Hopes were high for a full cease-fire and a start to formal peace talks. But at the last minute, the deal collapsed. Both sides blame each other, and the fighting continues today.

The setback revived concern that Bigombe isn't tough enough to pull off peace. "She needs to be able to say, 'No!' to the government," says Sheikh Musa Khalil, a local religious leader.

It may be a matter of outside support. "A mediator must have leverage," says Paul Omach, a professor at Uganda's Makerere University. As an independent peace seeker, he argues, Bigombe has none. Whether it's her or someone else, "You need somebody with authority and power," he says.

* * *

To ask for help or not?

In January 2005, the rebels wanted more food - more than Bigombe could buy herself. She could have turned to one of the donor-nation embassies, which are supporting her - paying her cellphone bills, lending her helicopters, and more. But there's a downside. "I could go to [one embassy] and get the food tomorrow," she says. "But if I did, the others would complain that I hadn't gone to them."

Despite a desire to help, she says, diplomats often complicate negotiations by jostling for the glory of supporting the peace effort. It's a common problem mediators face.

Sometimes diplomats "are like a bunch of jealous wives," Bigombe says in exasperation. Recalling her own divorce with a laugh, she adds, "I know - I was one."

In the end, she got the food from Museveni. "Everybody agreed it would send a better message if it came from the government," she says. It underlines her approach of putting Ugandans at the center of any solution here.

Yet she now faces the biggest outside intervention yet: The International Criminal Court in the Hague is expected to indict LRA leaders as early as this month.

The ICC's role in Uganda is controversial. Outsiders say Kony must be brought to justice, but locals worry indictments will make him feel cornered and less willing to end the war.

If the ICC indicts, it will end this phase of Bigombe's work, she says, and send her "back to the drawing board." But she won't give up: "I'll keep looking for opportunities for peace."

* * *

When the peace process hit a lull in May 2005, Bigombe made a five-day dash to the US. The last thing she wanted to do was see "Hotel Rwanda," a film about the 1994 genocide. But her daughter insisted. Pauline wanted her mom to see how the film's success in US theaters shows that Americans are capable of caring about Africa - about the kind of work Betty is doing. "It was important for her to see that people are paying attention," Pauline says.

So they went. Pauline watched her mom wince at several scenes. She'd been in Rwanda after the genocide - even to Hotel des Milles Collines, where the movie is set. People "can be so cruel to each other for no reason," Pauline remembers her mom saying, "and not even understand what they're doing." Such brutality "affects her deeply," Pauline says, and keeps her working hard for peace.

My Mom, the negotiator

Most of the time, Pauline Bigombe lives the normal life of a college junior studying history in Washington, D.C. But when people ask about her mom - where she lives and what she does - it gets a little weird.

"The joke with my friends is that no one knows what my mom does," she says. "I never quite know how to explain it." Her friends know Pauline sees her mom only a few times a year - and that Betty is usually off in Africa. "They just figure she's in the mafia," she laughs.

But there are unexpected moments when someone recognizes her mom's work.

At a Borders bookstore in D.C. recently, Pauline handed the clerk her mom's credit card. He glanced at the name, glared at her, and started yelling: "You're not Betty Bigombe."

He accused her of impersonation and credit-card theft. It turned out he's from Gulu, Uganda - the very town Betty is working in. Pauline finally convinced him that Betty is her mom. She promised to ask Betty to e-mail him. He beamed.

And there was the time she caught a ride with an Ethiopian cab driver. "Oh, you have problems there," he said of her native Uganda. But then he mentioned "the woman they're always talking about" who's making peace there.

"I'm pretty sure that's my mom," Pauline said quietly.

Astounded, he tried to refuse payment for the ride. She smiled, and paid anyway.

"I miss her a lot," Pauline says. "But I'm so proud of her."

Bigombe Biography

1954 Born in northern Uganda

1981-84 Became corporate secretary of the Uganda Mining Corporation

1986 Elected to parliament

1988 Appointed minister of state for pacification of northern Uganda

1993 Named Uganda's 'Woman of the Year' for her peace efforts

1997 Received master's degree from Harvard

1997 Appointed senior social scientist at postconflict department of the World Bank

Children: Pauline and Emmanuel

Load-Date: September 12, 2005

By George, now we're talking politics

The Sunday Times (London)

February 12, 2006

Section: FEATURES; Culture; Pg. 8

Length: 1746 words

Byline: Bryan Appleyard

Body

There's a new mood rising in post-9/11 film. And nobody's doing it better than Stephen Gaghan.

I've met some wired people in my time, but I've never met anybody quite like Stephen Gaghan after his third triple espresso. In his room at the Soho Hotel in London, he has made - and talked at some length about making - a perfect little pile of the sweets that came with the coffee; he has checked and rechecked his BlackBerry; he has bounced off the walls; run shrieking round the room with his hands in the air to demonstrate a typical crane shot of the Martin Scorsese school of film-making; crouched in a corner to demonstrate the way he prefers to make films; and talked rapidly, brilliantly, but not entirely connectedly, about drugs, politics and, when he was 14, getting trapped in the snow in Colorado with a girl he really fancied, but couldn't quite bring himself to kiss.

He has also mentioned a spectacular range of problems, from alcohol, crack cocaine and heroin to any other life-threatening,

abusive regime you care to mention. Er, I

tentatively suggest towards the end of our

conversation, do you think you have some problems with obsession, compulsion, addiction? He flings his hands in the air.

"It's all addiction, man. It's whack a mole, whack a mole - you pop it down here, it pops up over there. There is a

solution. It's not in the material world,

it's totally in the spiritual world. You have to commit at the level of a Buddhist monk

in a monastery, disconnected from everything, from expectation, from material goods. You can do it. It can be done. I've seen it, I've peeked into it, I don't want it. I'm too attached, I can't help it. You

suppress heroin, and up come ***women***; you suppress ***women***, and up come... watches.

You suppress watches, and up comes foreign policy. At least I'm honest about it."

Gaghan is 40 and, amazingly under the

circumstances, looks younger. He won an Oscar for the screenplay of Steven Soderbergh's Traffic, then, with a budget from Warner Bros that is said to have been

unlimited, he went off for almost two years

to research a film about the oil-money-

terrorism nexus. In Beirut, he met the ***Hezbollah*** leader Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, after first being kidnapped. He met countless other people he won't even talk about. And then, with a hugely fattened- up George Clooney, he spent 75 days in 220 locations shooting Syriana, a shocking, complex and brutally relentless film that may well become - deserves to become - one of the most influential of our time.

Tentatively, I begin by saying I liked it, but I didn't fully understand the plot.

"I'm ecstatic for your reaction. I want everybody to have your reaction. It's beyond design. I spent 3 years of my life on this film, and I want everyone to feel like that."

The film builds on the loose, objective, handheld style of Traffic. That, in itself,

represented a cinematic revolution, an attempted overthrow of the tautly built, highly subjective style of Scorsese and

Coppola. But Syriana goes one step further. It keeps the handheld style, but adds a sharp, dramatic subjectivity in every shot that doesn't just show you what's happening, but takes you right into the scene as a frequently unwilling participant.

"In Syriana, what I tried to do was disappear any distance between the audience and what's happening. I wanted a tonally whole world that was sealed unto itself and, once you enter in, nothing calls your attention to the fact that you're not just living in this world. I don't want any artificiality - or as little as possible."

Syriana is about America and the Middle East, oilmen, theocrats and politicians, and the truth is, nobody really understands this. Being confused, therefore, struggling to hold on to the plot, is part of the experience. Gaghan sank himself into this world, and now he wants us to sink into it, too. Why? Because this is real politics - not the politics of opinion, attitude or tribal loyalty, but politics as they now are, an indecipherable amalgam of God, blood, cash and technology, of beach houses in the Hamptons and palaces in the desert. Above all, it is the politics of a

corruption so deep, nothing else seems real.

"We're entering a period that will be known as the beginning of the end of the age of corruption. People in the future will look back and say, 'Wow, wasn't that amazing?' When 90 members of Congress have lobbyists as their fundraising chairmen... These people are like rats on f***ing meth, man. They'll gnaw through everything - gnnnnnnnnnn - they'll eat the cheese, then they'll eat the trap, then they'll gnaw through the copper wiring in the f***ing walls and the lights are going out. Corruption is an unstoppable force - let loose, it just gets bigger and bigger."

He didn't start with this view: he arrived at it in the process of making the film. "I set out to make the film without a pre-existing bias. I had no bias against oilmen, no bias against the way the world was run. I wasn't a fan of oligarchy, I'll admit that, and I don't like it when one person gets an unfair share, probably. But that's school-yard stuff. I didn't know enough about this world to have any judgment at all. To my credit, I do know what I don't know."

Gaghan's is the most radical cinematic response to the post-9/11 world, but there have been many others. Clooney himself has written and directed Good Night, and Good Luck, an austere black-and-white account of how Edward R Murrow and Fred Friendly, at CBS, defied and helped to stop Senator Joe McCarthy's anti communist witch-hunt in the 1950s. The film is an unstated commentary on Guantanamo Bay and the current corporate debauching of American television. Steven Spielberg has found a new maturity with Munich - don't listen to the critics, it's probably his best film - the story of the 1972 terrorist

slaughter of Israeli Olympic athletes and its aftermath. Countless other political movies, big and small, are now emerging, dripping with the anger and mystification of American liberals who find themselves, to use an image of Gaghan's, in a car being driven over a cliff by neocon madmen.

The very fact that Clooney is so deeply involved in this movement dramatises the depth to which these men think America has sunk. "Clooney was a perfect accident," Gaghan says. "I was thinking about the role of America in the world. We've worn the white hat in our minds since at least the first world war. Are we still wearing the white hat? Who's our archetypal hero? Is it Han Solo? See, that's how I think of the American experience - reducible to a movie archetype. Han Solo.

He's the guy. He's kind of grumpy, you kind of have a feeling he's really good, but he won't show you. But when push comes to shove, he'll strap on the six-shooters, he'll save the day. If you think you're wearing the white hat and you're getting contradictory evidence...

"Clooney is a movie star. He's the hero battling the wave. He's handsome and you invest in him in a certain way; he's an

idealised American, funny, charming. But if you take a movie star and you swathe him in fat, he's gone to seed, he's the hero gone to pot, he's exhausted, he's got a beard, he doesn't want to look you in the eye, he's screwed up his own family."

Fat Clooney is, in short, America gone wrong. The one way in which Gaghan does want you to step outside Syriana is to make you keep having to remind yourself that

this really is George Clooney and, boy, is he a mess.

What we have here, however, is not

simply the old story of heroic left-wing film-makers battling the corporate might

of Hollywood. That story is well told in

Ben Dickenson's recent book Hollywood's New Radicalism (IB Tauris). But all of

that doesn't go much beyond the hollow spectacle of overpaid actors mouthing conventional opinions, a spectacle brilliantly lampooned in Trey Parker's puppet film Team America. As the puppet Janeane

Garofalo is made to say in that movie: "As actors, it is our responsibility to read the newspapers, and then say what we read on television like it's our own opinion."

In reality, the politics - both of Hollywood and of the world - are much more complex than that. Dickenson, for example, catalogues the efforts of left-wing film-

makers in the 1980s to overthrow what was seen as a production line of right wing

movies such as Rocky and Die Hard. In fact, those films were also trashed by the right - notably Michael Medved - for subverting family values. Furthermore, look at the dominant traditions of Hollywood: Frank Capra's beautiful eulogies to the common man; John Ford's profound, humane and exquisitely expressed understanding of the true cost

of winning the West; and James Stewart,

the graceful, good man. These are not the products of a neocon corporate machine, they are the products of artists who made the money work. Whatever the bottom line says, it is to artists such as these that the studios will have to return. Warner Bros knew that when it signed what must have been a pretty sensational expenses bill from Gaghan.

In that context, what is now happening is an attempt by the US film industry - a much bigger and broader entity than anything encompassed by the word "Hollywood" - to feel its way into the reality of post-9/11 America. Spielberg, in Munich, has felt his own way to a kind of balance

of dismay: what can we do when every- thing we do seems to make things worse? Clooney has sought out an older heroism in the great days of American television.

Yet Gaghan has sunk deep, deep, not into

politics, but into the hot ground of human interactions from which politics emerges.

I am not entirely sure he has emerged unscathed, three triple espressos over the top at the Soho Hotel, and his record of addictive behaviour is not promising. But if he keeps it together, then Syriana is just the beginning of another heroic, cinematic attempt to see America in full.

"People hear that," he says of the corruption scandals now sweeping Washington, "and they say, 'Who are you f***ing

kidding?' Okay, so you get enough 'Who are you f***ing kidding?'s spread out across America in 200m households and the country starts to change. They lose faith in their leaders. They say, 'These people are bozos, they've been lying to me, they've bankrupted my country. They've bogged us down in a war we have no way to get out of and there's no plan...'"

First there is no plan, then there is politics. But at least there is also film.

Syriana opens on March 3; Good Night, and Good Luck on February 17 *bryan@bryanappleyard.com*

Load-Date: February 17, 2006

End of Document

Hamas Presses Fatah in Palestinian Vote, Surveys Say

The New York Times

January 26, 2006 Thursday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section A; Column 6; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1

Length: 1848 words

Byline: By STEVEN ERLANGER and GREG MYRE; Steven Erlanger reported from Ramallah for this article, and Greg Myre from Jerusalem.

Dateline: RAMALLAH, West Bank, Jan. 25

Body

Hamas, the militant Islamic party sworn to the destruction of Israel, won a large share of votes in the first Palestinian legislative elections in a decade, depriving the more secular Fatah party of its longstanding monopoly on power, surveys of voters leaving the polls indicated Wednesday.

While those surveys showed Fatah with a narrow lead, the vote marked the first entry of Hamas into representative Palestinian politics, a fundamental change, and its strong showing raised questions about the near-term future of any peace talks with Israel.

The acting prime minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, said his country could not accept a situation in which Hamas would be part of the Palestinian Authority if the group remained armed with unchanged goals.

Detailed results for the parliament's 132 seats are not expected until Thursday. Numerous Fatah candidates are competing against one another, which could allow Hamas candidates to win in some constituencies with a minority of the votes.

But judging from the polls, Fatah, though battered, should be able to form a working majority in coalition with other independent or secular parties like that of Salam Fayyad, the former finance minister who is considered a likely choice for prime minister. But Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, who will choose a prime minister, is thought to favor the inclusion of at least a few Hamas ministers to draw the party into the duties and responsibilities of government.

As voter surveys indicated that Fatah may have fended off the Hamas challenge, celebratory gunfire echoed through Ramallah's streets. The election itself went off remarkably smoothly, with little trouble at any of the more than 1,000 polling stations or in East Jerusalem, where Israel allowed Palestinians to cast "absentee ballots" in post offices. About 900 foreign observers, including former President Jimmy Carter and the former Swedish prime minister, Carl Bildt, monitored the voting. In a preliminary assessment, an official from a United States delegation called the voting "generally smooth, with sporadic violence and a robust turnout."

An exit poll from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, headed by Khalil Shikaki, showed Fatah winning 42 percent of the national vote and Hamas 35 percent, with a margin of sampling error of 2 percentage points.

Another such survey from Birzeit University indicated that Fatah would get 46 percent of the vote to Hamas's 39 percent. That would mean Fatah would be short of a majority of the legislature's 132 seats. The leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine could get several seats, Mr. Fayyad's list would get a couple, as would another independent one and the leftist Badil list. The director, Nader Said, cautioned that the poll should be treated as indicative, not final.

Palestinian voters, candidates and analysts said they expected Hamas to take some cabinet positions in service or welfare ministries, thus joining the government, but in jobs that would not necessarily require contact with Israel. But Hamas could stay out of the government and remain a parliamentary opposition, telling its voters that its job is to keep Fatah honest and to protect those who fight against Israeli occupation.

Ahmed Mubarak, a Hamas candidate in Ramallah and an Islamic jurist, said that ''I personally see no problem with being in the government if we were confident it will be for the sake of the people.''

The Palestinian Authority is committed, under the internationally backed peace plan known as the road map, to dismantling armed militias and ''terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.''

Inside the government or out, then, Hamas is considered likely to keep the Palestinian president, Mr. Abbas -- known as Abu Mazen -- and the new government from pursuing serious negotiations with Israel on any basis that Israel is likely to accept.

In a meeting with Sen. Joseph R. Biden, Democrat of Delaware, Israel's acting prime minister, Mr. Olmert, said: ''I will not negotiate with a government that does not meet its most basic obligations -- to fight terrorism. We are prepared to assist the Palestinians and Abu Mazen very much but they must meet their commitments.''

Israel, the United States and Europe all label Hamas a terrorist organization, and while American and European officials say they will not meet or deal with any Hamas officials, they will continue to have close relations with Mr. Abbas and a new Palestinian prime minister, much as they do in Lebanon, where ***Hezbollah***, a radical Islamic party, has cabinet representation.

Mr. Abbas pressed for these elections against considerable opposition from inside Fatah, convinced that the only way to tame Hamas and turn it from an armed militia to a political party was through representative democracy. A normally stiff and shy man, Mr. Abbas looked positively happy on Wednesday morning as he voted with his wife and then posed for the television cameras.

''We are so happy with this election festival,'' he said. Palestinians were festive, too, coming out in large numbers to vote in an election they understood to be a vital moment for their own history. Turnout was estimated by officials at nearly 78 percent of the 1.3 million eligible voters.

Mr. Abbas also had words of calm for Israel. ''The Israelis should have no reason to be fearful but rather pleased as we are building a democracy which can serve as a base for peace between us,'' he said. ''I am always ready for negotiations with the Israelis although they must want them on their side.''

Israel is engaged in its own election campaign and with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon still comatose after a massive stroke, it is not likely any time soon to talk to any government containing Hamas representatives. The Hamas showing and what should now be done will be a major issue in the Israeli campaign, which ends March 28.

Although Mr. Abbas has promised Washington that he will move to disarm Hamas after these elections, there is considerable skepticism that he will be able to do so.

Voting himself on Wednesday, the head of Hamas's candidate list, Ismail Haniya, said: "The Americans and the Europeans say to Hamas: either you have weapons or you enter the legislative council. We say weapons and the legislative council. There is no contradiction between the two."

The comments point up the awkwardness of any Fatah-Hamas coalition. Fatah, a secular, nationalist movement, wants to restart negotiations with Israel based on the road map, the dormant peace plan that was introduced in 2003, and Mr. Abbas has often suggested parallel secret talks with Israel on a final agreement.

Hamas has waged a suicide bombing campaign and always rejected negotiations with Israel. During the campaign, some Hamas leaders toned down their rhetoric, and the group has largely abided by a truce announced early last year, and is expected to continue to do so, focusing on an internal agenda and keeping its promise to voters of "change and reform." Still, Hamas leaders say the group will not lay down its weapons.

The polling stations here in Ramallah were vivid with the yellow flags of Fatah and the green of Hamas and the colorful posters of individual candidates and others of the 11 party lists running, as candidates and party workers handed out election material and lobbied voters up until the entrance of the stations.

Voters were anxious but talkative, pleased with the process of democracy but worried about the results.

Mai Alami, a mother of three girls and one boy, said the election was vital and would bring some needed "fresh faces" to a stagnant politics in the wake of the death of Yasir Arafat more than a year ago. "But we're afraid of the Islamic party," she said, "not because we are against them, but because of their prejudice and their policies."

Fatah was being punished by voters for the misrule and corruption of the last 12 years, Ms. Alami said outside the busy polling station at the elegant stone Friends Boys School.

Her husband, Ali Khashen, a constitutional lawyer, said the election also gave legitimacy to independent candidates like Mr. Fayyad and Mustafa Barghouti. "But now with Hamas we may have more obstacles for the peace process just as Israel was becoming more receptive," he said. "We all formed our agenda around Fatah, and now we need a new strategy."

In East Jerusalem, Fida Abdellatif, an architect, said: "This election is different because there is a full spectrum of parties, which wasn't the case before. We hope this will produce a strong leadership that everyone can support."

Mr. Abbas hopes so, too. He met on Wednesday with Senator Biden, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and suggested that he was considering ways to press Hamas to disarm, the senator said. "He said they'd have to choose in the end, that they can't be part of a government and have a militia," Senator Biden said. Mr. Abbas also asked the United States not to react too quickly to the Hamas vote and to continue to help him improve, reform and equip the Palestinian security services.

But the election also marked a fundamental change in Palestinian politics and a political earthquake rare in Arab countries.

"Fatah has decided to share power, that's the point," said Nader Said of Birzeit University here. "It's not easy for them, but in no Arab country I can think of has any ruling party wittingly shared power in a democratic process."

Mr. Said says that the transition will be difficult, and Fatah's own divisions will resurface. "But things will never be the same," he said. "Hamas has accepted to be a part of the political game, and it will never be able to be as militant or hard-line as it used to be, no matter its rhetoric."

Fatah, though its campaign finally came to life in the last 10 days, suffered from "tremendous disappointment in Fatah and the Palestinian Authority and Abu Mazen," said the pollster Khalil Shikaki. "There was anger about corruption, chaos, lack of law and order and a lot of disillusionment." Despite Hamas's participation and support, he said, the election "was not really about the peace process -- in fact three-quarters of Palestinians support the peace process and negotiations" and are more moderate on final-status issues like Jerusalem and refugees than ever before.

"Fatah will get more votes than Hamas today," Mr. Shikaki said. "But this is the last opportunity Fatah will have to get its act together." And if Mr. Abbas does not choose a candidate for prime minister that can get the support of Fatah's younger generation, Mr. Shikaki said, "you could see Fatah split."

Mr. Shikaki said he believed that Hamas wanted to join the cabinet in some role, and that Mr. Abbas also wanted it to do so, but would not predicate participation on disarmament.

"Abu Mazen wants to disarm Hamas, but through consensus, not confrontation," he said. "Hamas won't agree to disarm as a precondition, but could agree to hand over weapons voluntarily."

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: At one polling place in Gaza City, Hamas, No. 6 on the board, vied yesterday for a lead as an electoral worker tallied a vote for the Fatah party. (Photo by Emilio Morenatti/Associated Press)(pg. A1)

Palestinian ***women*** and men waited in separate lines to vote in legislative elections yesterday at a polling station in Gaza City. Hamas, the militant group sworn to Israel's destruction, won a large number of votes. (Photo by Patrick Baz/Agence France-Presse -- Getty Images)

Members of Fatah watched vote counting in a Ramallah refugee camp. (Photo by Rina Castelnuovo for The New York Times)(pg. A12)

Load-Date: January 26, 2006

No Headline In Original

The Advertiser (Australia)

July 24, 2006 Monday

State Edition

Section: OPINION; Pg. 17

Length: 701 words

Body

QUESTION:

The Israeli offensive against Lebanon shows no sign of letting up. What are your views?

Scar on humanity

THE U.S. and Israel are trying to tell the rest of the world that the current Mid East crises are the results of the kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers.

The Middle East conflict began in 1948 and remains unresolved to date.

The real causes of the conflict are the continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian and Lebanese lands, daily humiliation of the entire Palestinian population, targeted killings including civilians, demolition of Palestinian homes and the deprivation of the Palestinians from their basic human rights. There are 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails including ***women*** and children - most have been imprisoned for more than 20 years.

Israel is continuing to build a new Berlin Wall around the Palestinian populated areas and has rejected all United Nations resolutions while demanding from the rest of the Arab world to comply with UN demands.

Peace in the Middle East will remain an illusion unless the rights of the Palestinian people are recognised and delivered. Until such time, the suffering of the Palestinians will remain a scar on humanity.

* KHALDEH ZUYUD,

Windsor Gardens.

Oil's heavy toll

A DISTURBING aspect of the Lebanese crisis is the role of Australian motorists in the funding of ***Hezbollah*** terrorists by Iranian authorities.

Some of the money we pay at the pump is going to trickle all the way back to Iran, a major oil supplier.

A percentage of our motoring dollar would therefore be going towards producing the Iranian missiles that are now raining down on Israeli civilians.

No Headline In Original

Lebanese civilians, the families and friends of Australian citizens, and Australian citizens on holiday and business in Lebanon, are being bombarded by Israeli firepower, in response to attacks partly funded by an Australian society addicted to a costly Iranian commodity. If this isn't a spur to find alternatives to oil, then I don't know what is.

* ALBERT GOODRIDGE,

Murray Bridge.

Don't excuse history

WITH regard to your editorial (The Advertiser, 21/7/06), what a load of rubbish. The Israelis were terrorists before World War II and took the land in 1948. ***Hezbollah*** and their supporters are only trying to take back what was taken from them. Read your history books before you try and make excuses for the Israeli terrorists.

I do not support either side, I'm a third generation Australian with six children and I am well informed. I deplore our Government's illegal actions in Iraq.

* ROBERT LOW,

Happy Valley.

Give peace a chance

WE feel terrible for the Australians stranded in Beirut and the perilous time ahead for them. We also despair for those innocent civilians who have nowhere to go. Implicit in the Government pleading with other governments to cease fire until we get our people out, is the reality that, with no Australians to worry about, the subsequent death and destruction is none of our business. Peace and non-violent conflict resolution is everyone's business.

* SUE GILBEY,

for the Australian Peace Committee (SA branch),

Adelaide.

More detail needed

SO, the state of Israel was "democratically formed" in 1948 (The Advertiser editorial, 21/7/06). As my references to Middle Eastern affairs of this period provide no detail of such an event, would you please provide some background for your readers. Of particular interest would be the composition of the electorate involved. Who were the voters? How long had they lived in Palestine to qualify? What was the final count in this remarkable display of "democracy"?

* TED SCOTT,

Urrbrae.

Too many deaths

THE Palestinian death toll over the 58 years of Israeli occupation far exceeds that of the Israeli losses. With their superior firepower, Israel has destroyed Palestinian homes, seized their land, and killed many thousands. Palestinian children, growing up under the tyranny of death and destruction, are now part of Hamas and ***Hezbollah*** in retaliation and resistance.

Injustice will continue on all sides, until we are ready to acknowledge this tragedy by pressuring Israel to end the Palestinian occupation. Israel must be strongly condemned for extending its horrendous aggression into Lebanon.

* JOYCE SCOTT.

Urrbrae.

Load-Date: July 23, 2006

End of Document

LETTERS

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

January 28, 2006 Saturday

All-round Country Edition

Section: FEATURES; Letters; Pg. 16

Length: 2184 words

Body

MATP

Hamas vote proves democracy has undesired results

MOST TALKED ABOUT

PALESTINIAN POLL

I AM amused by the reaction to the results of the fairly run democratic elections in Palestine (''Hamas win threat to peace'', 27/1). I gather the result is not to the US's liking. Time to relive Iran 1953 when the US overthrew the democratically elected Mossadegh government and put the Shah in power as a compliant dictator. This led directly to the ayatollahs and the creation of a fundamental Islamic state that is the enemy of the US Government. To the Palestinians' credit, they did not succumb to all the interference and pressure put on this election by the US and Israel and voted freely, as is their right. If the US chooses to interfere with the results then they will probably create another fundamentalist Islamic state that is the sworn enemy of the US, just as Iraq will become. Sometimes democracy produces unpleasant results.

Glenn Lee

Maylands, WA

WHILE Israeli acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declares he will continue Ariel Sharon's policy of further withdrawals and endeavours for disengaging from the Palestinians -- and the majority of Israelis rejecting right-wing Benjamin Netanyahu -- the Palestinian majority have backed extremist radical militant group Hamas to lead them. No doubt we will eventually see, with huge fanfare, Hamas leadership officially stating they will accept the existence of the Israeli state and give up armed attacks on Israeli civilians while other militant groups such as Islamic Jihad and ***Hezbollah*** continue their attacks. Hamas leadership will publicly condemn these acts of terrorism and there will be a good cop/bad cop policy, with the international community urging Israel to continue making further concessions. Israel should make it clear to any future Palestinian government that it will only continue negotiating peace with a zero tolerance policy on terrorism.

Michael Burd

Toorak, Vic

LETTERS

WITH the election of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority has evolved from Fatah's terrorist-harbouring policies to become a fully-fledged terrorist state. This is less of a change than people pretend. The real difference between Fatah and Hamas is that Hamas is more honest, both in its financial dealings and about its goal of destroying the non-Arab state next door.

Judith Rona

Bondi, NSW

DO the Palestinians really expect productive negotiations with Israel by electing Hamas to power? Hamas has sworn to the destruction of Israel. It is part of the ongoing Palestinian refusal to accept reality: their refusal to accept the UN decision of 1948 to create Israel and after 1967 with their election of Yasser Arafat. Now they give power to a terrorist group detested in the Western world while expecting the same nations to keep providing them with the aid needed for reconstruction after the barren Arafat years. The Palestinians have proved to be their own worst enemies.

Norman Rich

Newport, NSW

WITH regard to Hamas, I completely agree with Prime Minister John Howard's statement that we don't support a people who indulge in suicide bombing. We support airplanes flying at great height dropping massive tonnage of bombs.

Ian Pollock

Maleny, Qld

IT was very amusing to read your headline ("Powerful Hamas vote stuns Israelis", 27/1). I have recently returned from Israel and the opinion of the average Israeli, whether it be taxi drivers, shopkeepers or lawyers, was that Hamas would win the election. It was the opinion of various military personnel that Hamas would win. The only point of disagreement being by how much. It would appear that, as usual, politicians are out of touch with reality therefore it was really only the politicians who were surprised.

Sheron Segman

Caulfield, Vic

THE Prime Minister's call for a democratically elected body, Hamas, to renounce violence, seems rather hypocritical. I know he was just parroting the US stance, but someone should have ensured he "had received advice" as to who was involved in using unprovoked violence against Iraq.

A. O'Connell

Allambie, NSW

WHAT is a president left to do when he gives democracy to the Palestinians and they get it wrong? Call them terrorists, get some slam dunk evidence and invade?

Jack Bedson

Armidale, NSW

NOW that they've been elected, will Hamas pursue a non-violent resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute? Let's examine what their charter says. "There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors." Israel had a fringe minority party called Kach that espoused a violent stance towards the Palestinians. It was outlawed in 1994. The

Palestinians prefer to vote in their violent ideologues. Perhaps we shouldn't be talking about extremists on both sides. Palestinian militancy occupies centre stage.

Mark Lewkovitz

Bondi Beach, NSW

PM's speech proves history still has its lessons

DURING the past 30 years, the teaching of history in Australia has been transformed from rote-learning text book information -- which students were expected to recall in examinations -- to an emphasis on inquiry-based learning. An increasing emphasis on the teaching of Australian and Asian history has accompanied this shift in pedagogy. This has provided a corrective sense of balance, to use the Prime Minister's term, to the dominant narrative empire histories that most Australians used to learn. Sadly, these advances have been misrepresented in John Howard's speech as succumbing to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record or achievement is questioned or repudiated. Doesn't the Prime Minister understand that some of the great advances in the history of humankind have been made because people have questioned and challenged accepted practices? Within the Enlightenment traditions that the PM valorises, everyday taken-for-granted practices were based on assumptions that some human beings could be owned by others, and that ***women*** were inferior to men. These continued until challenged by abolitionists who fought against the practice of slavery and suffragettes who struggled for ***women*** to own property and vote. Howard needs to sit in a history classroom. There he would observe young Australians not only engaged in rigorous intellectual work but also learning more about the processes of causation, continuity and change that have shaped their nation and world. He would see students posing questions, weighing up evidence, making decisions and debating points of view. Then he might realise why the skills of historical inquiry are such valuable life skills. If he spent time in the classroom, Howard might also note the levels of empathy and understanding students develop for people in other places and times and their genuine joy of learning about the past. In so many classrooms history teaching and learning are alive and well. The Prime Ministers comments fly in the face of this laudable reality.

Deborah Henderson

School of Cultural and Language Studies

Kelvin Grove Campus, QUT

THE renewed discourse on the merits of postmodernist school curriculum is welcome. As a recent senior school graduate, I praise the Prime Minister's criticism of this "fragmented stew of themes and issues". English and history students are, on the surface, encouraged to deconstruct all issues in order to gain an objective understanding of the text. We are told to challenge every viewpoint and ignore the dominant messages forced upon us by popular literature and culture. Students have become victims of ideologically driven education departments. Those who defend this system of teaching proclaim that students are learning to challenge accepted versions of the truth. But in the classroom the reality is that the independent ideas of students are encouraged only when they conform to the intrinsically biased views exposed by the postmodern humanities curriculum.

Brock William

Wongawallan, Qld

IT appears that our Prime Minister has taken offence to how history is taught in schools, referring to it as a fragmented stew, hijacked by a postmodernist culture of questioning and repudiation. That history has suffered as a discipline within Australian schools, goes without saying. However, I must have missed something. I was under the impression that one of the primary aims of studying history was to learn how to question the past in order to understand the present. That the agents of history, including the historians, have seen the world through glasses of various shades and tints. At what stage did history become a cabbage patch that sprouts a single, self-evident narrative every year to be served on the plate, whole and organic?

LETTERS

Travis Gottschutzke

Hyde Park, SA

Promiscuity fears misguided

IT is disappointing to read that the development of a world-first vaccine to prevent human papilloma virus has raised the furphy of teenage sexual promiscuity (''Vaccine sparks promiscuity fears'', 27/1). This achievement will save the lives of many ***women*** worldwide and our pride in the development of the vaccine by professor Ian Frazer should not be compromised by hypothetical and unfounded comments by people like Senator Barnaby Joyce. Research has shown that many teenagers are sexually active and there has been an increase in the rates of sexually transmitted infections among this population. Delivery of this vaccine must occur before sexual activity begins and therefore at a relatively young age. We have just completed the first study to examine attitudes to the vaccine among a representative sample of more than 1000 ***women***. There was a strong relationship between approval of vaccination in general and vaccination against HPV. In other words, ***women*** recognised that this vaccine was about disease prevention rather than sex. A majority (79 per cent) were in favour of vaccinating their children against cervical cancer. Senator Joyce may be interested to know that 91 per cent of these ***women*** disagreed with the statement that vaccinating young people against HPV would encourage them to become sexually active. It would be shameful if ideologically driven arguments about young people's sexuality got in the way of the community's adoption of life-saving prevention measures. As always, discussions about sex generate considerable heat. Regarding the sexual health of our young people, we need to rely on evidence not rhetoric.

Professor Suzanne Garland

Royal Children's Hospital

Professor Marian Pitts

La Trobe University

Professor Doreen Rosenthal

University of Melbourne

SENATOR Joyce's suggestion that any vaccine for HPV would be an invitation to teenage promiscuity is absurd. HPV is only one of a number of sexually transmitted infections that can result from unsafe sexual activity. Concerns over premature sexual activity should be met with open and active parental education of their children about sexual health and responsibility. Quite simply, the ''social implications'' of this vaccine would be a reduction in the number of ***women*** affected by cervical cancer.

Mathew Kunkel

Dutton Park, Qld

Muzak to our ears

NORMAN Lebrecht is clearly playing classical shock jock in his glib summing up of Mozart's ''mediocre'' life. I wonder if anyone will remember Lebrecht 25 years after his death, let alone 250.

Nick Scott

Woodend, Vic

FIRST BYTE

I'M concerned. If Australian soccer now demands to be called football, will this eventually lead to soccer players having the exclusive right to be called footballers.

LETTERS

J. Brown

Mountain View, California

DOES John Byrne (Letters, 27/1) realise that, thanks to the IR reforms, next year he may get his wish and may have to go to work.

John Auger

Freshwater, Qld

IF I burnt an Australian flag tea towel, am I making a political statement or am I just trying to get out of the washing up?

John Paul Janke

Curtin, WA

I WONDER if Tom Holden (First byte, 27/1) has considered the possibility that had the ABC not reported the Aboriginal cleansing ceremony in Sydney's Hyde Park on Australia Day, no other media broadcast organisation would have?

Garry Wong

Wanniassa, ACT

DID Lloyd Swanton (Letters, 27/1) count the state of Hawaii? It has no difficulty sporting the British flag within its own.

Barry Wells

Clifton Beach, Qld

THE current politicians in the National Party appear to be suffering from a crisis of uncertainty. They're not quite sure whether they are pro-Liberal or pro-Australian.

Randolph Magri-Overend

Point Clare, NSW

letters@theaustralian.com.au

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GPO Box 4162, Sydney, NSW, 2001Fax: 02 9288 3077

E-mail: *letters@theaustralian.com.au* (no attachments)

Emails and letters should bear a full postal address and day and night telephone numbers.

Letters to the Editor of The Australian are submitted on the condition that Nationwide News Pty Ltd as publisher of The Australian may edit and has the right to, and license third parties to, reproduce in electronic form and communicate these letters.

Prints of Leak cartoons

For information on buying prints of any

LETTERS

Bill Leak cartoon go to

leakcartoons@theaustralian.com.au

Prints of Nicholson cartoons

To buy a print of a Nicholson cartoon go to *http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/print*

Load-Date: January 31, 2006

End of Document

No Headline In Original

Canberra Times (Australia)

July 19, 2006 Wednesday

Final Edition

Section: A; Pg. 10

Length: 1130 words

Byline: The Canberra Times

Body

Enough of blood We "show restraint", it seems, by killing 10 children, not 100. We "minimise civilian casualties" by killing 100 children, not 1000. We "make a disproportionate response" by bombing the generators that power the humidicribs that keep scores of infants breathing, and the bridges over which the ambulances bring pregnant ***women*** to hospital.

We don't call it "mass murder", "massacre", "serial killing" or "the slaughter of the innocents" though this is what Israel is up to, surely, in the Gaza and Lebanon.

For approving the killing of 142 innocent people, Saddam Hussein and others will hang. Ehud Olmert's total of innocent dead has this last week passed 170. When it reaches 200 will he, and Peres and Peretz hang? Or would that be "disproportionate"?

A crime as large as the Beslan massacre, or the Bali bombing, and three times as large as the London underground bombings, is being applauded by George W. Bush's UN bully John Bolton and his roving blitherer Condoleezza Rice, and a billion Muslims, including those who were lately "responded" into chunks of meat, are taking note of their arrogant stupidity.

"Enough of blood, enough," Yitzak Rabin roared 10 years ago. The kidnappings, murders, torture cells, big lies and biblical bombast of his successors shame his people. A just UN would try them in The Hague.

How many hundred dead children is "disproportionate response"? How many dead children a war crime? And who gets the naming rights?

We should think of these things.

Bob Ellis, Palm Beach, NSW Henk Verhoeven (Letters, July 18) defends Israel's recent military action by implying that it is not intended to harm civilians.

However, what matters is not intentions but the suffering inevitably being caused.

The reported death toll among Palestinians and Lebanese is already over 250, with at least a third being non-militants. This compares with aggregate Israeli deaths of about 25.

No Headline In Original

The Israeli Government's disproportionate actions have caused more hardship in three weeks than terrorist attacks have produced in Israel over a much longer period.

The destruction of transport links, power supplies, fuel deposits, offices and homes has impacted on numerous ordinary citizens. The mass exodus from Beirut and other areas illustrates the fear and distress being experienced by the regular population.

Brent Howard, Rydalmere, NSW Paul Rodgers (Opinion, July 15) asks why Israel acts as a "law" unto itself.

As a former diplomat to that country, I thought he would have known that after serving there, the Jewish State has been dealing with Arab terrorism from its inception.

Israel didn't ask ***Hezbollah***, or even Hamas (or should we say a collective of Iran/Syria) to kidnap any of its soldiers, but as always it is seen as the aggressor. It is amazing how the world sees Israel when all it is doing is defending its people.

Jonathan Swimmer, Queens Park If Israel's occupation is the root cause of the current Middle East violence, as Kathryn Kelly argues (Letters, July 17), why is it that the attacks from Gaza and Lebanon happened after Israel ended its occupation of these areas?

The violence isn't because Hamas, ***Hezbollah*** and their allies object to Israel's "occupation"; they object to Israel's existence in any shape.

Kathryn may be interested in the following: for the millions of Christian Lebanese, driven out of our homeland, "Thank you Israel," is the sentiment echoing from around the world.

The Lebanese Foundation for Peace, an international group of Lebanese Christians, made the following statement in a press release to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert concerning the latest Israeli attacks against ***Hezbollah***: "We urge you to hit them hard and destroy their terror infrastructure.

"It is not [only] Israel who is fed up with this situation, but the majority of the silent Lebanese in Lebanon who are fed up with ***Hezbollah*** and are powerless to do anything out of fear of terror retaliation.

"On behalf of thousands of Lebanese, we ask you to open the doors of Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport to thousands of volunteers in the Diaspora willing to bear arms and liberate their homeland from [Islamic] fundamentalism.

"We ask you for support, facilitation and logistics in order to win this struggle and achieve together the same objectives: Peace and Security for Lebanon and Israel and our future generations to come."

Bill Arnold, Chifley Artists need help The resignation of Sydney Dance Company directors Graeme Murphy and Janet Vernon reflects a peculiar mix of success and failure - while Australia has produced a number of incredibly exciting and innovative dance creators, the art form itself remains severely under-resourced.

The departure of Murphy and Vernon simply underlines the unsustainable nature of trying to survive as a creative artist in this country.

As smaller dance companies disappear and independent choreographers struggle to make a living, there has still been no action taken by the Federal Government to address the recommendations in the 2004 report Resourcing Dance: an analysis of the subsidised Australian dance sector.

Unsustainable funding models lead to the inevitable - a lack of capacity to support development, and burnout and frustration in some of our most talented creators, many of whom live well below the poverty line.

Australia can ill afford to lose the immense contribution these artists make to our lives, to our economy and to our identity.

No Headline In Original

Australian dance - at all levels of creation and performance - will never be able to sustain the talents of its artists unless there is the political will to address these issues, and soon. Julie Dyson, national executive officer, Australian Dance Council - Ausdance Inc, Braddon Playing monopoly In Jack Kershaw's expected brave new world he laments the prospect of Terry Snow and Bob Winnel building extravagant housing developments in future (Letters, July 18).

Of course there's only one reason Terry, Bob and the Queanbeyan Council are so interested in suburban development now. It is because the Stanhope Government has for years been trying to maintain its monopoly over land availability in the ACT, in order to maximise its land sale prices.

By expensively trickling land onto the ACT market, it got the high prices but produced those tiny streets and blocks in Gungahlin and a Canberra- wide housing boom that saw prices rise like Sydney waterfront.

So now parts of Gungahlin are destined to become ghettos and our kids have no chance of affording housing (or even rent, when it catches up fully) for the foreseeable future.

Oh, and Terry and Bob and the Queanbeyan Council will keep trying to make a quid undermining the ACT land monopolist. In response Stanhope is turning regional water powers into the stick to bash Queanbeyan into submission.

Hugh Thomas, Reid

Load-Date: October 11, 2011

The battle for Baghdad, again; Bush, al-Maliki to send troops; 'control Baghdad, control Iraq'

USA TODAY

July 26, 2006 Wednesday

FINAL EDITION

Section: NEWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 2143 words

Byline: Rick Jervis and David Jackson

Body

BAGHDAD -- The battle for Iraq's future has come down to this: Can the country's U.S.-supported government control escalating violence in the streets of its capital?

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met with President Bush on Tuesday at the White House, where they announced a plan to dispatch more U.S. and Iraqi troops to Baghdad to try to salvage a faltering security plan for Iraq's war-ravaged capital.

The leaders said an unspecified number of troops would be redeployed to respond to a surge in violence that has killed more than 100 civilians a day since Bush's surprise visit to Baghdad six weeks ago, when al-Maliki announced a security crackdown in Baghdad.

About 9,000 of the 125,000 U.S. troops in Iraq are in Baghdad, a city of about 6.5 million where centuries-old tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims have exploded into increasingly difficult-to-control violence. The chaos is being fueled by militias and foreign Arab fighters such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Sunni extremist group trying to undermine U.S.-led efforts to establish a democracy in that nation. There are about 43,000 Iraqi soldiers and police in Baghdad.

Bush said additional U.S. troops will be sent to Baghdad from elsewhere in Iraq and will help train Iraqi security forces to eventually take over the job of protecting the capital. The plan includes placing more U.S. military police with Iraqi forces and giving the Iraqi forces more mobility and firepower. The focus will be on securing individual neighborhoods.

National security adviser Stephen Hadley said military officials are still working out a "repositioning" of forces and are deciding which ones to send to Baghdad.

"Our strategy is to remain on the offense, including in Baghdad," Bush said during a White House news conference with al-Maliki. "We still face challenges in Baghdad, yet we see progress elsewhere in Iraq."

Al-Maliki added that Iraq's new government is "determined to defeat terrorism, and the security plan for Baghdad has entered the second phase."

The increasing urgency of the situation in Baghdad reflects how, more than three years after U.S.-led forces steamrolled into the city and toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, the battle for Iraq's largest and most important city is widely viewed as a tipping point for the nation's future.

Bush's legacy has much riding on the outcome in Iraq. In a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll taken last weekend, just 35% of Americans said they approve of Bush's handling of the war in Iraq, down slightly from last month.

"The president has told people that Iraq is where he will make his mark on history," says Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I don't see a way to be successful in Iraq unless he's successful in Baghdad."

While much of the world's attention has focused lately on Lebanon, where Israeli troops and ***Hezbollah*** guerrillas are fighting, insurgents in Iraq have turned up the heat in Baghdad with a wave of violent, deadly assaults. Many of the insurgents apparently hope to demonstrate that Iraq's government is not able to control its capital and therefore the nation.

"Clearly, Baghdad is the center that everybody is fighting for," says Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, the top U.S. military spokesman in Iraq. "We will do whatever it takes to bring security to Baghdad."

Iraq's government believes Baghdad is the key to bringing security to the rest of the country.

"If you control Baghdad, you control Iraq," says Mishan al-Alusi, an independent Sunni lawmaker and secretary of the Parliament's foreign relations committee. "There's no other way around it."

Caldwell adds that "if Prime Minister Maliki succeeds in Baghdad, he'll be able to succeed in Iraq."

Despite patrols, violence rises

Soon after taking office in April, al-Maliki announced plans to send up to 75,000 Iraqi and U.S. troops into the streets of Baghdad to try to restore order. Iraqi forces, backed by U.S. troops, set up checkpoints and patrolled the streets.

The result: Violence increased. From February through May this year, Baghdad province, made up mostly of the capital city, averaged more attacks per day -- 29 -- than any other province. That includes the volatile Anbar province in western Iraq, which contains the restive cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, according to the Defense Department's quarterly report to Congress in May.

By mid-July, there was an average of 34 attacks each day against U.S. and Iraqi forces in Baghdad, the U.S. Defense Department has reported.

The Iraqi capital has long been a diverse city with large numbers of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. Some neighborhoods are mixed, and marriage between Sunni and Shiite Muslims is not uncommon.

As the country has been broken apart by war, insurgents have tried to exploit religious tensions. Death squads and Shiite militias have infiltrated heavily Shiite police and army units, which already were having difficulty gaining trust in heavily Sunni areas. As a result, violence between Sunnis and Shiites in the streets has increased.

Many of the death squads are believed to be associated with armed Sunni or Shiite groups, targeting each other as part of a struggle for power between the country's two major religious communities.

The U.S. military announced Tuesday that Iraqi soldiers had captured six insurgents involved in death squad activities.

To try to curb the violence, Iraqi officials will have to continue battling Sunni extremists, go after Shiite gunmen prowling the city and control Shiite militias, says Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"We are at a point where it's very unclear if what we're going to get is real political progress and movement toward security or steady drift toward civil war," he says.

Sectarian violence is the most dangerous threat facing Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, has said. Carefully staged attacks on mosques and other targets have helped to provoke a wave of violence between religious factions that sometimes has turned neighbors against each other and led to revenge killings.

A United Nations study released this month said the number of Iraqi civilians killed climbed from 1,778 in January to 2,669 in May and 3,149 in June.

"The overwhelming majority of casualties were reported in Baghdad," said the report, which was based on Iraqi Health Ministry statistics.

Baghdad now 'center of gravity'

Iraq's insurgency started gathering momentum several months after Saddam's regime fell in April 2003. At various times, coalition and Iraqi forces have tried to subdue outbreaks of violence in Baghdad, Mosul to the north, Fallujah to the west, and Basra in southern Iraq.

This spring, as Iraqi leaders wrangled over forming a government, Sunni extremist groups focused their strategy on Baghdad. Smuggling routes once used to get insurgents across the Syrian border to safe houses in Fallujah or Tal Afar began delivering them straight to Baghdad, Caldwell says.

Insurgents established an operations base south of Baghdad in the so-called Triangle of Death, where they began launching attacks on the capital.

Youssifiyah, a farming community on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River, was a hub of insurgent activity. This year, two U.S. Apache attack helicopters were shot down during clashes near there.

The violence in Youssifiyah came to a climax in June, when two U.S. soldiers were ambushed while manning a checkpoint, then were kidnapped and killed. The incident brought a tough response from the 4th Infantry Division, which moved in force into the area.

In prior raids around Youssifiyah, U.S. troops recovered documents and memos the U.S. military said were from al-Qaeda in Iraq. The documents indicate how important al-Qaeda considers Baghdad.

The memos, released by the Pentagon in May, chided the group's commanders in Baghdad for not having a long-term strategy and lacking organization. They also promised to focus more resources and energy on the Iraqi capital with the goal of starting a civil war between Sunni and Shiite Arabs.

"The operation at this stage is to incite the people against the Shias (Shiites), in view of the fact that the sectarian war has benefits for us," one of the memos reads. The memo recommends using car bombs.

bombmaking workshops, computers full of insurgent documents and weapons caches.

"All those groups had their attentions focused on Baghdad," Caldwell says. The area "was far more dense with foreign fighters down there operating and working than we perhaps realized."

Brig. Gen. David Halverson, a deputy commander of U.S. troops in Baghdad, says the city has become "the center of gravity" in the war. Al-Qaeda "wants to foment the insurgency in Baghdad. They're attempting to discredit the government's ability to govern and secure the people."

There are signs that insurgent efforts to touch off civil war are working. The bombing of a holy Shiite shrine in Samarra on Feb. 22 led to reprisal killings across Baghdad that left hundreds dead.

More recently, a bombing near a small Shiite mosque in the Jihad neighborhood of southwest Baghdad on July 8 triggered another cycle of violence. The next day, Shiite gunmen there pulled Sunni motorists from cars and homes and killed them on the spot.

In one of the deadliest incidents, masked men with machine guns mounted on pickups opened fire July 17 on a busy Shiite market in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad, killing more than 40.

'We don't know who's who'

Gen. Haider Abdel Rassum al-Badri, an Iraqi special forces commander in western Baghdad, was largely responsible for pacifying northwestern Baghdad, including Haifa Street, the site of battles between mostly Sunni insurgents and U.S. forces in 2004. His tactics included working with tribal leaders and cracking down on lawbreakers.

Dealing with religious-based violence between Iraqis is more difficult, al-Badri says.

Lately, he says, the enemy has been coming from all ethnic and religious sides, making it difficult to distinguish insurgents from civilians.

Rogue militias also are a growing problem, he says.

Sunni extremists recently kidnapped an Iraqi translator who worked on al-Badri's base in northwestern Baghdad. A video of her beheading later appeared on a militant website.

Shiite militia checkpoints have sprouted around some neighborhoods, where militiamen stop people and question ***women*** who are not covering their heads in adherence to strict Islamic tradition, al-Badri says.

Meanwhile, snipers have reappeared on Haifa Street.

"We don't know who's who anymore," al-Badri says. "It's all mixed."

Jackson reported from Washington

Security plan

President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met at the White House for the first time Tuesday, six weeks after Bush visited Baghdad to show support for al-Maliki. They agreed on outlines of a plan to boost security in Baghdad and nearby areas plagued by sectarian violence.

Bush and al-Maliki agreed:

*To embed more U.S. military police with Iraqi police. The U.S. forces would come from other parts of Iraq.

*That the United States would provide more equipment to give Iraqi forces "greater mobility, firepower and protection."

*To establish a "Joint Committee to Achieve Iraqi Self-Reliance," to smooth the transition as Iraqi forces eventually take over security operations.

Source: The White House

Attacks escalate

Key events in the recent growing violence in Baghdad:

*Feb. 22 -- The Shiite al-Askari Shrine in Samarra is bombed. In the following days, Sunni mosques are attacked and hundreds are killed in retaliatory attacks, mostly in Baghdad. The bombing sets off some of the worst sectarian violence since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

*March 7-21 -- The bodies of at least 191 people are found around Baghdad, most of them Sunnis. Many had been tortured, blindfolded and shot or strangled.

*March 12 -- Fifty-four people are killed in car bomb attacks in Sadr City, a mostly Shiite slum of Baghdad.

*April 7 -- Three suicide bombers attack the Shiite Buratha mosque, north of Baghdad, killing 85 and wounding 160 worshipers leaving Friday prayers.

*June 13 -- Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announces a security crackdown in Baghdad in an effort to control escalating violence. President Bush arrives in the capital on a surprise visit.

*June 25 -- Baghdad's morgue reports receiving 30,204 bodies from 2003 to mid-2006.

*July 8 -- A car bomb near a Shiite mosque in Baghdad's Jihad neighborhood kills at least five people. The next day, Shiite gunmen storm the neighborhood, killing several residents.

*July 18-19 -- At least 100 people die in attacks on Shiites. In the first one, masked men with machine guns on pickup trucks kill more than 45 in a Shiite market in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad. A day later, a suicide bombing near a Shiite mosque in Kufa kills more than 50.

Sources: U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq, wire reports

Graphic

GRAPHIC, B/W, Dave Merrill, USA TODAY, Sources: USA TODAY research (Map, pie chart)

GRAPHIC, B/W, USA TODAY, Source: Defense Dept., U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq (Map, bar graph)

PHOTO, Color, Wathiq Khuzaie, Getty Images

PHOTO, B/W, Khalid Mohammed, AP

Load-Date: July 26, 2006

'Please do whatever they want': The ransom being asked by Iraqi kidnappers for U.S. journalist Jill Carroll's life is the release of six female prisoners. The deadline is tomorrow. Should the U.S. government stand firm on its policy of not negotiating with terrorists?

Ottawa Citizen

February 25, 2006 Saturday

Final Edition

Section: SATURDAY OBSERVER; Pg. B3

Length: 2150 words

Byline: Chris Lackner, The Ottawa Citizen

Body

American journalist Jill Carroll may be dead by the end of tomorrow. The price of saving her is the release of a handful of Iraqi ***women*** in U.S. and Iraqi prisons.

The last time Ms. Carroll was seen alive was Feb. 9 when the brunette appeared in a sombre black and white video released on Kuwaiti television. Wearing an Islamic headscarf, she pleaded with her government in a firm voice: "Please do whatever they want, give them whatever they want as quickly as possible. There is a very short time. Please do it fast. That is all."

Ms. Carroll, a 28-year-old freelance journalist, was abducted by armed men in Baghdad on Jan. 7. Her driver and translator was killed during the roadside assault.

But while many foreigners have been kidnapped in Iraq, Ms. Carroll's situation is unique.

Most Iraqi kidnappers have made impossible demands such as the immediate pullout of all foreign troops. The price for Ms. Carroll's freedom may be as little as six ***female*** prisoners.

Throughout the Iraqi war, most Western governments have refused to deal with kidnappers. But, in Ms. Carroll's case, will the greater good be served if the U.S. and Iraqi government let her die?

Not all hostage situations should be written off as non-negotiable, argues Peter Singer, a bioethics professor at Princeton University. He said the U.S. government needs to publicly discuss the kidnapper's demands.

"If there's a ***female*** prisoner in Iraq who was a mastermind of 9/11 or who might cause a lot of future deaths, then it's a different case," Mr. Singer said. "But if these ***women*** have only been imprisoned for being related to terrorist suspects, then we need to ask why they haven't been released to save Jill Carroll.

"We should be told why the administration is willing to sacrifice this human life."

Ms. Carroll's captors call themselves the Revenge Brigades. In the last two months, they have released three videos in which Ms. Carroll begs the U.S. and Iraqi governments to meet their demands. After the first aired on Al-Jazeera television on Jan. 17, the kidnappers promised to execute Ms. Carroll within 72 hours if the ***female*** prisoners weren't freed. The deadline passed without word on Ms. Carroll's fate.

Shortly after the latest video aired, Ms. Carroll's captors set a new deadline of Feb. 26.

But not all hostages may be considered equal in their government's eyes. If a high-ranking official like U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice was kidnapped, the government would likely change tactics, said William Monning, a hostage negotiation expert at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

"In that circumstance, President Bush would quickly mobilize a potential military response -- they'd see it as it as an act of war," Mr. Monning said. "The public posture doesn't change, but everything changes behind the scenes. The higher rank the hostage, the more concerted the efforts made to secure their release."

Mr. Singer said Ms. Carroll's life is being devalued by the U.S government.

"This would be a huge debate if it was Jenna Bush or Condoleeza Rice," Mr. Singer said. "The fact that Jill Carroll isn't well known shouldn't really make a difference."

Ms. Carroll worked as a reporting assistant for The Wall Street Journal before launching a freelance career in Jordan in 2002. Working in Iraq for the Christian Science Monitor, she wore a headscarf to disguise herself as an Iraqi woman and pursue stories in unsecured areas.

The U.S. government has repeatedly stated it won't negotiate with Ms. Carroll's captors. But five Iraqi ***female*** prisoners were released from U.S custody at the end of January. Officials maintained their release was unrelated to Ms. Carroll.

Between six and eight Iraqi ***women*** remain imprisoned, but the U.S government has refused to change its official stance on Ms. Carroll. Negotiation is not an option.

"When the demands are credible, then the real burden of the decision shifts to the person refusing to negotiate," said Peter Sederberg, a political violence expert at the University of South Carolina.

The government's policy is grounded in the conventional wisdom that giving into terrorist demands will create more hostages, Mr. Sederberg said. While Jill Carroll may die, freeing her may put many more at risk.

Western governments are forced to walk a fine line between giving in to terrorist demands and appearing indifferent to their citizens welfare, said Mark Ensalaco, director of International Studies and Human Rights at the University of Dayton.

"Until governments are willing to create a public policy stating that all kidnapped citizens are casualties of war, the terrorists will always have the upper hand," Mr. Ensalaco said.

The status quo exists because governments are afraid of stirring public anger, said Mr. Ensalaco, author of From Black September to September 11, a soon-to-be released analysis of Middle East terrorism since 1968.

"I think people in the U.S. and Canada would be far more forgiving of a government that appeared to capitulate to terrorists than a government that simply wrote off the lives of its citizens."

Ms. Carroll is hardly the only foreigner currently being held in Iraq. Other high-profile hostages include two Canadians -- James Loney and Harmeet Singh Sooden -- who were kidnapped on Nov. 26 along with two other Christian Peacemaker Teams members.

Mr. Loney and Mr. Sooden's captors are demanding the withdrawal of all foreign troops in Iraq. Unlike Ms. Carroll's case, the demand is a "non-starter" Mr. Ensalaco said.

Scott Albrecht, a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams, said his organization is working with the Canadian government and the victims' families to secure their release.

He refused to comment on whether the organization is in contact with the Canadian men's kidnappers.

Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay came under scrutiny this week after he said new intelligence indicated both hostages are safe. He later backtracked on his statements.

A spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs, Kim Girtel, said she couldn't discuss whether the Canadian government negotiates with kidnappers.

"The Canadian government would be willing to discuss and receive information from anyone regarding the safe release of any Canadian hostage," she said.

No matter what public front a government presents during a hostage crisis, action is almost always being taken behind the scenes.

The U.S. government has likely been involved in low-level communication and negotiation with Ms. Carroll's kidnappers, Mr. Monning said.

Buying time can allow governments to determine where a hostage is being held.

"Often they keep them talking through backroom channels while searching for a military option -- or hoping to wear captors down," he said.

During hostage situations, governments often allow intermediaries -- such as a family members, a victim's employer or non-governmental organizations -- to communicate with kidnappers, Mr. Monning said.

"The question is what is the negotiating power of the family, business or news corporation?" he said. "What influence can they mobilize to get the U.S. or the Iraqi government to make good faith efforts to resolve the problem?"

Mr. Sederberg said low-level communication between governments and terrorists is a game of strategy.

Each day a victim is kept alive, the military has a better chance of uncovering their location and planning a rescue; the second a high profile hostage is killed, a terrorist group loses its leverage. Both sides know the risks and wait for the other to blink first.

Ms. Carroll's initial execution deadline has come and passed, meaning the kidnappers may now be worried about losing credibility, Mr. Sederberg said.

The televised beheading of of American businessmen Nick Berg in May 2004 caused outrage in the Middle East as well as the West. While terrorists may want to make political statements, they don't want to lose supporters.

Ms. Carroll has become a sympathetic figure in Iraq and the wider Muslim world. Many Middle Eastern politicians have called for her release. Last week, Iraq's state television began broadcasting ads that featured a prominent Sunni Arab politician and portrayed Ms. Carroll as a friend of Iraq.

"She is a journalist that went down and wanted to hear the ordinary people's stories -- she wasn't in the Green Zone only talking to colonels," Mr. Sederberg said. "The kidnappers know they aren't going to gain support by executing her."

But negotiating with terrorists is not unprecedented. While the Israeli government has maintained an official policy of non-negotiation with Palestinean militants, they've conducted numerous prisoner swaps throughout the conflict.

Experts say there are tentative signs that progress is quietly being made in Ms. Carroll's case.

The release of ***female*** prisoners at end the end of January may have helped stave off her initial execution date. An Iraqi government commission reviewing detainee cases recently recommended that U.S. authorities release six more ***female*** captives. But so far the U.S. hasn't budged.

"It could be evidence to (the kidnappers) that they have more to gain in keeping her alive than fulfilling the promise of the deadline," Mr. Monning said.

But the government's strategy could fail, he warned.

"No matter what statement the government is making, its conduct is still being monitored," Mr. Monning said. "Rightly or wrongly, if ***female*** prisoners are being released, it sends a message to the kidnappers that there is a currency here that can be exploited."

Mr. Sederberg said Iraq is becoming like Colombia, where kidnapping is practically "an industry." Beyond the threat to foreigners, Iraqi citizens are being frequently kidnapped and exchanged for ransom.

"Kidnappings are happening all over the place (in Iraq), but we only hear of them when they kidnap high-level Westerners and turn them into Al-Jazeera prime-time specials," he said.

If the U.S. is perceived as giving into Ms. Carroll's captors, it may bolster the "terrorist economy."

In countries like Colombia and Mexico, a unofficial template of demands and counter-demands has developed, Mr. Ensalaco said.

"An explicit set of rules evolves -- a 'hostage ritual,'" Mr. Ensalaco said. "Terrorists learn that when they kidnap people, as long as they don't harm them, the negotiations will always go a certain way. It creates a set of expectations."

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, most terrorist hostage negotiations involved demands for prisoners. "A terrorists freedom was always one hijacking away," Mr. Ensalaco said.

But there are ways for governments to negotiate with terrorists while still saving face.

For example, on Sept. 12, 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked four planes -- taking nearly 300 hostages. The group demanded the release of political prisoners in England, Germany, Switzerland and Israel. Both the Swiss and Germans almost immediately signalled their willingness to free Palestinean prisoners but, in return, asked that hostages of all nationalities be released -- not just their own. British diplomats ended up negotiating an exchange with the kidnappers.

The Iran-Contra affair stands as one of the worst government strategies to free hostages, Mr. Ensalaco said. The U.S. government repeatedly transferred weapons to Iran in a bid to free hostages held by the terrorist group ***Hezbollah*** in Lebanon. The arms deals only perpetuated more kidnappings.

Despite public pressure, governments can't always afford to approach hostage situations ethically.

Mr. Sederberg said state morality and individual morality are often at odds. While it would seem inhuman for a parent to refuse paying a ransom for a child, states have different priorities to consider.

"There is a need to uphold the power and credibility of the state -- sometimes they'd rather let people be killed rather than give in," he said. "States can lie and kill, but individuals can't. What is moral for the individual is not always moral for the state."

But making decisions based upon "state interests" can prove disastrous.

The Russian government's decision to storm a school held by Chechnyan terrorists in 2004 led to the deaths of nearly 200 people. Mr. Sederberg said the decision was made to protect Russia's image of military strength.

In Ms. Carroll's case, the American government is in a no-win situation. If she is killed, the public may say they didn't do enough. But giving in could undermine the long-term interests of the U.S. and Iraqi governments, Mr. Monning said.

"It could be 'get out of Iraq by Friday' or 'we want $100 and a cup of coffee,' but the government needs to keep toeing the line 'we won't negotiate with terrorists,'" he said. "They would be doomed if there was any public negotiation in these cases -- it would open the floodgates."

Hope remains that backchannel tactics may bring Ms. Carroll home safely.

"Something is keeping this woman alive," Mr. Sederberg said. "It may be more than the generosity of her captors."

Graphic

Photo: The Associated Press, Al-Jazeera; U.S. journalist Jill Carroll, who was kidnapped in Baghdad on Jan. 7, pleads for her life in a video aired by the Arab news network Al Jazeera on Jan. 30.

Load-Date: February 25, 2006

As black as oil, but not half so slick

Daily Mail (London)

March 3, 2006 Friday

Section: ED 1ST; Pg. 54

Length: 2130 words

Byline: CHRIS TOOKEY

Body

Syriana (15)

Verdict: Confused thriller with silly politics **

The Weather Man (15)

Verdict: Grey, but with bright intervals **

SYRIANA tries to do for the oil industry what Traffic did for the drugs trade.

Though intended to be deadly serious, this could be the silliest movie of the year.

The fictitious hero is a young, reform-minded Arab Prince (Alexander Siddig) who incurs the wrath of U.S. business interests by granting natural gas drilling rights - previously held by Connex, a gigantic U.S. corporation - to a higher Chinese bid.

The prince is advised by an ambitious young American energy analyst (Matt Damon), and the main plotline involves the attempts by Connex and its vassals in the U.S. government to destroy them.

Other leading characters include a CIA hitman (George Clooney) who becomes disillusioned with his own country and is saved from having his head cut off in Beirut by those niceguy terrorists - oops, freedomfighters - from ***Hezbollah***.

There's also a black lawyer (Jeffrey Wright) who has the task of investigating a Connex merger with a dodgy Texan oil company (led by Chris Cooper, repeating his George Bush impersonation from Silver City).

The catch is that no one wants the lawyer to investigate the merger too closely, and Wright's deeply sinister boss (Christopher Plummer) will undoubtedly fire him, or have people fire at him, if he does.

Most controversially, we are shown two likeable Pakistani youths (Mazhar Munir and Sonnell Dadral) who become terrorists.

In the States, Syriana has mostly aroused accusations of treachery for the way it tries to understand the motivation of these Islamic suicide bombers who eventually engineer the movie's denouement, helped (albeit unknowingly) by the American security services.

As black as oil, but not half so slick

Syriana is an ambitious movie that had me gripped, but it's wildly overelaborate-with thin characters and too many plot-lines. It's often hard to know what is going on and who is involved, let alone why.

Eventually, the plot strands do come together, as in writer-director Stephen Gaghan's previous, Oscar-winning screenplay for Traffic, but the film is often opaque, with characters too sketchy to involve our empathy.

The film follows The Constant Gardener in presenting a world in which shamelessly corrupt capitalists oppress the masses through unscrupulous globalisation.

AS WITH so many pictures from a Leftwing standpoint, it's a seemingly heartfelt cry of rage and despair. But is the world really as dark as this film paints it?

It offers a monotonously pessimistic view of capitalism and acknowledges none of its achievements.

It takes an utterly cynical view of Western notions of freedom and democracy. It argues that politicians are the helpless pawns of big business and that America is, in a very real sense, a terrorist state.

But blaming the U.S. for all the pollution, corruption and violence in the world is facile and stupid. Human rights and open government are more advanced in America than virtually

anywhere else in the world. Oil is a factor in the Middle East, but far from the only one.

Others include the inability of Israel and Palestine to reach a peace settlement; murderous, expansionist dictatorships such as Saddam Hussein's was in Iraq; and the kind of religious bigotry that has taken over Iran and is threatening anyone who believes that religion and politics are best kept apart.

Americans are often portrayed by the rest of the world as dumb, but the fact that they have stayed away from Syriana despite being told by most critics that it's a powerful, Oscar-worthy masterpiece suggests that they're not as dumb as all that.

THE WEATHER MAN is being mis- sold as a comedy from the director of Pirates Of The Caribbean. Unfortunately, Gore Verbinski directs as though someone has told him it's a deeply meaningful art film about existential angst.

The first half-hour is so slow that it threatens to send the audience to sleep. This is a pity, because later on there are funny scenes that recall the high points of Alexander Payne's About Schmidt.

This is a tragicomic account of a TV weatherman (Nicolas Cage) wallowing in self-pity about his unfulfilling job and the fact that he is widely regarded as a joke.

Strangers keep throwing fast food at him - which starts as a running gag and ends up as a metaphor for his disposable, downmarket celebrity.

The problem is that he doesn't have a lot to complain about. Yes, his wife (Hope Davis) has left him and is remarrying, but he still has access to their two teenage children, who seem well-adjusted, and he's surely young, attractive and rich enough to find someone new.

He's holding down a seven-figure salary that is stratospheric by British standards, and would surely allow him to do more fulfilling things in his copious spare time.

Cage has shown in a succession of films - notably Adaptation and Matchstick Men - that he is a master of the hopeless gaze and the helpless shrug.

Here, he is especially comical whenever Michael Caine is around, playing his quietly contemptuous father.

Caine makes one of his most perfunctory attempts yet at an American accent, but he does radiate the right degree of disappointment to send his son into yet more paroxysms of crumpled resentment and self-loathing.

But Steven Conrad's script isn't sharp, dynamic or profound enough.

The classy actors come across as wasted on this glibly morose material.

As the weatherman might say: 'This one's dull, grey and overcast. Stay indoors.'

Stay? I wish I'd never had to go

Stay (15)

Verdict: Don't go (turkey)

STAY is a cinematic catastrophe from Marc Forster, the talented director who gave us the beautifully acted Monster's Ball and the outstanding Finding Neverland.

Misconceived from beginning to end, it's excruciatingly arty and pretentious, with a narrative twist that makes no sense at all and yet (paradoxically) can be seen coming from the first few minutes.

Ewan McGregor gives one of his most vacuous, lazy performances as a psychiatrist with a girlfriend (Naomi Watts) who once tried to commit suicide and a troubled young patient (Ryan Gosling) who keeps threatening to end it all. If only he would, and put us all out of our misery.

Events unfold in a dreamlike fashion, with characters dissolving into one another and sometimes turning out to be dead. One moment, Bob Hoskins is blind. The next, he can see. Why? Why not?

What Forster is attempting to achieve is a hallucinatory intensity such as David Fincher did in Fight Club, and Darren Aronofsky managed in Requiem For A Dream.

But, hampered by David Benioff's incoherent and idiotic screenplay, nothing convinces on any level.

I especially didn't believe in McGregor as a shrink. Gosling, once promising, does a lousy impersonation of James Dean. Even the delightful Watts seems hopelessly lost. I kept wishing King Kong would appear and carry her off.

By the halfway mark, virtually all the critics around me were asleep, and several were snoring. The only way I could keep myself awake was to ponder on why the shrink's trousers were so short.

Had they shrunk?

Stay is more than a turkey. It is a diseased avian that has lost the will to live, is well beyond vaccination and should be dispatched as humanely as possible.

I shall say no more.

It's like Grange Hell...

Kidulthood (15)

Verdict: Who are they trying to kid? *

THIS is a preposterously depressing, bermelodramatic account of how hopeless it is to be a 15-year-old in a bog-standard West London comprehensive.

It's as if everything shocking that ever happened in Grange Hill is being poured into the grimmest feature you've ever seen. It's Grange Hell.

Far too many of these ingredients have been used before, and more effectively, in Bullet Boy, Kids and 15.

As black as oil, but not half so slick

Actor and screenwriter Noel Clarke (most familiar as Billie Piper's boyfriend in Dr Who) has a good ear for teenage language but can't see a pudding without overegging it.

As a result, his enthusiastic young actors - among them, Timothy Spall's son Rafe, Ray Winstone's daughter Jaime (pictured above), and a promising young actress of no known showbiz ancestry called Red Madrell - keep doing things that suggest they are being pushed around by a sadistic screenwriter.

Cinematographer Brian Tufano brings to the project the same urgency he showed in Trainspotting, and I was never bored, but I wasn't convinced either.

Adults and police are noticeable by their nearabsence, as are any teenagers not in thrall to bullying, self-harm, drink, drugs, underage sex, pregnancy, prostitution, knives and guns.

Instead of shocking us out of our complacency, the film engenders a suspicion that we are being flogged a deliberately dour, defeatist view of youth, and one that does neither them, nor those who want to help them, any favours.

Holiday in hell with the wisecracking Queen

Last Holiday (12A)

Verdict: Unsophisticated comedy **

AT LEAST once a year Hollywood produces a comedy about how we should all try to make the most of life, seize the day, make ourselves over, overspend to a ludicrous extent and start behaving as though we are, well, Hollywood celebrities.

These films are mainly aimed at middle-aged people in dead- end jobs, with no prospects whatever of attaining riches or stardom. In short, they are escapist tosh.

In Last Holiday, Queen Latifah stars as a meek and mild salesperson in a department store, who learns that she has weeks to live, and decides to blow her funds on a trip to a posh hotel where she will eat to excess and spoil herself with new clothes, beauty treatments and adventures.

When she gets there, she wows all and sundry with her down-home philosophising and go-getting attitude.

It's all based on a J.B.

Priestley-written film starring Alec Guinness in 1950.

But I don't think it was Priestley who came up with lines like: 'He could crack a walnut with that ass.' The screenplay is a hotchpotch of broad humour, product placement, unlikely coincidences and gross sentimentality, through which Queen Latifah sails, smiling beatifically as though expecting shortly to be canonised.

Some good supporting actors, notably Gerard Depardieu and Timothy Hutton, slum shamelessly.

Like the not dissimilar (but superior) Maid In Manhattan, where J-Lo played a cleaner who ended up marrying a Senator, this is glossily directed by Wayne Wang.

Last Holiday is rubbish from start to finish, and its consumerist values are deeply suspect, but it will find an audience, especially among ***women***.

It's probably best watched on DVD while consuming a large box of chocolates.

The more sensitive of you may need a sick-bucket handy.

Lottery loser of the week

As black as oil, but not half so slick

Mirrormask (PG)

Verdict: Before making this, they should have reflected longer *

MIRRORMASK is a weird British fantasy that's almost worth seeing for its visuals. The dreamlike sets look like the album covers that Yes rejected.

Dave McKenna directs with a visionary fervour, if no sense of humour.

As so often with British movies, it's the script (by Neil Gaiman) that disappoints. This film would dearly love to be a modern-day Alice In Wonderland but it doesn't have Lewis Carroll's wit.

It has the seriousness of Philip Pullman's Dark Materials trilogy, but never achieves the same drive or depth.

Most of the film is the dream of a gloomy adolescent (Stephanie Leonidas, looking like a young Helena Bonham Carter) troubled by the fact that her mother (Gina McKee) is undergoing an operation. The girl's feelings of guilt about her own bolshy behaviour towards her mum and dad (Rob Brydon) are translated into a fantastical quest.

The idea is promising but it's the execution that lets it down: the adventures the girl has aren't interesting or exciting, the pace is too slow, the story confuses and fails to reveal character, there aren't enough surprises and the plot seems to be made up as it goes along.

As with so many Lottery-funded movies, the script needed much more rewriting before it went into production.

DVDS OF THE WEEK

BLEAK HOUSE (PG, BBC)

THE best DVDs this week are both off the telly, and this is the finest TV version yet of the Dickens masterpiece. I especially admired Charles Dance as Tulkinghorn, Gillian Anderson as Lady Dedlock, and the extremely promising Anna Maxwell Martin, as Esther Summerson.

HOUSE (15, Universal)

THE TV series has made Hugh Laurie's name in America, and it isn't hard to see why. He's great as the irascible antihero doctor, Gregory House - a kind of medical Sherlock Holmes who somehow manages to solve all the puzzling cases that come his way.

SERENITY (15, Universal)

BASED on the short-lived American TV series Firefly, this is about a group of space pirates led by Mal (Nathan Fillion), a figure obviously inspired by Harrison Ford's Han Solo. The overall impression is of an updated Blake's 7, with a bigger budget and a lot more fighting.

Serenity may find a cult audience among those in their 20s and 30s.

Graphic

WATCH MY BACK: GEORGE CLOONEY, AS A SILLUSIONED CIA HITMAN, FAILS TO HIT THE MARK WITH THIS PORTRAYAL OF MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL INTRIGUE DON'T MENTION THE WALNUT: LATIFAH AND DEPARDIEU DREAMLIKE: GINA MCKEE

Load-Date: March 3, 2006

End of Document

No Headline In Original

Canberra Times (Australia)

July 18, 2006 Tuesday

Final Edition

Section: A; Pg. 8

Length: 1197 words

Byline: The Canberra Times

Body

Proportion relative Your criticism of Israel's so called "disproportionate response" (Editorial, July 17) is what I'd expect of an armchair critic living in comfortable middle class Canberra - probably one of the most peaceful capitals on the planet.

Imagine then, cowering in your north Canberra lounge room with your children while Kassam rockets landed about you at random and without warning, fired by an implacable foe in Bungendore who is dedicated to your destruction. And that this practice would continue relentlessly regardless of what you do or say. I doubt you would stop to consider what might be a "proportionate" response.

Israel has shown incredible restraint against an enemy which says it does not want peace at all if it means living with a Jewish state.

Despite this, Israel drops leaflets warning civilians as well as the enemy to take cover before it bombs.

Those who died after a missile attack in Haifa were never given a warning and are not likely to get them. Israel's response has been exceptionally restrained compared to what it could do.

Hezbollah and Hamas have declared war, so why should Israel be proportionate just because the maniacs who have declared war on them don't possess the same military might?

If the shoe was on the other foot, do you think ***Hezbollah*** and Hamas would be proportionate?

Will you consider it proportionate if ***Hezbollah*** and Hamas actually manage to kill just as many Israelis with a direct hit in high population centres?

This will finish when no more rockets are being fired across the border into Israel and when the terrorists hand back the soldiers they kidnapped.

Stuart Cohen, Watson No, Brent Howard (Letters, July 17), police in Australia would not blow up an entire street to block a dangerous criminal gang.

However, if the latter had access to bazookas and other rocket-type destructive gadgets, it would be reasonable for the police to demand assistance from the air; while nearby buildings and innocent citizens could be affected, such outcome would not be the intent.

In December 1942, about 100 British bombers were deployed to destroy part of the Philips works in the Dutch city of Eindhoven. Many bombs missed their targets and destroyed the city's oldest shopping street, and partly destroyed a hospital and a church; well over 100 Eindhoven citizens lost their lives.

The bombardment did not result in a hate or smear campaign against the Brits. However, the German bombardment of Eindhoven on September 19, 1944, the day after it had been liberated, was a different kettle of fish: for several hours, Luftwaffe Heinkel bombers were able to drop bombs virtually unassailed, the obvious aim being to destroy as much of the city and kill as many citizens as possible.

Reasonable people will see the bombardments by Israeli planes as being directed at "enemy targets", and at installations which are of strategic interest to the ***Hezbollah*** and similar groups. Israel is not at war with the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

Henk Verhoeven, Beacon Hill, NSW Keep TV ad-free Re Jack Waterford's thoughtful article ("Media and markets", Panorama, July 15) most people I talk to in my rather elderly age group watch commercial TV sparingly or not at all.

It is produced mostly for the young in mind and apart from its excellent sporting coverage has little to recommend it. The incessant advertising is self-defeating and a reason why DVD's are getting such a market share.

What sends shivers up our collective spines is the commercialisation by stealth of SBS and most probably the ABC.

As an instance I would select SBS's The Cutting Edge. It gains its impact from developing themes. This loses its effectiveness with commercial breaks.

The Government should use its surplus to keep our funded television free from advertising and preserve its excellence.

Howard Carew, Curtin Treasury design It was heartening to read the report ("Treasury chief urges cautious approach to current account deficit policy", July 12, p15) that Dr Ken Henry had acknowledged the three policy levers of fiscal, monetary and wages policy had failed in cutting the current account deficit and any government wanting to use such policies should be aware that "they might fail, or worse, dramatically slow the economy".His observation assumes that these policy instruments are used to slow the economy. But the current account deficit could be eliminated if 6 per cent of national spending were shifted from imports to domestic products.

Such a shift would not only eliminate the current account deficit, it would raise incomes and increase the rate of economic growth.

Engineering such an outcome does require more than simplistic text book solutions. However, it should be within the design capability of the Treasury.

Leigh Harkness, Queanbeyan RU-486 debate Penelope Gosling appears to have a problem with open debate and informed choice in relation to the abortion drug RU-486 ("Despite progress there's still a way to go", July 17, p9).

Although Parliament decided in February that any decision about its importation should be made by the Therapeutic Goods Administration rather than the health minister, no application has been made to the TGA for its general distribution in Australia.

Ms Gosling puts this down to her usual suspects: the health minister, myself as president of the ACT Right to Life Association, and any others who might vilify the use of the abortion drug RU-486.

She is obviously annoyed that Australia is still well behind in the provision of medical abortion services.

What is not said is that Australia is also fortunate in that the wide community debate preceding Parliament's decision, including Senate committee hearings, made available to the community well-documented information on the growing number of deaths and emergency hospital admissions attributable to this drug in other countries.

In particular, Australian ***women*** won the opportunity to look critically at this so-called safe, easy way to abort themselves.

Moves by the US Congress to ban the drug, for example, have made doctors less ideologically committed than Professor Caroline Da Costa rightly wary of prescribing it.

Ms Gosling imagines all sorts of demons blocking any applications to the TGA for the approval of RU-486 for general distribution. Why does she not ask the drug companies to explain their failure to make applications? Is she reluctant to expose their probable answer? Perhaps they believe in informed choice: the growing body of adverse information about the drug is a distinct disincentive for those who would invest in it.

The debate is not over and it was never framed to publicise the Right to Life argument. As a medical student you would be well advised to study the literature.

Kath Woolf, president, ACT Right to Life Association Sun smart at last Yay, finally the Government is making a good decision even if it is riding on the other states' coat tails, bringing daylight saving forward to the start of October. This gives the kids the school holidays to get used to the changes and it stops them from rising with the sun at 5.30. Mr Stanhope may win back some support from families if he goes with the other states.

Karen Coleman, Kambah

Load-Date: October 11, 2011

GREENTIDERISING

The Toronto Star

January 22, 2006 Sunday

Section: NEWS; Pg. A10

Length: 2066 words

Body

If the plan was simply to wet its toes in the churning waters of Palestinian democracy, Hamas must brace for a shock. Ready or not, the militant Islamic group now finds itself plunging head first into the deep end.

Quite possibly, it will form the government.

According to a succession of startling public opinion polls, the race for Wednesday's first truly competitive election the Palestinians have ever known is now a coin toss, with a surging Hamas in a statistical dead heat with the fragmented and corruption-riddled Fatah party founded by the late Yasser Arafat.

The most sobering numbers came Friday, in a survey of 1001 voters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre, showing support for Fatah sliding to 32.3 per cent, with Hamas at 30.2 per cent. The balance of the electorate was either undecided or siding in small numbers with nine other fledgling Palestinian parties.

Any way it breaks down, Palestinians are about to open their 132-seat legislature for the first time to the hard fist of political Islam.

"It is an incredible turn of events," says Nader Izzat Said, a political analyst at Ramallah's Birzeit University.

"Running for the first time, Hamas did not even ponder such an outcome. They wanted to do well, but not this well.

"Their idea was to sit in opposition, where Hamas can play the role of God-given saints that do no wrong. But the momentum is now carrying them beyond, and it is driven by impossibly high expectations. They will have to ask themselves how they can possibly deliver."

Initial Israeli reaction to the turning of the Palestinian political tide to Hamas green has been ambivalent at best. Many Israeli commentators scoff at the notion that the sharpest tip of the Palestinian uprising - the very group responsible for delivering the deadliest suicide attacks of the past five years - is now about to unstrap its bomb belts and don the business suits of political discourse.

Indeed, the arrival of politics, Hamas-style, only confirms what a great many Israelis already knew - that the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, under the fragile leadership of moderate President Mahmoud Abbas, is altogether too weak to be trusted as a partner for negotiation.

But many Palestinians argue the opposite, saying the long-awaited journey of Hamas to politics marks a dramatic shift away from the interminable cycles of violence that has brought neither side anything but growing body counts.

"As we watch the campaign unfold, Hamas has chosen vagueness as the best policy," notes Said. "They don't want to be seen as making great changes, so they are sending mixed messages about what happens the day after, in terms of their stand on Israel.

"But objectively, the Hamas change is huge. For the first time, they are willing to ponder working in a pluralistic council, of co-operating with secular and even leftist parties.

"It is easy to see that they have no choice now but to negotiate with Israel. The talk of destroying Israel is gone now because that is not reality. The talk of creating an Islamist state is gone because the people aren't ready for it. Now, they are ready to deal with it as they find it, and that means pragmatic, responsible, moderate leadership."

Shimon Peres, the elder statesman of Israeli politics, has delicately broached the possibility of talking to an eventual Hamas-led government. Now a leading candidate with Kadima, the new centrist party founded by ailing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Peres said that, after Israel goes to the polls on March 28, the issue will be the disarmament of Palestinian militias rather than the name across the table.

"We will not sit with anybody who comes to negotiations with a gun or a bomb," Peres told Israel Radio.

"We are not fighting against a name. We are fighting against a situation. If the situation changes, then what difference does a name make?"

Hamas officials acknowledge that a substantial part of their support amounts to victory-by-default, in that the overwhelming impulse of Palestinian voters is to smite Fatah, an organization widely seen as corrupt almost beyond reclamation.

After a generation of self-enrichment under the authoritarian rule of Arafat, the movement that landed in the West Bank and Gaza on the high hopes of the Oslo peace process in the 1990s is about to taste payback. Fatah's crumbling fortunes, and its evident inability to stem the often-violent clashes among its own factions, have hastened the trend.

"There a feeling of vengeance toward Fatah that is almost a mob mentality," says Birzeit University's Said.

"Even long-time Fatah supports are so disgusted, their attitude seems to be, 'My head is hurting, so I'm going to shoot myself in the head.'"

For a first-time run at politics, Hamas has demonstrated astonishing savvy in harvesting disaffected Palestinian voters. It has painted the West Bank and Gaza green with banners and posters vowing war on corruption and chaos.

The official Hamas ticket, running under the name Change and Reform, reminds voters they need only look at the organization's network of indisputably well-managed charities, which for the past five years have provided more on-the-ground relief than the Palestinian Authority itself, to know whether it can deliver.

"We intend to set an example, not just for Palestinians but for the entire Arab world," Fadel Saleh, 53, a Hamas candidate in the governorate of Ramallah, told the Star. "We will serve society properly. No more nepotism, no more favours. If we are there, we can ensure the ship will go straight forward."

For international consumption, Hamas has engaged an outside media consultant, Ramallah-based Nashat Aqtash, who has been busy massaging foreign journalists with a message that says, in essence: Hamas, Not As Scary As You Think We Are.

"The world has the wrong image of Hamas," says Aqtash, acknowledging that many Westerners equate the group's name with indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians. Aqtash takes pains to stress a mantra most Hamas candidates have embraced on the campaign trail: We don't hate the Jewish religion; we hate the occupation.

"The facts are the facts," he says. "If a thousand Israelis died in the last five years, open your eyes and see that four times that many Palestinians died, and a thousand of them children."

Palestinian analysts say Hamas has also exploited people's antipathy over the highly centralized nature of the Palestinian Authority, which has exacerbated Fatah's isolation from the electorate.

With most institutions of the state-in-waiting located in the West Bank city of Ramallah, the PA and its Fatah bureaucrats are separated from most everyday Palestinians, an annoyance that sometimes makes routine bureaucratic chores a multi-day ordeal. Fatah, in Palestinian eyes, bears the brunt of the blame. Hamas, by contrast, is nothing if not a grassroots entity, with a support network extending throughout the territories.

Uri Dromi, director of International Outreach at the Israel Democracy Institute and a former adviser to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, stands out among Israel analysts as one who welcomes the politicization of Hamas.

"Power mellows, so I actually prefer Hamas takes over, because then at least Israel will be dealing with the true Palestinians," Dromi told the Star.

"On one hand, Palestinians under Hamas are going to have to choose - to decide what it is they really want. If Hamas ultimately stands by its old charter of eliminating Israel, they will declare themselves to the world as being unworthy of negotiations. And that would be better at least than the present situation, which is where we have a Palestinian partner (Fatah, under Abbas) who has good intentions but is really incapable of delivering."

The day after elections, Israel's paramount demand will remain disarmament before discussions. Hamas, conversely, has yet to show its hand on whether it is willing to disarm its militant wing. If the movement intends to push forward on both tracks, political and military, in a manner similar to the Lebanon-based ***Hezbollah*** movement, it will risk becoming isolated.

"There will be a new kind of leverage now, a bigger carrot-and-stick dynamic," suggests Dromi. "If Hamas tries both approaches, to lead politically and to continue with terror, I wonder if donations and support will still be there for the Palestinians. I'm sure they are asking themselves this question."

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice went on the record last week with Washington's concerns about the politicization of Hamas. But she stood by Palestinian President Abbas' decision to welcome the organization into politics.

"I don't think (Abbas's) program is really consistent with that of Hamas, but I think he is trying to be someone who allows these elections to take place in a free and fair way and I think that is totally appropriate," Rice told reporters.

But America's blunt bottom line, said Rice, is that Hamas must compromise.

"In order to negotiate with a party, you have to believe in its right to exist. In order to have freedom of movement and access and peaceful development ... you have to believe that violence is not acceptable."

Several Hamas leaders have spoken on the campaign trail of weaning Palestinians off Western aid, saying the movement intends to redouble efforts to attract support and investment from the Muslim world, particularly the Arab Gulf states awash in oil revenues.

Birzeit University's Said suggests all options for Hamas lead to moderation.

"If Hamas wants to change its mandate with the Arab regimes to attract investment for Palestinians, this still requires that they change their relationship with the world," he says.

"The clearance will still have to come from the United States. That's why there is no going back. You will see Hamas become more and more moderate in their rhetoric, because that is the only option."

On at least some levels, the Palestinian political angst mirrors that of Canada: Here and there, a majority's contempt for its ruling elite is tempered by a creeping suspicion that the alternative comes with a social agenda only a minority could love.

In the case of Hamas, many Palestinians wonder how religious conservatism is likely to filter into the business of government, schools and social services.

"Education and the social ministries are the likely destinations for Hamas politicians in any government. There is no question that secular Palestinians are concerned," says Said.

"But I also think some people are coming around to the fact that Hamas will find there are limits to power. They need the people with them, and they know that deep down, they can count on less than one-third of Palestinians as true supporters."

The final moderating factor for Hamas could be the smaller Palestinian political parties, which could carry a combined heft representing 15 per cent of the vote.

All these parties are centre or left-of-centre movements, some represented by relatively high-profile seculars such as Palestinian human rights activist Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, Christian Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi and internationally respected former finance minister Salaam Fayad.

"We have 11 lists running for office and 10 of them are secular," says Said. "They don't have great strength individually, but put them together and these parties could be the tiebreaker, the cushion, between Hamas and Fatah."

Observers will be paying close attention to how Israel's reluctant acceptance to allow voting in Arab East Jerusalem plays out on the ground.

And they'll keep an eye on Gaza, where it is feared that armed Fatah gangs could disrupt voting.

Whatever the outcome, no one doubts the political landscape is about to be redrawn: win, lose or draw, the arrival of Hamas places Palestinian politics at the very forefront of the Arab democratic experiment.

With hundreds of international election monitors, including a Canadian contingent of 40, now taking up positions throughout the territories, many hope Wednesday's vote will set a new standard in transparency.

"This is going to be the truest democracy the Arab world has seen," boasts Hamas candidate Fadel Saleh.

Birzeit's Said is more restrained: "If we can just get through this process in one piece, I think we're going to have the real thing - a real parliament, a real democracy, not just in name but in practice.

"We just pray something good will come of it."

Graphic

AMMAR AWAD REUTERS AMMAR AWAD reuters Palestinian ***women*** talk politics in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Palestinian parliamentary elections, the first to be contested by candidates from the militant group Hamas, are set for Wednesday.ABED OMAR QUSINI reuters Tens of thousands of Hamas supporters, including these Palestinian men in the West Bank village of Qosra, poured into the streets of the occupied territories on Friday in a pre-election show of strength. Initial Israeli reaction to the turning of the Palestinian political tide to Hamas green has been ambivalent at best. Many Israeli commentators scoff at the notion that the group responsible for delivering the deadliest suicide attacks of the past five years is about to unstrap its bomb belts and

don the business suits of political discourse. PATRICK BAZ afp getty A campaign worker distributes Hamas leaflets during a Thursday rally at al-Fawar refugee camp near the West Bank town of Hebron, where the militant Islamic party is fielding a full slate of candidates.AWAD AWAD afp getty images A Hamas poster advising "Islam is the solution" competes with a portrait of Yasser Arafat, whose Fatah party is in decline.PATRICK BAZ afp getty A campaign worker distributes Hamas leaflets during a Thursday rally at al-Fawar refugee camp near the West Bank town of Hebron, where the militant Islamic party is fielding a full slate of candidates.ABED OMAR QUSINI reuters Tens of thousands of Hamas supporters, including these Palestinian men in the West Bank village of Qosra, poured into the streets of the occupied territories on Friday in a pre-election show of strength.AMMAR AWAD reuters Palestinian ***women*** talk politics in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Palestinian parliamentary elections, the first to be contested by candidates from the militant group Hamas, are set for Wednesday.AWAD AWAD afp getty images A Hamas poster advising "Islam is the solution" competes with a portrait of Yasser Arafat, whose Fatah party is in decline.

Load-Date: January 22, 2006

End of Document

Gunning for Israel

The Sunday Times (London)

January 29, 2006

Section: FEATURES; News; Pg. 19

Length: 2750 words

Byline: Mathew Campbell in Ramallah and Uzi Mahnaimi in Jerusalem

Body

Have the Palestinians lost the plot? Or does the election of terrorists make sense? Mathew Campbell in Ramallah and Uzi Mahnaimi in Jerusalem report

Farhat Asaad is a 44-year-old school teacher with a pleasant smile and a friendly manner. He is also one of the stars of Hamas, the militant Islamic party that is historically committed to the destruction of Israel.

"We are a caring organisation," he said after Hamas shocked western governments last week by winning the Palestinian election.

Yet on his computer screen he keeps an image of gunmen in black hoods, and on his office wall posters pay homage to a "caravan of martyrs" who have "shaken the citadel of our enemies" -a reference to the Hamas suicide bombers who have bathed Israel's streets in blood.

When Asaad emerged from the mosque in the West Bank town of Al-Bireh on Friday, well-wishers fought to congratulate him on the victory and he grinned contentedly, looking harmless enough with his dark, intelligent eyes and black beard tinged with grey.

So is this affable, newly elected MP for Ramallah a terrorist accomplice hiding behind a political mask -a man cast from the same mould as Iran's virulently anti- semitic new president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, one of Hamas's sponsors?

Or is he a new breed of democratic Islamic politician who, far from pushing Israel into the sea, only wants to reduce unemployment and raise the Palestinian standard of living after decades of neglect and misgovernment?

More momentous questions are raised by the Hamas victory. Is this the moment when the Middle East peace process crumbled into the dust? By electing bombers to run their affairs after decades of debilitating struggle, have the Palestinians finally lost the plot?

Or is it an opportunity for all the players caught in the world's most intractable political impasse -from the bomb-makers of Ramallah to the policymakers in Washington -to face reality and start working towards an historic compromise?

Sitting in a small, chilly office overlooking Ramallah's rooftops, Asaad said Israel and the West should try not to worry. "Everything in the future will be much better," he promised. "You will see. Both sides must try to change their speech. Then things will get better."

It is extremely difficult to imagine how -especially when, asked if Hamas would be prepared to make permanent its present informal truce and halt suicide bombings, Asaad replies: "Our aim is to live not to die ... But we want to recapture our freedom. Not to be under occupation."

Nor when, asked if Hamas will disband its 5,000-strong militia and decommission its weapons, he says politely but firmly: "All the states of Europe have big armies but these are for defence, not attacking neighbours. So why can we not have weapons? The violence will stop as soon as Israel stops forcing us to defend our lives."

But while pessimists point to the lessons of history -and Israel, America, Britain and other key European governments refuse to deal with Hamas so long as it remains committed to violence -there are glimmers of hope that this political earthquake will indeed prove to be the beneficial catharsis that the region has needed for so long.

Politics is a dynamic process, as one optimistic former participant in the peace process pointed out yesterday, and behind the intransigent rhetoric it seems that political dynamism is already at work, secretly exploring potential paths to peace.

PEOPLE laughed when Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who founded Hamas in 1987, predicted that it would control the Palestinian territories by the year 2027.

Yassin was assassinated by the Israelis two years ago in retaliation for Hamas mass murders, yet his prediction has already come to pass. His organisation, dedicated to jihad and the demolition of Israel, is in power two decades earlier than even he expected. How has it happened?

The answer lies in a story of failure and success. Yasser Arafat, the veteran Palestinian leader, failed in many ways. He failed to turn Fatah, his movement, into a properly functioning government after it was given a monopoly on power by the Oslo peace accords of 1993.

He failed to grasp a peace deal brokered by President Bill Clinton at Camp David in 2000 which would have given the Palestinians a functioning state, because he had failed to teach his followers the need for compromise. Then he failed to stop a new intifada, and he was helpless in the face of Israeli retaliation.

He furthermore failed to reinvigorate his government with popular figures from Fatah's younger ranks. And he failed to stem the blatant corruption by cronies who siphoned American and European aid that was supposed to build Palestinian civic society.

Arafat was mourned as the father of the Palestinian nation when he died in November 2004; but he bequeathed to his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, an electorate seething with frustration and despair.

Most Palestinians are worse off than they were before the Oslo process began. They live hemmed inside a ring of Israeli military steel, and their economy - particularly in the southern enclave of Gaza -is being gradually suffocated on account of their limited freedom of movement.

A few years ago, Naseef Muallem, a think tank director in Ramallah, was prevented from attending the funeral of a sister who lived in Israel because of travel restrictions imposed on Palestinians by the Israelis. Nothing has changed.

"I haven't seen my other sister, who lives in Haifa, for four years," he said. "It is almost impossible for my wife to visit her parents in Bethlehem." On top of that, one of his daughters, he says, is traumatised after exposure to so much Israeli bombing.

While failing politically and robbing the people blind, Palestinian officials have not provided even basic security. Almost as menacing as the Israeli military gauntlet are the Palestinian gunmen who regularly run wild on the streets, firing into the air.

"People want to see change," said Khader Musleh, a father of two sitting in a tea room in Al-Bireh yesterday. "Change could not be worse than the status quo." Men playing dominoes at a neighbouring table nodded furiously in agreement.

Hamas's success is the other side of this coin. On the Palestinian streets it is known not only for its Islamic militancy but also for its social work, providing the clinics and welfare that Arafat's secular regime neglected.

As well as winning the respect of the Palestinian masses, it has wooed Fatah's angry younger wing, exploiting their frustration over the venality and incompetence of the Fatah barons. Close observers of Palestinian policies detected a common purpose between Hamas and young Fatah to oust the old guard in the vote.

The other significant success in this story is the fact that the Palestinian election took place at all. Financed and monitored largely by the European Union and vigorously supported by Washington -the election is, after all, the apotheosis of the neo-conservative agenda for the Middle East -it is being hailed as the Arab world's first truly democratic election.

This has given the next Palestinian government a mandate of unassailable legitimacy, provided Hamas does not fritter it away.

But what sort of government is Hamas going to create? And how will it deal with the challenge that, unless it renounces terror, America and Europe -source of a big chunk of Palestine's annual $1.1 billion (£ 620m) annual foreign aid - will not speak to it or go on funding it?

Palestinian political analysts such as Muallem expect Hamas will surprise the world pleasantly, if only because "the expectations are so low".

He believes that Hamas has been quietly preparing its supporters for a change in rhetoric and will soon recognise Israel's right to exist -as it has tacitly in its election campaign by referring to the "rights" of occupying Israelis.

"We've come to a fork in the road," said Muallem. "I just hope Hamas takes the right path and renounces the guns and terrorism. I think they will."

First, Sheikh Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader, needs to talk to Abbas, who was elected president last year and remains in office despite the Fatah debacle.

Getting the two men together is not as easy as it might sound. Haniyeh lives in Gaza, the Hamas stronghold, and in order to travel to Ramallah he would have to pass through Israeli territory. The Israelis, who have assassinated several Hamas leaders, including the crippled Yassin, are unlikely to indulge him. Which means they might have to content themselves with the telephone -probably with the Israelis not-so-secretly listening in.

The question Haniyeh and Abbas have to address is who to appoint to cabinet posts? In the refugee camps of Gaza last week, gangs of youths were chanting "Mohammed Deef for defence minister", but this would seemimpractical. Deef, leader of the Hamas military wing, is in hiding after at least eight Israeli assassination attempts, the last of which appears to have maimed him.Instead, the Hamas leadership is expected to demonstrate a desire for unity -and an extremely pragmatic streak -by turning to figures outside its own ranks.

Haniyeh, 46, was said to have offered the prime minister ship to Munib Masri, a rich businessman, Fatah member and friend of Abbas. But Masri turned it down and suggested Salam Fayad, the former Palestinian finance minister. Masri also suggested Hanan Ashrawi, a Christian and familiar face of modern Palestinian womanhood, as foreign minister.

Analysts believe Haniyeh -or his agents -will also be in touch with Marwan Barghouti, Fatah's West Bank organiser and leader of its younger factions, who has been in jail in Israel since being captured four years ago and convicted of terrorism.

Israel has allowed Barghouti to remain politically active from his jail cell he even stood successfully in the election - and he is seen as a key figure in drawing Hamas into the political process. Some talk of him as a potential president if Abbas is persuaded to step down.

Alastair Crooke, a former EU special adviser who participated in negotiations with Hamas that led to a truce in 2003, says the talks were frequently interrupted while Hamas delegates sought Barghouti's views from jail.

Crooke sees evidence that Hamas already has evolved in a positive way. First, they have transformed themselves into a vote-winning political machine. "They went in like professionals," said Crooke. "From ground zero they ran a well-run campaign."

Second, they have a de facto truce in operation. "All this year they have observed a ceasefire," he said. "They have said very clearly they are ready to consider further a ceasefire now on the basis of reciprocity from Israel. They are offering a ceasefire as an entry point into the political process that could lead to an end to conflict."

This week Tsipi Livni, Israel's foreign minister, will meet her American counterpart, Condoleezza Rice, in Washington. At the top of their agenda, said an Israeli source, are ways of bringing Hamas to the bargaining table.

Nothing is expected to happen until after the Israeli election on March 28 which itself will be taking place in unprecedented circumstances. Ariel Sharon, the prime minister, is still in a coma from the stroke he suffered last month.

Kadima, the new centrist party he set up after his Likud movement disowned his withdrawal from Gaza, will have to fight for votes without him.

Initial calculations had the Hamas victory helping Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, the right-wing Likud challenger who has often singled out Hamas as the root of all evil.

Other Israeli politicians might be encouraged, nevertheless, by a newspaper poll this weekend showing that more than 67% of Israelis would not be opposed to negotiations with Hamas.

Despite Israel's announcement it will not negotiate, the first round of scheduled Israeli-Palestinian meetings in the next stage of the peace process could take place soon -and the involvement of Hamas is not ruled out.

"Hamas is not an ideal partner and it will have to modify its position, but Israel will not be able to ignore for long the Palestinian group that dominates the Palestinian parliament," said an Israeli source.

Other analysts are sceptical, however. In Washington, Michael Rubin, an expert on the Middle East at the American Enterprise Institute, said that dealing with Hamas was not an option.

"If an organisation like Greenpeace started blowing up buses, no matter how good they are on the environment, they're still terrorists," he said.Rubin also argued that the Palestinians' economic position is so dire that it is hard to imagine how anybody, let alone a beleaguered Hamas government, could fulfil its lavish election promises of prosperity and peace.

"I look at it as an opportunity," said Rubin, "to see how unpopular Islamists can be."

Hamas would certainly be unpopular if it tried to impose Islamic policies such as forcing ***women*** to wear headscarves. Despite the election result, Palestinian society remains largely secular -and banning alcohol would not go down well in Ramallah, which has several bars and even an Irish pub.

More disturbing to many is the prospect of civil war in the Palestinian camp if Hamas tries to take over the Fatah-controlled security forces.

Fatah supporters clashed with Hamas in Gaza after hearing the election result. And as young Fatah gunmen put on a show of force at Arafat's grave in Ramallah yesteday, Jibril Rajoub, Abbas's security adviser warned: "Hamas has no power meddling with the security forces."

BORN OUT OF CHAOS

December 1987: Hamas, meaning zeal in Arabic, is created amid the chaos of the fi rst Palestinian Intifada. Initially it is encouraged by Israel which saw it as a means of tempering militants within Yasser Arafat's Fatah party

August 1988: Hamas issues a virulently anti-semitic charter which calls on all Muslims to rise up and destroy Israel. Its leaders cite the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion as legitimate and declare any negotiations with Israel a waste of time

October 1990: Hamas declares every Israeli soldier and settler a legitimate target

December 1992: Israel deports 400 Hamas activists to South Lebanon. Among them is Ismail Haniyeh - Hamas's leader today. With the help of Iranian funded ***Hezbollah***, the deportees receive extensive terrorist training

1993: Hamas conducts its fi rst suicide bombing in opposition to the Oslo accords. Israel starts to target its leaders

September 2000: The second intifada brakes out and Hamas steps up its campaign with hundreds of suicide attempts inside Israel. In more than 300 attacks, it kills more than 400 people. Its popularity swells

January 2006: Hamas is voted into power

HAMAS LEADERS

YASSIN Founded Hamas in December 1987 and became the organisation's 'spiritual' leader. Wheelchairbound, he spent years in Israeli jails. Killed two years ago by Israeli helicopter gunships

ISMAIL HANIYEH The current Hamas leader. He served as the secretary of Yassin and is well placed to become the next prime minister.

He is said to be 'moderate'

ABDEL AZIZ RANTISI Credited with developing the organisation's three-pronged political, intelligence and military structure. Killed by Israel not long after Yassin

KHALED MASHAAL The head of the organisation's international wing, based in Damascus. In 1997 Mossad failed to kill him with poison in Amman. He said yesterday that he hopes to return to Gaza soon

SALAH SHEHADEH The fi rst leader of the military wing of Hamas and architect of its suicide bombing strategy.

Four years ago Israeli F-16 jets bombed his house in Gaza, killing him, his wife and children

HAMAS CHARTER

Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it

The Liberation of Palestine is an individual duty for every Muslim wherever he may be ... it is compulsory that the banner of jihad be raised

(Peace) initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are in contradiction to the principles of the Hamas... Those conferences are no more than a means to appoint the infidels as arbitrators in the lands of Islam...

The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight Jews and kill them.

Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: O Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him

Zionism scheming has no end, and after Palestine they will covet expansion from the Nile to the Euphrates River. Their scheme has been laid out in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion

Extracts from the Hamas charter or "covenant" issued in 1988

Load-Date: January 29, 2006

The week

Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

March 12, 2005 Saturday

First Edition

Section: NEWS AND FEATURES; News Review; Pg. 44

Length: 2674 words

Byline: Edited by Alan Kennedy

Body

EDITORIALS

THE DAILY STAR

The way forward

The ***Hezbollah*** secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, has urged all parties to discuss our differences so that we can decide together on the future of Lebanon. Ironically, despite our ideological differences, Mr Nasrallah, the opposition and the Americans are all saying the same thing at the same time: give Lebanon its freedom, sovereignty and independence. The Lebanese must be free to democratically govern themselves. Beirut, March 9

THE JAPAN TIMES

China's military show

So why Beijing's rush now to enact legislation on the exercise of military force? First, there are moves by the Taiwanese Government to enact a new constitution in 2008. By encoding the military threat, China can be seen as trying to make the first move in response to such a possibility. Second, China is displaying a "no compromise" stance to show both domestic and international audiences that there has been no change in its policy despite the [recent] change in leadership in Beijing. Tokyo, March 8

DAWN

Enough of short cuts

Good governance and a corruption-free society do not come into being through military takeovers and draconian laws; both require a system - a system based on the rule of law. Specifically, this means democracy. Whether it is war on corruption or creating a society wedded to honesty, answerability and responsible conduct, it is the people who can achieve these ends through an interplay of democratic forces. Pakistan has had enough of short cuts to democracy. Karachi, March 9

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Security v privacy

Welcome to the new world of homeland security, where the national resolve to be alert is clearly butting into the citizenry's near-almighty right to bear arms. Warnings about terrorism suspects' easy access to combat rifles grew after September 11 when it was disclosed that John Ashcroft, a gun rights zealot who was attorney-general at the time, had blocked federal agents from checking gun-purchase records against the growing list of terrorism suspects. The privacy rights of innocent gun purchasers were deemed paramount. The policy was theoretically reversed, but agents complain that they are still stymied by laws and officials dedicated to the most extreme agenda of the gun lobby. New York, March 9

WHAT TO SAY ABOUT ... DELTA GOODREM

Here in her home country she isthe squeaky clean darling, but lately an affair of the heart has put a few dents in the armour of the songstress Delta Goodrem.

The man in question is a wild Irishman called Brian McFadden, who has left his wife and two children and is squiring Goodrem around Australia.

But are they really happy?

Ireland Online said the relationship was rocky, claiming McFadden refused "to join her on the red carpet for a British TV program".

"Shocked witnesses told British magazine New! that Goodrem told him she's sick of being blamed for his split with estranged wife Kerry Katona, which led to her and McFadden being booed offstage as they performed their duet, Almost Here, at a benefit gig for Childline in Dublin."

But the Herald Sun's Cameron Adams found a different story when he reported that Goodrem and McFadden "flew into Melbourne keen to silence criticism of their relationship".

"I was a bit hesitant to come home because I was reading bad things on the internet; people were being so dramatic," Goodrem told Adams.

"I just thought: 'Surely Australia knows me?' But, thankfully, the public were so beautiful. I felt like a cousin who's been away for ages who's come home. I really want to reconnect with all the fans again."

Adams said Goodrem believed her fans approved of her new boyfriend and had ignored British press reports that painted her as a home wrecker.

The Daily Telegraph also found positive signs: "Delta Goodrem could not help but squeeze in a quick canoodle with her Irish beau at the premiere of Hating Alison Ashley in Melbourne.

"Wearing a mauve dress embellished with lace and beads, Goodrem, who plays Alison in the film, stepped on to the red carpet alongside lead actress Saskia Burmeister. With a bevy of admirers and photographers looking on, Goodrem rushed over to boyfriend Brian McFadden."

The Herald Sun also had Luke Dennehy on the case and he was able to announce that Goodrem was heading back to Ramsay Street for a part in the 20th-anniversary episode of the show.

"I couldn't be happier," she said. "It's kind of like, wow, I'm going back to Neighbours."

Goodrem was more worldly this time after the roller-coaster of the past two years. "I'm in a great head space."

While the Australian fans still love her and the Irish are not so sure, she may be about to make a far bigger enemy, if reports from Ireland Online prove true: "Delta Goodrem's record label, Sony Music, is planning to launch the Australian singer in America as a younger Jennifer Lopez.

"The company hopes to include a couple of new R&B and dance songs especially recorded for her first US album.

"The 20-year-old singer-actress is also having intensive dancing training before her launch in America."

Having Ireland hate you is one thing; having an "old" Jennifer Lopez on your case may be a whole new kettle of fish.

Alan Kennedy

IRA: TIME TO DISBAND

John Murray Brown

Financial Times, March 10

The British and Irish prime ministers expressed shock and revulsion yesterday at the claim by the IRA that it was ready to shoot members of its organisation involved in the murder of Robert McCartney (right, with his son Coneald), the East Belfast Catholic knifed in a pub brawl.

Sean O'Neill

The Times, March 11

Further evidence of a nationalist backlash over the murder of Robert McCartney emerged yesterday when a poll claimed growing support among Sinn Fein voters for the disbanding of the IRA. Six out of 10 nationalists and almost half of Sinn Fein supporters want the paramilitary wing of the republican movement to be wound up, according to the poll by the BBC and The Belfast Telegraph.

Brian Lavery

International Herald Tribune,

March 10

In response to the IRA's offer to shoot the killers of a Belfast man, the US envoy to Northern Ireland on Wednesday called on the IRA to disband and urged its political wing, Sinn Fein, to distance itself from crimes like the murder and a massive bank robbery in December. "It's time for the IRA to go out of business," the diplomat, Mitchell Reiss, told BBC radio.

Boris Johnson

Daily Telegraph, London, March 10

Listening to Sinn Fein, as it struggles to put the best gloss on IRA actions, one is struck by the amazing irony of the Government's current "war on terror". Westminster has been convulsed in the past few days by a bill whose central provision is that the state should be able to detain, without trial, anyone whom the Home Secretary "has reasonable grounds for suspecting of being involved in a terrorism-related activity".

And if we study article eight of the bill, we find that a "terrorism-related activity" is very widely drawn. It can be nothing more than "conduct that gives support or assistance to individuals who are known or believed to be involved in terrorism-related activity". Now, we do not have to make any extreme claims for the activities of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to see how they are perfectly captured by this description.

SKILLS: NOT WORKING

Steven Wardill

The Courier-Mail, March 10

Attacks on a $3.8 million Federal Government grant to Hungry Jack's to train young people to flip burgers was condemned as "snobbery" yesterday.

The Federal Opposition denied the gibes after deputy leader Jenny Macklin questioned the Government for spending taxpayers' dollars to subsidise salaries at the fast-food giant. Ms Macklin said the money should be spent on more traditional trades, such as plumbing, carpentry and other occupations where Australia has a growing skills shortage.

Gregory Hywood

The Age, March 10

It was during this debate around the bottleneck in the labour market, fuelled by the release of the Government's Skills for Work report, that Howard seemed to lose his touch. The Government is not used to being under serious pressure, and the Prime Minister revealed he was not across this significant strategic issue.

For Howard, reform is about the tangible issues of financial markets, tariffs and industrial relations. It is not about the workforce issues that are defining the reform agenda of the 21st century.

These involve a complex mix of education, skill development and immigration policy making that the Government has clearly been unable to get on top of.

Michael Costello

The Australian, March 11

What is John Howard's position? He says too many people are staying at school to year 12 - that is, Howard's view is that what this country needs is more school drop-outs. This is primarily a classic, subliminal Howard "culture wars" line - an under-the-radar backhander to the "elites" who go to university. Clever politics, but profoundly hostile to the future of our nation. Howard has gotten away with his failure to build a strong and sophisticated economic future for Australia - at least so far. The chickens may be coming home to roost.

Ross Gittins

The Sydney Morning Herald, March 9

But now, having neglected to train sufficient tradespeople, business is demanding the usual quick fix: a recruiting drive to bring in 20,000 foreign tradespeople, plus a scheme to admit "guest workers" (unskilled workers from poor countries willing to do unpleasant jobs such as fruit-picking).

These days, however, attracting well-trained, English-speaking skilled workers isn't easy. So it's likely they would need to be offered higher wages or tax concessions. Leaving aside the way letting employers off the hook would further undermine their commitment to training their own, how would those working alongside the newly recruited migrants feel about the better deal they were getting?

· QUOTES

Each time a problem has come up throughout my career I've managed to find a solution. This time aroundI don't have any straightforward answers. I'm really disappointed.

Brett Lee on being 12th man ... again

They haven't got time to think about sex.

Dr Helen Kelleher, convener of the Australian ***Women***'s Health Network, on the average Australian woman

We will start taking advice from the Leader of the Opposition on budget deficits when we start getting our marriage guidance counselling from Elizabeth Taylor.

The Treasurer, Peter Costello

He's a bit like the Wizard of Oz. He's now exposed as an economic midget with a very big microphone.

Labor's Wayne Swan, after Costello got some poor economic figures ... again

I thought, gee, this is pretty good, they usually feed us crap.

A Nerrena cricket player, Tim Clark, on claims players from a rival team fed them drug-laced cupcakes during a vital game in regional Victoria.

It wasn't all too bad. No Wizard of Oz- type stuff, nothing like that.

Peter Friel, manager of Lockhart River Airport, on the effects of Tropical Cyclone Ingrid in Far North Queensland

Everyone loves a fairytale, but our life is a reality and we're very happy - and if people want to refer to it as a fairytale then it's fine by us as well.

Crown Princess Mary on her life

Youse f---ing paparazzi are the reason why the Queen died. I'll see youse later, I'll get youse later.

Aaron Robertson, whose brother was killed in the Macquarie Fields car crash, attacks the media shortly after his arrest for allegedly spitting on a police officer

I'm flattered to be on a show with the Goodies. I might be a hit with the kids of Australia.

The Immigration Minister, Amanda Vanstone, confuses the 1970s British comedy trio with the children's group the Wiggles

· THE NATION

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Just briefly

The Australian Hotels Association has defended the use of skimpily dressed barmaids, which has been the target of criticism from a prominent human rights lawyer in the Kimberley. Krysti Guest used International ***Women***'s Day celebrations to call for an end to the practice in Broome, saying it perpetuated a culture that supports sexual assault.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Park plan

The South Australian Conservation Council says while plans to create the state's first marine park are better than nothing, more could be done. The park will be established 80 kilometres south of Adelaide, covering the coast and stretches of water between Kangaroo Island and Fleurieu Peninsula. TASMANIA

Research wanted

Anglicare Tasmania has called on the State Government to carry out more independent research into the effects of gambling. The chief executive, the Reverend Chris Jones, says the community support levy was set up to fund the research but he estimates that less than $310,000 has been spent in the past 10 years.

QUEENSLAND

Case continues

Gympie gun lobbyist Ron Owen's five-year battle with officialdom is set to resume after a judge overturned a magistrate's decision to dismiss firearms charges. The Courier-Mail reports that despite blasting the prosecution's handling of the case as "high-handed", Judge John Robertson ordered the charges revert to a magistrate's court for hearing. The offences arose from transactions associated with the government buyback scheme for weapons.

VICTORIA

Bye bye birdie

The State Government is putting its Commonwealth Games mascot at risk by sanctioning the clearing of habitat. There are only about 1000 south-eastern red-tailed black cockatoos, above, left and last year "Karak" was chosen as 2006 Games mascot. Most feed on rare 100-year-old buloke and stringy-bark trees in the West Wimmera region, where the Government has approved 94 per cent of farmers' applications to clear bulokes.

NSW

High times

People in Nimbin say police are getting the message that traditional ways of dealing with crime and social problems do not necessarily work there. Police, the public and the Premier's Department met this week to discuss the problems. One idea is to reintroduce the "jungle patrol" that used to mediate on the streets, pick up syringes and intervene in drug overdoses, until funding ran out last year.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

No runway success

Darwin Airport has been urged to spend more than $1 million on upgrading runway lighting after a near disaster involving a passenger jet carrying 85 people. The Qantas flight from Adelaide ran off the right side of the runway on landing. No one was injured, but the Boeing 737-800 suffered damage to its left engine, tyres and wing flaps.

ACT

Bikers clash

Thousands of members of the Ulysses Club visiting Canberra for an annual motorcycle rally have been instructed by the club to remove identifying badges from their jackets after threats of violence against them from the Rebels Motorcycle Club, who are offended by the similarity of the badges to their own. About 5000 members of the Ulysses Club for veteran motorcyclists - who range in age from 40 to 92 - are visiting Canberra.

· THE FALLOUT

A real slapper: Police in India are hunting a beautiful woman who slaps her male victims hard before running off with their valuables. In Lucknow her tactics have earned her the nickname of "The girl who makes your ears ring", reports the Hindustan Times. Three men have reported being robbed by the woman - but others are said to be afraid to report her because of rumours that she's the daughter of a policeman.

Dumb and dumber: A Russian gun-shop owner who was feigning that he was going to shoot himself in the head ended up in hospital because he forgot the gun was loaded - albeit with rubber bullets. Interfax reported he escaped death but was seriously injured. Ring you later: Romanian doctors have removed a man's wedding ring from his penis. The father of two told them he had a one-night stand with a woman. He couldn't say how the ring got onto his penis but suspected the woman wanted to embarrass him because he fell asleep.

Fingers of suspicion: Serbia's deputy culture minister has admitted that he was responsible for sending agents to steal a shaving from waxworks at Madame Tussaud's in London. Vladimir Tomcic wanted to ensure that his country's wax museum could be as good as the top London attraction. But he says the agents went too far and snapped off two whole fingers from a wax figure.

Graphic

PHOTO: Putting their backs into it ... skipper Nina Curtis and crew, representing Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club on Camp Eden, compete in the Harken ***Women***'s International Match Racing Regatta on Sydney Harbour. m Eight crews from Australia and New Zealand are taking part in the round-robin series, which started on Friday and ends on Sunday. Photo: Robert Pearce

Load-Date: July 17, 2007

No Headline In Original

Daily Mail (London)

July 26, 2006 Wednesday

Section: ED 1ST; Pg. 56

Length: 2008 words

Body

Hezbollah bias THE word 'disproportionate' seems to have became the favourite clichE of British reporters and commentators when describing the Israeli response to ***Hezbollah*** rocket attacks on cities in northern Israel.

Despite the fact that ***Hezbollah*** and not Israel initiated the conflict, every TV news bulletin starts and runs for ten to 15 minutes with detailed reports on casualties in Lebanon. As for Israeli victims, there is about five seconds in audio with no visuals.

Can any British TV editor explain this bias? Bearing in mind that the average TV viewer absorbs 90 per cent of information from visual material and 10 per cent from audio, the obvious conclusion to draw is that Israel is the bloodthirsty aggressor who deserves what it gets in South Lebanon and that ***Hezbollah*** is the real protector of Lebanon.

SAM YOSSMAN, London, NW6.

God-givenwar IT WAS no 'mistake' that the Israelites were brought back to the land of their forefathers (Letters). All through the Old Testament, there are prophecies of this event.

Think about it: no other nation on earth has been brought back to live in their land after so long a period. No other nation has revived its native language and - just as it is written in the prophets - Israel is blooming again.

Israel is no UN mistake but the work of God. To view Israel's existence as a mistake and apart from God is foolishness in the extreme. Or maybe you think that they should just down weapons and march into the sea so the rest of the world can live in peace?

I'm backing Israel. Yes they make mistakes but in their shoes what would you do?

DENIS COLL, Millisle, Co. Down.

Wednesdayheat HOT Wednesday - July 19 just gone - during which we sweltered, baked and thirsted, has a retinue of historical predecessors.

The 97f temperature experienced at Epsom in July 1911 might, for the 20th century, have some claim on last Wednesday's top temperature for July.

It shares that claim with Cheltenham, which recorded 97f on July 3, 1976.

Summer 1868 was a scorcher.

Tonbridge in Kent claimed 24 days of 90f or above - exceeding the number of such days in 1911 and 1976.

July 22 in that year reached 100.5f at Tonbridge, also a Wednesday, as was August 9, 1911, with its 100f at Greenwich. Prof C. E. P. Brooks says this temperature lasted from 3pm to 3.30pm.

Hotter still was another Wednesday - July 13, 1808, when the heat was so fierce across England that many farm labourers and horses collapsed and died.

And, according to the Scots Magazine, it was so hot that the wax in beehives melted.

The effects of the heat indicate it was even hotter than in Faversham, Kent on August 10, 2003, when temperatures reached a record 101f. In the 1880s, a book on weather and harvests by Thomas Baker refers us briefly to another hot Wednesday in July 1513.

It led to heatstroke deaths as did its parallel nearly 300 years later in July 1808. Hot Tuesday in July 1707 claimed a number of lives in the southern half of England. Dumfries in Scotland claimed a record high for Scotland of 91f on July 2, 1908.

ALASDAIR MacLEAN, Stourbridge, West Mids.

Defiant DEFRA IT'S TOTALLY wrong for DEFRA not to support a five-metre spray ban around fields bordering villages and houses. It involves no red tape whatsoever. What does the Government want? A few dead bodies to prove chemicals can be dangerous?

Georgina Downs is going a little over the top by demanding one-mile buffer strips (Mail). Most farms would not then be worth farming.

I wouldn't think many dairy farmers are sorry to hear that the Dairy Crest chief executive has retired to change nappies. Yet again, near-bankrupt dairy farmers have had a reduction in their price of milk, while a huge-salaried executive retires on a huge pension.

A. K. CASSWELL, Gainsborough.

Cool as a cat AS AN animal lover, in my 80 years I've seen many cats up trees, some for a long time, but I never thought about calling out the emergency services. A cat that can climb a tree will without doubt find its way down when hungry enough.

As a youngster, we had a tall pine tree outside the public house my parents kept, and our much-loved cat was chased up the tree by a dog. He was there for four days and three nights.

My father said not to worry as he would come down when hunger struck.

Sure enough, Tom came down, looking a bit ashamed but none the worse for his epic stay. I think he enjoyed all the customers looking at him each day.

The fire service do such an excellent job, no way should they put their lives and limbs at risk, when 99 times out of 100, the cat will sort itself out.

I don't think the episode in Cumbria justified a Euro MP getting involved, although I do think this nanny state has gone too far. Let's leave our fire ' persons' to do the job they are very good at, saving human lives.

L. A. BLAKER, Portsmouth, Hants.

Fuming middleclass

I NOTED the possible solutions put forward by scientists to explain why well-off children should be more at risk of cancer (Mail). I wonder if anyone has considered the fact that children from well-off families and children from rural areas could possibly receive more exposure to lead-free petrol.

Around the time that lead-free petrol came on the market, my husband visited an engineering company making valves to be fitted to petrol pumps at garages to siphon off vapours emitted by lead-free petrol.

The company was producing this product for the U.S. market where a law had been passed stating that all petrol pumps must have this valve fitted because the vapour from lead-free petrol is carcinogenic and lethal.

My husband asked if the valves were to be fitted on petrol pumps in the UK?

The answer was no, and he was advised 'when you fill up with petrol turn your head away'.

I remember a scientist saying that lead-free petrol is carcinogenic and very lethal when the vapour is inhaled.

Poorer families from inner cities might not be able to afford a car. And they might live near their schools and places of work, so they can walk.

I don't know if the Government has encouraged the petrol companies to fit petrol pumps in the UK with a product that removes the lethal carcinogenic fumes when people fill up their vehicles.

Perhaps someone should ask.

Maybe parents should think carefully about taking children into garages when they fill up with fuel. If their children are in the car when they use the pumps, keep windows and doors shut.

MARGARET ARNOLD, Whitstable, Kent.

Adding to depression THE suicide rate of manic-depressives might be partially due to the illness but that is not the whole story (Mail).

Mental illness is horrible yet no other illness elicits such utter contempt by society: shunned by communities, ignored by the media, actively discriminated against by prospective employers and even voluntary organisations.

We are the butt of hostility and jokes by journalists and so-called comedians, not to mention holding the unique position of being the only group of people that can legally be abused despite the stranglehold of political correctness.

Even the short respite that a spell in hospital can bring has been taken away from us as wards are closed to us to alleviate the 'bed-blocking' crisis caused by people who are no longer willing to look after elderly relatives.

Hardly surprising that a lot of us choose to kill ourselves, is it?

LINDA PAYNE, New Ash Green, Kent.

Long wait for justice

WHEN reforming the criminal justice system, will John Reid also take a look at how long it takes for a case to come to trial?

The son of a friend of mine was charged with an offence more than two years ago and is still awaiting a trial date. A date was originally set for March of this year and was scheduled to run for two weeks.

Due to various circumstances (one of which was the absence from court of the judge for three days in the first week and a half), the trial would have greatly overrun the allocated period and therefore several jurors stated their inability to commit to the whole trial, causing it to be adjourned to a later date - still to be set.

By the time this case does go to court,

three years will have elapsed, which cannot be fair, either to the accused or the public.

If the accused is innocent, his whole life over the past three years has been placed on hold and considerable stress has been caused to his family.

If he is guilty, surely he needs to be punished, and more importantly, the public need to be protected.

D. SMYTHE, Long Eaton, Derbys.

Food court SURELY the next step has to be Supercourts: Sainsbury's Sessions has a ring to it.

Form a disorderly gang before a local magistrate in the fast food aisle, raise a clenched fist

Musical error AS HEAD of a primary school in Wiltshire (C of E voluntary aided), I would not allow children to perform John Lennon's song Imagine because the lyrics are ungrammatical.

It should not be 'there's no countries' but 'there are no countries'.

JOHN RUMMING, Bath.

Let us imagine IT NEVER ceases to astonish me that supposedly well-educated-people consider John Lennon's Imagine to be subversive or anti-religious (Mail).

Most of the song is taken directly from the book of Revelation in the Christian Bible where it speaks of Paradise.

John was 'imagining' that it had arrived. How is that anti-Christian or subversive?

Had the song been penned by somebody such as Robert Burns, no doubt it would have been lauded to the skies as showing great depth and perception.

I do not personally care for John Lennon and many of his works, but I love to hear this particular song as I share the sentiment.

Rather than banning the song, I think the headmaster should be exploring it in more depth with his pupils.

LYNN WILSON, Swindon, Wilts.

Naked truth

DESPITE Amanda Platell's view, the current hot weather's display of awful shorts, bellies, buttocks and thongs bring a stark immediacy to the last lines of A Coat, by W.B. Yeats.

'For there's more enterprise In walking naked.' As ***female*** underwear, the thong might be a matter of personal choice.

As so- called 'modesty' for man or woman, I'm beginning to wonder whether it's not rather more pervy than anything it might conceal.

BILL COLLETT, Penryn, Cornwall.

DEBATE

Is it wrong to discriminate against fatties?

YES WHAT a nasty woman Sue Whitehead must be, complaining about the two large people she was sandwiched between at the theatre. I suggest we begin a campaign to vet people before they are allowed into public arenas.

Perhaps those who are wider than she considers they should be could be forced to buy two seats.

Those who smell could be sprayed with deodorant; people with disabilities kept isolated in case they cause other patrons concern; and tall folk could be forced to kneel in front of their seats. Finally those, like Sue, who fidget (how annoying) should be issued with a DVD to watch in the comfort of their homes where 'fat and happy' people won't be able to upset them.

Next time this happens, Sue, tell the 'large' people you are uncomfortable. I'm sure they will be more than generous to such a frail, but perfectly formed little lady.

L. WEBSTER, Bexleyheath, Kent.

NO WHY should an obese person get to 'use' part of a seat next to them at a theatre or on a coach which is occupied and paid for by a slimmer member of the public purely because they're unable to keep their body to themselves?

On a one-hour coach journey, I was forced to lean against the window due to the enormous man sitting next to me. He never once apologised for causing me such discomfort - even when I complained.

I wrote to the coach company asking for reimbursement as I hadn't been able to sit properly in the seat I'd paid for. I told the company it should devise a policy under which overweight passengers who need two seats should pay for two.

The company merely replied: 'We do not discriminate against our customers due to their size.' I had to laugh. Of course the company discriminates against size - my size. I wrote again pointing this out but heard no more. Am I size-ist? No. My best mate and her sister both weigh 18st - but they stick to their own cars. Maybe I should start eating more pies.

ELIZABETH McCARDLE, Cotham, Bristol.

Load-Date: July 26, 2006

In Tiny Arab State, Web Takes On Ruling Elite

The New York Times

January 15, 2006 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section 1; Column 2; Foreign Desk; Pg. 1

Length: 3167 words

Byline: By NEIL MacFARQUHAR; Abeer Allam contributed reporting for this article.

Series: STIRRINGS IN THE DESERT/Minority Rule

Dateline: MANAMA, Bahrain

Body

Ali Abdulemam, this country's most notorious blogger, sat in the boxlike reception room of his father's house in a cramped Shiite village dotted with raw cinder-block houses, trying to log onto the widely popular Web site that he founded.

The government on this flyspeck of an island nation, home to an American Navy base, recently renewed its effort to block dozens of opposition Web sites. So Mr. Abdulemam, 28, a computer engineer, had to spend about 10 minutes whipping through various computer servers around the world before finally pulling up his Web site, BahrainOnline.org.

It was National Day, Dec. 16, and some five miles away, the beautifully landscaped boulevards of Manama, the capital, were packed with revelers enjoying bands and fireworks. Pictures of the ruling princes blanketed the city, which was also awash in the national colors, red and white. Red and white lights were even wrapped around the palm trees lining the main thoroughfares.

But most of the couple of hundred people posting messages in the "National Forum" section of BahrainOnline mocked the idea of celebrating the day in 1971 when a Sunni Muslim king ascended the throne to rule over a Shiite Muslim majority.

"In Bahrain, glorifying the king means glorifying the nation, and opposing the king means betraying the homeland and working for foreign countries," wrote one online participant, noting that the formula is the mark of a dictatorship. "Should we be loyal to the king or to Bahrain?"

Bahrain, long a regional financial hub and a prime example of the power of the Internet to foment discontent, bills itself as a leader of political change in the Arab world. It is a claim echoed in praise from the United States, which considers Bahrain crucial for its many regional military ventures because the American Navy's Fifth Fleet is based here.

But in Bahrain, as across the Arab world, those pushing for democratic change want to end minority rule by a family, sect or a military clique.

The royal family here dominates, holding half the cabinet positions and the major posts in the security services and the University of Bahrain.

Sheik Muhammad al-Khalifa, the prince who runs the Economic Development Board, argues that Bahrain should not become a democracy in the Western sense. "As traditional Arabs, I don't think democracy is part of our nature," he said.

"I think all people want is accountability," he added, noting that some form of democracy was needed to achieve that.

So political change in the Middle East rests partly on whether and how the many minority governments will yield power and allow others to participate. So far, the results are anemic.

The al-Saud tribe slapped its name on the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where local elections a year ago have not produced active municipal councils, and crucial issues like how much oil wealth the ruling family absorbs are not discussed.

In Syria, the ruling Assad family and its confederates from the Alawite minority sect are in crisis, accused of assassinating Rafik Hariri, a former Sunni prime minister of Lebanon and an important figure who might have been able to rally majority support against the Alawites' monopoly on power.

Of course, Iraq remains the biggest experiment of all in changing the practice of minority rule. The American occupation has yet to answer whether it is possible to forge a democratic government in the Arab world, or if the attempt will drown in a cauldron of sectarian bloodshed. But the results are being closely watched, perhaps nowhere more than in Bahrain, where up to 70 percent of its native population of 450,000 are Shiites, similar to Iraq's Shiite-Sunni split. Shiites here also increasingly look to moderate religious leaders in Iraq for guidance.

Some political change has occurred. Debate is growing through the Internet, satellite television and other forces, and elections this year will replace the Parliament and municipal councils first chosen in 2002 under a new Constitution. Members of the ruling Khalifa family describe this as a vibrant process that will ultimately establish a local strain of democracy. Yet some of its most senior members and their Sunni allies hint that the process is threatened because Bahrain's Shiites disloyally serve outside interests like the Shiites in Iran and Iraq.

Members of the opposition call this nonsense and accuse the ruling dynasty of questioning their loyalty to avoid having to share power. They say King Hamad and his Khalifa clan, descendants of Bedouins from the Arabian mainland who conquered this island, taking it from its Persian masters in the 18th century, will only make cosmetic changes, noting that almost nothing has been done to alleviate the entrenched discrimination faced by the poorest segments of the Shiite population.

"The problem with the royal family is that when they give us any democracy they think that it is a gift and we have to thank them for it," Mr. Abdulemam said. "The time when they were the lords and we were the slaves is gone. The new generation is well educated. They won't live like our fathers did in the past, when they said O.K. to whatever the royal family did."

A 'Golden Time' Cut Short

Bahrain's first Parliament, elected in 1973, proved too boisterous for King Hamad's father, who dissolved it after 18 months. Opposition demands to restore it increased through the 1990's, marked by bombings and other sporadic violence. The authoritarian government subjected the mostly Shiite opposition political activists to arrest, torture and forced exile.

When King Hamad, now 55, inherited power in 1999, he promised a democracy that he described as "areeqa" or "well rooted."

He announced changes that included amnesty for exiles and the disbanding of the dreaded State Security Courts. Bahrainis enthusiastically approved the new plan in a public referendum.

It was then that Mr. Abdulemam established his groundbreaking Web site, determined to give Bahrainis a place to share ideas and develop plans to deepen political change. ''It seemed like a golden time, when the country was moving from one period in its history to another,'' he said. ''Everybody needed a place to talk so I provided it.''

But King Hamad soon hit the brakes. In 2002 he announced a new Constitution, formulated without public consultation.

The cabinet, led by his uncle, a hard-liner opposing democratic change, would report to him, not the Parliament. Instead of a single 40-member Parliament, he added an appointed upper house. Amending the Constitution now required a two-thirds majority of both houses, giving the monarch full control. Parliament now could only propose laws, not write them. An audit bureau that had previously reported to Parliament was replaced with one that would not subject the spending of the royal court or the 2,500 royal family members to any public scrutiny.

''I had been full of hope that a new era was coming to Bahrain,'' Mr. Abdulemam said. ''But what happened next threw us all in the dirt. When the king brought in the new Constitution, everyone was crushed.''

Politics in the Internet Age

In the old days, with its monopoly over television and radio and the ability to shut down newspapers, the Khalifa dynasty would have had less trouble controlling the debate. Now, with the Internet and satellite television outside its reach, the government resorts to tactics like tossing Mr. Abdulemam and two of his fellow Web masters into jail for a couple of weeks, as it did last year.

At the time, the opposition orchestrated repeated demonstrations and international intervention to help win his release, but legal charges of insulting the king, incitement and disseminating false news remain pending and can be dredged up at any time.

One reason the Internet is so popular -- scores of villages have their own Web sites and chat rooms -- is that far more can be said about the ruling family online than through any other means.

''Freedom of expression is something you have to take, not something that will be granted to you,'' Mr. Abdulemam said, but he doubts that free speech alone will accomplish much. ''Their policy basically comes down to, 'Say what you want and we will do what we want.' ''

BahrainOnline is the go-to political site, with princes, Parliament members, opposition leaders and others with an interest in politics saying they consult it daily to find out what the opposition is thinking.

The easiest way to ensure a large turnout for any demonstration, the leader of the main Shiite opposition group said, is to post the announcement for it on BahrainOnline.

''If something happens anywhere in Bahrain, usually within five minutes maximum something about it is happening on my site,'' Mr. Abdulemam said.

Still, the site's Web masters are often criticized for creating a ''tabloid'' that spreads rumors and demeans those considered enemies. Ghada Jamsheer, a ***women***'s rights advocate who criticized the Shiite clergy for opposing a proposed law that would give more defined divorce rights to ***women***, said her face was pasted onto a naked body.

Mr. Abdulemam said his site was blamed for trash posted on any site in Bahrain, and his Web masters, monitoring as many as 1,000 posts a day, remove anything that promotes violence. He laughs when he recalls his arrest and how little his interrogators knew about how the Internet works, blaming him for the content of every posting.

Mansour Jamri, editor of a daily newspaper, Wasat, and the son of a famous Shiite opposition cleric, notes that many of those writing on the Web sites are very young.

"If you don't shout with them you are a corrupt person, you are basically a dog used by the government," said Mr. Jamri, who has been portrayed as just that.

Part of the issue is that the press remains hobbled. When Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja, a prominent human rights advocate, was arrested in late 2004 after giving a speech attacking the prime minister over corruption, no newspaper printed what he had said. For that people had to turn to BahrainOnline.

"This pocket of anarchy is a byproduct of half-hearted democracy," Mr. Jamri said.

Simmering Frustrations

In 2002, BahrainOnline led a fight to boycott the elections. As a result, Shiites mostly stayed away from the polls, and the vote exacerbated the sense among Shiites that the Khalifas and their Sunni allies were not interested in treating them as equals.

Election districts were gerrymandered so that sparsely populated Sunni districts in the south got almost as many members as the heavily Shiite villages in the north. Opposition groups amassed evidence that the government gave passports to various Sunni Muslim groups, including members of a tribe in Saudi Arabia that had once lived on Bahrain, to alter voting demographics.

Ultimately, Sunnis captured 27 of the 40 seats in the election. As in many parts of the Muslim world, fundamentalists were the best organized, and a group of Sunni fundamentalists became the largest bloc in Parliament. They muted any opposition to the government out of concern that it might help spread the influence of Shiite Islam.

The new Parliament spent half its time bickering over religious practice. It won a fight to allow fully veiled ***women*** to drive. It proposed a ban on scantily clad window mannequins. It tried to separate the sexes in all classrooms. Last year, alcohol sales were banned during a Muslim holiday -- a time when tens of thousands of visitors arrive from Saudi Arabia to drink.

What Parliament did not do was really confront the government over a chronic housing shortage and unemployment, particularly among Shiites. The gap between the largely Sunni haves and the Shiite have-nots grows ever more apparent and feeds simmering frustration.

Mr. Abdulemam, for example, earns a decent salary as a computer engineer at an American-owned company. With a wife who is expecting their first child any day, he can not afford $130,000 for a plot of land and does not ever expect to be able to.

He is the youngest of 10 siblings, 4 of whom still live with their children in his father's house. Some 15 people live there, with each nuclear family allotted a room. "I know we deserve better," he said.

Exact numbers are hard to pin down in Bahrain, but about 27,000 applications are pending for subsidized government housing, senior officials concede. Unemployment stands officially at 15 percent but runs as high as 28 percent among Shiite young adults ages 20 to 24, diplomats and Bahraini economists said.

Opposition members accuse the royal family of monopolizing all available land, and say an expatriate community of 250,000 -- from Asia and other Arab countries -- blocks Shiites from most decent jobs. Shiites avoid some tough jobs like construction and are generally barred from joining the security services. Royal family members concede that more needs to be done to improve housing but deny hoarding land. A job training program is to begin this month.

Last spring, the committee in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that monitors racial discrimination rebuked Bahrain. The report said that although Bahrain paid lip service in its laws to barring discrimination, actual practice lagged.

When Mr. Abdulemam was arrested in February 2005, he found that his interrogator was an Egyptian, one of hundreds of Sunni Muslims from the Arab world and Pakistan recruited into the security services, given houses and usually citizenship.

"He was asking me whether I was loyal to this country," Mr. Abdulemam said sourly. "How can an Egyptian ask me about my loyalty? There are many ways to love your country, and what I do is one of them."

The poverty suffered by many Shiites seems particularly galling to them given the real estate boom. The capital's skyline is dominated by gargantuan luxury office blocs under construction, which Bahrainis contend are all owned by the royal family. The capital is also plastered with ads for housing developments like Riffa Heights, an upscale community with sea views and a golf course in a plush neighborhood already dominated by royal palaces where Shiites cannot buy land.

Senior officials call it all essential development to attract investment to Bahrain, long the Persian Gulf's financial hub but one competing increasingly with far richer emirates like Dubai and Qatar.

The young, American-educated crown prince even used a huge tract to build a $150 million Formula 1 racing circuit. Talal al-Zain, the investment banker who is the raceway's chairman, lauded it as a means of putting Bahrain on the international map. The track seems to baffle Bahrainis. For special races on National Day only about 500 people, most of them foreigners, sat in stands built for 30,000. One Web site mocks the crown prince, Sheik Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, as "Salman Schumacher," a reference to Michael Schumacher, a top racer.

Formally, the Bush administration has declared that it supports democratic change across the region, that the United States will no longer laud despots just because they back American policy. "Hopeful reform is already taking hold in an arc from Morocco to Jordan to Bahrain," President Bush said in his 2005 State of the Union address.

Practically, though, the United States has not pushed for sweeping change out of concern for what might happen if states fell into the hands of Islamists.

The Khalifas court the Bush administration particularly well. The foreign minister, Sheik Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa, noted that a proposed port might provide the deep-water docking space needed for the aircraft carriers that now have to anchor offshore. Such cooperation has earned Bahrain a free-trade deal and praise from Mr. Bush.

A Shiite-Sunni Divide

During a protest march on National Day, some of the participants chanted "Death to Khalifa!" referring to Sheik Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, 69, who has remained prime minister since independence in 1971. They yelled it in Arabic and Persian, the language of Shiite Iran.

With Iraq holding so much of the people's attention here, much the way Iran did after its revolution, the question is whether developments in Iraq will lead Bahrain to more sectarianism or more democracy. Signs of both exist. Some postings on BahrainOnline include portraits of prominent Iranian ayatollahs past and present, particularly Khomeini and Ali Khamenei. Members of the ruling family generally use such displays to buttress the accusation that the basic goal of the Shiites is to establish an Iranian-style theocracy in Bahrain.

But Shiites here respond that the ayatollahs are strictly spiritual guides and that native Shiites have lived in Bahrain longer than the ruling family and have no intention of living under the thrall of yet another foreign power. To counter the accusation that their loyalties lie outside Bahrain, the Shiite activists stopped hoisting such pictures at rallies.

"The new Iraq is the model," said Sheik Ali Salman, the 40-year-old Shiite cleric elected to lead Al Wifaq Islamic Society, the main Shiite opposition group, and a man who once organized rallies denouncing the American invasion of Iraq. The expectation that Shiites will dominate the Iraqi government has given Shiites across the region new confidence.

Speaking fluent English learned during five years of exile in Britain, the cleric ticks off all the steps Iraqis have taken toward choosing their own leaders in the same period that King Hamad has been busy consolidating power while warning against moving too quickly to carry out change.

Most Shiites follow one senior cleric on matters of religious practice in their daily lives. Mr. Abdulemam said he used to look to Khomeini in Iran, but recently switched to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the moderate and powerful Shiite cleric in Iraq.

Sunnis in Bahrain are at times incensed when Shiites fax Ayatollah Sistani questions, like asking him whether they must obey traffic laws, because King Hamad is not, in their view, a legitimate Islamic ruler. (He faxed back to say yes, they do.)

Where many Shiites here used to watch Al Manar, the satellite channel broadcast from Beirut by the militant Shiite group ***Hezbollah***, they have switched to the Iraqi-run Euphrates channel. When a bombing kills Shiites in Iraq, some in Bahrain wear black.

Shiites and Sunnis silently assess all events in Iraq, which are both feeding democratic yearnings and deepening the divisions between them.

"If a Sunni area is bombed, the Sunnis wish it was a Shiite area; they don't say it, but they feel it," said Sheik Khalid al-Khalifa, a prince and an academic who serves on the Shura Council, the appointed upper house of Parliament. "It's the same for the Shiites. It's all reflected here."

About This Series

This is the last article in a series examining the prospects for democracy in the Middle East. The earlier articles are at nytimes.com/middleeast.

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: In Manama, the capital of Bahrain, from left to right, portraits of the prime minister, king and crown prince, all members of the Khalifa family. (Photo by James Hill for The New York Times)(pg. 1)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS -- Sheik Adel al-Mawada, second from left, an elected member of the lower house of Parliament, with colleagues in his home.

THE BLOGGER -- Ali Abdulemam, founder of the Web site BahrainOnline.org, in his father's home. (Photographs by JAMES HILL for The New York Times)(pg. 14)Map of Bahrain highlighting Manama: Bahrain's contrasts: Manama's luxury coexists with poverty and joblessness. (pg. 14)

Load-Date: January 17, 2006

Closing in on Zarqawi; We go inside the search for the ringleader of al-Qaida in Iraq

Air Force Times

May 8, 2006 Monday

Section: NEWSLINES; Pg. 14

Length: 3441 words

Byline: By Sean D. Naylor; Times staff writer

Body

Just nine days before al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi released his latest video, a special operations raid killed five of his men, captured five others and apparently came within a couple of city blocks of nabbing Zarqawi himself.

Then, the day Zarqawi's video debuted, special ops forces killed 12 more of his troops in a second raid in the same town.

The raids in Yusufiyah, 20 miles southwest of Baghdad in the heart of the Sunni Triangle, were the latest battles in a small, vicious war being waged largely in the shadows of the wider counterinsurgency effort.

It is a war fought by a secretive organization called Task Force 145, made up of some of the most elite U.S. troops, including Delta Force and SEAL Team 6. They have one goal: hunting down Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted man, and destroying his al-Qaida in Iraq organization.

Zarqawi's escape in Yusufiyah was not the first time special ops troops have nearly had him. In early 2005, they came so close they could see the Jordanian's panicked face as he fled.

The first of the two Yusufiyah raids began at 2:15 a.m. April 16 when SEAL Team 6 operators and Army Rangers approached a terrorist safe house, a U.S. special operations source said.

A U.S. Central Command news release said "coalition forces" - the usual shorthand for Task Force 145 elements - were "searching for a wanted al-Qaida associate."

When the U.S. troops arrived, the enemy opened fire with small arms. In the fight that followed, the special ops troops killed five terrorists, three of whom wore suicide belts, according to Central Command. "Two of the suicide bombers were killed before either could detonate his vest, and the third detonated his body bomb, killing only himself and injuring no one else," the news release said.

A woman in the house also was killed. Three other ***women*** and a child were wounded and were medically evacuated to the 10th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad.

U.S. forces detained five other occupants, one of whom was wounded. One of the five was later confirmed as "the wanted al-Qaida terrorist for whom the troops were searching," according to Central Command.

"The terrorist, whose name is currently being withheld, was involved in planning and executing improvised explosive device attacks and allegedly was associated with al-Qaida foreign fighter operations," the command said. The other four suspects are being "assessed for knowledge of and involvement in terrorist activity," the news release said.

usufiyah is Zarqawi country. Indeed, intelligence later suggested the terrorist kingpin "was probably 1,000 meters away" at the time of the raid, a special operations source said.

In addition to the suicide vests, U.S. forces recovered four AK-series assault rifles, a pistol and several grenades. In an indication of the intensity of the close-quarters, indoor battle, "one grenade was found with the pin pulled, but not yet expended, in the hand of a dead terrorist," according to Central Command.

Five U.S. troops were hurt in the raid, but they have either returned to duty or are expected to shortly.

Tale of the tape

Among items recovered from the safe house, the special operations source said, was a video showing Zarqawi at various times in "black pajamas with New Balance running shoes on."

The source said the video seized in Yusufiyah was the same one released April 25.

One section of the video shows Zarqawi firing an M249 squad automatic weapon outside, and another depicts him sitting inside next to an M4 assault rifle.

In the video, Zarqawi mocks President Bush, and makes clear his fierce opposition to attempts to establish democracy in Iraq.

Produced by al-Qaida in Iraq's "Media Committee," the video reflects "Zarqawi's number one thing … the information campaign," said the special ops source.

But on the same day that video was released, "coalition forces" killed 12 other fighters at another Yusufiyah safe house "associated with foreign terrorists," according to Central Command.

The special operations source confirmed that this was another TF 145 raid. The news release said "multiple intelligence sources" led troops to the safe house. As they approached, a man ran out brandishing what Central Command described as "a shoulder-fired rocket," which he was attempting to launch when the operators shot and killed him.

More fighters appeared and exchanged fire with the special ops troops, who were supported by helicopter machine-gun fire. The U.S. fire took out another four terrorists outside the safe house.

When those inside continued to fire, the special operators called in an airstrike that destroyed the building. A search of the rubble revealed the bodies of seven men and a woman. Each man wore webbing holding two loaded magazines and two grenades.

"The troops also discovered suicide notes on one of the terrorists [and] body bombs," Central Command said.

U.S. forces believed two "wanted terrorists" were operating from the safe house. At press time, Central Command was still trying to identify those killed.

A war within the war

The job of hunting Zarqawi and rolling up his al-Qaida in Iraq network falls to Task Force 145, which is made up of the most elite U.S. and British special operations forces, and whose headquarters is in Balad.

The U.S. forces are drawn from units under the Joint Special Operations Command at Pope Air Force Base, N.C. These include the military's two "direct action" special mission units - the Army's 1st Special Forces Operational

Detachment-Delta, known as Delta Force, and the Navy's SEAL Team 6, sometimes known by its cover name, Naval Special Warfare Development Group; the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and 75th Ranger Regiment; and the Air Force's 24th Special Tactics Squadron.

After Saddam Hussein's fall, the first order of business for the JSOC forces was capturing or killing the 55 individuals on the "deck of cards" that depicted the regime's senior officials. Delta's C Squadron was at the heart of the task force that captured Saddam in December 2003.

The emergence of Zarqawi and his al-Qaida in Iraq group as a major threat to Iraq's stability then gave JSOC a new priority. As the war in Iraq has ground on, and with Zarqawi still on the loose, the JSOC force in Iraq has grown steadily and undergone several name changes. TF 121 and TF 626 were two previous incarnations.

TF 145 is divided into four subordinate task forces in Iraq:

. Task Force West, organized around a SEAL Team 6 squadron with Rangers in support.

. Task Force Central, organized around a Delta squadron with Rangers in support.

. Task Force North, organized around a Ranger battalion combined with a small Delta element.

. Task Force Black, organized around a British Special Air Service "saber squadron," with British paratroopers from the Special Forces Support Group in support.

Although Army Lt. Gen. Stan McChrystal, JSOC commander, spends much of his time in Iraq, his job there is to coordinate with Army Gen. John Abizaid, chief of Central Command, and other senior leaders. The man in charge of TF 145 is the Delta Force commander, a colonel Air Force Times agreed not to name.

Each TF 145 element operates largely autonomously.

The O-5 commander of each task-force can authorize a raid without seeking TF 145 approval.

This freedom, combined with the amount of intelligence generated on missions, creates a furious operational tempo for the TF 145 elements, which average well over a mission per day.

From 6 at night to 10 the next morning, "We're going balls to the wall, doing hits all over the place," the special operations source said.

Bigger than Osama

TF 145's war with Zarqawi has become a higher priority for JSOC than capturing al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and his right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, presumed to be hiding somewhere in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province along the border with Afghanistan.

"Iraq is the main effort" for JSOC, the special operations source said, adding that JSOC's presence in Afghanistan is smaller than it is in Iraq - a reflection of the threat Zarqawi poses to U.S. efforts in Iraq.

"Who's the biggest threat right now?" the source said. "In military terms, bin Laden has been neutralized. He's not going anywhere. He can't really move. His communications are shallow. … Zarqawi is a bigger threat."

In addition, he noted, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's refusal to let U.S. forces operate in Pakistan reduces the utility of keeping a large JSOC force in Afghanistan awaiting actionable intel on bin Laden's location.

The source said Pakistan plays the same role for al-Qaida's leaders that Cambodia did for the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War: "safe haven."

The JSOC presence in Iraq continues to grow. About a year ago, Army Special Forces Command offered McChrystal some A-teams, but he declined the offer, according to the special operations source.

However, TF 145's needs have grown. It is already augmented by a Special Forces company that specializes in direct-action missions. Each Special Forces group has one of these companies, called a CIF, for Combatant Commander's In-Extremis Force.

But McChrystal wants more combat power, and has asked that a battalion task force of the 82nd Airborne Division be placed at TF 145's disposal, two special operations sources said.

Multi-National Forces-Iraq "does not comment on proposed force deployments," Army Capt. Bill Roberts, an MNF-I spokesman, wrote in an e-mail response to questions from Air Force Times.

However, an Army colonel confirmed that MNF-I placed a request in mid-April for a three-battalion light-infantry task force, with communications, transportation, military police, medical, human intelligence and psychological operations "enablers."

"McChrystal's pushing pretty hard for it," the special operations source said.

If the request is approved, the three infantry battalions would not deploy simultaneously, but would rotate in about every 110 to 120 days.

"The battalion would be split between the three [U.S.] task forces in country," the special operations source said.

It would perform the same sort of functions handled by Rangers, but would not replace the Rangers, he said.

Not everyone in the special ops community approves of the scale of TF 145 operations, which appears to be enabled by McChrystal's close relations with Abizaid and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. "JSOC just sucks up all the assets [in Iraq]," said a non-JSOC special ops officer with experience in Iraq. "They can do whatever the hell they want," because, he said, anything McChrystal wants is OK by Rumsfeld.

So close, and yet …

The burgeoning size of the JSOC commitment to Iraq speaks to the challenge posed by Zarqawi, who elicits grudging respect from special operations personnel for the risks he takes leading from the front.

"You've got to respect your enemy," said the special operations source. "He's an out-front commander. He's using all the elements to fight us."

But Zarqawi's command style and his determination to take the same risks as his fighters have almost led to his capture on several occasions, with perhaps his closest brush with JSOC coming Feb. 20, 2005.

Using intelligence derived in part by an Arab-American soldier in TF 145, the task force obtained a time frame for when Zarqawi was due to travel down a stretch of highway along the Tigris River.

This allowed a task force of Rangers and Delta operators to set up an elaborate ambush. But according to special operations sources familiar with the event, Zarqawi was late.

The U.S. troops were preparing to leave when his vehicle came into view. He and his driver blew through a Delta roadblock before nearing a Ranger checkpoint. The Ranger M240B machine-gunner had Zarqawi in his sights and requested permission to fire, but the lieutenant in charge of the checkpoint did not give the OK because he did not have "positive ID" of the vehicle's occupants, a TF 145 source said.

To the intense frustration of other Rangers on the scene, Zarqawi's vehicle hurtled past, with the Jordanian staring wildly at the Rangers, while wearing a Black Hawk vest and gripping a U.S. assault rifle, the TF 145 source said. Delta operators took up a high-speed pursuit, while a Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle tracked the action from above.

But the Delta men fell victim to bad timing. When he realized he had a tail, Zarqawi's driver took the vehicle - with Zarqawi inside - off the main highway and onto a secondary road. With the TF 145 operators perhaps 30 seconds behind, Zarqawi jumped out and ran for it.

As staffers in an operations center tried to vector the chasing Americans toward him using the UAV's pictures, the Shadow's camera chose that moment to "reset," switching from a tight focus on Zarqawi's vehicle to a wide-angle view of the town. By the time the staffers frantically zoomed the camera back in, Zarqawi had vanished.

It was an extraordinarily frustrating experience for the members of TF 145; they knew how close they had come, and how infrequently such opportunities arise.

Zarqawi also seemed to realize the peril he was in.

"He was shitting his pants. … he was screaming at the driver," the special operations source said. "He knew he was caught."

But JSOC's forces in Iraq also have enjoyed victories. A slide published by the Defense Department in May 2005 shows 21 senior Zarqawi lieutenants, seven of whom were listed as killed, 13 as captured and only one as "wanted."

By August, the special operations source said, JSOC forces had captured or killed "upwards of 200" Zarqawi leaders senior enough to have contact with the man himself.

TF 145's method of operating is simple: target a safe house, capture individuals, exploit whatever is found for intelligence and use that to drive a new mission immediately. Whenever possible, the operators try to avoid killing their targets.

"It's a lot better to capture them," the source said, because in a manhunt, the most valuable intelligence comes from humans, not technology.

For the operators on Zarqawi's trail, the op tempo "continues to go faster and faster," he said - "six or seven missions a day," at times simultaneously.

Many missions use ground vehicles rather than helicopters, he said.

"You'll hit a place, get intelligence that drives you to another one. We're cops - hit, go; hit, go."

But a key difference between this campaign and previous ones has been that Delta, which runs TF 145, has the authority to launch missions immediately based on raw intelligence. In the past, he said, Delta had never been able to do that; instead, it would have had to bring intelligence material back to the rear and have it analyzed before striking again.

Now, the source said, "People have bought off on Delta's methodology." TF 145 describes this fusion of operations and intelligence as "the unblinking eye," said a Special Forces lieutenant colonel.

TF 145's success has been Zarqawi's loss, a special ops source said. His senior lieutenants used to be foreigners, but not anymore; TF 145 and its predecessors killed or captured them all.

"He doesn't have a foreigner working for him anymore - most of them are Iraqis. We've either captured or killed all of his foreign influence."

The foreign terrorists coming into Iraq from Syria, he said, "are suicide bombers only … 'Muslims on Spring Break.' They come in through Syria, get a week of training - 'Here, this is an RPG' - come down and strap a bomb on them."

The limited success has not been cost-free. Delta has suffered at least seven deaths and has lost several other operators to serious injuries. The Rangers have lost at least five soldiers during the counterinsurgency in Iraq.

Credit where credit is due

Sources said much of the credit for TF 145's success goes to McChrystal, who was recently promoted to lieutenant general, has a Ranger background and is admired by subordinates for his aggressive nature.

"McChrystal's got balls," said the special operations source. "He's brilliant and has got balls. He can be a pain in the ass, but he is all about going after it. He's not risk averse, but he will weigh the risk and go."

Two special operations sources said that unlike some generals, McChrystal holds subordinates responsible for inaction. "That's what impresses me about him," one of the sources said.

But despite the successes his troops have had taking down the Zarqawi network, McChrystal recently urged them on to greater heights. In a memo published earlier this year on JSOC's intranet, McChrystal wrote of his desire to "professionalize" the JSOC fight.

"This has been, and will be, a long and serious war," he wrote. "Although initial structures and TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] have evolved tremendously from where they were even two years ago, we are still operating with manning and operating processes that need to be improved to be more effective and professional.

"We must increasingly be a force of totally focused counter-terrorists - that is what we do," he wrote. "This is as complex as developing a Long Term Strategic Debriefing Facility that feeds out in-depth understanding of the enemy, and as simple as losing the casual, 'I'm off at my war adventure,' manner of dress and grooming.

"In every case it will not be about what's easy, or even what we normally associate with conventional military standards. It will not even be about what is effective. It will be about what is the MOST effective way to operate - and we will do everything to increase the effectiveness even in small ways.

"If anyone finds this inconvenient or onerous, there's no place in the force for you. This is about winning - and making as few trips to Arlington Cemetery en route to that objective."

"Long Term Strategic Debriefing Facility" is a doctrinal term for a place to hold detainees after their initial interrogations, said a special operations source. TF 145's facility is due to be up and running in the next several months at Balad, he added.

He sought to distinguish it from secret prisons that the U.S. has reportedly established for high-value detainees in other nations. In the TF 145 facility, detainees will have International Committee of the Red Cross numbers. "It's not a 'black' site," the source said.

Punch and counterpunch

Zarqawi has plans, too. His organization is beginning the transition to what the special ops source referred to as "phase three" of the insurgency, in which he would develop a maneuver force, an "army," rather than a force geared solely to dramatic terrorist actions.

Intelligence suggests that he wants to build a capability to launch coordinated attacks against major coalition facilities, the source added.

Meanwhile, Zarqawi also hungers for more personnel. "Al-Qaida is trying to get some other people to him through Iran - some planners, some trainers," the special ops source said.

The Iranian government knows about this, and despite Zarqawi's violence against fellow Shiites in Iraq, the Iranians have decided to allow the transit of al-Qaida personnel, the source said, calling it "a marriage of convenience."

JSOC knew of insurgent training camps in both Syria and Iran that TF 145 could hit, the source said, but "politics" had kept the task force from launching cross-border missions.

He said the trainers in the camps did not appear to be Syrian or Iranian military personnel, but members of affiliated groups like ***Hezbollah***. He suspects that these activities were also occurring with the tacit approval of the host governments.

Some observers question whether eliminating Zarqawi would significantly improve the U.S. position in Iraq, given that his forces account for a small slice of the insurgency.

The special ops source accepted this as a reasonable argument, but noted that killing Zarqawi would take out the "bridge-builder" between the financiers, the Syrians and the foreign fighters. It would also deprive al-Qaida in Iraq, known in the U.S. military as AQIZ, of a dynamic, charismatic combat leader.

"For AQIZ, it's going to stop for a little bit," the source said. "They'll have someone replace him, but I don't know if he'll have the demeanor and the ability to bring the fight to the table."

Beyond Zarqawi, bin Laden and Zawahiri, there are other targets that JSOC could hit, if it had the authority and resources, the special ops source said.

The U.S. knows of "high-tier" al-Qaida personnel in multiple European countries, he said.

"They're around the world … The point is, does the U.S. have the resolve … to go conduct a unilateral operation to get these folks?"

Asked if anyone in JSOC was doing this now, he said, "Not really."

Part of the reason: Special mission units are already stretched by the mission in Iraq.

"There's no one left," he said.

Notes

3 COLOR PHOTOS.; 1 COLOR GRAPH. GRAPH HED: THE HUNT FOR ZARQAWI. SEE: TNS-Iraq Map 06-08.

Load-Date: May 16, 2006

The roundup

Guardian Weekly

January 14, 2005 - January 20, 2005

Section: The Week; Vol. 172, No. 4; Pg. 2

Length: 951 words

Body

Americas

Pinochet fit to stand trial

The former Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, 89, was placed under house arrest after the country's top court ruled that he was fit enough to be charged with murder and kidnapping. A judge granted him freedom on bail of $ 3,500, subject to the court of appeals.

Abu Ghraib trial opens

The alleged ringleader of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal went on trial with witnesses telling a US military court they watched him punch an Iraqi inmate in the face and saw him laugh while forcing prisoners to pose naked. Spc Charles Graner Jr is the first soldier accused in the scandal to go on trial.**Clinton nemesis is security chief**

President Bush named a former assistant attorney general, who was one of Bill Clinton's principal inquisitors in the Whitewater affair, as his new homeland security secretary. The nomination of Michael Chertoff, 51, came as a surprise in Washington, where he was not seen as an influential political player.

Judge sues ageist colleagues

Marian Opala, 83, a supreme court judge in Oklahoma, is suing his colleagues for age discrimination, claiming that they passed him over for the state's top job of supreme court chief justice because he was too old.

Rosemary Kennedy dies at 86

Rosemary Kennedy, younger sister of President John F Kennedy and the inspiration for the Special Olympics, has died at the age of 86.

Gonzales defends his record

US attorney general nominee Alberto Gonzales defended his tenure as White House counsel before the Senate judiciary committee, including his conclusion that the protections of the Geneva conventions do not apply to alleged terrorists.

Tortoises get protection

A judge has ordered a ban on off-road vehicles on 200,000 hectares of southern California to protect the endangered desert tortoise. Anyone caught driving there could face a $ 1,000 fine or up to a year in prison.

Book-signing by machine

The award-winning Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood is developing a remote book-signing machine allowing authors to sign books without leaving home.

Europe

Yanukovich appeal rejected

Ukraine's supreme court rejected an appeal by Viktor Yanukovich against his defeat by Viktor Yushchenko in the rerun presidential election. It said the decision was final.

Italy institutes smoking ban

An official ban on smoking in all of Italy's enclosed public places -- including bars, restaurants and offices -- has come into force. Businesses face a fine of up to (euro) 2,000 if they fail to ensure that customers do not smoke.

Train crash kills 14 in Italy

A passenger train and a goods train crashed head-on in fog north of Bologna, killing at least 17 people and injuring more than 50.

Police question Deneuve

The French film actor Catherine Deneuve was questioned as police investigate allegations that celebrities had received payments from a disgraced tycoon, Rafik Khalifa. Police in Paris stressed that she was helping them only in her capacity as a witness in the case.

Bomb blunder recalled

Nijmegen, the oldest city in the Netherlands, is to ask the US for (euro) 200,000 to fund a study of the effects of a 1944 raid in which US bombers returning from an attack on Germany mistakenly dropped their last bombs on the town, killing over 800 people.

Africa

Mugabe purges Zanu-PF

In a purge of several high-flying Zanu-PF members, Robert Mugabe has jailed Philip Chiyangwa, one of Zimbabwe's wealthiest men. Mr Chiyangwa, who faces charges of espionage, apparently challenged Mr Mugabe's choice of vice-presidents.

Pretoria gun law angers owners

All privately held guns in South Africa have to be re-licensed under a new law, which has upset gun owners. Some 4.5m guns are held legally, more than by the army and police combined.

UN workers face sex claims

An internal investigation has shown that UN peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo traded eggs and milk for sex with ***women*** and girls as young as 13.

Mbeki attacks Churchill

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has called Winston Churchill and other historic figures racists who ravaged Africa. He told the Sudanese assembly that Churchill had justified British atrocities by depicting the Africans as inferior races who needed to be subdued.

Middle East

UN peacekeeper dies in shelling

A French officer serving with the UN peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon was killed by Israeli shelling, following a ***Hizbullah*** bomb attack that killed an Israeli soldier.

US considers assassin squad

The US is considering setting up an elite squad of assassins to target leaders of the Iraqi insurgency. The ploy has been called the "Salvador option" after the strategy that was adopted by the Reagan administration in El Salvador in the early 1980s to kill guerrilla leaders.

31 media workers killed in Iraq

Iraq was the most dangerous country for journalists in 2004, with 19 reporters and 12 media assistants being killed there during the year. A report from Reporters Without Borders said 53 journalists throughout the world were killed while doing their job.

Iran opens up 'bomb' site

Iran agreed to allow UN inspections of a military site at Parchin, south of Tehran, where Washington believes that work linked to nuclear bomb-making is carried out. Tehran insists that its atomic programme is solely for producing electricity.

Asia

Riots follow cleric's death

A round-the-clock curfew was imposed in the Pakistani town of Gilgit, after the shooting of a Shia Muslim cleric led to sectarian rioting in which 14 people died.

EU could lift China arms embargo

European leaders are heading for a confrontation with human rights groups amid signs that an EU arms embargo on China, imposed after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, will be lifted within months.

Graphic

The roundup

Picture, Venezuelan farmers gather at a British-owned cattle farm that was seized by the government for redistribution to the poor, Photo: Chico Sanchez/EPA

Load-Date: January 25, 2005

End of Document

The Enigma of Damascus

The New York Times

July 10, 2005 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section 6; Column 1; Magazine Desk; Pg. 28

Length: 8134 words

Byline: By James Bennet

James Bennet is a staff writer for the magazine. His most recent article was about Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president.

Body

The opera house in Damascus was a long time coming. Hafez al-Assad, the iron-willed military man who ruled Syria for three decades, was in power just a few years when he laid the cornerstone. But lack of materials and equipment, hard economic times and a devastating fire delayed the project year after year. It fell to Assad's son and successor, Bashar, to finish the job. He opened Al Assad opera house with his wife, Asma, last year. Decorated with paintings and sculptures by Syrian artists, offering up classical concerts and works by Arab playwrights, the building expresses something of the elder Assad's vision of Damascus as the Arab capital of cultural, if not political, enlightenment. The name of his controlling party, Baath, means resurrection, and nothing could better reflect an Arab renaissance than achievement in the arts.

For a dance performance one evening last month, a mixed crowd streamed through the doors. ***Women*** with showy hairstyles mingled with others in head scarves; men came in suits or jeans. One teenage boy wore a T-shirt that admonished in English, "Your game is still as ugly as your girl." As curtain time approached, Syria's power couple walked in.

President Assad wore a black suit and a charcoal shirt without a tie; Mrs. Assad, a sea-foam green sweater over a sheer top and a white skirt. Her long, honey-colored hair was uncovered. Together they made a kind of visual rhyme with the building: tall, slender and young, they seemed the essence of secular Western-Arab fusion, the elegant doctor-turned-president out on the town with his dazzling British-born Syrian wife, the former J. P. Morgan banker whom Syrians call their Princess Diana.

For the Bush administration, many European leaders and many reform-minded Syrians, this is a mirage. Some of them had hopes for this Assad when he came to power after his father's death five years ago. But since then, what they have seen as a pattern of empty promises, nasty oratory and bloody tactics has turned them against the Syrian regime. Since Saddam Hussein's rule ended in Iraq, no other Arab government has come in for as much pressure and disdain from the Bush administration. In December 2003, President Bush imposed economic sanctions on Syria. This February, the administration recalled its ambassador, who has not returned to Damascus. It acted after a powerful bomb in Beirut killed Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister and a critic of the Syrian regime. International pressure soon forced Syria to end its military occupation of Lebanon, which began in 1976 during Lebanon's civil war.

By ideology, inclination and geography, Bashar al-Assad's regime looms as a rock in the road to fulfillment of the Bush administration's foreign policy, if not its philosophy. It is the one government in the Middle East that has not recognized that Bush is serious about comprehensive reform, a senior administration official told me, speaking on condition of anonymity. To the administration, Assad is a murderous proxy warrior, permitting or even encouraging jihadists to stream eastward into Iraq, and allowing Iranian weapons to stream westward to the guerrilla group ***Hezbollah*** in Lebanon. The Bush administration accuses him also of encouraging terrorism to the south, against Israel, by permitting militant Palestinian leaders to operate in Damascus. It sees him as a dictator interrupting a new expansion of democracy from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. If, as Bush has said, "in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty," then Syria's relative stability, after 35 years, may be due to run out.

For Assad, however, it is the Bush administration that is sowing chaos in the region and reaping new extremists who menace Syria as well as its neighbors. Assad contends that he is opening his economy and preparing for a day he can be peacefully voted out. Although he is viewed in Washington as possibly a mere figurehead, he says he is just at the point of consolidating control by removing the so-called old guard of his father's government and installing change-minded technocrats. While his Syrian critics see him as trapped in the system created by his father, or complicit in it, or simply uncertain what to do, Assad insists he has a plan but is implementing it at a rate that Syria can manage, given its turbulent past and social divides. In any event, he is acting like a man with plenty of time. His unhurried pace may be a sign of a self-assurance that his critics insist he lacks, or else of a dangerous complacency, or possibly of both.

When he paused on his way through the opera house to say hello, I asked if he was concerned about a report that American troops were again operating in western Iraq, near the Syrian border. The report had renewed rumors in Damascus of an imminent American invasion. Assad shrugged. "The United States is a very powerful country," he said -- one that could strike as easily from the Mediterranean as from Iraq. "It's not a matter of where they are," he said. "It's a matter of how they behave."

Well, was he worried that they may indeed strike from somewhere? "No," he said, as a wry smile formed on his lips. "I think the experience in Iraq has not" -- he hesitated for a beat -- "worked out." His wife flashed a warm smile and deftly flicked me away. "We're off duty," she said in her plummy English.

The show proved not to be the ballet I anticipated but a kind of Orientalist pageant, with jingling Bedouin headdresses, flashing scimitars and barefoot ***women***. It was a story of good versus evil, the good led by an elderly sheik and his strapping son in a black-and-gold robe, the evil led by a sinewy man with a shaved head and a snake tattooed over his left shoulder blade. He wore a sort of leather singlet studded with chrome buttons, and he brandished the biggest sword onstage.

Like Big Macs or a fully convertible currency, news of the end of history and the triumph of liberal capitalism has not reached Syria. Although Assad has begun to update it, the ideology of the Arab Socialist Baath Party -- less a vehicle for political participation than a far-reaching instrument of state control -- pulls at the economy, politics and society. The dance evoked the romantic pan-Arab dream that still burns in Syria, and in the Baath Party, long after it has faded through most of the Arab world. This once-revolutionary dream of a border-erasing, secular-leaning Arab union, promoted by the Assads and historically centered on Damascus, is now being squeezed between two more dynamic movements: its longtime, bloody Islamist rival, the vision of a renewed, border-defying caliphate; and the countering demand by Bush and Arab democrats for a Middle East of defined borders and democratic governments.

During the performance, the bad guys at first had the good guys on the ropes, stealing their ***women*** and abusing them. But then the Arab tribes united and stood up to the villains. Clearly enchanted, the man in the seat next to me leaned over and whispered, "This is our history."

"Syrian history?" I asked.

"Arabic history," he replied.

The audience burst into applause and whoops when a chorus figure lip-synched a warning: ''Do not make peace with them, for they are truly evil!'' In the ensuing battle, Snake Tattoo killed the sheik's son by stabbing him in the back. Then came despair and a funeral, followed by the happy arrival of a handsome stranger from another tribe to marry the sheik's daughter. The performance ended with the wedding, a tableau of celebration and Arab unity despite the evil that remained unvanquished. Nobody mentioned Israel.

The Assads' applause never ventured beyond the perfunctory. After the bows, the actor who portrayed the sheik began the inevitable chant -- ''In our blood, in our souls, we sacrifice for you, Bashar'' -- but Assad did not pause in his exit from the theater, and the chant quickly died. Once outside the hall, the couple stopped to shake hands and chat. Scores of audience members clustered by the president's Audi sedan. Some held high their cellular telephones -- legalized by Assad only three years ago -- to snap digital photographs. ''God protect you!'' one woman called. Then Asma al-Assad climbed into the passenger's seat, Bashar al-Assad slipped behind the wheel, and they drove off alone into the jostling traffic and the balmy Damascus night.

The next day, when I asked Asma al-Assad what she thought of the dance, she winced. ''I think there was a lot of talent,'' she said carefully. But, she added, ''I don't think it portrayed what Syria is, in any era.''

Yet what Syria is -- what it means to be Syrian -- is at the center of the debate over the country's future. To the extent that Syria has had a national identity, it has been based on the dismissal of a local Syrian identity in favor of its grander claim, to be ''the beating heart of Arabism.'' Along with the presidency, Arab socialism, the occupation of Lebanon, a network of corruption and the security state, Hafez al-Assad bequeathed that perplexing legacy, and the question of what, if anything, to do about it, to his son, who had expected to be an eye doctor.

I spoke with the Assads on successive days in the same setting, their private office in a small, sand-colored villa on the western hills overlooking Damascus. On the first occasion, Assad was waiting alone in the doorway. He ducked his head slightly as we shook hands. Perched atop that attenuated body, his head and features seem small; his deep- and close-set eyes make his default expression one of worry. That morning, his mustache, the essential accessory of the Baathist male, was shaved to a bar of stubble above his lip. He led me to the office, where he sat on a black leather sofa. An interpreter sat across from him, but Assad, who spoke in English with a slight lisp, would turn to him for a word only a handful of times over the next two hours. Hafez al-Assad was notorious for lecturing visitors for hours on end, testing their patience and their bladders. His son waited politely for my first question.

I began by noting that there was a debate in Washington over whether he was in control of his government. I asked his view. He laughed. ''That was before our conference,'' he said, referring to the Baath Party congress that had just ended. Several senior figures had stepped down; Assad had now replaced all but 6 of the 21 members of the Syrian Baath Party's top panel, its Regional Command, and in replacing them, he had whittled their total number to 15.

Assad said he had been following the Washington debate. ''There are maybe two different articles,'' he said. '' 'He is not in control' -- but in the other article, 'He is a dictator.' So there is a contradiction.'' Neither description fit, he said. ''By law and by constitution, the president of Syria has a lot of authority. But if you take a decision by yourself -- it doesn't matter if it's a big decision, an important decision or a normal decision -- you do a lot of mistakes. You must consult everybody. This is my way. Second, they say, 'He's reluctant, not in control,' because I take my time. I'm not hasty.'' He pointed to another change made at the Baath congress, the substitution among the party's goals of a social-market economy for socialism. That change was 18 months in the works, he said. I knew that, in the past, Assad had asked for patience from Americans by indicating that the old guard -- remnants of his father's regime -- were thwarting him. But now he brought up the members of the old guard only to dismiss their influence. ''Now they're gone,'' he said. ''We made that change.''

Under Bashar al-Assad, Syria is more isolated in the world than it has ever been. Hafez al-Assad made his share of mistakes; he did not fully emerge as the ''lion of Damascus'' until years after taking control. Yet the father had the Soviet Union and cold-war gamesmanship to fall back on. He also had on-again-off-again peace talks with Israel, which gave him a framework for talking with the United States. Bashar al-Assad has had neither of these tools. He came into power after talks collapsed in 2000 over the return to Syria of the Golan Heights, which Israel occupied in

1967, in the Six-Day War. Soon a new Palestinian intifada was raging. And then came Sept. 11, 2001. In the eyes of the Bush administration, Assad set about digging himself a deeper hole. His father supported the Persian Gulf war, but Bashar al-Assad opposed the war with Iraq in 2003. He pushed the Lebanese to change their constitution to extend the term of President Emile Lahoud, an Assad loyalist. Then, on Feb. 14, 2005, Rafik Hariri and 19 other people died in the Beirut bombing.

Assad denies having anything to do with the Hariri assassination. He told me that allies of Syria had also been killed in Lebanon, and no one had figured out who was responsible. ''There are always assassinations in Lebanon,'' he said. ''Hariri was an international businessman. We don't know anything about his relations.'' I asked if he agreed with a recent op-ed column in the Arabic press by one of his ministers, Buthaina Shaaban, suggesting that American or Israeli intelligence was responsible. ''Even if I want to blame any other international or regional party, I can't say it as president,'' he said. ''That's why we supported the international investigation.''

Responding to claims made in Washington, Assad said Syria had complied completely with a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on it to withdraw its soldiers and intelligence agents. When I asked if he would help the United Nations fulfill another component of that resolution -- the disarming of ***Hezbollah*** -- he shrugged. ''They asked Syria not to interfere in Lebanon, so it is not our issue.'' What did he think the Bush administration wanted from him? ''I don't know,'' he said. ''This is the problem.'' He said that all he heard from the Americans was about sealing the Iraqi border, which runs more than 300 miles through the desert. ''They say, 'You do not do enough,' but we ask what is the meaning of 'enough'?'' American officials have acknowledged that the Syrian government provided valuable intelligence in the aftermath of Sept. 11. But they said Assad repeatedly dragged his heels when it came to combating the insurgency in Iraq. They said that in January, when Richard L. Armitage, then the deputy secretary of state, gave him a list of former Iraqi officials hiding in Syria, Assad did nothing. The Syrian version is quite different. A senior Syrian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told me that after the Armitage visit, Syria arrested and turned over a suspected insurgent leader, Saddam Hussein's half-brother Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti, and more than 20 others. But he said that the Syrians, while seeking nothing in return, asked to keep their cooperation quiet for fear of alienating Arab opinion and angering extremists. The arrest by Syria made headlines worldwide, and the disclosure was seen in Damascus as double-dealing. Syria immediately denied any involvement.

The senior Bush administration official, by contrast, characterized the Syrian arrest of Hassan as one more attempt by Assad to play his father's hedging game, trading a chit sought by the Americans for the freedom to work against Bush policies elsewhere. Assad simply did not realize that the Bush administration would not play this game, the official said.

Assad told me he had arrested more than 1,500 extremists who tried to cross the border, to or from Iraq. He said his repeated offers of border cooperation with the Bush administration had gone ignored. ''First of all, who to cooperate with?'' he asked. ''If you go to the border, there are only Syrian guards on our side. But if you look at the Iraqi side, there is nobody. No Iraqi guards, no American guards. Nobody.''

I asked if he considered the violence in Iraq to be legitimate resistance. He sidestepped, saying he had put the same question to Iraqis. ''Of course, about suicide bombers and killing tens every day, nobody considers it legitimate resistance anywhere in this region,'' he said. ''But at the same time, they talk about Iraqis attacking allied forces -- they consider it resistance.'' Despite their shared ideology of Arab unity, the Baathists of Iraq and Syria were always trying to kill each other off, plotting coups and countercoups. Hafez al-Assad supported Iran in its war with Iraq, a decision that Bashar al-Assad listed for me as an instance of his father's farsightedness. Assad told me he did not regret his own opposition to the latest war with Iraq. He said he was against war on principle, and that he knew that Syria would ''pay the price of any side effects of this war in Iraq.'' He said Syria was now paying that price. Days before our interview, the Syrian government announced that it had arrested one man and killed two others who had been planning an attack in Damascus on behalf of an organization called Soldiers of Al Sham, a reference to a ''greater Syria'' that would include Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Assad now provided new details. He said that the group intended to send a 3-year-old girl laden with explosives into the crowded Ministry of Justice. He also said that the Syrians had foiled a planned attack last year on the American Embassy by a man ''with a bomb and machine gun.'' Assad said the Americans did not understand what he called their common enemy, the

forces of religious extremism and intolerance he said Syria had been fighting since the 1950's. ''This state of mind is dangerous for everybody, for East and West, for everybody,'' he said, and as he talked he laid out what amounted to a three-step formula for his governance. He said that his top priority was stability. To achieve that, to dispel rising extremism, he needed to achieve a new prosperity. To achieve prosperity, he needed democracy. The adjectives he used throughout our conversation were ''open-minded'' and ''closed-minded.'' Emphasizing the former, he said, was his key to prosperity. ''When you talk about upgrading society, you talk about open-minded,'' he said. ''When you talk about open-minded, you mean freedom. Freedom of thinking.''

Bashar al-Assad was a spare, not the heir. His elder brother, Basil, was groomed to lead. Growing up under their own Baathist father, the Assad brothers of Syria were never like the wilding Hussein boys of Iraq. Neither had a reputation for personal corruption or cruelty. Yet they were very different from each other. Old friends and teachers of the Assad children remember Basil as charismatic and commanding, Bashar as self-effacing. Bashar had fewer, though long-lasting, friends. Basil was a champion equestrian and followed his father's path into the military. Bashar chose medicine, the profession his austere father had dreamed of pursuing as a boy. When Basil died in a car accident in 1994, Hafez al-Assad summoned his second son home from his studies in London, dispatched him to the army and began promoting him through the ranks. As president, Assad has chosen to decorate his office with paintings and sculptures of horses drawn from his brother's collection. Bearded, eyes blanked by aviator sunglasses, Basil's face still haunts many walls in Damascus.

When asked about himself, Assad tends to drift into using the second person -- a kind of grammatical step away from oneself, the opposite of the embracing royal we. When I asked if he sometimes wished he was pursuing his chosen profession, ophthalmology, he replied that he was accustomed to Syrians turning to him, as his father's son, for help. ''You're maybe just an ordinary person, but they don't consider you as ordinary,'' he said. ''They want you to help them. So this is since you are young. So you get attached to the problems of the general people.'' Assad seems to draw a line between himself as a person and his attempt to perform his father's self-designated job of Arab spokesman. In May 2001, while greeting Pope John Paul II in Damascus, Assad suggested that Christians and Muslims make common cause against those ''who try to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality with which they betrayed Jesus Christ.'' Yet in the crowd at the funeral of that pope this year, Assad reached out to shake the hand of Israel's president, Moshe Katsav. Even when they were negotiating with Israelis during the Clinton presidency, Syrian officials resisted any public handshakes. ''God made him,'' Assad said of Katsav when I asked him about the handshake. ''Anybody God made should be recognized.

''As Syrians,'' he added, ''we have never been closed-minded.''

Assad told me he had moved to open general debate in Syria, permitting new criticism of the regime. When I asked if he really believed that people felt free to speak their minds now, he said: ''No, we don't say that we achieved democracy. We don't allege that. It's a long way. But we are going this way. The situation today, the question that we should ask, Is the situation today like the situation, say, 10 years ago? It's definitely not the same. So it's a road. You should walk the road.'' He added, ''They want us to jump.'' But, he said, ''if you jump, you will fall on your head.'' I said that some Syrian reformers, after watching him for five years, concluded he was not serious about political change. He said that his priority had to be economics, and he grew impatient: ''What should I feed them? Statements? Or paper? They want to eat food.'' He had to act against corruption immediately, he said. ''If we don't have a new party today, we can have it two years later, nobody will die. But if you don't have the food today, they will die tomorrow.''

The next day, when I sat in the same seat across from Asma al-Assad, she seized the initiative. What had I expected from my visit to Syria? What had I found? My first, vague response was met with polite impatience. ''Away from the cosmetic,'' she emphasized. ''I mean underneath.'' She went on to surprise me -- and to flatter my line of work -- by describing the difficulty of promoting development in a nation without a free press or, as she put it, ''in a country like Syria, where the media hasn't reached its full potential.''

She went on to say, ''The employee will give you his perspective as a government employee -- he wants modernization, but he doesn't want the government to be able to fire him.'' The businessman, she added, ''wants development, but he wants the market to remain closed, because he's benefiting.'' So ''everybody's looking at

development from within his own aspect, rather than seeing a country's development.'' The media ''gives it a national perspective, rather than a community perspective.''

So could Syrians expect to see a free press soon? ''Absolutely.'' How soon? She hesitated, then smiled to acknowledge the impending evasion. ''Let me start by telling you a bit about myself.''

The daughter of a Syrian cardiologist, Asma al-Akhras grew up in London and graduated from the University of London. She did stints as a banker in New York, first with Deutsche Bank and then with J.P. Morgan, where she worked in mergers and acquisitions. She loved New York, and while she lived in a corporate apartment uptown, she wants it to be understood that she preferred to hang out downtown. She also worked in Paris, and she speaks French and Spanish. She has relatives in Houston. She had been accepted to Harvard's M.B.A. program when she chose to return to Syria and marry Assad, less than a year after he succeeded his father. The couple have two boys and a girl; the eldest, Hafez, is 3 1/2. The Assads had just begun speaking English with Hafez, having focused on his Arabic first. They have no professional day care and rely instead on the extended family. Asma al-Assad is 29 years old, 10 years younger than her husband.

But all that came later in the conversation. It turned out that in saying she wanted to talk about herself, she had a particular aspect in mind, one that seemed meant as a caution to an outsider asking about change, and maybe to an American administration hoping to reshape the Middle East. ''I came to live in Syria for the first time five years ago,'' she said, ''and I haven't even touched the surface. The fact that I speak the same language means nothing. The fact that I understand the culture means nothing. Because I didn't know what the mechanics of the society were.''

She was accustomed to working in a large bank with a clear objective, where ''the system doesn't allow you to go away from that objective or go out of that focus.'' Syria lacked institutions, she said, and even basic habits like ''absence of leave'' forms: ''Here, in Syria, if somebody wants to take a day off -- 'Where is he? Don't know, hold on, let me find out. Where is his contact number? Oh, let's ask admin.' And they've got a number that's 20 years old.'' Every ministry, she said a few minutes later, was ''a one-man show.'' The dearth of competent administrators was a refrain for both Assads.

Asma al-Assad has given almost no interviews; yet it was hard to imagine the wife of any other head of state in the region speaking with such easy assertiveness. Like an American first lady, she has focused on family issues, particularly economic empowerment and education. She said she gathered complaints and ideas and studied those around her to see, for example, if Syrians were following a new seat-belt law (they were not, she said). She presented herself as a full partner to her husband. When I asked if she passed this information on to him, she said: ''Of course. We exchange it, not only pass it on.''

She said that she initially approached Syria's problems as a businesswoman but added, with a laugh to drain the pomposity, that Assad ''gave me back my humanity.'' Cutting state jobs, however necessary it was, meant hurting families. ''We've got to make sure there's opportunity someplace else,'' she said. ''It's about finding the right balance between creating opportunity and managing risk. And that's for me what Syria is about today, and that's the transition process we're going through.''

As the sentences paraded smartly by, I thought of Syrians I had met who spent years in prison for opposing Hafez al-Assad, of the stories of torture I had heard. I thought of accusations of murderous policies pursued under Bashar al-Assad, of corruption among his relatives. It made for a jarring juxtaposition with this earnest talk of bureaucratic reform. You grew up in a capitalist democracy, I said at last. Didn't Syria seem kind of crazy to you when you moved here?

''Um,'' she said, momentarily searching. When she began again, she spoke more slowly. ''It's a process. And I know. I've seen the end of the process, if you like, and we are moving toward that objective.''

What did she say to Syrians who considered this a repressive government that jailed political opponents? ''How many political prisoners and how many have been released?'' she shot back. Assad has released hundreds of people imprisoned by his father, though he has also jailed some of his own. ''How many prisoners do you have in

the U.S., political or otherwise? It doesn't mean you're a repressive society either. But just by focusing on one, you skew the picture."

I noted that in Washington her husband was called a dictator who did terrible things. What was it Americans did not understand about him? Leaning forward on the sofa with her hands clasped in front of her, she sat silently for 13 seconds. "I don't know which angle to take it from," she said at last. Another pause. "I think people need to see the man behind the presidency," she said at last. "They need to see what values he has. What his work ethics are. What his personal characteristics are. And then they can understand more about who he is and what he's trying to do." As I left the villa, I thought her initial inquiry was still the most important. What was, in fact, cosmetic, and what might be underneath?

Time has not forgotten Damascus, but it seems to have remembered it only on special occasions -- the invention of the tail fin, for example, or of the Soviet-style apartment block or, more recently, the rediscovery of the latte. But as Assad's stop-and-go changes open cracks in the socialist economy, money and modernity are trickling in. A few Internet cafes have opened their doors. People can now use credit cards. "Kingdom of Heaven" was playing downtown. One afternoon, a man in a Spider-Man suit was hawking Tweety Bird balloons outside the Scuzzi Cafe. "Hi," he said, when he caught me staring.

Culturally, the atmosphere is far more open than it is in much of the Arab world. Lovers hold hands and cuddle in the parks. Over a sushi lunch one day, I watched the Syrian couple at the next table suck down six Scotches between them. It is a dissonant environment, of a policed liberalism confined to religious and cultural life and banned from politics. White-gloved policemen are everywhere directing the clogged traffic. They are obeyed. Syria's state of emergency, dating to 1963, gives them the power to arrest anyone with no stated cause. Some reformers hoped Assad would cancel the emergency law, but he told me he planned to change it "to have more security, less abuse of the people." He cited as a model the Patriot Act.

The poverty is stark. Unemployment is said to stand at 20 percent. Maybe even more dangerous to the regime than American pressure is that the oil is running out. Nabil Sukkar, an economist and business consultant in Damascus, told me that Syria may become a net importer of oil by 2008. Sukkar said that he used to believe the regime could separate political and economic reform, but that it had now run out of time and had to do both over the next two or three years. "You can't have the party monopolizing decision making," he said. Sukkar said that gulf investors were eager to build in Syria, but the Baathist ideology was scaring them off.

In his documentary "A Flood in Baath Country," the Syrian filmmaker Omar Amiralay gives a chilling look at a society stunted by Baathism. As his camera stares, children in uniform in the barren classroom of a rural village mouth their slogans: "We the Vanguards of Light salute our leader, Bashar." Together, the children chant: "We are the voice of the proletariat. In sacrifice, we eat little." The film is banned in Syria. Like everyone else there, I watched it on DVD.

I met Amiralay at a Damascus coffeehouse with walls banded in black and white marble. As a fountain splashed nearby, backgammon pieces clicked and Madonna warbled, he told me his story of long-term cultural resistance. He came to politics after the Arab defeat in 1967, and to filmmaking and Marxism on the barricades in Paris in 1968. His first film was a celebration of a giant dam that Hafez al-Assad built across the Euphrates. "As a Marxist, I found it something to honor," he said wryly, in French-accented English. For the new film, he visited villagers relocated to make room for Lake Assad.

Amiralay said that one of the Arab satellite networks had bought "A Flood in Baath Country" Since Bashar al-Assad had permitted satellite television, this meant the movie would be shown in Syria after all. Amiralay said he had asked the network to include a dedication to a friend, Samir Kassir, a Lebanese journalist and critic of the Syrian regime who was killed on June 2 by a bomb hidden in his car. The dedication seemed tantamount to accusing the regime of the murder, and I asked Amiralay how he could be sure he was not going too far. He touched his right index finger to his nose. "It's an animal sense," he said. But he also said that times had changed: "There was a demystification after the death of Hafez al-Assad of the fear, because he personified this power, this charisma and

this capacity of violence. There was a psychological release, because the people felt the state was not controlled as before, and because the state is confused."

The journalistic shorthand for Syrian critics of the regime is the ''opposition.'' It is the wrong word. It suggests coherence, organization and political leverage that do not exist. It suggests the existence of leaders with followers. A better word might be ''dissidents,'' with its connotations of moral authority and solitude. They are a mix of Baathist reformers, communists, Islamists and even one or two Syrian-style neoconservatives. In Arabic and English, they have seized the tools of communication that Assad has permitted: the Internet and satellite television. Assad told me he had hoped to foster a productive conversation about reform and that he kept track ''from time to time'' of the Internet chatter. ''Some people, they just talk because they want to talk,'' he said. ''Some people, they just hate. And some people, they want to criticize because they need a better country. That's what you want.''

Ayman Abdel Nour, 40, puts himself in the last category. A Baathist, he issues an e-mail bulletin bird-dogging corruption and promoting change within the movement. He attacks senior Baath figures by name. He sees himself as strengthening Assad's hand. When I visited him at his apartment, he was enthusiastic about the sacking of Baath leaders during the party congress. Now, he said, ''we expect that the decisions will be more radical, and faster.'' He said that Assad was now in ''100 percent full control,'' which meant he also had complete responsibility for delivering and no more excuses. Abdel Nour told me there would certainly be multiparty elections by 2007, when Assad is to run for a second term. (Assad did not commit to this when I asked him about it. He said he would need a year or two to build consensus for a new multiparty law. ''We should give it time,'' he said.) There may be limits even to Abdel Nour's faith. When I asked if he believed that Assad had a clear idea of what he wanted to do, the brazen reformer gave his response in baby talk, and addressed it to the infant son he was cradling in his arms. ''This is a question,'' he told the baby. ''I don't know.''

Some Syrian intellectuals have a darker view. ''I think the Arab regimes will live a very long life, and a prosperous life,'' said Mohamad Shahrour, an engineer who writes about Islam. ''Because freedom as a value does not exist in our consciousness.'' He blamed this on ''Islamic culture.'' In Syria and some other Arab nations, he said, regimes should fear only religious uprisings. ''The government could arrest 5,000 people now in one day, and it will not be afraid of an uprising. But if in any city they will take the veil, the hijab, from 1,000 ***women***, they will be afraid of an uprising.''

Given focus by the chaos in Iraq, that is a vision of the end days of this regime that many Syrians fear. A green-domed mosque in the hills above Damascus marks the spot where Cain is said to have slain Abel. The city took its name from the stream of blood that ran down. There are those who think that a time of violent reckoning with sectarian hatreds may be necessary. Ammar Abdulhamid, 39, runs the Tharwa Project, which tracks treatment of minorities in the region. He had a fellowship at the Brookings Institution in Washington last fall, and he has decorated his Damascus office with photographs from his walk to work along Connecticut Avenue. One shows the American flag through the bare limbs of trees. When I stopped by, he called the regime ''defunct'' and the Baathists ''idiots'' and ''morons'' while we were still settling into our seats. He saw no alternative in civil society either. ''They all want a leader or a messiah,'' he said. He did not advocate ''bloody revolution,'' he said. But he also said that the civil strife accompanying regime change in Iraq might be the only way forward in the region. ''Stagnation is killing our souls and our minds,'' he said. ''Hopefully, this baptism by blood and mayhem will teach us to cherish the liberties.''

A few days before I spoke with Assad, I received an e-mail message from Joshua Landis, an assistant professor of Middle Eastern studies from the University of Oklahoma who is living for the year in Damascus. Landis writes an indispensable blog about Syria, Syriacomment.com. He is married to a Syrian woman who is a member of the same esoteric Islamic sect as the Assads, the Alawites, who believe in the divinity of Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Alawites were oppressed as infidels for centuries by other Muslims.

Landis's e-mail message recapitulated a remarkable petition he came across while researching his dissertation, which is to be published next year as a book, ''Democracy in Syria.'' In 1936, as the French were debating how to carve up their League of Nations mandate in the region, a group of Alawite notables urged that their northern mountainous redoubt not be annexed to Syria, which would surely be dominated by Muslims. ''The spirit of hatred

and fanaticism imbedded in the hearts of the Arab Muslims against everything that is non-Muslim has been perpetually nurtured by the Islamic religion," the petition read. "Therefore, the abolition of the mandate will expose the minorities in Syria to the dangers of death and annihilation, irrespective of the fact that such abolition will annihilate the freedom of thought and belief." According to Landis, one of the six signers was Suleiman al-Assad, Bashar's grandfather.

Before I had the chance to bring up the petition, Assad volunteered that his grandfather had petitioned the French with other Alawite leaders to "go back to our mother country, which is Syria." He said: "They knew that if we divide the country we would have wars. So it's better to be, to mingle, with the others." I had the spooky feeling that someone else was reading my e-mail.

I said that I had heard the petition proposed separation. "No, no, no, no, no," Assad replied. "It's the opposite." Setting aside that question, the petition in favor of separation helps explain the profound appeal of Baathism, with its message of an embracing Arab unity, to a man like Hafez al-Assad, a member of a brutalized minority. Baathism could be the way to bring together all religions and races -- or else the means for minority domination. It could also be the bandage beneath which sectarian wounds healed or festered. As to which effect it has had in Syria, no one can know unless the bandage is pulled off, as it has been in Iraq.

The Syrian Baathists have dealt with sectarian differences through official denial. The education system teaches one vanilla brand of Islam. Yet sectarianism is never far from the surface. Within Syria, some who blame the regime for the killing of Hariri see it as a sectarian play that cost Assad international support but strengthened him internally. Hariri, a Sunni, had money, influence and contacts with Syria's Sunnis to potentially foster an alternate power structure. (Others dismiss this theory as crediting Assad with a cunning he has not otherwise displayed.) Unlike Lebanon, Syria has a clear majority -- Sunnis -- and some view them as the potential foundation of a stable democracy. Farid Ghadry, who has set himself up in Washington as a regime opponent and has been invited in for discussions by the State Department, presents a candidly sectarian vision of Syria's future. He speaks of a state with minority rights but also argues, "We need to give Muslim Sunnis a country -- a legitimate country -- from which to launch the war on ideology," meaning extremism. Yet the new mosques that have sprung up across Syria in recent years -- another kind of patient resistance -- may well be preparing believers for a different war. They just happen to be fighting it now in Iraq.

Hafez al-Assad maneuvered endlessly to co-opt Syria's Sunnis. He reserved top posts in his government for Sunnis. Land reform helped ally him with rural Sunnis against the urban Sunni elite. Through intricate sectarian balancing, he created what Landis calls a supertribe. "You're substituting party ideology for blood," Landis told me over coffee, "but it's very similar." When this method broke down -- when the Muslim Brothers, Sunni extremists, rose against him in the 1970's -- Hafez al-Assad used his Alawite-dominated security forces to crush them. In 1982, he leveled the old town of Hama, the city where their resistance was based.

Anwar al-Bounni, a 46-year-old lawyer in Damascus, was living in Hama in 1981, when Syrian forces first moved in. Bounni is a Christian, but he was bearded, and soldiers grabbed him as a suspected Muslim Brother. As the soldiers began beating him, Bounni said, neighbors ran up to identify him. Pinning Bounni's hands behind his back, the soldiers set his beard on fire, then let him go. Bounni now does the Sisyphean work of representing political prisoners. To finance his work, he was preparing to sell his office; he had already sold his car. As we talked among his packed boxes, a beaming young man with a bouquet of flowers entered. He was Abdel Nasser Kahlous, a 33-year-old accountant for General Motors in Syria. He had just been released after a week in prison. He and eight other members of a dialogue group called the Atassi Forum were arrested after one of them read a statement by the Muslim Brothers, e-mailed by their leadership in exile, during a meeting. It is a capital offense in Syria to belong to the Muslim Brothers. "We thought it was open and modern," Kahlous said of the statement. He said that, once arrested, he expected to get at least three years in prison. But he took heart when, at the initial detention center, he glimpsed Bounni on satellite TV speaking about the case.

When I raised the Atassi Forum arrests with Assad, I thought he might call them a mistake. He did not yield an inch. "When you know in the United States that somebody has a relationship with Al Qaeda, what do you do?" he asked. "You arrest him." The Muslim Brothers, he said, "are terrorists. They killed more than 15,000 in Syria." (That

is the official number. It is believed to be lower than the number killed in the regime's crackdown.) He said that Atassi group members were released after they said "they wouldn't do it again." As of this writing, the member of the Atassi Forum who actually read the e-mail message aloud, Ali al-Abdullah, is still in jail.

The subject of sectarianism creates a bind for the regime. On the one hand, it would like to argue that it has succeeded in easing sectarian tensions; on the other hand, it would like to argue that these tensions are a terrible threat. In the interview, Assad did both. When I cited the historic oppression of the Alawites and asked if he believed that such wounds ever healed, he responded with a rather airless tautology. "The proof is that I am in power," he said. He did not mention it, but in another way he clearly is evidence of assimilation: his wife is a Sunni. Yet Assad also argued that sectarian tensions in the Middle East recognized no borders. "There is a domino effect, not only in Syria but in the region in general," he said. "This domino effect will start from the Mediterranean -- Syria and Lebanon -- and go south to the gulf region and the Red Sea and east to Middle Asia and north to the southern borders of Russia. All these societies are linked with one another. So the answer is yes, very clearly yes. We always worry about the effect of this conflict."

You could blame bad intelligence for it all. In 1915, a member of a Damascus secret society opposed to the rule of the dying Ottoman Empire made his way to British intelligence headquarters in Cairo. As recounted in David Fromkin's history, "A Peace to End All Peace," claims by this young man persuaded the British officers that Arabs would rise in revolt against the Turks in exchange for commitments about the postwar Middle East. Not much of a revolt materialized, but the commitments and the borders that they led the Western powers to demarcate helped create the crisis of legitimacy that Middle Eastern regimes are still facing. Nowhere is this crisis greater than in Syria, where those postwar borders have always been scorned as imperialist artifacts. Syria has such a weak commitment to its own national identity that it once willingly surrendered its sovereignty, giving itself away in 1958 to Gamal Abdel Nasser's short-lived United Arab Republic. "What constitutes a nation?" asked Georges Jabbour, a Baathist parliamentarian. "Is it modern Syria, now? Or is it Greater Syria? Or is it the Arab nation, as the Baath Party says? Or is it the Islamic nation, as the Muslim Brotherhood says?"

Throughout the region, the struggle to clarify and legitimize borders is reaching a new pitch. The Israelis and Palestinians are edging toward another division of historic Palestine. In Iraq, the Bush administration is trying to create a government with the legitimacy to resist sectarian fragmentation and preserve the postcolonial boundaries. In Lebanon this spring, there were hints of a national patriotism that transcended ethnic and religious divisions. And in Syria, by default, design or desperation, Assad is taking steps as well. He has withdrawn his soldiers from Lebanon and moved to clarify Syria's borders with Jordan and Turkey. He has erected a berm that for the first time defines the border with Iraq.

Assad defended the pan-Arabism that his father relied on, though he described it today as more a feeling of connectedness than a desire for shared government. "The practice is more, now, open-minded," he said. Some who watch him most closely say they have detected a significant change. "There is a sort of transformation within the party," argues Jabbour, a onetime aide to Hafez al-Assad. Referring to a speech by Bashar al-Assad before the party congress, he told me: "President Assad did not talk about Arab unity. He talked about Arabism in general, the Arab identity." Ayman Abdel Nour, the Baath reformer, made a similar argument. " 'Unity' doesn't mean that you have to conquer all the Arab countries and absorb them and occupy them," he said. "No. It means to raise the standards of cooperation, of economic cooperation." Amiralay, the filmmaker and opponent of Baathism, says he also sees a change. "I think this is absolutely the end of this sorrowful page in the Syrian history," he told me. "I think that with the new era in which we are entering today, there is a redefining of the borders. They will be definite for the first time." He added, "It will be a mercy killing of Arab nationalism."

Yet if Assad sees this, he has yet to spell it out. "It's a crab-walk," Landis says. "They're backing toward this. It's not an articulated, conscious thing." It looks, much like his moves on reform or on Lebanon, more improvised than strategic. A defined Syrian nationalism could be a bulwark against sectarian chaos, a source of legitimacy and regional stability. It could also help bring home the skilled expatriates whom Assad is trying to woo, the ambitious Syrians who fled the smothering state to seek fulfillment abroad. But to achieve it, Syrians would need something to be proud of besides a threadbare pan-Arabism and their periodically glorious history.

The crab-walk is certainly not impressing the Bush administration. Bashar al-Assad is in a box. If he makes what the administration would consider concessions, he would confirm its view that only pressure can move him. "If you give, you convince them that pressure works," argues Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group, which is closely monitoring Syria. "If you don't give, you convince them they need to put more pressure on." Flynt Leverett, a former C.I.A. analyst and Bush official and the author of a new book on Assad, "Inheriting Syria," told me that this approach was carrying the Bush administration along a fixed path. "I think this administration is basically moving in the direction of a regime-change policy in Syria," he said. Yet while some administration officials see the regime as ultimately doomed -- unable to reform because to do so would be to surrender the privileges of the ruling clique -- they also see no alternative now for governing Syria. Outside of the Baath Party and the security apparatus, Syria, like Iraq before the war, has no institutions for sustaining national coherence and channeling political expression. If he wants to build a modern Syria, Assad must -- like the American president he confronts -- develop a strategy that breaks radically with his father's.

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: President Bashar al-Assad and his wife, Asma, at their private office overlooking Damascus.

Damascus, at once politically isolated and culturally connected (via satellite television).

Omar Amiralay, a Syrian director. His latest film criticizes the regime. (Photographs by Taryn Simon for The New York Times)

Load-Date: July 10, 2005

No Headline In Original

Sunday Mail (Queensland, Australia)

March 27, 2005 Sunday

Section: FEATURES; Pg. 23

Length: 766 words

Byline: Jim Soorley

Body

Thanks for the movie sex lesson

I HAVE discovered there are many film fanatics out there, people who know their movies so well they were able to come up with examples of black men and white ***women*** in Hollywood sex scenes.

Thanks to everyone who shared their expertise after my item last week questioning the lack of stories involving such liaisons on the big screen.

I certainly overlooked Spike Lee. This director has always pushed boundaries, so he was defiant in films like He Got Game and Jungle Fever. So apparently were actors Laurence Fishburne and Irene Jacob in Othello. Others mentioned 100 Rifles in which Raquel Welch and Jim Brown had a steamy scene that nearly "melted the celluloid and caused riots in the streets of Alabama". Others said Sidney Poitier and Elizabeth Hartman got very intimate in A Patch of Blue along with James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander in The Great White Hope.

But most agreed that Hollywood plays safe by down-playing the romance if it's inter-racial, or substituting Cuban or Latina ***women*** who are less likely to ruffle feathers. Final word goes to the reader who said that it appears to be preferable to depict graphic sexual assaults and violence on the screen than consensual sex between black men and white ***women***.

I'm baffled by

'un-Australian'

DICTIONARIES regularly revise their lists of words to make sure they are relevant to the language of the day. So it's not surprising that "un-Australian" has made it to the fourth edition of the Macquarie Dictionary, due out in October.

"Un-Australian" is defined as "disloyal to the nation". How confusing is that? What one person thinks is disloyal, like not supporting the national cricket team or not getting emotional on Anzac Day, might be viewed very differently by another. Similarly, locking up people who come seeking refuge from murderous regimes or refusing to say "sorry" for past injustices to Aborigines are not what I consider Australian behaviour.

They must give

peace a chance

No Headline In Original

'The price of AK-47 has gone up to $700

THE Lebanese have made their presence felt in this country in a positive way. Some of my best mates are Lebanese, and I love their food.

For 22 years their country was torn apart as Israel used the place as a firing range and bomb-testing buffer zone. Then Syria decided it would have a go, while the Lebanese Christians and Muslims were adding a bit more blood to the streets through years of civil war.

For the past few years there has been relative calm and Lebanon has begun to bloom again. Beirut has taken off as a tourist destination, returning to its glory days when it was one of the beautiful cities of the Mediterranean.

Is this all about to end? Former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was killed in a bomb attack and now George Bush has said he will make Lebanon and the destruction of ***Hezbollah*** the centre of his next "war for peace".

Not a good sign. Let's hope this gutsy country does not revert to civil war again as many are predicting.

A grim portent is that the price of an AK-47 rifle has risen from $100 to $700 in the past couple of weeks.

Why Grant is

an inspiration

GRANT Hackett is in my view one of Australia's greatest athletes -- and a great Australian. Just imagine how you would cope with his lot in life. At the beginning of his swimming career he comes up against Kieren Perkins and when Perkins retires Ian Thorpe appears on the scene.

In any other period in history, Grant's medal tally alone would establish him as one of the greatest swimmers ever. He always displays style, sportsmanship, and resilience. It was wonderful to see him do what few others have ever done and no male swimmer has done for 20 years -- win the 200m, 400m, 800m, and 1500m at the national trials.

I just hope that when staring at the black line is over he gets all the personal and commercial accolades he has earned.

Hope I'm wrong

on bank chief

PAUL Wolfowitz is set to replace Australian James Wolfensohn as president of the World Bank. The bank is an institution whose mandate is to address Third World poverty and debt levels, development projects, and First World responsibilities. I hope I'm wrong about Wolfowitz but my gut instincts are that the man who was instrumental in advising President Bush to wage war against Iraq is unlikely to be overflowing with the milk of human kindness.

Life, light and

hope to you all

EASTER is an ancient pagan celebration of northern hemisphere spring. A new dimension was added with the Christian story of death and resurrection. It's a time of hope, of new life and light after the darkness of winter. I wish everyone a wonderful Easter holiday.

Load-Date: March 26, 2005

Bordering on What?

The New York Times

September 25, 2005 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section 6; Column 1; Magazine; Pg. 46

Length: 5272 words

Byline: By Christopher Caldwell

Christopher Caldwell, a contributing writer for the magazine, is writing a book about immigration, Islam and Europe.

Body

The East in the West

On a warm Saturday night, beneath the cable car that runs up into the mountains from a quiet neighborhood in the historic Ottoman city of Bursa, the Teleferik Family Tea Garden is mobbed. Whole families from the farthest reaches of Anatolia, the Asian part of Turkey, are crowded around tables in front of glasses of tea, watching a pair of guys with a keyboard sing arabesques and rock songs in Kurdish. The families have arrived in the past few years, a cashier explains, from Tunceli, a town at the epicenter of the terrorist campaign against the Turkish state that Kurdish guerrillas waged from 1984 to 1999. Most of the young ***women*** wear the loose-fitting headscarves traditional in Turkey; others, the more elaborate and constraining ones that are a mark of newer currents in political Islam. Still others are on the dance floor, uncovered, bare-armed, dancing in an implausibly immodest way they have probably seen on videos. None of the boys are far enough removed from village mores to dare join them. Watching the dancers impassively, their mothers, in headscarves and long rain jackets despite the heat, smoke cigarettes and chatter on cellphones.

This jostling together of European fads, age-old rural folkways and Islamic fervor has been a fact of Turkish life for a long time, especially in big provincial cities like Bursa. Imitating Europe was already an Ottoman project when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic in 1923. But thereafter, the Europeanization of its citizens became the state's mission, its raison d'etre even. This meant modernizing industry, mores and the Turkish language. Mostly it meant pushing Islam out of the public square. There were bans on headscarves in university classes and at state jobs. There were government-trained imams who gave government-issued sermons on Fridays. Elites tended to approve Ataturk's vision; when they didn't, a huge standing army could be summoned to defend it.

And yet even as Turkey prepares to open membership negotiations with the European Union next week, the country's Europeanizing mission has been challenged, both at home and abroad. Turkey started petitioning for admission to the European Union's precursor organizations nearly half a century ago. Until the late 1990's, Europe wasn't interested. But embarrassed by persistent Turkish accusations that they were running a ''Christian club,'' Europe's bureaucrats softened their stance. If Turkey could democratize according to the so-called Copenhagen criteria -- by getting the army out of politics, eliminating the death penalty and expanding freedom of speech and religion, among other things -- it could seek full E.U. membership. Turkey has complied, mostly. At a summit

meeting last winter, the E.U. agreed to start talks this Oct. 3. There was cause for satisfaction on both sides. Turkey would get a ratification of its European identity from Europe itself. Europe would get a closer partnership with an economically dynamic Muslim country that has a long track record of keeping religious enthusiasm under control.

It looked different to the European on the street. French and Dutch voters rejected the union's proposed constitution last spring, citing worries about immigrant labor. A poll by the E.U.'s Eurobarometer service showed only 35 percent of Europeans favoring Turkish accession. So now, on the eve of negotiations, European politicians are looking for a face-saving way to leave Turkey at the altar. The French prime minister, Dominique de Villepin, spoke out in favor of delaying talks unless Turkey recognized the Greek part of Cyprus, which Turkey sees as a new condition. Germany's Christian Democrat leader, Angela Merkel, asked Turkey to be content with a ''privileged partnership'' rather than member status. It is not likely that Turks will consider that prize worth the self-abasement. Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul told The Economist: ''Should they propose anything short of full membership or any new conditions, we will walk away. And this time it will be for good.''

What is unclear is where Turkey would walk away to. Back to its American ally, from whom the Iraq war has estranged it? Into ad hoc pacts with its neighbors Iran, Iraq, Syria and Russia? Or into the embrace of the worldwide Muslim umma? Maybe the failure of Turkey's E.U. candidacy could even cause Turks to renounce altogether their century-old aspiration of making themselves ever more European.

The Cultural Contradictions of Kemalism

Since the end of the cold war, the lid has come off Turkish life. Turkey's population is growing by nearly a million people a year, even as emigration to Europe continues. Suat Kiniklioglu, who heads the Turkish office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, says, ''Urban Turkey is being overrun by the countryside.'' Take Bursa. In the 1980's, the city had fewer than a million people. Now it is at 1.5 million and swelling daily with newcomers from both the surrounding villages and places like Tunceli. The western edge of Bursa is as modern and European as any place in Turkey, with malls, trimmed lawns, ''Beware of Dog'' signs and the Renault and Fiat plants that are the backbone of the country's auto industry. But some of the newer apartment blocks near the Teleferik Family Tea Garden are home to people who work for village-level wages, practice a village-level piety and give their votes to the three-year-old Islamist government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party.

Maybe ''Islamist'' is a simplistic way of putting it, but maybe not. What Erdogan has sought to do since his party came to power in 2002 is to resolve some of the cultural contradictions of Ataturk's republic. The Turkish state has always tried to imitate the ways of Western democracies, but without giving the country's Muslim middle and lower-middle classes much voice in the matter. Turkey's masses are pious even by the standards of the Islamic world, though their piety has mostly been a private one, bearing scant resemblance to the authoritarian fundamentalism of the Saudi Wahhabis or the Iranian Khomeneiites. For almost all of the last century, they were too distant, too poor and too disorganized to demand a hearing. Yet whenever society has reclaimed a bit of power or freedom from the Turkish state, it has done so in the name of Islam or, at the very least, of traditional Turkish values. In a Turkish context, more democracy generally means more Islam.

The lesson has never been lost on Erdogan. In 1994, the Welfare Party, founded by the hard-line Islamist Necmettin Erbakan, swept big-city mayoral races across the country. Erdogan, who as a young man led the youth wing of a precursor to the Welfare Party, became mayor of Istanbul. The key to his success was that there were 11 million people living in and around Istanbul, six times the population of three decades before. Empty lots and unclaimed fields had filled up with houses and apartments known as gece kondu -- a Turkish expression that means, roughly, ''thrown up overnight.'' The devout, dirt-poor and disoriented new arrivals found in Erdogan a mayor who was one of them. It was not just that he himself had grown up a poor provincial in Istanbul (his family were sailors from the Black Sea) or that he had sold simit (Turkey's ubiquitous singed sesame bread rings) on street corners to pay for his schoolbooks or that his mighty baritone had made him a sought-after muezzin or that he eschewed alcohol (and even tried as mayor to ban it from the touristy neighborhood of Beyoglu). The new arrivals also respected him because he was a formidable organizer. He had studied management and understood how a modern municipality worked. In an era of endemic official corruption, he was accessible and relatively transparent. He was a maestro at bringing electricity and running water into the gece kondus and garbage and sewage out.

That first round of Turkish Islamism flamed out. When the Iranian ambassador sang the praises of fundalmentalism at a public rally, the army sent tanks into the street. This "postmodern coup," as it is called, eventually resulted in Erbakan's resignation and the banning of his party. Erdogan, meanwhile, was arrested, jailed and stripped of his mayoralty in 1998 for publicly reciting a poem about bayonets and minarets.

But events cut in Erdogan's favor. The 1997 coup did not do what it was meant to. It brought a wave of corruption that discredited all the establishment political parties. As 2000 turned to 2001, Turkey underwent a banking collapse and then a currency crash. Erdogan broke with Erbakan and founded the Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., in 2001 with the help of secular centrist politicians. He won an overwhelming parliamentary majority in elections the following year. He entered office in 2003 (once a ban on his holding office had been lifted) in very good shape. An International Monetary Fund bailout package gave him a road map for economic revival that he followed punctiliously. His mix of market economics and social conservatism won the support of newly prosperous Muslim entrepreneurs in the Anatolian heartland. And the perennial problem faced by any conservative Turkish politician -- wooing the Muslim base while not scaring the staunchly secular army -- was simplified greatly by Turkey's E.U. candidacy, which has always been understood to stand or fall on society's ability to keep the military out of public life.

Freedom and the Headscarf

Since Sept. 11, the West's biggest question about Turkey has been whether it forms part of the problem of an increasingly militant Islam or part of the solution. The E.U.'s rationale for welcoming Turkey into its councils and its economic sphere used to be a matter of "strategic rent," compensation for its position at a crossroads of continents and military blocs. Today, says Soli Ozel, a political scientist at Bilgi University, what Europe sees in Turkey is "an example that a modern, secular democratic state and capitalist society is compatible with a Muslim population." Europe has come to value Turkey not just for where it is but for what it is.

About a third of the Justice and Development Party's support comes from liberals who joined it in hopes that Erdogan's commitment to the European project would bring them visa-free travel, investment opportunities or equality for ***women***. It is an open question which part of Erdogan's coalition is the dog and which the tail. He has shown signs of wanting to coax hard-line Islamists into the modernizing consensus. He has also shown signs of using Europe as a means to weaken the army to the point where he can pursue untrammeled an Islamist agenda of the sort he espoused a decade or two ago.

One of Erdogan's notorious pronouncements during his term as Istanbul mayor was that democracy was like a streetcar: "You ride it until you arrive at your destination, then you step off." In the old days, he was one of those Islamist politicians who would not shake a woman's hand. Turkey's secular order still poses problems in his personal life -- there have been state functions that his headscarf-wearing wife could not attend. And even as he has sought to Europeanize Turkey's political structures, he has lost few opportunities to Islamicize its social ones. Weeks before his visit to Brussels last December to make the final push for the start of Turkey's accession talks, he tried to change Turkish law to criminalize adultery. The A.K.P. has all but destroyed Turkey's fledgling wine industry with punitive taxes. And Erdogan has decriminalized "clandestine" Koran courses, even though they have been a meeting place for radicals of the Iran-backed Turkish ***Hezbollah*** movement.

Erdogan harps on the need for religious freedom -- American-style religious freedom. Last year he explained to a German newspaper that secularism as the French understand it (i.e., as a state ideology) was not the Turkish way. "We Turks," he explained, "are closer to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of secularism" (i.e., as religious freedom). As regards the government, this assertion is preposterous: the Turkish system was not just inspired by, but copied from, the French. As regards the public, he is probably right. The increasing visibility of religion in Turkey has many of the same sources that it does in the United States. In a recent Pew poll that asked why Islam's role is increasing, the largest reason cited (by more than a third of Turks) was the "growing immorality in our society."

Erdogan opposes abortion and contraception, both of which are legal. But Turkey's hot-button issues of religion and state concern whether university ***women*** and civil servants should be permitted to wear the headscarf and whether young men who attend religious schools should be allowed to transfer their credentials to nonreligious programs. These pit the parliamentarians of Erdogan's party against the Higher Education Council, which appoints

rectors who can veto laws that threaten universities' secular orientation. The council was established by the military government in 1980, when radical leftist and radical rightist students were murdering one another by the literal thousands. But over time, public patience with such supervision erodes. "Suppose the scarf is a political symbol against the secular republic," says Nazli Ilicak, a newspaper owner and columnist and an ally of Erdogan since before his A.K.P. days. "There is still no harm in their going to university. If you are against religion, let them go! They'll get more emancipated and have their own jobs."

More and more Turks share Ilicak's view that Islam and its symbols are compatible with modernity, are perhaps even a sign of modernity: a woman who aroused no comment on a goat path migrates to a city and stands out when she takes a computer class or sits in Starbucks. "It's not that people are more religious," says Can Paker, a businessman and analyst at Tesev, an Istanbul policy center. "It's that they are more free." And free, upwardly mobile ***women*** may choose to wear the veil for a variety of reasons. It can be a sign of solidarity with the family or small town left behind. It can be a marker of membership in a new rising elite. It can be simply chic. After all, the prime minister's wife wears one.

Sunni Rotarianism

Calls for veiling and more religious instruction are modern in another way. They reflect the increasing economic clout of provincial Muslims. Before the Ottoman Empire collapsed and its ethnic populations were reshuffled, most businessmen were Christians and Jews. It has taken a long time for the Muslims who took over their functions to build up father-and-son firms into big national and international ones. But now they have done it, aided by a kind of Sunni Rotarianism. Muslim obligations of zakat, or charitable tithing, inevitably turn the country's rural businessmen into important community leaders and lead them into clubby (and formal) fraternal arrangements. The challenge to political establishments posed by powerful entrepreneurs espousing traditional values is familiar from the American Sun Belt or the Canadian or Australian west.

A natural affinity is developing between Erdogan's party and the most innovative sectors of the economy. For years, the centralized Turkish state bought social peace by creating jobs in state-backed industries, which are now a drag on the economy. About a sixth of the work force is still in the public sector, and its interests are protected by aggressive unions. The A.K.P.'s voters, however, are almost by definition outsiders to this statist system and have no stake in defending it.

No political party in Turkey has ever found itself more often in the Thatcherite role. Erdogan fought the public-sector paper company SEKA, which used to dump tons of chlorine into the Bay of Izmit while losing tons of money. Despite a 51-day occupation of the factory by militant workers, he succeeded in closing down the plant. He is now fighting to privatize Erdemir, the public steel company -- a fight that pits him not only against Erdemir's unions but also against supporters of the army, who have argued for its strategic importance. When Erdogan visited Diyarbakir, an impoverished eastern city, in August, a heckler called on him to build more factories. "Listen, my friend," Erdogan replied, according to a report in the English-language Turkish Daily News. "The A.K.P. government will not build any factories here." Instead he promoted a new enterprise-zone law his government had passed, which offered tax rebates and utility discounts to private companies. "What else do you want?" he asked. "Don't get used to freebies."

The provincial cities where Sunni Rotarianism flourishes -- Denizli, Gaziantep, Urfa, Konya and others -- are called the Anatolian Tigers. One of the more important is the 5,000-year-old Silk Road trading town Kayseri, which now makes furniture, beds, textiles, carpets and denim. Mehmet Ozhaseki, the mayor of Kayseri, is a direct fellow who wears a dapper gray suit and the regulation A.K.P. thick mustache. Close to Erdogan, he is one of the mayors who came to power in the Welfare Party's Islamist wave of 1994. Ozhaseki received 72 percent of the popular vote in the last election. He attributes his success locally to good government and the A.K.P.'s nationally to its perceived freedom from corruption. He says, "People never give their votes saying, 'They can be corrupted like other parties, but at least they're Islamic.'" He notes that the headscarf ranks seventh or eighth when voters are asked what's on their minds; jobs generally top the list.

So what interests Ozhaseki is managing the monsoon of social change. Last year, 139 factories opened in Kayseri, and dozens of 15-story apartment blocks are under construction on Kayseri's outskirts. Kayseri had

100,000 people in the 1950's. It has 750,000 today and will have a million in five years. Traditionally, this growth came from agricultural villages nearby, but now Kayseri is one of many Turkish cities getting not just migrants but also immigrants. Local residents say thousands of Iranians live and work in Kayseri. In Turkey as a whole, estimates of the number of "irregular" immigrants -- from Iran, Syria and elsewhere -- run as high as a million.

Why Trust Turkey?

Turkey's aspiration to the E.U., its adjustment to the global economy, its booming tourist trade and, now, the first signs of mass immigration -- all of these make the country a more porous place than it has been for the past century. But the treatment of Armenians, Greeks, Jews and others remains a sensitive subject. Turkey has been mostly free of the anti-Semitism that is widespread in all other Muslim countries of the Middle East. But "Mein Kampf" is now a best-seller, on sale in at least a half-dozen low-price Turkish-language editions. The "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" is also for sale, and its theses are trumpeted regularly in Vakit, the large-circulation Islamist daily.

In late August, on the eve of important E.U. meetings to iron out Turkey's responsibilities on Cyprus, prosecutors announced that Orhan Pamuk, the country's most acclaimed novelist, would be tried under a law that prohibits denigrating Turks or Turkey. Pamuk had told a Swiss publication in February that "30,000 Kurds were killed here, one million Armenians as well." Many scholars (and the French National Assembly) call the Turkish killings of Armenians between 1915 and 1923 a genocide, but the Turkish state considers it fallout from a civil war. For many Europeans, Pamuk is the embodiment of the kind of Turkey that the E.U. could welcome. The decision of authorities to prosecute him could be a blunder that jeopardizes the country's accession chances, though the blame is likely not Erdogan's. The prosecutor who brought charges against Pamuk -- a member of the pre-A.K.P. state bureaucracy -- investigated Erdogan himself four years ago for "insulting the state."

If Turkey requires a new way of relating to its neighbors and its minorities, the man most influential in formulating it is likely to be Erdogan's adviser Ahmet Davutoglu, a historian and a specialist in international affairs. Mutatis mutandis, Davutoglu is Turkey's closest equivalent to a neoconservative. That is, as he makes moment-to-moment political judgments, he is never far from considering his country's history and ideals. In Davutoglu's case, the relevant history is that of the Ottoman Empire, and the relevant ideals are the ones that permitted that empire to accommodate (not without friction) a wide range of minorities and subcultures. His scholarly obsession of late has been what German historians call the Mittellage -- the geographical position that traps certain countries in the cockpit of history. How should such countries face the world?

Part of Davutoglu's answer is to be found in his 2000 book, "Strategic Depth" (not translated into English), in which he urges that Turkey pursue a "zero-problem strategy" with its neighbors. Ataturk's motto was "Peace at home and peace in the world." In the 1990's, Turkey's decision to damp down conflicts with its neighbors, particularly Syria, which had sponsored and sheltered Kurdish guerrillas, helped further its ambitions to enter the E.U. What is new about Davutoglu's formulation is that it looks to Ottoman history for inspiration. "If you want good examples of cultures living in harmony, where do you look?" he asked during an interview in the prime ministry in Ankara in July. "You look to Ottoman cities: Istanbul. . .Sarajevo." He sets great store by the fact that in Ottoman times Turkey was probably the most cosmopolitan place on earth, even if he tends not to dwell on the amount of governmental force that was required to keep the multiethnic empire together.

The practical consequences of a zero-problem strategy have been clearest in the cases of Iran and Syria. Turkey has favored talking with, rather than confronting, Iran over its nuclear program and has not been prominent among those countries stepping up the pressure on Syria to democratize. Erdogan, insiders suggest, is of the view that Bashar al-Assad of Syria is at heart a reformer and deserves support against elements in Syria's security forces that are responsible both for infiltrating terrorists into Iraq and for assassinating Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister. Assad visited Turkey last year at Erdogan's invitation. Some Turks fear that a good-neighbor policy may be ideological camouflage to move the country's foreign policy in a more Islamist direction. And indeed, the A.K.P.'s supporters would like to see a bit more Muslim solidarity from Turkey. Nazli Ilicak, for instance, laments that Turkey opposed the Algerian movement for independence from France. "Until the 1960's," she says, "we acted like Europeans toward the Arab world."

That mending fences with your Muslim neighbors could constitute a defection from the West is something that appears not to have occurred to Davutoglu. In his office in July, he seemed affronted by the very suggestion. He called it "ignorant." Turkey, he noted, borders on just as many Christian countries -- Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Armenia -- as Muslim ones. Closer ties with Christian neighbors are something he positively invites. "Europeans feel if Turkey is part of Europe, Turks will invade," he told me. "I say the opposite: Istanbul will be invaded by Eastern Europe." It is a welcoming vision, even if it is not in line with Gallup's polls of Turkish opinion, which show that the top reason Turks favor belonging to the E.U. is the ability to move to any country in Europe and work there.

The End of the 'Deep State'

In confronting the Erdogan government's efforts to create a more Muslim democracy, the old Turkish order -- the army and the Kemalist institutions around it that are often called the "deep state" -- must cut against the whole logic of modern economics and life. There is not any sense in which A.K.P. leaders can be considered reactionaries. For all his interest in the past and whatever his level of personal piety, Davutoglu is pitching his vision in the language of multiculturalism and globalization. Erdogan has not only been custodian of Turkey's European ambitions for the last half decade; he is also talking about Americanizing its system of constitutional rights.

Against this, the deep state does not look particularly deep. Its civilian followers man the Turkish equivalent of Rust Belt industries. The army has some historic claim to be the guardian of Turkish institutions and freedoms, including ultimately its democratic ones, but its recent record has been mixed. The 1997 coup capsized the economy, which has been righted only by a combination of the International Monetary Fund's expertise and the A.K.P.'s discipline in following it. World conditions are moving to render the deep state less and less effective as a counterbalance to populist excesses. During the 1980 coup, 180,000 political activists were arrested, dozens were executed and most party leaders were banned from politics for a decade -- and the country's largely self-enclosed economy barely felt it. A coup under present circumstances would look very different. Any dip in the currency, for instance, could endanger Turkey's delicate international banking agreements.

It is such concerns -- over what the E.U.'s bureaucrats or America's bankers would think -- that have provided the real discipline of the A.K.P. These have kept under control a growing anti-Americanism in the party and in the public at large. According to polling by the youth-oriented policy institute ARI Hareketi, 36 percent of Turks think the United States and Turkey are heading toward a war. Last winter, "Metal Storm," a fantasy set in 2007 in which a U.S. invasion of Turkey ends with the nuclear destruction of Washington, became one of the best-selling novels in Turkish history. Turks are quick to insist that public opinion is not anti-American, only anti-Bush. They recall the standing ovation Bill Clinton got when he addressed the National Assembly in November 1999.

But much anti-Americanism in Turkey could be called "primary" and is unaffected by American behavior one way or the other. The last U.S. ambassador, Eric S. Edelman, who departed in June to replace Douglas Feith as under secretary of defense for policy, was a butt of calumny in the popular press, some of it anti-Semitic. Erdogan often has difficulty trammeling his own ideological reflexes, as when he referred to Iraqis killed in Fallujah as martyrs or when he questioned the legitimacy of Iraq's elections last January or when he accused Israel of "state terrorism" after the assassination of the Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin.

The March 1, 2003, parliamentary vote to deny the United States its request to attack Iraq from Turkish soil was a democratic milestone. Newspapers were filled with impassioned arguments, people wrote angry letters to their parliamentarians and phone lines were jammed at the National Assembly. According to Kiniklioglu of the German Marshall Fund, "People were behaving for the first time as if public opinion affected foreign policy." So Turks now quote resentfully an interview that Paul Wolfowitz, then the deputy defense secretary, gave to CNN-Turk two months later, lamenting that the military "for whatever reason. . .did not play the strong leadership role on that issue." This summer, Foreign Minister Gul -- who was acting prime minister at the time of the March 1 vote (since Erdogan was in the final days of his ban from holding office) and supposedly in charge of winning it -- said it was a good thing it had failed.

Treason and Paranoia

The recasting of the U.S. relationship and the sudden deterioration of the European one come at a bad time. Over the past year, Kurdish separatists have relaunched their war. Since June 2004, when the Kurdish Workers Party, or

P.K.K., announced an end to its five-year cease-fire, more than 100 people have been killed, mostly by remote-control bombs. Mayors have been kidnapped, clandestine chemists blown up making bombs and tourists bombed in the resort town Cesme.

Terrorists enter the country from the Kurdish section of Iraq, Turks claim, where they have safe haven in the Kandil Mountains. One American official admits that there is a grain of truth to this. The U.S. Army has been too busy elsewhere in Iraq to do much about the problem, but Washington is now taking the matter more seriously. Earlier this month, top military officers visited Turkey's highest ranking general to discuss the P.K.K. Now that the United States is in Iraq, Turkish forces can no longer cross the border and sort out the problem themselves. So the frustration is multidimensional. Turks resent the European Union for placing obstacles in the way of a no-holds-barred antiterrorist strategy. They resent Americans for being in Iraq. And they resent themselves for removing themselves from the Kurdish region of Iraq.

Under such circumstances, the basic and perennial Turkish fear is easily reactivated -- namely, that foreign countries will gang up and dismember it, as European countries did the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries. According to ARI Hareketi, two-thirds of Turks hold this view. Turks are easily whipped into a panic over threats to the nation. Last spring, there were huge protests, with flags hanging from balconies all over the country, after a flag desecration in the port city Mersin was shown on TV. Alongside this arguably healthy patriotism are signs of a malevolent nationalism. There have been attempts to lynch people suspected of terrorist ties in Trabzon, on the Black Sea coast, and in Seferihisar, near Cesme.

There is an explicitly nationalist party, the M.H.P., that draws thousands to its meetings atop Mount Erciyes outside Kayseri every summer. This year, Devlet Bahceli, the party's leader, accused the A.K.P. of compromising Turkish sovereignty and giving away Cyprus for the chimera of E.U. membership. "There are dress rehearsals for treason going on," Bahceli proclaimed. But these attitudes go far beyond the M.H.P. Erdogan himself is not immune to nationalism's promptings. In a bizarre speech early this summer, he said: "I condemn and curse the BBC and Reuters for describing the P.K.K. as a 'militia group.' . . .If this attitude continues, the terror that hits the sons of this country today will hit them tomorrow."

Nationalism is now the most plausible alternative to the A.K.P. That will be a rude awakening to Turkey's traditional allies, who tend to assume that there remains a Kemalist "loyal opposition" that will somehow "tone down" the enthusiasms of the A.K.P. or that the country has the option of "going back" to the semidemocratic, westernizing regime that suited the purposes of the free world very well. The problem is that that regime did not always suit the purposes of Turkish society, which, anyway, has entered into a new era. The past century has turned Turkey inside out. The Ottoman Empire was a multicultural society under a Muslim government. The Turkish Republic is an overwhelmingly Islamic society in an officially secular state. The open question at the front of European and American minds is whether reforming that state according to society's wishes can lead to anything other than an Islamic republic.

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: Urban Tradition: An open-air market in the conservative Fatih neighborhood of Istanbul.

Strong Rulers: Banners heralding Ataturk and Erdogan, legendary founder of the republic and current prime minister, respectively, at a political conference outside Ankara. Photographs by Lynsey Addario/Corbis)

Load-Date: September 25, 2005

End of Document

The War Inside the Arab Newsroom

The New York Times

January 2, 2005 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section 6; Column 3; Magazine Desk; Pg. 27

Length: 8099 words

Byline: By Samantha M. Shapiro

Samantha M. Shapiro is a contributing writer. She last wrote for the magazine about students at an evangelical Christian college.

Body

Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, the general manager of Al Arabiya, a 24-hour satellite-news channel broadcasting from Dubai, has six plasma-screen TV's in his office on the floor of the channel's glowing, ultramodern newsroom set. They are always on. One is tuned to Al Arabiya itself, and depending on where the cameras are placed, Al-Rashed sometimes catches a glimpse of himself, pacing around his desk on his cellphone. Another shows Al Jazeera, the channel's main competition. A third is tuned to a new Saudi government satellite channel, and a fourth displays CNN. Al-Rashed likes to flip around on the other two -- from Al Hurra, the widely ignored news channel that the United States government started last February, to the BBC and then to Al Manar, the ***Hezbollah***-owned station that was banned by the French and American governments last month for broadcasting anti-Semitic slanders and what a State Department spokesman called "incitement to violence."

Al-Rashed's job is to find a place for Al Arabiya within this array, preferably at the top of the ratings. For now, though, it is Al Jazeera, which was started in 1996 by the emir of the gulf state of Qatar, that sets the standard, and the tone, for Arab television news. According to a poll conducted last May by Zogby International and the University of Maryland, Al Jazeera is the first choice for 62 percent of satellite-news viewers in Jordan, 66 percent in Egypt and 44 percent in Saudi Arabia. In most countries in the poll, Al Arabiya came in a distant second, although the professor who designed the poll, Shibley Telhami, said it had captured a "remarkable" market share for a satellite channel that, at the time, had been on the air for only a year; 39 percent of satellite-news viewers said they watched Al Arabiya almost daily. And in Saudi Arabia, the biggest advertising market in the region, the ratings race is much closer.

Sheik Walid al-Ibrahim, a Saudi, is the owner of both Al Arabiya and its parent network, the Middle East Broadcasting Center, or MBC, the flagship station of which, a "family entertainment" channel called MBC 1, has more viewers than any other channel in the Middle East. Sheik Walid started Al Arabiya in February 2003 to provide a more moderate alternative to Al Jazeera. His goal, as he told me last month, was to position Al Arabiya as the CNN to Al Jazeera's Fox News, as a calm, cool, professional media outlet that would be known for objective reporting rather than for shouted opinions. He said he thought the market was ready for an alternative. "After the events of Sept. 11, Afghanistan and Iraq, people want the truth," he said. "They don't want their news from the Pentagon or from Al Jazeera."

Sheik Walid's personal political interests may also be a motivating factor. He is the brother-in-law of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia; the Saudi royal family dislikes Al Jazeera because it gives air time to Al Qaeda, and one of Al Qaeda's most cherished goals is the overthrow of the Saudi government. And before Al Jazeera, Saudi businessmen owned almost all of the major pan-Arab media, including MBC, the only channel that broadcast news bulletins to the whole of the Middle East, so the country and its rulers were rarely scrutinized by Arab journalists. Qatar's emir allowed Al Jazeera's reporters to take on the Saudis, as well as other governments in the Middle East.

Al Arabiya's sophisticated production values set it apart from other Arab news channels. Its sets and graphics have a clean, high-tech look, and its news bulletins are fast-paced -- no item lasts longer than two and a half minutes -- and are introduced with a dramatic drumbeat. While Al Jazeera anchors sit at a desk in front of a drab two-dimensional backdrop that looks a little like a local American news set from the 1970's, Al Arabiya's news is broadcast from the floor of its futuristic in-the-round silver-and-glass newsroom.

From its inception, Al Arabiya had a different style than Al Jazeera. There was nothing on Al Arabiya quite like Al Jazeera's signature programs, ''Islamic Law and Life,'' which offers advice to viewers on how to apply Sharia to their lives, and ''The Opposite Direction,'' which features fierce head-to-head debates. But what was reported and broadcast on Al Arabiya in its first months was, at times, similar to what you could see and hear on Al Jazeera. The two stations competed to show the most provocative, gory footage of casualties from Iraq. And after American troops captured Baghdad, Al Arabiya reported, incorrectly, that American forces had carried off all the treasures in the national museum.

American military authorities in Iraq and the American-appointed Iraqi Governing Council certainly didn't seem to distinguish between the two satellite channels: they considered both to be allied with the enemy. In September 2003, the Governing Council suspended Al Arabiya from reporting on official government activities for two weeks because, the council maintained, the channel was supporting resistance attacks. And that November, the council ordered Al Arabiya to stop all of its Iraqi operations after the channel broadcast a taped message from Saddam Hussein in hiding. At a news conference that month, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called Al Arabiya ''violently anticoalition'' and in a separate interview said, ''There are so many things that are untrue that are being reported by irresponsible journalists and irresponsible television stations, particularly like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, that are leaving the Iraqi people with a totally imbalanced picture of what is happening in their country.''

When Sheik Walid heard in early 2004 that Al-Rashed had just stepped down as editor of Asharq Al Awsat, a prominent Arab-language daily published in London, he began trying to persuade him to come to Dubai. Al-Rashed, an American-educated Saudi, is well known for his often angry and outspoken columns criticizing Islamic fundamentalism, and especially for a particularly scathing column that he wrote after Chechen rebels seized a school in North Ossetia in September, a siege that ended in more than 300 deaths. ''It is a certain fact that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it is equally certain, and exceptionally painful, that almost all terrorists are Muslims,'' he wrote. ''What a pathetic record. . . . We cannot tolerate in our midst those who abduct journalists, murder civilians, explode buses; we cannot accept them as related to us, whatever the sufferings they claim to justify their criminal deeds. These are the people who have smeared Islam and stained its image.''

Beyond Al-Rashed's criticism of Islamic fundamentalists, the main target of his wrath is the Arab media. He didn't want to speak on the record about Al Jazeera, but during the three weeks I recently spent with the station's management and staff, he made it clear that he thinks his competition is not just misguided but actively dangerous. ''The region is being filled with inaccuracies and partial truths,'' he told me. (Like everyone I met at the station, he spoke English with me and Arabic with his co-workers.) ''I think people will always make good judgments if they have the right information and the whole information. What we lack right now is the truth and information. After that, we'll have a sane society. Right now it is an insane society because of the way information is being delivered to individuals.''

When Al-Rashed arrived at Al Arabiya, he replaced the news director and hired a new executive editor. The three men share a vision for the station that involves less gore and a wider definition of what is news and what should captivate the interest and emotions of their viewers. The new leadership triumvirate is interested in reporting stories about honor killings and violence against ***women*** in Arab countries, a widespread phenomenon rarely considered

newsworthy by other Arab media outlets. Al-Rashed and his top editors also push for lighter stories about daily life -- the kind of apolitical features that fill much of the programming day on Western news channels.

On directions from Al-Rashed, Al Arabiya anchors and correspondents now refer to American troops in Iraq as "multinational forces," not "occupying forces." He told the producer of "The Fourth Estate," a program that serves as a roundup of Western media, to stop quoting from The Guardian and The Independent, two left-leaning British papers whose content used to provide much of the show's material. One Al Arabiya host told me that she had been instructed to cut off guests who digress into anti-American rants, and other hosts I spoke to said they were being encouraged to ask tougher questions in their interviews.

To Al-Rashed, the challenge he faces is much bigger than simply revamping a television channel. His goal is to foster a new kind of dialogue among Arabs, to carve out space for moderate and liberal ideas to enter the conversation, and in the process to do nothing less than save the Arab world from itself. "People become radicals because extremism is celebrated on TV," he told me. "If you broadcast an extremist message at a mosque, it reaches 50 people. But do you know how many people can be sold by a message on TV?"

Al-Rashed, 49, had never worked full time in television before coming to Dubai. But he knows that television is the medium that is remaking the Middle East, for bad or good. "I am sitting on a nuclear reactor," he said, speaking of Al Arabiya. "It could produce electricity and light up a city, or it could cause destruction. It's up to the person sitting in the chair where I am sitting to decide which way it will go."

For most of the short history of the Arab media, television stations have been run by national governments, who used them as extensions of their information ministries. Satellite TV changed that dynamic by allowing Arab journalists to go offshore -- initially mostly to London -- and beam Arab news into the Arab world without fear of being arrested or shut down. MBC was the first network to do so, but after 11 years in London, it was lured in 2002 to Dubai, the glimmering hub of capitalism and tourism in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai is a city under construction, 24 hours a day, and what is being built often seems like a caricature of Western excess: an archipelago of man-made islands shaped like the continents; the tallest skyscraper in the world; and, still on the drawing board, the largest mall in the world, replete with an indoor ski slope, and an underwater hotel. As part of the development of Dubai, the emirate established "free zones" -- tax-free areas with financial incentives to lure businesses into clustered luxury office parks. The Al Arabiya offices are in the flagship building of Media City, facing a man-made lake with unnaturally even waves, not far from Internet City, Health Care City and Knowledge Village.

The chance to be in the Arab world but still removed from the economic and political problems that plague many of its countries proved attractive to MBC and to a number of other media outlets. It also appealed to Al-Rashed. The second of 14 children born to two wives in a middle-class Saudi family, Al-Rashed hadn't lived in the region since he left Riyadh in his 20's to attend American University in Washington. The seven years that he spent in the United States were eye-opening: he watched the Iranian revolution through the prism of the American media and covered events in the early 1980's from Washington for Al Majalla, a Saudi-owned London-based magazine. Al-Rashed moved to London in 1985 and rose through the ranks of elite Saudi-owned magazines and newspapers. He never thought he would return to the Middle East. Dubai, he said, is the only place in the Arab world he can "exist." He sees Dubai as an experiment that could spur reform in other Arab countries and show what can be accomplished with a little openness and less corruption.

The population of Dubai is only 18 percent native; the rest of the residents are Western and Arab expatriates and laborers, mainly from India, Pakistan and East Asia who live in camps of squat cinder-block housing and ride back and forth to their work sites in company buses. Young single journalists at Al Arabiya go out to places like the cafe at the Dubai marina, where they can smoke water pipes next to a fountain designed to mimic the sounds of the ocean. In self-consciously "Arabian"-style restaurants and nightclubs, Al Arabiya employees find themselves in combinations that would be unlikely in their home countries: one night atop the Royal Mirage rooftop bar, I sat sipping cosmopolitans with a Sunni, a Shiite and a Maronite Christian, all from Lebanon. With its Disneyesque Arab souks in which you can purchase Arab handicrafts or a Cinnabon, Dubai seemed like an elaborate stage set for modernization in the Arab world, a shallow facade of empty skyscrapers with -- so far -- nothing but sand behind them.

Al-Rashed has been in Dubai for nine months, and he misses his house in the Kensington neighborhood in London, where he lived alone and where most of his possessions remain. He occupies an apartment suite in a downtown hotel, but he has barely set foot in the kitchen, and the bedroom serves as little more than a warehouse for half-unpacked suitcases and dress shirts still in their boxes. I met him at his place one morning in December, and we rode the elevator down to a cafe in the lobby for breakfast. He beamed politely at our waitress, Almira, a petite Indonesian woman in a lavender fez-like hat and apron whose name tag read ''Amy.'' ''I missed you,'' he told her, his dimples flashing. ''You were gone so long over Ramadan.''

Halfway through his croissant and latte, his cellphone beeped with a text message from the news director at Al Arabiya: ''Wael Essam is arrested by Americans.'' Wael Essam, or Wild Wael, as Al-Rashed likes to call him, is Al Arabiya's correspondent in Falluja. He is only 27, and he has something of a reputation as a renegade. He was the only reporter who was able to get into Falluja at the beginning of the American offensive in November without being embedded with the United States military. From inside Falluja, he delivered breathless reports on Al Arabiya, his brow furrowed with intensity, his camera spinning from plumes of smoke billowing over the city to black-hooded fighters gathered in a lantern-lighted room. In a report I saw, the insurgents spoke calmly, not in the formal, didactic style of the kidnappers on beheading tapes; they were obviously relaxed around Essam, even when they were telling him that they were registered to commit ''martyr operations.''

Essam was born in Qatar, to Palestinian parents. He attended Baghdad University, where he was president first of the Palestinian student group and then of the Arab students' union. He started working for Al Arabiya in 2003 as a reporter. Partly because of his student-government position, Essam had connections to families in Falluja and to former members of Saddam Hussein's Baathist government, and last April he began pestering his editors to let him report from Falluja. Salah Negm, who was the news director before Al-Rashed arrived, refused to give Essam the assignment, saying it was too dangerous. So last April, Essam used his vacation time to travel to Iraq from Dubai and ''embed'' himself in a house of insurgents in Falluja.

Essam spent the summer back in Dubai, working in the newsroom. In the fall, when the American military authorities in Iraq announced plans to retake Falluja, Essam knew he wanted to return there. He couldn't bear to be in the office any longer, he told me. ''I hate it too much,'' he said. ''You just stay in your chair just taking news from wires.'' Al-Rashed was hesitant about sending Essam to Falluja, because, he said, Essam is ''hot-blooded.'' When Essam threatened to use his vacation time to go back, Al-Rashed relented.

Overall, Al-Rashed has been happy with Essam's reports from Iraq. The Al Arabiya Web site featured them prominently, detailing Essam's journey through Falluja, from his close calls with insurgents and American marines to the ''large predatory mosquitoes'' he encountered just outside the city. Al-Rashed knew it was a great coup to have a reporter behind the lines in Falluja -- American and British television journalists couldn't safely report from there, and in August Al Jazeera was banned from Iraq altogether by the government of Ayad Allawi.

Al-Rashed, finishing his croissant, did not seem particularly fazed by the text message about Essam's capture. If Essam was in American custody, Al-Rashed reasoned, he was less likely to be shot or blown up. ''The chance that he was going to be killed was a lot higher than that he would be arrested,'' he said. ''If the Americans have him with two legs and two arms, that's good news.'' (He was right to be sanguine, as it turned out; Essam was released a few hours later.)

American troops have killed three Al Arabiya employees in Iraq. Ali al-Khatib, a reporter for the channel, and Ali Abdul Aziz, a cameraman, were killed last March by American gunfire near the site of a rocket attack on a Baghdad hotel. Mazen Al-Tumeizi was killed by a missile fired from an American helicopter in September while he was reporting live on a crowd celebrating in the streets of Baghdad after an attack that destroyed a Bradley fighting vehicle.

Even more Al Arabiya employees in Iraq have been killed by insurgents. In late October, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb outside the Al Arabiya compound in the Al Mansour neighborhood in Baghdad, killing five, wounding dozens and destroying the channel's Baghdad office. Al Arabiya, like many Arab news stations, received threats from Islamist groups, by e-mail and posted on Web sites, in the preceding months. A group called the

Jihadist Martyrs Brigades took credit for the attack. In its dispatches, members had criticized Al Arabiya for giving the new Iraqi government overly favorable coverage. They called Al Arabiya a "terrorist channel" and suggested that its name, which means "the Arab," should be changed to "the Hebrew."

After the attack, Al-Rashed's first directive to his Baghdad staff was to get on the air. Within minutes, he was on the phone to his roving anchor in Baghdad, Najwa Kassem, a serious, high-cheekboned veteran of five wars. It was important to send the terrorists a message, Al-Rashed told her, that they had failed to drive the channel out of Iraq or off the air. Kassem was in the compound during the attack, and she had been thrown onto some broken glass by the explosion. She was still helping wounded co-workers when Al-Rashed got her on the phone. After she spoke to him, she began reporting live by telephone from the blast site, and as soon as the channel's video feed was fixed, she was on the air, saying in a shaky voice that the bodies of her colleagues were too torn apart to identify. The list of the dead, she said, was being determined by who was missing.

I watched the tape in the Al Arabiya office, and it is powerful footage. Kassem's face looked strangely naked -- it had seemed inappropriate to wear makeup for the broadcast, she told me last month -- and she spoke urgently, affecting none of the rhythmic speech and eyebrow-lifting of a typical rehearsed report.

In the days following the report, Al-Rashed said, a group called the Baath Party Arab Congress began to post reports on its Web site threatening Kassem by name. One, issued on Nov. 13, charged Kassem with being the "organizational point-person" responsible for "the dissemination and perpetuation of falsehoods against the resistance" and labeled her "the prime-mover of such a policy at the present time." After Al-Rashed read the statements and other warnings, he reversed his earlier instructions to Kassem. Without saying why, he told her she would be fired if she didn't go to Beirut immediately. It was only after she had arrived that he told her her life had been threatened.

Many employees in Al Arabiya's newsroom have intimate connections with the conflicts they cover, and not all of them agree with all of Al-Rashed's ideas. There are Sudanese Arabs, Palestinians who grew up in Syrian refugee camps and a reporter who had been a member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. There are also several former Al Jazeera employees. Some were poached for their expertise; others defected because, they said, Al Jazeera's management these days is too Islamist for them. ***Women*** were discouraged from wearing tight pants, they said, and some men refused to shake your hand if they knew you didn't follow Islamic law.

The job of overseeing a staff of reporters that comes from so many places, geographically and politically, falls to a man named Nabil Khatib. Al-Rashed didn't hire Khatib directly. He hired Khatib's boss, Nahkle El Hage, a former executive at MBC who is now the news director at Al Arabiya, and the first thing El Hage did in his new position was hire Khatib. El Hage knew Khatib from the 12 years Khatib spent as MBC's bureau chief for the Palestinian territories and Israel. El Hage was impressed by what he saw as Khatib's sense of fairness, even when it caused trouble for MBC. "I took a lot of heat for his coverage," El Hage said. "At seminars and parties, people would ask: 'How can you be neutral on Palestine? Why don't you say martyr?'" -- meaning that Khatib should have been using the word "shahid," or martyr, to describe Palestinian suicide bombers. "I was glad we didn't," El Hage went on. "Nabil was the most evenhanded reporter in the region."

Khatib's desk is just outside Al-Rashed's office. There is a constant rhythm going on all around him -- urgent bleeps from the wire services, the ring of his office phone and the warble of his cellphone. He answers most calls with the same deep-voiced greeting, "habibi," which means sweetheart, an endearment that he also finds the opportunity to murmur to a surprising number of co-workers.

Khatib has a 5 o'clock shadow, and dark bags draw his big, bloodshot eyes downward. His head and shoulders seem permanently rounded forward, even when he is not staring at his computer monitor. A pack of Dunhill Lights usually sits by his keyboard. Khatib is a big man, but he used to be even bigger, and these days his clothes bunch baggily at his waist. In the four months he has worked at Al Arabiya, Khatib has lost 36 pounds. One evening he complained to me that he had not seen his baby daughter in two weeks, because she is asleep when he arrives home at night, and she is still asleep when he leaves in the morning. Woefully, he described the time he made his

wife meet him at a nearby mall for lunch so he could see her and his daughter. "I had only time for coffee and to kiss her," he said. "Calls came in the entire time."

Khatib was hunched at his desk one morning over the story lineup for the next bulletin, typing, when Wael Essam called. Essam was upset that his most recent report from Falluja had been broadcast only twice over the weekend. Khatib hadn't seen it. Essam later told me that he puts in these sorts of phone calls fairly regularly to both Khatib and Al-Rashed, complaining that his reports aren't getting enough air time. "We are the only channel that has this kind of tape!" he said he told them. "Why didn't we show it every hour? We have to show it many times!"

Khatib punched a few keys on his computer, and Essam's latest report popped open on his screen. At this point, the American operation in Falluja was winding down. But according to Essam's report, American harassment had not ended. "More than 200 families in Falluja are under siege by troops," Essam's voice said on Khatib's screen.

Khatib leaned in and asked: "What does he mean? Let us see."

An Iraqi man angrily told Essam's camera: "They are not allowing us to go out of our homes. They are arguing when we say we need to go out. They say snipers will shoot if you go out."

"Well, that doesn't sound like a siege," Khatib mused. "Maybe a curfew. Let us see." Then his cellphone chirped. He took the call and muted the audio but kept watching the screen. While he talked, on the video Red Crescent workers searched for a missing man, and a woman sobbed in a rage inside her damaged house. Essam cut to a close-up of holes in her walls.

Khatib hung up, raised the volume and translated for me. "The woman says she lost her son in this house and now it is damaged," he said. "She is screaming, 'Where should I go now after I lost my house -- to sleep in the street?'"

The next scene showed families leaving their houses to go to a Red Crescent shelter. Khatib rewound the video and played it again. The families loaded into the car again. He rewound again to the beginning, where the man described not being able to leave his house because of snipers. Khatib played the video through to the end, where Essam signed off, sitting casually on a ledge at the Red Crescent shelter with a group of families, new refugees in their own city.

Khatib thought he saw a contradiction there. Essam was reporting that families couldn't go out because of snipers and curfews, but in the second part of the clip families were shown leaving their houses to go to shelters, walking in the street with American soldiers in the background, who did not appear to be shooting at them.

Khatib said: "I have the feeling that he didn't care that much about being accurate. He just wanted to explain that the people of Falluja are suffering in many ways." A little later, Khatib crossed the newsroom floor to head down to the cafeteria for the one meal he eats a day. When he sat down to his meal, his phone rang again. It was Essam. He still hadn't seen his report back on the air. Khatib asked if the curfew Essam described was in place throughout Falluja. Then he asked about the scenes of American soldiers standing around people on their way to shelters. Essam explained that the second scene was from another area in Falluja, which is not under curfew.

Khatib told him: "If there's still a place where people can't go out, you have to say it is just that part where they can't go out. There is no reason to exaggerate tragedy. The pictures are strong, but it's a big problem for viewers to think everyone in Falluja cannot leave his place."

Essam's segment was not broadcast again.

Khatib and Al-Rashed share many of the same views about journalism. They are both idealistic about the transformative social power of objective journalism, and both want to push Al Arabiya toward a less emotional, more measured view of the Middle East. But they came to these ideas from experiences that were almost completely opposite.

Al-Rashed's political perspective evolved at a distance from the Arab world, in the United States and England, where he seems to have found life more pleasant, rational and interesting than it is in Saudi Arabia. Khatib's life and

career, by contrast, have been bound up in the claustrophobic conflict he was born into. Khatib is the youngest of seven children raised by a widowed mother in Nablus, in the West Bank. He said he first got the idea to be a journalist at age 15, in 1978, after he spent three months being interrogated in an Israeli jail before being released without charges. He was frequently beaten, he told me, and during one such beating, by an Israeli officer who called himself Captain Uzi, Khatib was told he had been arrested for incitement. Khatib didn't know what the word meant. After his release, he asked his oldest brother. ''Incitement,'' his brother told him, ''is journalism.''

When Khatib graduated from high school, he was eager to do whatever he thought would make Captain Uzi most angry, so in 1981 he applied for a Palestine Liberation Organization scholarship to Belarus State University in Minsk to study journalism. His courses trained him in the Soviet art of creating propaganda on behalf of the proletariat. During his sophomore year, when the P.L.O. mobilized students on campus to go to Lebanon to fight the Israeli Army, Khatib was inspired to join, and he persuaded a friend, who was studying medicine, to come with him. When they arrived, Khatib said, he quickly realized how woefully unprepared they were for war. Neither had been given any military training. His friend was killed in front of him, and two weeks later Khatib had had enough. When he flew back to Minsk, his anger had a different focus.

''I was ready to die for a cause, and we were excited to fight for justice,'' he said. ''But it gave me a difficult question about good and bad: Who are these politicians who decide I should go to war when I don't know how to fight -- really to send me to a war when I am not a fighter -- because they want to make a strong showing numbers-wise? Who decided it was the right thing for me to leave my studies?''

After he completed his Ph.D., Khatib returned to the West Bank, where he started his own news agency and eventually became bureau chief for MBC. Reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict brought him close to death again and again. He watched as his colleague Nahum Barnea, a journalist for the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot, discovered that his own son had been killed in a suicide bombing that both men were covering. He reported in Hebron in 1994, after Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Muslims at prayer. He was looking over a list of the dead when an illiterate woman asked him if her son was included. His was the first name on the list, but Khatib couldn't bear to tell her.

Khatib does not discuss these experiences easily, but their imprint on him is apparent. He has a sense about him that there is weight to the task he has been charged with: there is something irrevocable about making a mistake, about getting information wrong. He is clearly sickened by the media landscape of the Arab world. ''Sensationalism incites people to hatred,'' he said. ''I have smelled the blood of hatred, and I cannot understand how someone in an air-conditioned newsroom feels that he has the right to manipulate people's emotions, to rile people up or to generalize about a group, when he sees the repercussions.''

More than anyone else at the station, Khatib was deeply frustrated by the ground rules of Arab TV journalism. Aside from the obvious ethical concerns an editor has about sending a reporter to dangerous places like Iraq and the West Bank, he said, there are other dangers involved in dispatching reporters to Arab countries where there is little or no freedom of the press. ''If in Libya or Egypt I push someone to tell a story that will get him in conflict with the authorities,'' Khatib explained, ''I can't tell them, 'We need it.' Because it goes without saying that this subject is dangerous. This applies to most of the issues that matter -- all the things related to corruption and political conflicts.'' Al-Rashed told me that Al Arabiya can't report freely on the Saudi government because it is Saudi-owned, and the channel is unable to cover Algeria at all right now. Al Arabiya's correspondent has been prohibited from reporting for the last eight months by the government of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the recently elected president: during the election, the reporter had predicted that Bouteflika's rival would win.

The central problem, as Khatib sees it, is that although Arab journalists have access to state-of-the-art technology, the governmental and civic structures needed to support a free modern press don't exist in the Middle East. ''CNN works in an environment that supports CNN,'' Khatib explained. In the United States, ''there are groups that regulate the media and protect the public interest. There is rule of law and access to information.'' Not so, he said, in nearly every Arab country. Even basic information like demographic statistics is treated as if it were a state secret, and it is almost impossible for the channel to report on the inner workings of Arab governments -- how budgets are drawn up or how leaders are chosen.

To Khatib, those stories are much more important than the daily dose of news from Israel that is a prerequisite for Arab stations, both the old government mouthpieces and the new satellite channels. ''People are lazy,'' Khatib said. ''And Israel is a safe target. The access is easier there than in many Arab countries. But this reporting doesn't help Palestinians know which mayoral candidate to vote for.''

Khatib is in the minority in the newsroom. Right next to his cubicle sat Abdelkader Kharoubi, then the assignment editor. Kharoubi told me that he thinks it makes sense that the Israel-Palestine bureau is Al Arabiya's largest and most sophisticated, because that conflict, he said, is a tragedy unsurpassed in human history: ''Nothing like this ever happened in the world. What happened in Palestine is the most horrible murder in the history of humanity.'' Kharoubi said he thinks that Al Arabiya's reporters should always refer to Jerusalem as '''occupied Jerusalem,' with the emphasis on 'occupied.'''

There is a general feeling around the Al Arabiya offices that since Al-Rashed was named news director, the channel has become pro-American. Kharoubi agrees. Recent injunctions from Al-Rashed and Khatib to balance coverage in Iraq have gone too far, he said. Al-Rashed told me he thinks Al Arabiya's coverage of the Iraq conflict overemphasized civilian deaths in Falluja and played down American military successes against terrorists. Kharoubi thinks the opposite. ''How can you 'balance' civilian deaths?'' he asked me. ''Maybe you could show dead soldiers, but the American government doesn't even want us to show them. When you talk about the agonies of civilians, there is no way to balance it -- they are a different category of people. The Iraqi government says, 'Please concentrate on positive aspects.' Why should we concentrate on good things?''

Kharoubi recently went in to Al-Rashed's office to express his concern that the station's portrayals of the American military and the Iraqi interim government were too positive. He was worried, he said, that it put the channel's Baghdad staff at continued risk. ''One concern I mentioned was that we don't want them to be killed again,'' he said. ''Not by Americans or terrorists.'' He also said that the recent direction in Al Arabiya's coverage means a risk of losing viewers. ''If we keep talking to Arab viewers as if this government'' -- the Allawi government in Iraq -- ''is going to introduce democracy, as if the U.S. Army are very nice occupiers who kill only terrorists, then they won't switch us on,'' he said.

When Al Arabiya's reporters were killed by Americans, Al-Rashed said, the station received hundreds of condolence calls from journalists at other channels, and the reporters were mourned as martyrs. By contrast, after the Al Arabiya bureau in Baghdad was bombed by insurgents, Al-Rashed said, only a few of his colleagues offered a single word about the five employees who died.

Diar al-Omari, an Iraqi-born reporter for Al Arabiya, worries that the channel is increasingly seen in the Arab world as being too partisan toward the Allawi government. ''In Iraq we are losing sympathy,'' he said. ''People are not looking to Arabiya as an independent channel.''

Ehab Elalfy, 30, a burly, bearded Al Arabiya reporter from Egypt, was very happy working at the station until the last few months, he told me. On one afternoon when I visited with him, Elalfy returned from midday prayers to find that he had been assigned to write an item from a wire report on the aftermath of an insurgent attack on American-trained Iraqi soldiers in Mosul. He winced when he got to a line in which an American military spokesman said, ''Twelve more unidentified bodies were found by multinational forces.'' Elalfy said no one specifically told him to stop using the phrase ''occupying forces'' in bulletins, but whenever he does, it is edited out. This isn't the only change at his job that he is annoyed by. A few months ago, he would run searches on Google Arabic every hour or so looking up words like ''Zarqawi,'' the name of an insurgency leader. He would often find a page that was up for just a few hours with a videotaped threat or hostage tape and take it straight to his editor. He said he's proud that because of those efforts, the station was sometimes able to play such tapes before Al Jazeera. But lately his bosses don't seem as interested. As an observant Muslim, Elalfy didn't like these tapes -- he said he thinks they violate Muslim laws about how to treat prisoners of war, especially ***women*** and civilians. But still, he thought they belonged on TV.

As Elalfy typed up his report, Rana Abu Atta, a young Al Arabiya reporter from Saudi Arabia with short, curly black hair pulled back with a headband, swung by Elalfy's desk to see if he wanted to get in on her lunch order to Burger King. Elalfy scowled at her.

"Oh, sorry, I forgot!" she said, and laughed.

For the last eight years, Elalfy has boycotted American products, because, he told me, "American products help the U.S. administration earn more profit, and they use that profit to provide Israel with weapons to kill Palestinian civilians."

Until recently, it was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that dominated Elalfy's imagination and passions. He recently completed an unpublished novel titled "Me and Best Wishes," about an Egyptian journalist who plans to visit the Al Aksa mosque in Jerusalem but doesn't want to recognize the legitimacy of Israel by crossing its border legally. So instead, he sneaks across the Lebanese border with suicide bombers. Elalfy's protagonist is sidetracked in Lebanon when he falls in love with a Palestinian girl, who is killed by an Israeli airstrike. Hopeless, the protagonist decides to "avenge her death" by taking part in an attack on Israeli soldiers.

In the smoke-filled stairwell of the MBC building -- where employees conduct business while chugging cigarettes and sipping foamy Nescafe dispensed by a machine -- Elalfy told me that part of the reason he wants to be a novelist is to inspire pan-Arab nationalism. Elalfy said that all Arab lands should be one country; it is ridiculous, he said, that he has to apply for a visa to enter Lebanon. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the former president of Egypt, is his hero, because "when Egypt came to freedom, it helped all Arab countries become free."

Elalfy recently started work on a new novel. It is about Iraq, the issue that has joined the Palestinian situation for him as the most pressing and important in the Arab world. It is based in part on his experiences reporting for Al Arabiya from Iraq a few months ago. In Iraq, Elalfy reported stories that were close to his heart and also didn't hesitate to involve himself in what he was reporting. He told me about one incident in which he saw an American soldier manhandling an Iraqi and picked a fight with the soldier. Elalfy said that while reporting from Falluja, he helped pull civilians out of rubble. He kept a little girl's dust-covered green plaid dress and mounted it in a wood frame. "It was a child named Hannin's," Elalfy said. "She died holding it, and her brother said I could keep it."

I sat with Elalfy one day when he was asked to take two sound bites from a 45-minute speech by Allawi. He wanted to follow one of Allawi's statements -- that suicide operations in Iraq are not true jihad -- with a statement from an imam saying that in fact they are. But his editors wouldn't let him.

"There's no balance between the points," he said, shrugging, seeming defeated. When he finished the report, he drove back to the Gardens, the beige-and-apricot complex where Media City workers live, rubbing a fragrant Egyptian oil on his hands to kill the cigarette smell, a Palestinian kaffiyeh wrapped around the headrest of his passenger seat.

It is unclear if the Department of Defense has changed its view of Al Arabiya since Donald Rumsfeld called it "violently anticoalition" a year ago. "At this point in time, we do not want to offer our evaluation of the editorial content or direction of a particular news outlet," a Department of Defense spokesman, Lt. Col. Barry Venable, told me late last month. George Bush did choose to give Al Arabiya an interview after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, and Al Arabiya's business manager, Shafaat Khan, said he was visited by a few American generals in the summer who wanted to establish friendly relations. They summed up their view of the Arab media by saying that as they understood it, "Al Jazeera is very, very bad, and Al Arabiya is bad."

But on the newsroom floor, producers and editors said they find it difficult to get the American perspective when they want to put it on the air. On Nov. 19, gunfire broke out at a mosque in northern Baghdad. Khatib said he immediately had a local sheik on the line offering his account of the attack: that the United States Army opened fire on civilians. But Khatib saw in the footage an exchange of fire and wondered if the mosque had been harboring fighters. He spent the 45 minutes until air time trying to get an American or Iraqi government account of the incident; three hours later, he still didn't have one.

"To my surprise," he said, "the opposition is doing better, P.R.-wise, than the official Americans and Iraqis, who are not as readily available for comment to give their side as the opposition. The militants are ready with a video of masked men and a person available for comment a half-hour after the story breaks." Khatib went ahead and broadcast the segment on the gun battle at the mosque without the Army's side of the story; he said that the

segment looked unbalanced but that he had a choice between an incomplete segment or not covering the fight at all.

The United States government's primary strategy with the Arab media has been to create its own outlets -- the satellite-news station Al Hurra and Radio Sawa -- at a cost of $100 million, rather than engage aggressively with existing Arab media stations. But as a result, there is no easy mechanism for journalists at these stations to find American voices, even ones that might be able to make a sympathetic case to Arab viewers. One night, Nael Najdawi, a middle-aged producer in suspenders, ran up to me in the newsroom, his glasses bouncing off the cord around his neck. He asked me if I knew anyone who was related to a victim of the Sept. 11 attacks. I said that a woman in my neighborhood whom I had met a few times lost her brother. "Can we get her to go live for the 10 o'clock bulletin?" he asked.

Officials in the State Department's public diplomacy division have argued for more direct engagement with the Arab media. But Norman Pattiz, a member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, who masterminded Al Hurra and Radio Sawa, told me he thinks that view is mistaken, because it "presupposes that the indigenous media is the solution, not the problem." Pattiz speaks about the Arab media as a monolith. In a recently published essay, he wrote: "Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya transcend traditional media roles. They function, in effect, as quasi-political movements, reflecting two of the defining characteristics of the Middle East today. One is the lack of political and press freedom. The other is Arab nationalism. Arab networks manifest both." He said Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya do this by covering news that Arab regimes suppress and stories that "intensely arouse Arab passions," namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Iraq.

Among experts who track the Arab media, there is a debate over whether this kind of coverage is good or bad for the prospects of democracy in the Middle East. Marc Lynch, assistant professor of political science at Williams College, agrees with Norman Pattiz that the satellite networks focus on hot-button issues -- his recent research broke down coverage on Al Jazeera since 1999 and found that the top three topics shifted among Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Arab political reform -- but to Lynch, this makes Al Jazeera the most pro-democracy of all the stations in the Arab world: it reflects public opinion and opens up space for political debate.

William Rugh, a former United States ambassador and now an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute, likewise thinks that the dialogue on Al Jazeera, heated though it may be, opens up discussions that force authorities to be more accountable. But he says that Al Jazeera's attention to controversial issues and different points of view has not translated into democratic politics. "That next step has not been taken as you might expect in terms of bringing democracy to the Arab world," he says. "People haven't formed political parties and interest groups. You can't assume that just because there is a lot of shouting going on that there is a lot of transparency and accountability going on."

S. Abdallah Schleifer, director of Adham Center for Television Journalism at the American University in Cairo, says that part of a healthy democracy is that there are certain ground rules for discussion. "The danger of a press moving from an authoritarian mode is sensationalism, which is sometimes evident in Al Jazeera," he says. "Things are said on that network that would never be said in England and America because they are moving into uncharted territory, and so there are no taboos, no libel and slander, no limits to what one says."

Schleifer went on to say that he hopes Al Arabiya's more cautious and more professional approach will provide a foil for Al Jazeera: "It might show that you could have a free press operating but with manners, and democracy depends on good manners."

Khatib said he plans to stay at Al Arabiya for only a year. Although Dubai is an easier place to live than Ramallah, he said he doesn't want to stay because he is troubled by the "huge gap" between Dubai and the world Al Arabiya broadcasts to. "In New York, as an editor, you can go have coffee, and everything around you gives you the feeling of the place," he told me one day in the newsroom. "Working in Cairo, just going to work in the morning as an editor, you might see 10 people asking for money and come up with 200 stories. In Dubai, the most you see on your way to work is traffic."

Khatib said that people in Dubai "don't live in the real world, the Arab world, and this affects the depth and the richness of our reporting." Gesturing to the newsroom, he said: "They convey reality through glass. It's fake. I don't want to be like those who are away from the public. I felt this the first day I was here. If the network succeeds and I stay, I will lose what made me a good journalist."

But when pressed, Khatib also admitted that he is not enthusiastic about returning to his bureau in the West Bank. He said he is always treated as a Palestinian first and a journalist second, being held at checkpoints for hours en route to appointments. And he said that at times, the struggle to offer calm reports about a painful situation was overwhelming. "I am tired of the process," he said, "and the constant tension to hold my emotions at bay, and I don't feel that in a year or two years it will end."

Khatib took the job at Al Arabiya, he said, because he thought "the Arab world was not able to be as moderate and free as it could be, because they are not getting true information." He wanted to be a bridge between ideals he holds about journalism and the realities of Arab reporting, and he thought he could have real impact at Al Arabiya.

But now that he has been in Dubai for four months, he said late one night in the marble lobby of the MBC building, the distance between those points seems vast. "I am not sure I can personally afford to pay the price for this success, even if it is possible," he said wearily.

Al-Rashed is usually more optimistic about the prospects for Al Arabiya, and for creating a truly free press in a region that is not free. But when pressed, he admits that his undertaking is risky, and that the cost of failure would be great. "In a real way, I have to win this," he said one evening as his driver took us to the station. "I have been preaching for a long time these kinds of thoughts, and if it doesn't work, I have to walk out and say, 'It didn't work -- you're on your own.' I am dragging everyone with me on this. I have to succeed."

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed left Saudi Arabia in his 20's to attend American University in Washington and then thrived in the Arab expatriate media world of London. He never thought he'd return to the Middle East.

Nabil Khatib is responsible for overseeing Al Arabiya's reporters. It's no small task, considering that many of them don't agree with all of Al-Rashed's ideas about the channel's mission -- he has lost 36 pounds in his four months on the job and reads through bloodshot eyes.

Al Arabiya's employees take cigarette breaks in the stairwell outside the newsroom, which overlooks the man-made lake in Media City. Media City was built as part of Dubai's effort to use tax incentives to lure businesses into clustered luxury office parks.

Najwa Kassem, getting ready to anchor the news in Dubai. In October, after a suicide bombing outside Al Arabiya's Baghdad offices, Kassem, a veteran correspondent, reported live from the blast site, without makeup, which she deemed inappropriate to the circumstances. (Photographs by Lynsey Addario/Corbis, for The New York Times)

Load-Date: January 2, 2005

The Interregnum

The New York Times

March 13, 2005 Sunday

Late Edition - Final

Section: Section 6; Column 3; Magazine Desk; Pg. 39

Length: 8277 words

Byline: By James Bennet

James Bennet, a staff writer for the magazine, was chief of the New York Times bureau in Jerusalem from September 2001 through last summer.

Body

The day they buried Yasir Arafat in the Ramallah fort that had become his prison, the most remarkable sight was not the thousands who brushed aside Palestinian security to swarm over the walls and bid him an impassioned farewell, some with semiautomatic gunfire. It was not Uri Avnery, the dogged Israeli dove, comparing Arafat to Moses for leading his people from bondage to die within sight of his promised land; it was not the delegation of Moonies from Rockville, Md., who sat primly amid the mob. One grows accustomed to such things. This was Palestine after all, and Palestine is really a state of mind, or a state of being, but not, in any event, a state. Its rules are its own rules, those of a place that is not wholly real, that is dreamlike and a little scary -- an Oz at once remembered and mythic with a small number, yet more than its share, of flying monkeys.

What was most remarkable that day was that the crowd simply vanished. The Palestinians buried their Old Man, their epic hero, and they went home to eat, to break the fast of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. They went home to get on with their lives. It was not as if they drifted away. It was as if they teleported. They left behind an honor guard by the grave, a few spent mourners sprawled on a dirtied red carpet and a startlingly tranquil dusk.

This struck me as a very hopeful sign. On subsequent visits to Palestine, I was impressed by the absence of passion about Arafat's death, by its bearable lightness, even though its cause was never disclosed and Palestinians took it for granted that Israel had poisoned him. The posters of Arafat tore, faded, then vanished. Visitors came to the grave, but by the handful. Their mood tended to be reflective. A few days after Arafat's burial, I visited the guards outside his Gaza City headquarters, which like the Ramallah compound had been bombed repeatedly by Israel. They said they would protect this ruin by the Mediterranean forever, as a memorial. Then one blustery day in February, the governing Palestinian Authority obliterated it, leaving a trim sand lot and a clean sweep to the sea.

People were sad about Arafat's death. Even those who were thwarted by him felt bereft -- fatherless, as one Palestine Liberation Organization official who disdained Arafat put it, with surprise at his own reaction. But it was not as if they felt suddenly leaderless. They were used to Arafat's absence; they missed him while he was still alive.

"I don't really speak about real, effective accomplishments," Haider Abdel Shafi said in Gaza City after a long pause, when I asked him to name Arafat's achievements. At 86, he is a grand old man of the movement and a longtime critic of Arafat. "Arafat left us in a real way to drift along," he added.

Now for Palestinians, he said, "the challenge is on the level of to be or not to be."

Yasir Arafat was wrong about a lot of things. He was wrong to believe, as two of his closest associates told me he did, that Israel would never elect Ariel Sharon to be prime minister, that after rejecting Ehud Barak's offer at Camp David in the summer of 2000 the Palestinian leader could exploit the second intifada, which began that fall, to continue negotiating concessions from a re-elected Barak. He was wrong to believe after the Sept. 11 attacks that the Bush administration would tilt to him and away from Israel, to court the Muslim world. He was wrong to believe the following spring that Sharon would never risk international criticism by launching a giant offensive into the West Bank, and he ignored the pleas of aides who begged him to pre-empt Sharon by cracking down on militants. The invasion came, and the governing Palestinian Authority, created by the Oslo accords, lost control of the major Palestinian cities. Israel began forbidding even the Palestinian Police to function, saying they included terrorists.

One night in Arafat's office in Ramallah, after Israel had trapped him there, I asked if he still expected to see a Palestinian state in his lifetime. ''No doubt,'' he replied without hesitation. ''No doubt.'' Well, he was wrong about a lot of things.

But he was right about at least one big thing. Arafat's core insight, derived in the 1960's from Frantz Fanon, was to reject the ascendant pan-Arabism of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and to posit instead a Palestinian exceptionalism. He believed that a distinct Palestinian nationalism would take shape through armed struggle with Israel. After Israel humiliated Nasser and the Arab armies in the Six-Day War in 1967, Arafat and his vision emerged as the heroic alternative. The Palestinians are divided by class, religion and geography, yet, drawn together by opposition to Israel, they have attained a national coherence that other recovering wards of British colonialism -- like the Iraqis -- lack.

As the struggle for nationhood took shape, a yearning grew not just for any state but for a democratic one. In their diaspora, Palestinians worked or studied under dictatorships and democracies and appreciated the difference. Those living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza after the Six-Day War came to resent authority. Liberated in a way by their very statelessness -- lacking a glass house -- Palestinians developed what the political scientist Khalil Shikaki has called a ''culture of criticism,'' freely ridiculing Arab autocrats and declaring they could do better. Hardest for some Palestinians to admit is the influence of Israel, of the parliamentary debates and acerbic press they followed on television and in the newspapers. To be Palestinian is to be intimately, painfully acquainted with paradox. It is to know that, in part, you owe your national character and your democratic dream to the very people who occupied your land and compromised your rights.

This national coherence and democratic aspiration combine to explain why, on Arafat's death, the Palestinian public pivoted from Arafat to Mahmoud Abbas and why it did it so smoothly. More than four years into their latest violent conflict with Israel, Palestinians drew together behind Arafat's longtime No. 2, Abbas, who turns 70 this month, as one of the few national figures remaining -- one with the credentials to span the divided populations of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the diaspora. In an election Jan. 9, he won more than 60 percent of the vote. That he did so well was evidence to Palestinians of their national unity; that he did not do better was evidence to them of the strength of their democratic institutions. Hassan Khreisheh, an opposition member of the Palestinian Parliament, tied these themes together when he proudly declared at the swearing-in of Abbas, ''Our people have put an end to the 99.999 percent that Arab leaders have become accustomed to.'' Palestinians were now exceptional, he was saying, because they had democracy.

But these strands in the Palestinian identity do not usually pull in the same direction. With national liberation as his goal, Arafat was able to slough off such niceties of nation-building as creating an independent court system, just as low-level militants are still able to avoid licensing their cars. Who could dun men who are risking their lives for the cause? For many Palestinians, building a state before they have one puts the cart before the horse. Khaled Al Batish, a leader of Islamic Jihad, told me that he supported democratic reforms but ''these democratic steps won't last if the occupation remains. The occupation will confuse matters, and the focus will be on resistance.'' Even the most reform-minded Palestinians bridle at the fact that President George W. Bush has made democratic change a condition for negotiations. ''I always preach the need to look in the mirror -- responsibility, accountability, all of that,'' Salam Fayyad, the Palestinian minister of finance and the official closest to the Bush administration, said with some

heat. ''But you should not mistake the depth of my feeling about how unfair it is to put conditions on our freedom.'' We were speaking in his Ramallah office, which looks out on an Israeli settlement.

For Abbas, nation-building is the path to national liberation. It is the armed struggle that must give way. Over the counsel of some advisers, who feared he was touching the third rail of Palestinian politics, Abbas called for a halt to violence during his campaign this winter. ''I told them everything openly -- that I'm against the armed intifada, I'm against the rockets,'' Abbas told me one night in February in Gaza City. ''It was in the interest of our people. So I told them the truth, and for that I believe -- I don't know -- they elected me.''

Much has been made of the fact that Abbas wears a suit rather than a uniform and headdress, as Arafat did. His style is not that of a charismatic leader but of a negotiator, and both Palestinians and Israelis suspect him of being soft. He has a negotiator's surface mildness, not a politician's riveting passion -- possibly a severe handicap for the leader of a liberation movement. He prefers not to dwell on old grievances (''It's better not to talk about history or religion,'' he told me once with a wry smile at the improbability of this sentiment's being realized), and in the interview he tried to avoid assigning blame for this intifada. Ultimately, he said Israel started it, but that ''both sides'' were responsible for its duration. He refused to call the uprising a mistake, saying that what's done is done. It was, he said, time to talk. Yet his mildness should not be mistaken for uncertainty, as Arafat's bluster was sometimes mistaken for decision. While Abbas is conciliatory in trying to achieve his principles, he is certain about the principles themselves. He did not much want his new job and told me he planned to keep it for only a year or two, maybe three. He comes across as entirely confident and in command, even a little supercilious. When he wants to smoke -- and he often does -- his practice is to tilt a cigarette tip into the air and wait for an aide to snap to with a lighter.

Since he was in his 20's, Abbas worked in Arafat's shadow, quarreling with him, sometimes breaking with him, but ultimately serving beside him. ''He was a real, real leader,'' Abbas said. He acknowledged that he often disagreed with Arafat -- even that they did not speak for what proved the last year of Arafat's life, until just before he died in a Paris hospital. ''At the last I went to him,'' Abbas told me. ''I talked to him, and I followed him to Paris. He is my brother, but the brothers also have their own differences.'' Abbas, and the world, can now test if those differences matter. Arafat could never completely break with armed conflict; his fortress became not only his prison but also the Palestinians'. Abbas wants Palestine to make sense abroad. By ending what he calls the armed intifada and creating an orderly Palestinian state-in-waiting, he seeks to rally the world to the Palestinian cause and, above all, to recruit an American president who equates democracy with freedom and freedom with peace. To do this, Abbas will have to persuade Palestinians to be patient and to embrace, for now, yet another paradox in their national life -- democracy without freedom. It is the only way that he sees to eventually exchange the dream of Palestine, and the nightmare of Palestine, for a state of Palestine.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- a narcissistic face-off that pays little notice to the world around it -- counsels cynicism as the safest guide. Yet the seemingly endless, and in fact episodic, violence disguises the fact that over the last 20 years, the two peoples have moved toward recognizing each other's rights to statehood. Still, Abbas's strategy is one for the long term. Arafat's departure may have removed an impediment to calm and to state-building. But it seems less likely to have removed an obstacle to their higher forms, peace and sovereignty. It may simply lay bare how far apart even leaders who wear suits remain.

Abbas's approach is different, but his stated goals are like Arafat's. He said that he considered Arafat ''a model for the pragmatic and moderate people,'' and he should be taken at his word. Abbas also rejected the deal that Barak offered at Camp David. Like other Palestinians who support a two-state solution, Abbas argues that the Palestinian leadership made its territorial concession many years ago, agreeing to settle for the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. That amounts to a mere 22 percent of historic Palestine, Abbas likes to point out. A refugee himself, Abbas is no less insistent than Arafat that Israel recognize a ''right of return'' for refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and their descendants, though he has explored ways to limit any resulting immigration into Israel. But the intifada has made the Israelis far less likely to offer as much as Barak did. While Abbas struggles to build a state, Sharon is forging ahead with plans that may well define it. As he tries to pull Israelis out of Gaza and four settlements on the northern West Bank, Sharon is building Israel's barrier elsewhere on the West Bank and tightening its hold on the big settlements there. He is chipping away at Abbas's 22 percent.

Abbas knows all this. When I asked him if he expected to see a Palestinian state in his lifetime, he replied: "I hope. I hope we will see it." Most Palestinians I spoke to think that he will not. An optimist in Palestine these days is someone who believes that calm will prevail for a few years, before the next intifada begins.

To the outside world, Abbas may look like the one-eyed man in the land of the blind. He is trying to persuade Palestinians of things that seem obvious: that firing crude rockets into Israeli fields harms Palestinians more than Israelis, by summoning overwhelming Israeli retaliation; that dispatching the young to blow themselves up among Israelis is also a form of national suicide. Yet seen from inside Palestine, the violence has developed a logic of its own. Militants in Gaza and on the West Bank believe that it is they who see the world as it is.

Rashid Abu Shbak proudly flashed his right thumb when I walked into his office in Gaza City two days after Abbas was elected. His nail was stained purplish black. Like all Palestinians who had voted, he looked as if he had banged his thumb with a hammer. In theory, Abu Shbak bears great responsibility for making this latest attempt at calm succeed. He is the chief of the Palestinian Preventive Security force in the Gaza Strip, the notional front-line force in any strategy to stop militants. Gaza is emerging as the proving ground for a Palestinian state because of Sharon's plan to remove the 8,500 Israeli settlers who live there and the many thousands more troops who guard them.

"After four and a half years of intifada, four and a half years of chaos -- of absence of law and order -- the mission is very tough for Abu Mazen," Abu Shbak said, referring to Abbas by his nickname. (It means "Father of Mazen"; Mazen, Abbas's eldest son, died three years ago.) He added, "I hope in the coming days there will be changes."

Abu Shbak was talking like a man inheriting a big mess. Yet like many of Abbas's men, he had been in the same post for years. I had a memory of him pounding his desk almost two years ago and declaring of rockets that militants launched into Israel, "We are convinced that the firing of Qassams must be stopped!" At the time, maybe I should have paid more attention to the passive voice. But I had spent enough time in Palestine to know why a security chief could call for action and supply none. Inevitably, a devastating Israeli raid to stop the rockets would provide a reason, or pretext, not to act. Sure enough, the Israelis came, and just as surely, the rocket fire intensified.

Skip forward again to January. Our conversation was getting weirder. "The security apparatus should abide by the law," Abu Shbak declared indignantly. I could only agree; for more than two years, the security services had been like private militias. But Abu Shbak was not referring to the rule of law in general. He dropped a half-inch-thick stack of paper on his desk: a bill spelling out just what the Preventive Security was supposed to do. "In the last 10 years," Abu Shbak explained, "there was no law."

The door opened, and two men entered. One was Samir Mashharawi, a rising leader of 39, a politician-slash-security-man with wide-spaced eyes, a dimpled chin and an aura of cool, assured intelligence. Like many Palestinian men of his age, he cut his teeth in the first intifada, learned Hebrew in Israeli prisons and came to chafe under the leadership of Arafat and members of his generation who returned from decades in exile with little understanding of Israelis or even life under occupation.

It was Mashharawi who, one evening in Gaza City, gave me the most elegant description I have heard of Palestinian-Israeli bargaining. Palestinian officials were then negotiating, unsuccessfully, not for their own state but for the Israelis to pull their troops back to their positions before the uprising. Mashharawi recalled how, during one of his terms in prison, he and other inmates demanded chairs and tables. So the Israelis took their mattresses. The Palestinians demanded the mattresses back. "We forgot that we asked for the chairs and tables," he continued. "After a month, they returned the mattresses. And we felt very happy because we achieved something." I said this reminded me of the Jewish story in which a rabbi advises a man to bring a goat into his home; when, at the rabbi's instructions, he eventually takes the goat out, the man's wife no longer finds her house too small. Mashharawi nodded. "Israeli diplomacy," he said, "is based on this idea."

I did not know the man accompanying Mashharawi. He wore work boots, black jeans and a baggy khaki coat. He had the weary, aged look of the hard-core militant. The hard boys of the militant groups tend to swagger and pose, as if a photographer at any moment might snap their portraits for martyr posters. Their leaders, at least those who have lived into their 30's, have seen too much for that.

''Ah,'' Abu Shbak exclaimed, brightening at the sight of the second man. ''By chance you meet the leader of the Abu Al Reesh Brigades!''

The Abu Al Reesh Brigades is a militant offshoot of Fatah, Arafat's mainstream, secular-leaning faction, which dominates the Palestinian Authority and to which Abbas, Abu Shbak and Mashharawi belong. Abu Al Reesh is part of the loose confederation of Fatah freedom fighters, terrorists and gangsters that also includes the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades. This man, Abu Amani, 35, was among the Gaza militants most wanted by Israel. Militants say that the Israelis call him the Fox, though militants tend to say things like that, and it is not always clear how they would know.

It struck me as unusual, even by Gazan standards, that the Fox would pay a call on the head of Preventive Security.

''He was my teacher in Israeli jail,'' Abu Amani explained, nodding at the benignly beaming Abu Shbak. ''It's my duty to visit him.'' For two years, Abu Amani said, he had not been able to visit Abu Shbak in Gaza City because he could not cross the intervening Israeli checkpoints. But the Israelis had loosened restrictions to permit voting. ''I took advantage of the elections,'' he said.

The road map, the negotiating template drawn up by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, calls on the Palestinian Authority to immediately begin ''sustained, targeted and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.'' But Abbas is trying to co-opt militants, not confront them. As Mashharawi told me later, he was meeting with militants to broker Abbas's cease-fire. The relationship between Abu Shbak and Abu Amani helps to explain why the new Palestinian leader is using this approach. They are not just old friends. They are comrades in the same struggle -- a struggle not only for statehood but also for political control of Palestine right now.

In its early days, the uprising against Israel functioned partly as Palestinian diplomacy by other means. But it became Palestinian politics by other means. From the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian factions began competing to conduct sensational attacks as much to score political points against one another as to kill and terrify Israelis. Within Fatah -- a word that translates as ''conquest'' -- militants like Abu Amani are seen as having preserved the faction from a challenge by the Islamic Resistance Movement, known by its acronym, Hamas, which is also an Arabic word that means ''zeal.'' The day after meeting Abu Amani, I sat in a Gaza City coffee shop with three Fatah militants. The fighters said that they would normally never go to such a public place, but that since I was an American, they felt safe from Israeli attack. One of them, Abu Haroun, 27, was a member of Abu Al Reesh. He said that he supported Abbas, but that when it came to resistance, ''We have our own vision.''

''What sustained Fatah were the military activities that Al Aksa and Abu Al Reesh did in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,'' he said. ''This revived Fatah. Abu Mazen must understand it.''

When I asked if he would accept a job with the security services, which is how Abbas hopes to co-opt the militants, he looked blank. Most of his comrades already worked for the security services, he said. ''We're Fatah,'' he said. ''It's their duty to get us jobs.'' He had seen many friends die, he said, and he was not going to settle for getting his mattress back. He had a list of demands, including an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, and little expectation the Israelis would meet it. ''Nobody should blame Abu Mazen later if they find out he is taking the same path as Arafat,'' he said. Abbas has shown no sign of promoting any alternative resistance, like civil disobedience. When negotiations stall, these men see only one road.

The father of two girls, Abu Haroun said he did not relish fighting, but that he had little choice. ''Resistance is not a hobby,'' he added. That is a mantra I have often heard from such men. It means, I think, that this is not a game, that violence is not entered into lightly or abandoned easily.

The fighters were willing to quiet things down, but they would keep their weapons handy. ''And the day we feel they aren't doing what they promised,'' Abu Haroun said, ''we will use them again.'' It was not clear if by ''they'' he meant the Israelis, the Palestinian leadership or both. Moments later, he left, saying that next time we should meet elsewhere; the cappuccino machine here was just too loud. Unlike the men of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, these

Fatah militants say they want a two-state solution. That is why, for Fatah, there is a strategic component to this violent interfactional politicking. It is perhaps the most twisted rule of Palestine, but it makes sense to those who advocate it. Marwan Barghouti, the fiery West Bank leader of the uprising and probably the most skillful Fatah politician after Arafat, explained it to me one day in the spring of 2002. ''It's very helpful for the peace,'' he said that day of the violence.

I had asked Barghouti, then in hiding, about recent high-profile Fatah killings, including the first suicide bombing by a woman. He insisted that he supported attacking only settlers and soldiers in occupied territory, resistance that Palestinians believe to be legal under international law. But he said proudly that all the attacks had rebuilt Fatah's popularity. As a result, Barghouti said, Fatah was again strong enough to make an agreement stick. Because it had killed so many Israelis, it could make peace. ''Do you think a very weak organization can protect a historical agreement?'' he asked. Yet in salvaging a Palestinian constituency, Fatah, and Arafat, sacrificed their Israeli one. With Al Aksa suicide bombers exploding in Tel Aviv, Israelis no longer saw any difference between the factions. Fatah seemed as intent as Hamas on destroying Israel. Israel arrested Barghouti shortly after I saw him, and he was convicted in an Israeli court last year of murder charges, which he denied.

There is a final reason that violence is likely to remain at hand for the Palestinian national movement: Palestinians have good cause to believe that it is working. Although the outside world sees the intifada as purely a disaster for the Palestinians, within Palestine, the violence seems to have succeeded, at a high cost. It has resulted in something, at least in prospect, that all the negotiating by men like Abbas never achieved: the actual evacuation of Israeli settlements.

In mid-February, I returned to Gaza to see if the Abbas administration and the prospect of Israeli withdrawal were changing life on the ground. There were signs of progress. Abbas had ordered the demolition of buildings erected without permits along the beach during the intifada. Most striking, along the trashed roads of the Jabaliya refugee camp, uniformed police officers were stopping cars and demanding to see proof of insurance. For Gazans, this was like having the lights turned on after years in the dark.

Small as they were, these steps signaled change, and not just in Gaza. They also demonstrated a surprising political savvy by Abbas. In 2003, he served for four months in the newly created post of prime minister. With no constituency of his own, he was outmaneuvered by Arafat and by Sharon, who did not think the prime minister had a chance. He quit, confirming his reputation as a sulker. He was now starting to dispel that reputation. With Arafat gone, Abbas, at heart a closed-door diplomat, was beginning to act like a politician. During his campaign he kissed babies and gave speeches in isolated places long ignored by the Palestinian leadership, like Khan Yunis in southern Gaza and Jenin in the northern West Bank. He donned an Al Aksa Martyrs cap at one stop, and he opposed violence less as morally wrong than as undercutting Palestinian interests. He was careful to praise ''martyrs,'' a term that refers to all Palestinians who died in the conflict. Criticizing them is the true third rail of Palestinian politics. Sometimes Abbas sounded like his old comrade. The distinction was that no Palestinian doubted where he stood on ending the intifada. ''All my political life was under the table, was secret,'' Abbas told me. ''Now I was obliged to go outside to talk to the people. It is the first time in my life.'' He began to laugh. ''I don't know how it happened!''

He had a very long way to go. ''We are starting below zero, not from zero,'' Abbas said. ''From every corner, we have to start from the very beginning. It is not impossible. It is difficult, very difficult. But not impossible.'' The Israelis had halted their armored raids, and they had stopped hunting accused militants from the skies. But in Gaza, as on the West Bank, people were feeling few other changes. An Israeli withdrawal seemed a long way off.

On the day Abbas met with Sharon at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh to announce their cease-fire, I visited Khan Yunis. It abuts Israel's Gush Qatif settlement bloc, which is surrounded by a wall more than 40 feet high of concrete and steel, braced by guard towers. Israel has responded to the mortar and rocket fire into Gush Qatif with repeated raids into Khan Yunis, churning the landscape into a heaving sea of broken concrete and twisted rebar. Down a dirt track about a hundred yards from the wall stands a three-story cinder-block tenement. Beside it lie the remains of neighboring houses. Its own walls are so pocked with bullet holes, scores of them, that the building resembles a cheese grater. On the second floor lived Ghada Brais, 27, with her four children. The only toy I saw

was a toddler's walker. You could fit apples through some of the bullet holes in the walls. She kept her apartment spotless.

Brais's husband, Yousef, 28, left for Canada two years ago to find work. He called and sent money, but she had no identity papers and so could not join him. She was trapped. She did not speak in slogans. Instead she talked about constant shooting at night and about trying to act as if she were not scared. She spoke about her children's bed-wetting. She was particularly concerned about her eldest, a 9-year-old boy named Barah. ''I think the intifada interfered with his studies,'' she said. ''He always wants to be in the streets. I go crazy when his grades get really bad.'' She tried to keep him indoors, but he insisted on going out to play and had taken to running along the settlement's wall; one bullet had grazed his leg, she said. ''I can't control him,'' she said. She said she hoped the Israelis would follow through and remove the settlements. But she did not expect her children to recover quickly. ''I think it will always remain in their minds,'' she said.

It lacks the headline-grabbing drama of attacks or reprisals, but the steady expansion of Israeli settlements has been an engine of this uprising. To Palestinians, it proved that Israel would never permit a Palestinian state. Abbas is betting that if he can stop the fighting, he can shift international attention from suicide bombers to settlements, which are growing on the West Bank.

In Gaza City, I met another woman from Khan Yunis, Rana El Farra. Wearing winter coats, we spoke in the family's apartment, its windows open despite the day's chill. Open windows are less likely to shatter from sudden shifts in air pressure; the apartment is across the street from a Palestinian security headquarters, a frequent Israeli bombing target.

On one table stood two dozen containers of cobalt-blue mouthwash. El Farra asks Gazans to gargle it, then return it to her to provide DNA samples, which she isolates in a gel. A molecular biologist, El Farra is archiving Gaza's DNA in hopes of curing diseases like the diabetes that contributed to her beloved father's death, as well as of comparing the oral histories of Gaza's clans with their DNA footprints. ''I prepare the samples here, and then DHL them to the States,'' she said in her idiomatic English. She sends them to Utah for sequencing at Brigham Young University, where she got her master's. She loved Utah, feeling at home with its conservative values, its big families. ''Provo is just like Khan Yunis,'' she explained. ''Only it's cleaner.'' A lively woman with a musical laugh, the married mother of a 3-year-old girl, El Farra teaches cell biology at Al Azhar University. She adores ''Friends'' -- she identifies with Monica -- and she recently finished Hillary Rodham Clinton's memoir.

El Farra and people like her are the real political face of Hamas. About three years ago, a year into this uprising, El Farra became more religious. She began covering her hair. ''Islam is the best pole you can hold onto when things get really tough,'' she said. She saw no contradiction between her science and her religion, finding God's handiwork in the intricate, complete systems of cells.

But she did find contradictions in her politics, and trying to follow her thinking was like racing through a series of switchbacks up a steep mountain trail. She is hopeful that Abbas will improve life for Palestinians, but she did not vote for him because she is fed up with his faction. ''Fatah didn't do anything in the last 10 years,'' she said. She said she will probably support Hamas if it fields candidates in legislative elections scheduled for July because its leaders were not corrupt and they were serious about improving government services. But she supported Hamas only for internal reform, not conducting relations with Israel. At that level, she wanted a Fatah politician to represent her, because Fatah supports negotiations. But she did not expect negotiations to succeed.

''We just need a break,'' she said. ''I know the war between the Israelis and the Palestinians will be there until God stops the whole system. But we just need a break of five years.'' She explained, ''We got used to this system, of taking this break for some time, probably 10 years, and then, when things reach a point where no one can deal with them anymore, then war will be for some time.''

El Farra agreed with Abbas that it was wrong to carry out armed attacks -- at least for now. ''I don't think it's the right time for suicide bombings,'' she said. But she argued that violence was ultimately necessary because she thought Israel responded to nothing else. ''When they say no to peace, we have to be able to answer back,'' she said. She thought the two sides would never settle their differences -- because Israeli Jews would never yield the

man-made plateau in Jerusalem that they call the Temple Mount and because Muslims would never relinquish their claim to the same plot, which they call the Noble Sanctuary. No matter how tired the Palestinians became, she said, they would not abandon this goal, because future "generations will probably curse us."

"It's very contradictory, the feelings that we have and our reality," she said at last. "The reality is pushing very hard." She slapped one hand into the other. "Our feelings and beliefs are pushing hard, too. You know what I mean? It's very contradictory. And I see this with all the people, and I see it with myself too. See, you want to have peace; you want to live; you want to have children; you want to be able to live a normal life. But at the same time you cannot just give up on everything in return for this." She paused, then added more quietly, "For me, I think we all need psychotherapy here, at least in Gaza."

From this welter of political impulses, Abbas was trying to wrest a political deal with Hamas. He was trying to persuade Hamas to sell high -- to join the Palestinian political system at a moment when Hamas was very popular. His strategy was to contain it, just as the Israeli system contains parties that reject any Palestinian state. Islamic Jihad would follow Hamas, Abbas's advisers said. Hunted by Israel, under pressure from the United States and Europe and attuned to the mood in the street, Hamas politicians in Gaza and the West Bank wanted to calm things down, according to numerous Palestinian officials.

While I was in Gaza, I encountered a Hamas leader named Nizar Rayan. Rayan earned a master's degree in Jordan with a thesis on martyrdom. (His doctoral thesis was on the future of Islam.) A mountain of a man with four wives -- "I love ***women***," he once told me -- he is one of Hamas's most charismatic leaders, pulling young men into the movement. He has been in hiding from Israel for 18 months. He was very proud of his second son, killed at 16 in a suicidal shooting attack on a settlement. "To get back our land," he said another time, "it seems to me we have to lose half of this generation." He called Israeli Jews "Europe's trash." But gone were the days when he would bring his laptop to an interview so he could call up scriptural justifications for suicide bombings. In February, he was happy to have his picture taken, but he did not want to say much beyond "Hello, nice to see you." Hamas was having only its more polished spokesmen and sophists speak with the media. It was treading very carefully.

In municipal elections in Gaza in January, candidates from Hamas trounced Fatah candidates in several areas. In its disciplined way, Hamas ran engineers and academics -- people like El Farra; Fatah had put forth people with no such credentials. Abbas said Hamas had committed to field legislative candidates; Hamas had previously refused to run for the Palestinian Parliament because it was a creature of the Oslo agreement. Abbas told me that he would be happy to appoint ministers from Hamas. "If they want to participate, why not?" he asked. "It's good for us." Hamas was almost certain not to contest the national leadership. "If they rule, what are their choices?" asked Ziad Abu Amr, a legislator and political scientist who is Abbas's chief liaison to Hamas. "Do they go and negotiate with Israel or do they declare all-out war? Can they afford this? I don't think so." Abu Amr thought Hamas could win as many as half the parliamentary seats. Even if Hamas wins a small minority of seats, it will supply an effective opposition, promoting debate and legitimizing what is otherwise government by Fatah. It might also, at last, wake Fatah up to its political decay.

It was obvious in Gaza that Fatah's weakness was still Abbas's biggest internal problem. Regardless of the ferocity of its militants, Fatah was facing a reckoning for its failure at nation-building. Abbas needed the truce with Israel to build his national institutions, but he needed the institutions to keep the truce. Palestinians were referring to the halt in violence not as a cease-fire but merely as a "tahdiyah" -- a "lull." Palestinian officials were concerned that leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Damascus would not back the political deal. And they were particularly worried about the Lebanese guerrilla group ***Hezbollah***, which Israeli intelligence officers also said was financing and directing some Al Aksa cells in the West Bank. Allies of Abbas were pressing Palestinian security chiefs to cut off this money. In late February, an Islamic Jihad suicide bomber killed five Israelis and wounded dozens at a Tel Aviv nightclub. Israel blamed Syria and warned that if Abbas did not act against Islamic Jihad and other groups, it would.

Over time, Abbas was betting that a massive jobs program, together with an Israeli withdrawal, would strengthen his hand. But for now, his chief political ally, a temporary one, was the exhaustion of his people. He could not even be certain his orders were being carried out. Abu Amr told me that he had asked Abbas why he had stopped demolishing illegal buildings. He said Abbas was surprised the work had halted and had immediately reissued his

order. ''He still has to institutionalize his authority,'' Abu Amr said. Abbas was depending on some Fatah officials with reputations for corruption. The campaign over, he had also stopped making public speeches. Many reformist politicians feared he was not moving fast enough. He was locked in a debilitating standoff with the prime minister, Ahmed Qurei, another longtime negotiator who, several Palestinian politicians said, felt he should have been Arafat's successor. Qurei resisted appointing new faces to the government until he faced a parliamentary revolt. No wonder Gazans were mocking Fatah by calling it by a feminine form, ''Fat'hiah'' -- a name that brought to mind a doddering peasant woman.

One day while I was in Gaza, gunmen from two large families burst into a Gaza City prison and shot dead two accused murderers. They dragged a third Palestinian prisoner to a refugee camp, where they beat him and burned him with cigarettes before killing him. That day, Hamas militants fired off some rockets, prompting two other groups -- not wanting to cede the political stage -- to do the same; each group followed its salvo with a press statement. Then something surprising happened: Abbas fired several security officials for not stopping the mayhem. They were men he could afford to fire -- either responsible enough not to fight back or lacking any constituency -- but the move nevertheless spoke of a new accountability. My own most hopeful experience in Gaza also came that day. I was visiting Mashharawi in his heavily guarded office. He was still working the phones and meeting with militants, reminding them of their ''national duty,'' keeping the lid on. On one wall hung a framed poster that was a gift from the Abu Al Reesh Brigades. It showed a man lying amid rubble and bore the words, ''You purify my soul, you martyr.'' A visitor appeared -- none other than Abu Amani, the Fox. He seemed transformed. He had exchanged his heavy coat and boots for a black jacket and street shoes, and he looked about 10 years younger. He was smiling. It turned out he had remained in Gaza City, rather than return to Khan Yunis, to enjoy his new freedom. ''When you saw me last time, you could tell I was exhausted,'' he said, grinning. ''Now, we can move more freely, sleep more.'' Maybe resistance was not a hobby. But at least some militants, given a real choice and national leadership, were eager to give calm a chance.

With the Israelis easing travel restrictions, word in mid-February was that one could drive from the growing fortification of the Israeli barrier around Jerusalem to Jenin without hitting a checkpoint. After leaving Gaza, I gave it a try. It was not a frictionless passage -- Israeli soldiers were stopping Palestinian cars by the side of the road, and I passed through one checkpoint -- yet the road was more open, the Israeli military presence less obvious, than I had seen it. Besides, on the West Bank, spring was coming. The almond trees were blooming white, and the first poppies with their startling red were spangling green fields that would soon bake to dust. Spring is always an ambiguous moment in Palestine: a time of hope, yet also the time of year that makes the land seem most worth the contest.

I had come to Jenin to visit an acquaintance, Mahmoud Hawashin. Hawashin is not a militant leader or a politician, though he functions as a liaison between them. He is not a religious thinker or a deeply educated man, though in an environment that does not always favor it, he thinks for himself. He is broad-shouldered, with a close-shaved scalp and something of the appearance of Laurence Fishburne, together with that actor's air of steeliness and potential menace. He is 34, though he seems years older. He leads a considered life. He trimmed his ambitions to fit his unyielding environment rather than conserve them as dreams. It is a kind of courage found, if not celebrated, in Palestine like everywhere else. He grew up in Jenin's refugee camp, a forge of extremism, and still lives there. At 15, during the first intifada, he was jailed by Israel for a year and a half. He dreamed of becoming an electrical engineer, but could not afford the tuition. He now works as an electrician on the side while doing one of the toughest jobs in Jenin: he is in charge of collecting utility fees. Jenin residents took to not paying their bills during the uprising and even to attacking the collectors. Hawashin once told me, with bitterness, that he knew he had gotten his managerial city job -- he is one of few residents of the camp to have one -- because officials believed his credentials as a fighter and ties in the camp would ease collections. Like other residents of the camps, he felt discriminated against. ''If I go to the U.S., in five years I can get residency,'' he said once. ''We are 50 years living here in Jenin, and we have never been considered residents.''

''My dream as a refugee is not to return back to my original village,'' he said. ''It's to buy a piece of land here and register it under my own name.'' He wanted a house with a garden -- ''a normal house, where I can keep my memories to myself.'' He had bought the land, but he could not yet afford to build.

Most militants are from the camps, and when Israel forbade the Palestinian Police to operate, the militants began taking control of cities like Jenin, in some cases avenging themselves on elites. Jenin is now effectively run by an Al Aksa leader, Zacharia Zubeida. Part of the challenge for Abbas is to make sure that West Bank enclaves like Jenin do not feel forgotten as he focuses on Gaza. For Abbas to consolidate control, he must somehow sideline the local warlords. Yet in a sign of the militants' power, the day I saw Hawashin he was arranging a meeting for the mayor with Zubeida; he said the mayor was hoping Zubeida would intervene on his behalf with Abbas to secure money for the city. Hawashin respected Zubeida, but it alarmed him that his own children looked up to the militant. ''I want them to have a childhood,'' he said. ''I don't want them to spend a day in jail.''

Once, while Arafat was alive, Hawashin astonished me by saying that his people needed a ''Palestinian Sharon.'' He did not admire Sharon's policies, but he did respect his dedication to his nation's interests. ''Abu Mazen could be that person,'' Hawashin said when I caught up with him in his office last month. While city workers processed bills around him, he sat at the head of a long table. The walls, like most walls in Jenin, were plastered with images of the dead, but they also bore photographs of Hawashin's children and more prosaic pictures of workers repairing electric lines.

Hawashin admired Abbas's courage in criticizing the armed intifada. Hawashin had long argued that Palestinians let themselves be led by emotion rather than reason, that the violence of the uprising -- of all the fights with Israel -- had only left the Palestinians further behind. Now he was hearing a Palestinian leader say similar things. ''There's a shared quality you can find in both Abu Mazen and Sharon, which is clarity and frankness,'' he said. ''Sharon is clear with his own people and in telling the world what he wants.'' The parallel may run deeper. Abbas is trying a Palestinian version of Sharon's own unilateralism. In pushing for a pullout from Gaza, Sharon is trying to break the zero-sum logic of the conflict, to persuade his people that a move that appears to benefit the Palestinians is actually in Israel's interest. For his part, Abbas is trying to end Palestinian violence and promote democracy to serve the Palestinian interest, not Israel's. These are not concessions to each other. They are concessions to reality. But realists can disagree as strongly as myth-makers, and for better reasons.

Hawashin argued that most Palestinians wanted internal reforms long before Israel or the Bush administration demanded them. Many Palestinians believe Arafat encouraged the intifada to give an outlet to discontent with his own rule. Hawashin gestured with a broad hand at the portrait of Arafat above his head. ''Unfortunately, our symbol -- and we consider him a model -- his real mistake was not to establish institutions in Fatah or the Palestinian Authority.'' In Jenin, he said, Palestinians did not yet feel any change, but they were anxious for it. ''Everyone knows the reality,'' he said. ''Israel brought us to a point where we started looking just for bread.'' He said that he would settle for ''the minimum of my dreams,'' but he thought that minimum was well above Israel's maximum concession.

What is known rather grimly as a ''final status'' deal does appear a long way off. There is a possible intermediate step, and Abbas fears it. He worries that the Israelis and Americans will seize on a Gaza withdrawal to push for a possibility mentioned in the road map, the creation of ''an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders.'' No one knows exactly what this would be. But it would give the appearance of a great step forward, an achievement for Bush on the order of Oslo. Abbas says he would reject it as a trap, a version of what Sharon calls a ''long-term interim agreement'' that would defer resolution of the toughest issues. Abbas thinks it could create a state that hopscotched from Gaza through enclaves on the West Bank, while downgrading the conflict to just another border dispute and releasing international pressure on Israel for further concessions. From a historical perspective, it is an astounding possibility: that Ariel Sharon could wind up insisting on a Palestinian state over the objections of a Palestinian leader. If Bush backs it, it may be an offer Abbas cannot refuse.

Sharon's aides say that he believes a long-term interim arrangement will allow the adversaries to cool off and learn to live together. As time goes by, they say, the precise borders will matter less. Yet the historical pattern is the opposite. It is when Palestinians are feeling rested and prosperous that their political demands come once more to the fore. Nation-building makes people impatient for national liberation. Like other Palestinians, Hawashin is already anticipating the fire next time. ''There will be another intifada, of course,'' he told me. The Palestinians will once again be ruled by their hearts, not their heads, he said, and in their hearts they will never surrender.

''I don't consider myself a defeated person,'' Hawashin said. ''I consider myself a weak person.''

I left Jenin by crossing through the barrier at the town's edge. Built here of electrified fencing, it stretched into the distance on either hand, flanked by a dirt road and stacked coils of concertina wire. The old checkpoint, an ad hoc array of concrete blocks and armored vehicles, was gone. In its place was a giant yellow steel gate, a separate passageway to examine pedestrians and a building of glass and steel. The soldier smiled as he took my passport. It looked, as the major checkpoints increasingly do, like an international border crossing. As I drove past it, between the rich brown furrows of Israel's Jezreel Valley, a paraglider circled overhead against the blue sky. From up there, it must all look so peaceful and sensible: Israelis on one side, Palestinians on the other, a bright, sharp line in between. I wondered what he would think if an errant breeze carried him into Palestine.

http://www.nytimes.com

Graphic

Photos: Yasir Arafat's grave at the presidential compound in Ramallah.

Nizar Rayan, a Hamas leader in Gaza whose master's thesis was on martyrdom.

Rana El Farra, a molecular biologist and professor who is archiving Gaza's DNA.

Mahmoud Hawashin, who grew up in Jenin's refugee camp and is now in charge of collecting utility fees. (Photographs by Taryn Simon for The New York Times)

Load-Date: March 13, 2005