

Date and Time: Saturday, May 4, 2024 2:44:00AM EEST

Job Number: 223499004

Documents (60)

1. [*'Death to the dictator': Thousands march in Iran opposition protests*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

2. [*A Coren affair Profile*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

3. [*Iran policy reveals split between U.S. Jewish and Israeli left*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

4. [*Radical Islam in decline; Iranian protests are only the latest symptoms of a move toward moderation*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

5. [*Iran : U.S. Congress and Middle East Conflict*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

6. [*Morocco slows pace of reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

7. [*The time may be right for a new cold war*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

8. [*Morocco puts brakes on reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism*](#)

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Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

9. [*Tehran is terrified: America is being friendly Iran 's hardline leadership has been knocked sideways by Barack Obama's conciliatory tone. But how will it affect the election?*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

10. [*The world was wrong to oppose a military solution in Sri Lanka*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

11. [Eating out there](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

12. [Everyone should apologise during papal visit](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

13. [Islamic radicalism is casting a shadow on Morocco 's liberal beacon](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

14. [Swat's descent into chaos](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

15. [Rappers who speak their minds in the name of peace Hip-hop music is helping heal the wounds in post-conflict Lebanon . Katherine Butler in Beirut reports THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2009](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

16. [*No longer just about world peace*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

17. [*Accounts of Gaza Killings Raise Furor in Israel*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

18. [*Grim testimony on Israeli assault Soldiers report killing of unarmed civilians in Gaza*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

19. [*Obama reaches out to the Islamic world*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

20. [*Obama gets serious on Middle East*](#)

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
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21. [*Islamic Radicalism Is Casting a Shadow on Morocco 's Liberal Beacon*](#)

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

22. [*Yearning for the Golan Heights: why Syria wants it back The disputed territory is key to the broader US goal of Arab- Israeli peace. On Monday, Washington hosted the first high-ranking Syrian official in five years.*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

23. [*Comment & Debate: Seismic events in Iran and Israel have set a critical test of Obama's resolve: One weekend has seen the entire Middle Eastern landscape transformed - and the US president's critics are already circling*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

24. [*Across the Mideast, Praise and Criticism for Obama*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to
Dec 31, 2009

25. [*Obama gets serious on Middle East*](#)

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to

Dec 31, 2009

26. [*Ghandi comes to the fore as India decides*](#)

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

27. [*Tehran launches its custard pie strike*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

28. [*Iraq war is over, for the U.S. anyway*](#)

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

29. [*Israel : Jewish city turns 100, parties through crisis*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

30. [*Moderates and extremists*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

31. [World Report](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

32. [Iran the world leader in abuse of human rights](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

33. [Clerics' supremacy under siege](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

34. [A very public death FOCUS](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

35. [BRITAIN BARS 'RACE HATE' EXTREMIST](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

36. [Our Enemies Are Still Plotting Against Us](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
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37. [World Report](#)

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

38. [FOUND GUILTY BY THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

39. [From Tripoli to Damascus](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

40. [The bigger picture](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

41. [How masters of chaos thrive on bombs and charity Guerrillas are exploiting the divisions caused by ineffectual and corrupt government to rebuild the Taleban's influence, writes James Hider](#)

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Content Type
News

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42. [*How masters of chaos thrive on bombs and charity Guerrillas are exploiting the divisions caused by ineffectual and corrupt government to rebuild the Taleban's influence, writes James Hider*](#)

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

43. [*'The revolution in Iran has just begun'*](#)

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

44. [*'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'*](#)

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

45. [*LETTERS TO THE EDITOR*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

46. [*Inside the Times, March 13, 2009*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Content Type
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Narrowed by

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News

Narrowed by

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48. [No Headline In Original](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

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Content Type
News

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49. [Letters to the editor](#)

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

50. [G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman meets Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by

Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

51. [\(ADVERTISEMENT\) Peter LINDSAY REPORTS - WORLD STUDY TOUR](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

52. [*The battle of the boycotts*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Content Type
News

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53. [*No Headline In Original*](#)

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54. [*No Headline In Original*](#)

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55. [*No Headline In Original*](#)

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Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

56. [*Israel still looks good, warts and all*](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

57. [PRETTY DANGEROUS](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

58. [The Palestinian Terrorist And Me](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

Search Type: Terms and Connectors

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

59. [Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David Samuels investigates how 'supernotes' are funding crime - and a dictatorship](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: "Hizbullah" OR "Hezbollah"

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Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

60. [EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

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Content Type
News

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Publication Type: Newspapers; Timeline: Jan 31, 2009 to Dec 31, 2009

'Death to the dictator': Thousands march in Iran opposition protests

The Salt Lake Tribune

September 18, 2009 Friday

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Section: BREAKING; News; National; World

Length: 983 words

Byline: By Nasser Karimi Associated Press Writer

Body

TEHRAN, Iran » Hard-liners attacked senior pro-reform leaders in the streets as tens of thousands marched in competing mass demonstrations by the opposition and government supporters. Opposition protesters, chanting "death to the dictator," hurled stones and bricks in clashes with security forces firing tear gas.

The opposition held its first major street protests since mid-July, with marchers decked out in green -- the reform movement's color -- waving V-for-victory signs on major boulevards in the capital.

In some cases on several blocks away, larger crowds marched in government-sponsored rallies marking an annual anti-Israel commemoration, waving pictures of Iran's supreme leader and president and placards denouncing the Jewish state.

The commemoration, known as Quds Day, is a major political occasion for the government -- a day for it to show its anti-Israeli credentials and its support for the Palestinians. Quds is the Arabic word for Jerusalem. During a speech for the rallies, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad railed against Israel and the West, questioning whether the Holocaust occurred and calling it a pretext for occupying Arab land.

But the opposition was determined to turn the day into a show of its survival and continued strength despite a fierce three-month-old crackdown against it since the disputed June 12 presidential election.

Top opposition leaders joined the protests, in direct defiance of commands by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who barred anti-government demonstrations on Quds Day. That could provoke an escalation in the crackdown: hard-line clerics have been demanding the past week that any leader backing the protests should be arrested.

Several tens of thousands joined the opposition marches, witnesses said -- far smaller than the masses that turned out in the Quds Day rallies, which were helped by government organizing. Police and security forces, along with pro-government Basij militiamen, fanned out along main squares and avenues and in many cases tried to keep nearby opposition protesters away from the Quds Day rallies to prevent clashes, witnesses said.

Opposition supporters poured onto main boulevards and squares, wearing green T-shirts and wristbands and waving green banners and balloons. They waved pictures of opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi and denounced Ahmadinejad, chanting "death to the dictator."

'Death to the dictator': Thousands march in Iran opposition protests

Others chanted, "Not Gaza, not Lebanon -- our life is for Iran" -- a slogan directly challenging the government's support for anti-Israeli Palestinian militants in Gaza and Lebanon's **Hezbollah** guerrilla. Some shouted for Ahmadinejad's government to resign. Some **women** marched with their children in tow.

But at one of the several opposition rallies around the city, a group of hard-liners pushed through the crowd and attacked former President Mohamad Khatami, a cleric who is one of the most prominent pro-reform figures, according to a reformist Web site. The report cited witnesses as saying the opposition activists rescued Khatami and quickly repelled the assailants.

Opposition Web sites reported that Khatami fell to the ground, but witnesses said he was only jostled and remained standing.

Hard-liners also tried to attack the main opposition leader, Mousavi, when he joined another march elsewhere in the city, a witness said. Supporters rushed Mousavi into his car when the hard-liners approached, and the vehicle sped away as his supporters pushed the hard-liners back, the witness said. He and other witnesses spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of government retaliation.

Another pro-reform leader, Mahdi Karroubi, who also ran in the presidential election, also joined protests elsewhere in the city.

In one of the main Tehran squares, Haft-e Tir, security forces wielding batons and firing tear gas tried to break up one of the opposition marches, and were met with protesters throwing stones and bricks, witnesses said. Several policemen were seen being taken away with light injuries. At least 10 protesters were seized by plainclothes security agents in marches around the city, witnesses said.

The pro-government Quds Day rallies were held in cities around the country, and the opposition staged competing rallies in the southern and central cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, witnesses said. In Shiraz, police rushed the protesters with batons, scuffling with them, witnesses said.

The opposition claims that Ahmadinejad won the June election by fraud and that Mousavi is the rightful victor. Hundreds of thousands marched in support of Mousavi in the weeks after the vote, until police, Basij and the elite Revolutionary Guard crushed the protests, arresting hundreds. The opposition says 72 people were killed in the crackdown, though the government puts the number at 36. The last significant protest was on July 17.

In sheer numbers, the opposition turnout was far smaller than the mass pro-government Quds Day marches -- not surprising given the state's freedom to organize the gathering.

Customarily on Quds Day, Iranians gather for pro-Palestinian rallies in various parts of the city, marching through the streets and later converging for the prayer ceremony. The ceremony was established in 1979 by the leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Just hundreds of yards (meters) away from opposition protesters on the main Keshavarz Boulevard, thousands of Ahmadinejad supporters marched carrying huge photographs of the president and Supreme Leader Khamenei. Some in the government-sponsored rally chanted: "Death to those who oppose the supreme leader!"

At the climax of the occasion, Ahmadinejad addressed worshippers before Friday prayers at the Tehran University campus, reiterating his anti-Holocaust rhetoric that has drawn international condemnation since 2005. He questioned whether the "Holocaust was a real event" and saying Israel was created on "a lie and mythical claims."

Graphic

'Death to the dictator': Thousands march in Iran opposition protests

Escorted by his bodyguards, opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, center left at rear, attends Quds Day rally, as a pro-government man tries to attack him, in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009. thousands of opposition supporters held protests in competition with government-sponsored mass rallies to mark an annual anti-Israel commemoration, the Quds Day that reflects the Persian nation's sympathy with the Palestinians. (AP Photo)

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks before Friday prayers at the Tehran University campus in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009. Ahmadinejad lashed out at Israel and the West saying Friday the Holocaust was a lie and a pretext for occupying Palestinian lands. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Holding a green ribbon, a symbolic color of pro-reform Iranian opposition, a ***female*** opposition supporter attends a protest in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009, in competition with government-sponsored mass rallies to mark an annual anti-Israel commemoration, the Quds Day that reflects the Persian nation's sympathy with the Palestinians. (AP Photo)

Iranian opposition supporters attend a protest in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009, in competition with government-sponsored mass rallies to mark an annual anti-Israel commemoration, Quds Day that reflects the nation's sympathy with the Palestinians. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Iranian opposition supporters attend a protest in Tehran, Iran, Friday, Sept. 18, 2009. Thousands of opposition supporters held protests in competition with government-sponsored mass rallies to mark an annual anti-Israel commemoration, the Quds Day that reflects the Persian nation's sympathy with the Palestinians. (AP Photo)

Load-Date: September 20, 2009

End of Document

A Coren affair; Profile

The Sun Herald (Sydney, Australia)

June 14, 2009 Sunday

First Edition

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Section: SUNDAY LIFE; Pg. 14

Length: 1089 words

Byline: Angus Fontaine

Body

After an unhappy tenure as the host of tabloid current affairs show Today Tonight, Anna Coren is out to prove her journalistic credentials as a news anchor for CNN International.

Anna Coren's days as a purveyor and pawn of tabloid journalism are over. Australian commercial television might as well be a thousand light years from CNN International in Hong Kong, if the 33-year-old news anchor is to be believed.

Back on a short visit to Sydney, sipping coffee in her favourite cafe in Paddington and with a swim at Bondi and an Oxford Street shopping assault beckoning, Coren's willowy limbs, finely chiselled features and honeyed timbre make it easy to see why, for a while, she was hailed the "golden girl" of Australia's small screen.

"In Australia, it's all about the wardrobe and image department," says Coren with a laugh. "But at CNN it's DIY; I look after all my hair and make-up. Fortunately, like most women reporters, speed grooming on the run is a skill I acquired long ago."

It's been eight months since the former host of Today Tonight fled the red-light district of 6.30pm on the Seven Network for the 11am blue-steel anchor shift on the world's No. 1 news and current affairs network, which employs more than 80 anchors and correspondents from 20 countries around the world.

International news, she says, has always been her first love. "While Today Tonight was an amazing job, it very quickly became a huge challenge. The heat was on from the outset and the personal toll was huge. As it turned out, I outgrew the gig very quickly."

And left it controversially, in a blaze of headlines and bitter allegations. Wooed to the Seven Network by CEO David Leckie in December 2003, Coren had enjoyed a fast rise through the TV ranks. After graduating from Charles Sturt University in 1996, she landed regional reporter jobs for Prime and NBN in Coffs Harbour before the Nine Network beckoned her to the big-time of Sydney.

"My first impression of Anna in 1999 was that she was a bloody good sort and a highly ambitious young woman," says Ian Ross, the former Nine Network news anchor in Sydney who switched to Seven in 2003. "Here was a girl with star quality and a real eye for the prize; one quick to ask questions and keen to learn all she could about phrasing and presence."

A Coren affair Profile

When Naomi Robson quit as Today Tonight's host in November 2006 (her quest to save West Papuan orphan Wa-Wa from death-by-cannibals had ended in farce), Coren's four summers as fill-in host earned her the hottest seat in television.

Until then, she'd read news and hosted everything from the Edinburgh Military Tattoo to Zero Hour: The Bali Bombing and even Royal Wedding Night With Seven. "Leckie and [news chief] Peter Meakin were saying, 'We want you to make this show your own,'" says Coren. "It was a huge honour and very exciting."

And so it was that every weeknight, Coren donned a translucent blouse and whiplash bob to bring tales of dodgy plumbers, bogus scandals and skydiving grannies to upwards of 1.5 million Australians.

But things went awry fast. Three months into her stint, Today Tonight was sued by Mercedes Corby for defamation. Seven months later, Coren's journalistic credentials were derided when Seven's lawyers suppressed a sketch by The Chaser on the grounds she was no journalist, merely a "performer".

And although she was soundly trouncing Nine's A Current Affair in the ratings, Coren's private life saw her targeted by the tabloids. The Daily Telegraph's Sydney Confidential gossip pages were rarely without a snip about Coren's "current affairs", claiming she had dumped freelance cameraman Ben Hanson, was preparing to move in with Today Tonight reporter Andrew Bourke and fended off share trader ex-beau Adam Upton in the space of a month.

Today, Coren's life in Hong Kong has her happily single. "But if you think I don't want a bunch of kids bouncing around, you're crazy," she says. Maneater? "I'm challenging... but I'm worth it."

Back then, though, the perfumed steamroller front cracked. "Anna was a young woman in a big job whose love life became grist for the media mill," says Ian Ross. As Coren admits, "The personal attacks were constant and they got to me. I mean, sure it's a pressure-cooker job and it goes with tabloid territory, but it was my face and my name being dragged through the gutter and it took its toll."

Soon, Coren's fiery exchanges with Peter Meakin were common knowledge in the media. "He'd open his door and I'd come in all guns blazing," she says. "Neither Peter nor I shy away from a good argument - in fact we both relish them. But they always ended with a kiss on the cheek."

Coren had already acquired a taste for travel when she was posted to Los Angeles as Seven's US correspondent in 2006. "I was always flying between America and Europe. But the highlight was when I was sent to Israel to cover the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah." She still misses the smell of napalm in the morning. "I'd love to get back in the flak jacket. I'd go to any of the world's hotbeds - Pakistan, Afghanistan, back to Israel, anywhere it's going off."

The flak jacket might have been handy in July last year, when she was sprung doing a screen test for CNN while still contracted to Seven. "I got caught out," admits Coren. "Hours after my interview in Atlanta, Seven in Sydney was on the phone." The upshot? Coren was ejected in October and replaced at Today Tonight by sportscaster Matthew White.

As an anchor for CNN Today, Coren heads a program broadcast to 249 million households globally each day. "On my first day they told me: 'People come to CNN and make careers.' That reinforced for me what a dream job I'd landed. But I'm ready to do my time behind the desk before climbing a new ladder. That's what's great: I'm proving myself over again."

Coren rises just after 5am each morning. By 6am she leaves her apartment and is in a cab driving to the office to catch up with the news and do research, then is on air from 11am till 3pm.

"I knew I'd made the right decision when I heard: 'Bomb. Gunfire. International cricket team,'" says Coren. "I thought: 'My shift. My story. My time!' That's when I entered the eye of the hurricane that is breaking news - earpiece in, producer online... GO!"

A Coren affair Profile

For more than 90 minutes, Coren rolled with the coverage of the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in March, re-spinning the same footage and artfully upsizing the same 10 words of hard information over and over. "I walked away with plenty to learn and improve on, but I did it. That felt great."

Graphic

PHOTO: Photography: Peter Brew-Bevan. Styling: Emily Yee. Hair and make-up: Rose Borg

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Iran policy reveals split between U.S. Jewish and Israeli left

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Byline: Ron Kampeas

Body

WASHINGTON (JTA)--Israel's highest-ranking **female** soldier, Brig. Gen. Yisraela Oron, was sounding all the right notes for her J Street hosts.

At the tail end of a U.S. tour for the left-wing pro-Israel lobby, Oron was lending her considerable security credentials to its platform: a two-state solution, territorial concessions by Israel and a robust U.S. peacemaking role.

The conversation with a group of reporters then turned to Iran and its nuclear potential, and Oron was unequivocal: yes to engagement, but on a timetable that would be tied to punishing sanctions.

"The thing that worries me and that worries other Israelis is that it is not limited in time," Oron said as the faces of her J Street hosts turned anxious, adding that, "I'm not sure I'm expressing the J Street opinion."

She was not. J Street explicitly opposes a timetable and has reservations about proposed additional sanctions.

The awkward moment pointed to a potential split between left-wing pro-Israel groups and the Israeli constituents for whom they claim to speak. Unlike the Israeli-Palestinian issue, little dissent exists among Israeli politicians over how to deal with Iran.

That puts left-wing U.S. Jewish groups at odds with Israeli left-wingers.

"There is a more hawkish perception among virtually all circles in Israel" than there is in the United States, said Yossi Alpher, a consultant who has worked with Americans for Peace Now. "It's very natural. Iran doesn't say the U.S. has no right to exist and doesn't do the equivalent of denying the Holocaust. It doesn't deploy proxies like Hamas and **Hezbollah** against the United States and on its borders."

Iran policy reveals split between U.S. Jewish and Israeli left

Right now, the differences are not pronounced--the administrations of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Obama are virtually on the same page on the need to confront Iran, and soon. That could change, however, if Iran makes a serious counter offer to Obama's proposal to engage.

Lastweek, the Iranians said they had made such an offer. Its details are not known, but it will be part of the "reassessment" Obama has pledged to complete by the end of September, when the major world powers meet at the U.N. General Assembly.

"If Iran engages and the Obama administration argues that a deal has been made, the Israeli government will be very wary," Alpher said. "This could immediately create a whole world of suspicions."

Under those circumstances, the vast majority of American Jewish voters who backed Obama last year would be faced with the first either-or U.S. vs. Israel issue in decades, and groups that describe themselves as pro-Israel and pro-peace will find themselves for the first time speaking for virtually no one in Israel on a critical issue.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations lobbied in Washington on Sept. 10 and will rally outside the General Assembly on Sept. 24 for sanctions that would end the export of refined petroleum to Iran, which imports 40 percent of its refined oil.

On Israel's left, the Labor Party, currently part of Netanyahu's governing coalition, aggressively backs sanctions. Its leader and the current defense minister, Ehud Barak, makes Iran's isolation the centerpiece of his exchanges with his counterparts in the West.

The smaller Meretz Party, to Labor's left, also backs Iran's isolation. It routinely frames its arguments for robust peacemaking in terms of the need to contain Iran's ambitions.

Former Meretz leader Yossi Beilin tells audiences that Yitzhak Rabin, the late Israeli prime minister who launched the Oslo process in 1993, did so principally because of his fears of Iran. Beilin told a German audience last year that he "advocates increased sanctions towards Iran in order to stop centrifugal uranium programs."

Avshalom Vilan, a Meretz Knesset member until March, was a forceful advocate of reaching out to the nations most able to wound Iran's economy, including Germany and India.

Across the ocean, however, left-wing U.S. Jewish groups--not to mention non-Jewish left-wing groups--are against more sanctions.

Americans for Peace Now has the most pronounced opposition.

"We don't think crippling sanctions are right if the meaning of that is that the sanctions will not be targeted against Iran's governments and leaders but will target Iranian people," spokesman Ori Nir said. "We think that's not only morally wrong but is also strategically perilous."

Other left-wing groups also hedge on the prospect of sanctions.

The Israel Policy Forum, in a July 15 paper, encouraged engagement and said threats of enhanced sanctions were "not necessary" because Iran's leadership knew they were forthcoming.

The most recent statement from Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, dated July 2008, rejects "diplomatic isolation or veiled threats of military action" and advocates "utilizing diplomatic and economic incentives and sanctions together."

In a policy statement, J Street says it does not oppose further sanctions "in principle," but "under the current circumstances, it is our view that ever harsher sanctions at this time are unlikely to cause the Iranian regime to cease weapons development." Engagement should "not be conducted with a stopwatch," it said.

The Reform movement, which often aligns with the left-wing groups on Israel-Palestinian matters, is a bit closer to the Israeli position when it comes to Iran.

Iran policy reveals split between U.S. Jewish and Israeli left

Rabbi David Saperstein, who directs the Reform's Religious Action Center, disputes Americans for Peace Now's contention that the proposed enhanced sanctions are immoral.

"These were chosen as a much more targeted way to put the maximum pressure on the power structure in Iran," he said.

The other left-wing pro-Israel groups arrived at their Iran policies partly because of their alliance with an array of liberal Democrats wary of engaging Iran in the wake of the Iraq War and its resultant quagmire. Behind the scenes, these groups have sought sanctions that would not harm ordinary Iranians.

Supporters of tougher sanctions argue that sanctions targeting the regime have been in place for years and have had little effect.

Shai Franklin, a senior fellow for U.N. affairs at the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, said that gravitating away from deference to Israeli constituencies may be healthy for some U.S. Jewish groups.

"It makes the conversation more interesting, and once that happens you'll find more people getting involved, from the right and left," he said.

Steven Spiegel of the Israel Policy Forum said differences might emerge next month over the pacing and intensity of sanctions.

"The Iran difference is part of a differentiation that has got to be addressed," he said. "At some point there has to be a serious dialogue between American Jews and Israel and the Obama administration and Israel."

One tactic might be to remind Israel that Obama's policy of engagement with Iran appears to have rallied support in Europe in recent weeks for tougher sanctions.

"The doves," Spiegel said, "accomplished what the hawks could not."

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Radical Islam in decline; Iranian protests are only the latest symptoms of a move toward moderation

therecord.com

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Byline: Joshua Muravchik, Washington Post

Body

Is history ending yet again? Much as the hammers that levelled the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War, so might the protests rocking Iran signal the death of radical Islam and the challenges it poses to the West.

No, that doesn't mean we'll be removing the metal detectors from our airports anytime soon. Al-Qaida and its ilk, even diminished in strength, will retain the ability to stage terrorist strikes. But the danger brought home on Sept. 11, 2001, was always greater than the possibility of murderous attacks. It was the threat that a hostile ideology might come to dominate large swaths of the Muslim world.

Not all versions of this ideology -- variously called Islamism or radical Islam -- are violent. But at the core of even the peaceful ones, such as that espoused by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, is the idea that the Islamic world has been victimized by the West and must defend itself. Even before the United States invaded Iraq, stoking rage, polls in Muslim countries revealed support for Osama bin Laden and for al-Qaida's aims, if not its methods. If such thinking were to triumph in major Muslim countries beyond Iran -- say, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia -- violent extremists would command vast new stores of personnel, explosives and funds.

This is precisely the nightmare scenario that is now receding. Even if the Iranian regime succeeds in suppressing the protests and imposes the reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by force of bullets, mass arrests and hired thugs, it will have forfeited its legitimacy, which has always rested on an element of consent as well as coercion. Most Iranians revered Ayatollah Khomeini, but when his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, declared the election results settled, hundreds of thousands of Iranians took to the streets, deriding his anointed candidate with chants of "Death to the dictator!"

"Even if they manage to hang on for a month or a couple of years, they've shed the blood of their people," says Egyptian publisher and columnist Hisham Kassem. "It's over."

The downfall or discrediting of the regime in Tehran would deal a body blow to global Islamism which, despite its deep intellectual roots, first achieved real influence politically with the Iranian revolution of 1979. And it would also represent just the most recent -- and most dramatic -- in a string of setbacks for radical Islam. Election outcomes over the past two years have completely undone the momentum that Islamists had achieved with their strong showing at the polls in Egypt in 2005 and Palestine in 2006.

Radical Islam in decline; Iranian protests are only the latest symptoms of a move toward moderation

This countertrend began in Morocco in 2007. The Justice and Development party (PJD), a moderate Islamist group that had registered big gains five years before, was expected to win parliamentary elections. But it carried only 14 per cent of the vote, finishing second to a conservative party aligned with the royal palace. And in municipal elections earlier this month, the PJD's vote sank to seven per cent.

Jordanians also went to the polls in 2007 and handed the Islamic Action Front "one of its worst election defeats since Jordan's monarchy restored parliament in 1989," as The Washington Post reported.

Forged from diverse ethnic groups linked only by Islam, Pakistan would seem fertile soil for radical Islamism. Nonetheless, Islamist parties had not done well until 2002, when -- with military strongman Pervez Musharraf suppressing mainstream political forces -- Islamists won 11 per cent of the popular vote and 63 seats in parliament. But in a vote last year, on a more level field, the Islamists' tally sank to two per cent and six out of 270 elected seats. Moreover, they were turned out of power in the North West Frontier Province, previously their stronghold.

In April, Indonesian Islamist parties that had emerged four years earlier to capture 39 per cent of the vote lost ground in parliamentary elections this time around, falling to below 30 per cent.

Then in May came parliamentary elections in Kuwait, where women had won the right to vote and hold office in 2005 but had never yet won office. Even though the Islamic Salafi Alliance issued a fatwa against voting for female candidates, four captured seats in parliament. Adding insult to injury for the Islamists, their representation fell from 21 seats to 11. "There is a new mindset here in Kuwait," the al-Jazeera network reported, "and it's definitely going to reverberate across the Gulf region."

Finally, Lebanon held a tense election earlier this month that many expected would result in the triumph of Hezbollah and its allies over the pro-Western March 14 coalition. Instead, the latter carried the popular vote and nailed down a commanding majority in parliament.

Of course, each election featured its own dynamics, reflecting local alignments and issues, but they all point in the same direction for radical Islam -- a direction reinforced by recent opinion polls in the Muslim world.

Military and social developments in Iraq and Pakistan seem also to be bending to the same wind. Whatever the contribution of the U.S. military "surge" of 2007, the tide of battle shifted in Iraq when broad swaths of the Sunni community that had supported or participated in the resistance to U.S. occupation turned their guns against the insurgent group al-Qaida in Iraq. And this year, the moderate government in Pakistan finally seems to have turned decisively against the Taliban.

Clearly, citizens in Pakistan and Iraq were repelled by the brutality of the radicals, as have been many in such other Muslim countries as Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia, which have suffered domestic terrorism attacks. Nor has the Islamists' performance in power in Afghanistan, Sudan and Gaza won any admiration. The Internet and other communications technology is entangling the younger generation of Muslims more thoroughly with their Western counterparts than their elders, making appeals to turn away from the West ring hollow.

Regardless of the underlying causes, a defeated or merely discredited Islamic Republic of Iran could mark the beginning of the end of radical Islam. Until now, Iran has offered the only relatively successful example of Islamist rule, but the bloody events there are strengthening the momentum against radicalism and theocracy in the Muslim world. If the regime hangs on, it will depend increasingly on its security forces and less on its religious stature.

Of course, the fading of radicalism would not necessarily mean the disappearance of Islamic politics. The Egyptian intellectual Saad Edin Ibrahim noted in the Wall Street Journal last week that Islamist parties are being "cut down to size," and he hopes that they "evolve into Muslim democratic parties akin to the Christian Democrats in Europe."

That would be a result the West could live with.

Joshua Muravchik is a Foreign Policy Institute fellow in the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and the author of *The Next Founders: Voices of Democracy in the Middle East*.

Radical Islam in decline; Iranian protests are only the latest symptoms of a move toward moderation

Graphic

Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS , An Iranian living in Japan calls for the overthrow of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a demonstration in Tokyo last weekend.

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End of Document

Iran: U.S. Congress and Middle East Conflict

Right Vision News

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Body

Pakistan, Nov. 16 -- The surest way to make a problem a conflict is by embracing the attitude that only your view matters. When any party refuses to accept any view but its own, peaceful resolution of differences becomes impossible. The problem is exacerbated when those differences feed the anger, hate and distrust of both sides. This is relevant with respect to our U.S. Congress and the Middle East Conflict. Here are some facts.

Israel has demolished more than 18,000 Palestinian homes since 1967. Last year it demolished 107 Palestinian homes in the West Bank alone. According to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights hundreds of Palestinians have died at Israeli checkpoints in previous years due primarily to denial of travel and an inability to reach timely medical care. The walls and barriers in the West Bank do not merely separate Palestinians and Jews -- they limit Palestinian movement, access to work, basic resources, trade and business. Unemployment in the West Bank hovers at 23% versus 7.3% in Israel. More than 10,000 Palestinians are estimated to be in Israeli prisons, hundreds held without trial and many deprived of family visits. Israel has barred Palestinians from suing Israel for death, injury, civil rights abuses or damages caused by Israeli security. Israeli Defense Forces admit their killing of Palestinians is investigated only under "exceptional" circumstances. Palestinians in the West Bank receive less than 20 Liters of water per day, while the average Jewish settler gets 300 Liters/day. Palestinians in occupied territories have no legal voice or rights comparable to Israelis. The U.S. Congress has responded to these conditions in the last 10 years with a singular view. Last week, the U.S. House passed HR 838 telling Obama and Clinton to oppose the Goldstone report critical of Israel's Gaza war. Earlier this year Congress passed HR 34 stating Palestinians in Gaza were wholly responsible for the conflict with Israel. The more than 1,500 Palestinian deaths -- many of them women and children -- from that conflict was merely a reaffirmation of Israel's right to defend itself. HR 557 this year condemned the UN Human Rights Council for placing Israel human rights abuses and its treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories on their permanent agenda. In July of 2004 HR 213 complained of misuse of the International Court of Justice for political purposes because it decided to address the legality of the Gaza and West Bank walls enclosing Palestinian people. Congress has been unequivocal in finding Palestinians at fault for the problems. HR 1069 condemned Hamas for its hateful TV programming. HR 951 condemned Palestinian rocket attacks on Israeli civilians. In July 2006, HR 415 condemned terrorist attacks against Israel and reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself. In February 2006, HR 79 stated no Palestinian Authority could be provided direct U.S. support if its majority called for the destruction of Israel. In December 2005, HR 575 stated Hamas should not be allowed to participate in elections held by the Palestinian Authority. In March 1999, H.Con.Res.24, submitted by Arizona Rep. Matt Salmon, with 280 co-sponsors, stated Congressional opposition to any unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state. Not one bill introduced in the U.S. House in the last 10 years has ever found Israel at fault for any problem in the Middle East. The House has never criticized Israel even once for violation or abuse of human or civil rights of Palestinians, for denial of their political or legal rights, illegal detention, restriction of their right to free movement, deplorable living conditions, harassment or persecution, illegal arrests, violation of their human dignity or the deaths

of Palestinian civilians. By this inaction, the U.S. Congress has provided its tacit approval of Israeli treatment of Palestinians. Meanwhile, Congress has shown great sensitivity for Israel and Jewish people as reflected in no less than 18 different House Resolutions in the last 10 years supportive of Israel and Jewish views. Not a single House Resolution in this time has suggested support of Palestinian rights, freedoms, justice or equality. The outcome of such a myopic view is predictable. The U.S. Congress has approved the Israeli course in the Middle East. A course based on maps of this region showing territories occupied or controlled by Israel to be well advanced toward total annexation. Congress has approved Israeli expansion and control of the occupied territories, their annexation of Beit-ul-Moqaddas (Senate bill 1322, 1995) and collateral slaughter of any Palestinians associated with those who would resist Israel by force. If history is a guide, the U.S. Congress will approve the sale of more weapons to Israel to kill any or all Palestinians who dare to pick up a stone and fight back. Hezbollah arose from the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians after the 1949 and 1967 wars that expanded the borders of Israel and forced Palestinians out of Israel into Lebanon. Millions more displaced Palestinians will be kicked out of their homes as Israel continues its expansion into the West Bank for "natural growth," and this will merely swell the ranks of current angry displaced Palestinians. Peace, reconciliation and understanding do not result from denying human rights, intolerance and imposition of oppressive living conditions. By encouraging Israel's present path that feeds the hatred and conflict in the region, the U.S. Congress seals the future for all who live there. Will Palestinians displaced from their homeland, witness to the slaughter of family and relatives by U.S.-made missiles and bullets, daily humiliation by the Israeli Defense --see the U.S. as anything other than benefactor, supporter, enabler and patron saint of a hated and despised enemy? Will any see the tepid efforts at peace by sequential prior U.S. administrations as anything but cover for the far more consistent and heavy handed support of Israel by a U.S. Congress already enshrined by its multiple resolutions and support for Israel's ultimate solution to the Palestinian issue? What then will protect the U.S. public from the hate, anger, retribution and terrorism these outcomes will inevitably produce later? Peace has its benefits and failure has its costs. Anger, hate and revenge stroked to the point of conflict and war are not easily calmed until they have exacted their price in death, destruction and suffering. No one has to agree with terrorism to understand how it developed the deep roots that sustain its growth. And we encourage these roots by facilitating a process that feeds the hate, anger, suffering, injustice and neglect we blindly support with Congressional approval of the killing, displacement, subjugation and oppression of one group by another. What then will be the epitaph of countless innocent U.S. civilians in the future? Will they be killed because no one bothered to question, care or demand answers to these problems until it was too late to make a difference, or it had become too difficult to correct them? Certainly no correction or peace will ever be possible if all we see is a single, limited perspective of the problem. Published by HT Syndication with permission from Right Vision News. For more information on news feed please contact Sarabjit Jagirdar at htsyndication@hindustantimes.com

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Morocco slows pace of reform; King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

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Body

ABSTRACT

Morocco has long been viewed as a liberalizing Islamic state, but under pressure from Islamic radicalism, the pace of change has slowed.

FULL TEXT

Morocco has long been viewed as a rare liberalizing, modernizing Islamic state, open to the West and a potential bridge to a calmer Middle East that can live in peace with Israel.

But under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change. Power remains concentrated in the monarchy; democracy seems more demonstrative than real. While insisting that the king is committed to deeper reforms, senior officials speak instead of keeping a proper balance between freedom and social cohesion. Many discuss the threat of extremism in neighboring Algeria.

Since a major bombing of hotels and shopping areas in central Casablanca by Islamic radicals in 2003, and a thwarted attempt at another bombing campaign in 2007, there has been a significant and continuing crackdown on those suspected of being extremists here.

In 2003, anyone with a long beard was quite likely to be arrested. Even now, nearly 1,000 people considered to be Islamic radicals remain in Moroccan jails. Six Islamic politicians and a reporter from *Hezbollah's* Al Manar television were jailed recently, accused of complicity in a large terrorist plot. The case was full of irregularities and based mainly on circumstantial evidence, said a defense lawyer, Abelaziz Nouaydi, and Human Rights Watch.

In a rare interview, Yassine Mansouri, Morocco's head of intelligence, said that the arrested politicians had "used their political activities as a cover for terrorist activities."

"It was not our aim to stop a political party," he said. "There is a law to be followed."

Morocco is threatened, Mr. Mansouri said, by two extremes - the conservative Wahhabism spread by Saudi Arabia and the Shiism spread by Iran. "We consider them both aggressive," he said. "Radical Islam has the wind in its sail, and it remains a threat."

Morocco slows pace of reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, especially active in Algeria, remains a major problem for Morocco, Mr. Mansouri said. Officials say it is appealing to the young and has recreated a training route to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and it just claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing this month in Mauritania.

Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said: "We know where the risks to our stability are. We know kids are listening to this Islamic song, so we have to act quickly."

King Mohammed, who celebrated his 10th year on the throne this year, has vowed to help the poor and wipe out the slums where radicalism is bred. One such slum, Sidi Moumen, where the bombers lived, is being redeveloped. Half of it has already been ripped down, with about 700 families shipped to the outskirts of the city, where they are provided a small plot of land at a cheap price to build new homes.

Hamid al-Gout, 34, was born in Sidi Moumen and built his own hovel. Nearly everyone has been to prison, he said, and Islamic political groups quietly hold meetings. "Sometimes we talk, 12 or 14 people, about our lives," he said, then added carefully, "But there is no radical thinking here now."

Abdelkhabir Hamma, 36, said that he had been told that if he and his family did not leave the neighborhood by the end of the year, they would be thrown out. He said that while many people respect the king, few trust the other authorities.

The king sees himself as a modernizer and reformer, having invested heavily in economic development, loosened restraints on the news media, given more rights to women and shed light on some of the worst human rights abuses of the past. Those are remarkable steps in a region dominated by uncompromising examples of state control, like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Because the king, who is believed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, is also revered as the "commander of the faithful," challenges to Moroccan Islam are taken very seriously. In March, the king dramatically cut diplomatic ties to Iran, accusing Tehran of "intolerable interference in internal affairs" by trying to spread Shiism in Morocco and by recruiting Moroccans in Europe, especially in Belgium, to participate in acts of terror, Mr. Mansouri said.

The king has tried to be more inclusive, traveling, for instance, to the north of Morocco, where his father refused to go. The north is also a hotbed of extremism and home for many of the Qaeda bombers of Madrid. The king held the traditional baiaa ceremony of mutual allegiance this year in Tetouan and directed significant development funds there.

But Morocco's response has also been to slam the brakes on change, even to the corrupt judiciary and in support of women's rights, so as not to inflame conservative and traditional views of Islam, especially in the countryside and among the poor, where extremists fish.

For that reason, too, the king has not put Morocco forward as an interlocutor between Israel and the Palestinians, as his father did. The view is simply that Israel - and other, harder-line Arab states - must move first, before Morocco exposes itself.

The crackdown has also damaged Morocco's human rights record. Islamic prisoners are treated roughly in jail, sometimes sodomized with bottles, said Abdel-Rahim Moutard, a former prisoner, whose hands were broken during interrogations. He runs Ennasir, a rights organization for Islamic prisoners. But when they emerge from prison, they get little help, even from the mosques or Ennasir. "A lot of them are shocked that their country would treat them this way," Mr. Moutard said. "After the bottle treatment, every time he goes to the toilet he'll remember, and he will think of vengeance."

The main Islamic party, the Party for Justice and Development, is effectively neutered, but officials want to ensure that it does not combine with the socialists. So for recent local elections, the palace created the Authenticity and Modernity Party, run by Fouad Ali El Himma, 46, who as a youth had been chosen, like Mr. Mansouri and other boys from varied backgrounds, to study with the young king. Mr. Himma is also a former deputy interior minister.

Morocco slows pace of reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

The effort is to provide an alternative - informally sanctioned by the palace - but also to try to mobilize Moroccans, who do not see their participation as having much effect on weak governments, to vote. The new party won, with 22 percent of the vote on a turnout of 52 percent. Mr. Himma is seen as a future prime minister.

In an interview, he spoke passionately about the commitment of the king to aid the poor and reform Morocco. Morocco, he said, "has always been a country of transit, and we have found the cement for all this - our multifaceted monarchy."

But critics see the king and his friends as a closed, anti-democratic "monarchy of pals." Moves toward a more democratic system, with more power to Parliament, or even a constitutional monarchy, are off the table, certainly for now.

The officials readily concede that poverty, illiteracy and corruption remain serious challenges. King Mohammed, they say, has made judicial reform a key goal. Yet in a nationally televised address on his 10th anniversary as king, the king spoke of poverty and development. But he did not use the word "corruption," and he only once spoke of "social justice," making no mention of judicial reform.

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The time may be right for a new cold war

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Body

It was on Oct. 7, 2001, when U.S. bombs and missiles started falling on Afghanistan. The war has become the longest in American history. The eighth anniversary of the conflict beckons, with no end in sight.

The counterinsurgency campaign proposed in Gen. Stanley McChrystal's strategic assessment will prolong the war for an additional five or 10 years. The war's most ardent proponents insist that President Barack Obama has no choice: It's either fight on or invite another 9/11.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to a global counterinsurgency campaign. Instead of fighting an endless hot war in a vain effort to eliminate the jihadist threat, the United States should wage a cold war to keep the threat at bay. Such a strategy worked before. It can work again.

At the dawn of what the George W. Bush administration came to call the Long War, then defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld told U.S. military personnel: "We have two choices. Either we change the way we live, or we must change the way they live. We choose the latter." In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the work of changing the way they live has turned out to be difficult, costly and problematic.

After years of exertions, \$1 trillion expended and more than 5,000 American troops lost on two fronts, U.S. forces have yet to win a decisive victory. The high-tech American way of war developed during the 1990s (once celebrated in phrases such as "shock and awe" and "speed kills") stands thoroughly discredited.

Changing the way they live - where "they" are the people of the Islamic world - qualifies as mission impossible. The Long War is a losing proposition; it will break the bank and break the force.

Devising a new course requires accurately identifying the problem, which is not "terrorism" and, despite Washington's current obsession with the place, is certainly not Afghanistan. The essential problem is a dispute about God's relationship to politics. The proposition that the two occupy separate spheres finds particular favour among the democracies of the liberal, developed West. The proposition that God permeates politics finds particular favour in the Islamic world.

This conviction, almost entirely ignored in McChrystal's report, defines the essence of the way they live in Iraq, Afghanistan and a host of other countries throughout the Middle East.

The time may be right for a new cold war

At its root, this is an argument about what it means to be modern. Power, no matter how imaginatively or ruthlessly wielded, cannot provide a solution. The opposing positions are irreconcilable.

In confronting this conflict, the goal of U.S. national security strategy ought to be limited but specific: to insulate Americans from the fallout. Rather than setting out to clear, hold and build thousands of tiny, primitive villages scattered across the Afghan countryside, such a strategy should emphasize three principles: decapitate, contain and compete. An approach based on these principles cannot guarantee perpetual peace. But it is likely to be more effective, affordable and sustainable than a strategy based on open-ended war.

Decapitation - targeting leaders for elimination - provides the means to suppress immediate threats to our safety. The violent jihadists who pose those threats are vicious but relatively few in number. They possess limited capabilities. Their aspirations of uniting the world's Muslims into a new caliphate are akin to Sarah Palin's or Dennis Kucinich's presidential ambitions - unworthy of serious attention. They are rank fantasies.

Without effective leadership, the jihadists are nothing. The aim of decapitation is twofold. At a minimum it will oblige jihadist chieftains to devote enormous attention to ensuring their own survival, giving them less time to plot against the West. Optimally, it will confront jihadist networks with never-ending succession crises, consuming organizational energies that might otherwise find external expression. Decapitation won't eliminate the threat - Hamas and Hezbollah have survived the Israeli government's targeted assassination campaign - but it can reduce it to manageable levels.

A crucial caveat is that assassinations must be precise and accurate. The incidental killing of noncombatants is immoral as well as politically counterproductive. The missiles launched from U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles in Pakistan have repeatedly demonstrated the wrong approach. The recent elimination of Saleh Ali Nabhan in Somalia - in a helicopter-borne raid by special operations forces - models the correct one.

Containment implies turning to the old Cold War playbook. When confronting the Soviet threat, the United States and its allies erected robust defences, such as NATO, and co-operated in denying the communist bloc anything that could make Soviet computers faster, Soviet submarines quieter, or Soviet missiles more accurate.

Containing the threat posed by jihad should follow a similar strategy. Robust defences are key - not mechanized units patrolling the Iron Curtain, but well-funded government agencies securing borders, controlling access to airports and seaports, and ensuring the integrity of electronic networks that have become essential to our way of life.

As during the Cold War, a strategy of containment should include comprehensive export controls and the monitoring of international financial transactions. Without money and access to weapons, the jihadist threat shrinks to insignificance: All that remains is hatred. Ideally, this approach should include strenuous efforts to reduce the West's dependence on Middle Eastern oil, which serves to funnel many billions of dollars into the hands of people who may not wish us well.

During the Cold War, containment did not preclude engagement, and it shouldn't today. To the extent that the United States can encourage liberalizing tendencies in the Islamic world, it should do so - albeit with modest expectations. Sending jazz musicians deep into the Eastern Bloc in the old days was commendable, but Louis Armstrong's trumpet didn't topple the Soviet empire.

Finally, there is the matter of competition. Again, the Cold War offers an instructive analogy. During the long twilight struggle with the Soviets, competition centred on demonstrating scientific superiority (putting a man on the moon) and material superiority (providing cars, refrigerators and TVs for the masses). The West won.

Competition today still includes a material element. Yet a conflict rooted in a dispute over God's place in human history necessarily extends beyond the material realm. Radical Islamists assert that all humanity must submit to their retrograde version of Islam. Western political leaders declare with equal insistence that all must live in freedom, that term imbued with specific Western connotations.

The time may be right for a new cold war

The competitive challenge facing the West is not to prove that Islamic fundamentalism won't satisfy the aspirations of humanity, but to demonstrate that democratic capitalism can, even for committed believers. In short, the key to winning the current competition is to live up to the ideals that we profess rather than compromising them in the name of national security.

The upshot is that by modifying the way we live - attending to pressing issues of poverty, injustice, exploitation of **women** and the global environmental crisis - we might through our example induce the people of the Islamic world to consider modifying the way they live. Here lies the best chance of easing the differences that divide us.

The war we're fighting can become plausible, sustainable and even morally defensible.

It just has to go from hot to cold.

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Morocco puts brakes on reform; King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

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Body

ABSTRACT

Morocco has long been viewed as a rare liberalizing, modernizing Islamic state. But under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change.

FULL TEXT

Morocco has long been viewed as a rare liberalizing, modernizing Islamic state, open to the West and a potential bridge to a calmer Middle East that can live in peace with Israel.

But under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change. Power remains concentrated in the monarchy; democracy seems more demonstrative than real. While insisting that the king is committed to deeper reforms, senior officials speak instead of keeping a proper balance between freedom and social cohesion. Many discuss the threat of extremism in neighboring Algeria.

Since a major bombing of hotels and shopping areas in central Casablanca by Islamic radicals in 2003, and a thwarted attempt at another bombing campaign in 2007, there has been a significant and continuing crackdown on suspected extremists here.

In 2003, anyone with a long beard was quite likely to be arrested. Even now, nearly 1,000 people considered to be Islamic radicals remain in Moroccan jails. Six Islamic politicians and a reporter from *Hezbollah's* Al Manar television were jailed recently, accused of complicity in a large terrorist plot. The case was full of irregularities and based mainly on circumstantial evidence, said a defense lawyer, Abelaziz Nouaydi, and Human Rights Watch.

In a rare interview, Yassine Mansouri, Morocco's head of intelligence, said that the arrested politicians "used their political activities as a cover for terrorist activities."

"It was not our aim to stop a political party," he said. "There is a law to be followed."

Morocco is threatened, Mr. Mansouri said, by two extremes - the conservative Wahhabism spread by Saudi Arabia and the Shiism spread by Iran. "We consider them both aggressive," he said. "Radical Islam has the wind in its sail, and it remains a threat."

Morocco puts brakes on reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, especially active in Algeria, remains a major problem for Morocco, Mr. Mansouri said. Officials say it is appealing to the young and has recreated a training route to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and it just claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing this month in Mauritania.

Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said: "We know where the risks to our stability are. We know kids are listening to this Islamic song, so we have to act quickly."

King Mohammed, who celebrated his 10th year on the throne this year, has vowed to help the poor and wipe out the slums where radicalism is bred. One such slum, Sidi Moumen, where the bombers lived, is being redeveloped. Half of it has already been ripped down, with about 700 families shipped to the outskirts of the city, where they are provided a small plot of land at a cheap price to build new homes.

Hamid al-Gout, 34, was born in Sidi Moumen and built his own hovel here. Nearly everyone has been to prison, he said, and Islamic political groups quietly hold meetings. "Sometimes we talk, 12 or 14 people, about our lives," he said, then added carefully, "But there is no radical thinking here now."

Abdelkhabir Hamma, 36, said that he had been told that if he and his family did not leave the neighborhood by the end of the year, they would be thrown out. He said that while many people respect the king, few trust other authorities.

The king sees himself as a modernizer and reformer, having invested heavily in economic development, loosened restraints on the media, given more rights to women and shed light on some of the worst human-rights abuses of the past. Those are remarkable steps in a region dominated by uncompromising examples of state control, like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Because the king, a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, is also revered as the "commander of the faithful," challenges to Moroccan Islam are taken very seriously. In March, the king dramatically cut diplomatic ties to Iran, accusing Tehran of "intolerable interference in internal affairs" by trying to spread Shiism in Morocco and recruiting Moroccans in Europe, especially in Belgium, to participate in acts of terror, Mr. Mansouri said.

The king has tried to be more inclusive, traveling, for instance, to the north of Morocco, where his father refused to go. The north is also a hotbed of extremism and home for many of the Qaeda bombers of Madrid. The king held the traditional baiaa ceremony of mutual allegiance this year in Tetouan and targeted significant development funds there.

But Morocco's response has also been to slam the brakes on change, even to the corrupt judiciary and in support of women's rights, so as not to inflame conservative and traditional views of Islam, especially in the countryside and among the poor, where extremists fish.

For that reason, too, the king has not put Morocco forward as an interlocutor between Israel and the Palestinians, as his father did. The view here is simply that Israel - and other, harder-line Arab states - must move first, before Morocco exposes itself.

The crackdown has also damaged Morocco's human rights record. Islamic prisoners are treated roughly in jail, sometimes sodomized with bottles, said Abdel-Rahim Moutard, a former prisoner himself, whose hands were broken during interrogations. He runs Ennasir, a rights organization for Islamic prisoners. But when they emerge from prison, they get little help, even from the mosques or Ennasir. "A lot of them are shocked that their country would treat them this way," Mr. Moutard said. "After the bottle treatment, every time he goes to the toilet he'll remember, and he will think of vengeance."

The main Islamic party, the Party for Justice and Development, is effectively neutered, but officials want to ensure that it does not combine with the socialists. So for recent elections for local authorities, the palace created the Authenticity and Modernity Party, run by Fouad Ali El Himma, 46, who as a youth had been chosen, like Mr. Mansouri and other boys from varied backgrounds, to study with the young king. Mr. Himma is also a former deputy interior minister.

Morocco puts brakes on reform King and advisers assert they must crack down on Islamic radicalism

The effort is to provide an alternative - sanctioned informally by the palace - but also to try to mobilize Moroccans, who do not see their participation as having much effect on weak governments, to vote. The new party won, with 22 percent of the vote on a turnout of 52 percent. Mr. Himma is seen as a future prime minister.

In an interview, he spoke passionately about the commitment of the king to aid the poor and reform Morocco. Morocco, he said, "has always been a country of transit, and we have found the cement for all this - our multifaceted monarchy."

But critics see the king and his friends as a closed, anti-democratic "monarchy of pals." Moves toward a more democratic system, with more power to Parliament, or even a constitutional monarchy, are off the table, certainly for now.

The officials readily concede that poverty, illiteracy and corruption remain serious challenges. King Mohammed, they say, has made judicial reform a key goal. Yet in a nationally televised address on his 10th anniversary as king, the king spoke of poverty and development. But he did not use the word "corruption," and he only once spoke of "social justice," making no mention of judicial reform.

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Tehran is terrified: America is being friendly; Iran's hardline leadership has been knocked sideways by Barack Obama's conciliatory tone. But how will it affect the election?

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Body

In Tehran drivers dutifully wear their seatbelts but think nothing of racing through a red light.

Women must cover their faces and bodies under strict Islamic laws, but young women stretch the rules to reveal designer clothes, dyed hair, heavy make-up and prominently displayed bandages from recent cosmetic surgery.

The state-controlled media fill the papers and air waves with a solid diet of prayers, documentaries about the Iran-Iraq war and speeches from the country's leaders. In the privacy of their homes, most Tehranis watch illicit satellite television channels beaming Persian music videos from California and uncensored news bulletins or just read foreign websites.

The very same Iranian who would chant "Death to Britain" at the end of Friday prayers would also regard English football as his second religion. Steven Gerrard and Wayne Rooney are household names and the visa queue at the British Embassy stretches around the block. Iranians are hospitable to a fault. But the same generous host can just as easily lapse into paranoid conspiracy theories about how British spies run the country and the Jews rule the world.

Welcome to Iran, now marking 30 tumultuous years since the Islamic revolution and facing an identity crisis as it ponders middle age. True, the country is young and energetic and has a strong sense of its culture and heritage. It is also endowed with huge energy resources. But power still resides in the grey-haired clerics whose policies have provoked international sanctions and pariah status in the West. Many Iranians still struggle to find work and feed their families in the face of double-digit inflation.

As it battles between preserving the ideals of the revolution and navigating its way in a complicated modern world, one figure looms large. The late Ayatollah Khomeini, the father of the Islamic revolution, may have died 20 years ago but he still looks down on his people with a stern gaze from every office wall and billboard. His legacy continues to cast a powerful shadow.

Tehran is terrified: America is being friendly Iran 's hardline leadership has been knocked sideways by Barack Obama's conciliatory tone. But how will it affect....

Now two serious problems have converged at the same time to confront Iran with some difficult decisions. One is Barack Hussein Obama, the first US President who broke the mould of previous leaders of the "Great Satan" by proposing to end 30 years of hostility. His address to the Iranian people last month knocked the regime off balance. This is not what American presidents are meant to do.

The Iranian leadership is desperately looking for a way out.

One confided to me this week that the proposal was a "mask" that concealed a new plot against Iran.

The ailing Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, conceded that Mr Obama had reached out a "velvet glove" but warned his people that it concealed a hand of steel. Another aide told me he regretted the passing of George W. Bush who, he said wistfully, was at least "honest".

Anti-Americanism is a central pillar of Iranian revolutionary dogma. Iran has watched with alarm the handshake between Hugo Chávez and Mr Obama last week and the rapprochement with Cuba.

Removing America as the bloodthirsty foe would not only mean redecorating the walls of many Tehran buildings covered in anti-US propaganda but it would also remove a central tenet of Khomeini's ideology. If that went, what would be next? Would American culture again swamp the country as it did during the Shah's reign? Would the millions of Iranian expatriates in America flock back and turn Tehran into the Los Angeles of the Middle East? The other big challenge facing Iran is the nuclear programme. Its conventional military may be obsolete but it has invested heavily in long-range missiles and acquiring the technology and hardware to build an atomic bomb, some believe within the coming months. This sets Iran on a collision course with the West, the Arab world and Israel, which has repeatedly stated that it will prevent Iran building a nuclear weapon, by force if necessary.

Iran is an imperfect democracy.

Any candidates outside the mainstream of politics are banned..

Critical journalists and human rights workers are regularly arrested or intimidated. But every four years it still holds presidential elections that do express the will of most of the 46 million eligible voters.

On June 12 President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to seek re-election that would give him another four-year mandate to pursue his hardline policies. At home this means strengthening the security apparatus that keeps the regime in place and cracking down on dissent.

Abroad it will mean greater support for militant Islamic groups such as Hamas and **Hezbollah**. He will again seek to challenge the West on the international stage, as he did with such effect in Geneva this week at the United Nations conference on racism, when his tirade against Israel led to 30 countries walking out of the event. Above all, it will mean that Iran will pursue its nuclear programme with renewed vigour and risk a new war in the Middle East.

Lined up against Mr Ahmadinejad are two reformist candidates, the strongest being Mir-Hossein Mousavi, a soft-spoken former Prime Minister, best known for his leadership during the Iran-Iraq war. Although called out of semi-retirement, Mr Mousavi appears to have brought together the fractious reformist groups. Certainly, his campaign headquarters appears well funded and well staffed by young Iranian volunteers. He told me this week that he would seek to improve relations abroad and change Iran's image, and that he hoped one day to shake the hand held out by Mr Obama.

Few Iranians are prepared to give up their nuclear programme, which was begun by the Shah, but there is a sense that a victorious reformist candidate could take the poison out of the dispute by co-operating with the international community and turning down the bellicose rhetoric.

Mr Ahmadinejad is on the record as denying that six million Jews died in the Holocaust. He has also called for Israel to be "removed from the pages of time" - a comment many regard as advocating wiping the Jewish state off the map Mr Mousavi's biggest problem is people like Mehsohrabi, a spiky-haired youth with nothing but contempt for

Tehran is terrified: America is being friendly Iran 's hardline leadership has been knocked sideways by Barack Obama's conciliatory tone. But how will it affect....

the entire political Establishment. Like almost half the electorate, he does not intend to vote, something Mr Ahmadinejad's well-organised hardline supporters are counting on to win.

But if the country's modern history is anything to go by, the teenager might do well to reconsider. Who leads Iran after the elections could decide which path the country will take, a move with great consequences not only for Iran and the region, but also the rest of the world.

Richard Beeston is foreign editor of The Times

Graphic

An Iranian woman walks past graffiti on the former US Embassy in Tehran

AP/VAHID SALEMI

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End of Document

The world was wrong to oppose a military solution in Sri Lanka

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Body

With its bloody end recently, Sri Lanka's quarter century long deadly civil war leaves some troubling questions in its wake. What limitations exist on governments' right to use force to crush terrorist organizations? How can the responsibility to protect norm be extended to nonstate actors? Do westerners have divine dispensation to be the moral arbiters of the conduct of others as well as their own?

The world was gravely concerned over the fate of civilians caught in the crossfire. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon pressed Colombo to grant unrestricted access to aid agencies. The government resisted, saying more time was needed to flush out Tamil Tigers hiding among the displaced people in the camps.

A fortnight earlier, Ban had received a report on Gaza incidents in January from his own inquiry board that indicted Israel for "reckless disregard" for human life, accused it of a direct and intentional strike into UN premises, and recommended an impartial inquiry to investigate incidents that were beyond its own deliberately narrow terms of reference. On May 5, Ban submitted this report to the Security Council with a terse statement that he did not intend to establish any further inquiry.

Yet presumably Ban expects to be taken seriously on his call for greater transparency, access and accountability by Sri Lanka.

The double standards and selectivity of western governments who have aggressively promoted the rhetoric of the war on terror, waged an illegal war of aggression in Iraq where civilian lives are so devalued they are not even counted, and support the war on terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan with its high toll on civilian casualties, has been breath-taking.

Sri Lanka was waging a military offensive against a guerrilla army that had fought a brutal war against the legitimate state for 26 years, killed up to 80,000 people, and brought the assassination of an Indian prime minister as well as a Sri Lankan president. The Tigers were among the most ruthless terrorist organizations and designated as such by more than 30 countries. They pioneered the use of women suicide bombers, invented the explosive suicide belt, killed many civilians including Tamils, recruited child soldiers and often raised funds from the Tamil diaspora through extortion. Post-conflict recovery and progress was not possible until they had been decisively defeated on the battlefield.

The world was wrong to oppose a military solution in Sri Lanka

Civilians were held against their will by the Tigers, not the army. Many who tried to flee were shot by the Tigers -- an act of depravity against their own to which even Hamas and Hezbollah, other practitioners of the art of using civilians as human shields, have not stooped.

Tellingly, there were no reports of civilians trying to flee from the Sri Lankan forces to the Tigers. A movement that began as the protector of the nation's oppressed Tamil minority had mutated into their killers. Along the road it is the Tigers who fought for a solely military solution to the three-decade conflict, spurning the few opportunities that were presented for a political settlement through dialogue and negotiations, including through Indian and Norwegian mediation; they insisted on being the sole representative of the Tamil population and cause, liquidating all rival challengers; and they lost international goodwill after 9/11 as the global tolerance for terrorism as a tactic collapsed, regardless of the justice of the cause.

Yet, even if true -- and, as always, much of this was contentious and furiously contested -- this did not obscure the humanitarian tragedy of large-scale civilian deaths and shelling of civilian targets such as schools and hospitals in the shrinking area still held by the Tigers as government troops closed in. Government claims of zero civilian casualties caused by their firepower are simply not credible. Around 7,000 civilians died this year alone.

To what extent did the global community's unanimously endorsed responsibility to protect (R2P) norm apply to the Tigers, the government and the international community for evacuating -- by land, sea and air -- the civilians caught in the crossfire?

R2P places the responsibility first and foremost on the state itself. Given the Tigers' nature and record, it was not unreasonable for the government to build the capacity and demonstrate the determination to defeat the Tigers as part of its responsibility to protect. R2P proponents cannot advocate the international use of force against government troops engaged in atrocities against civilians, but not permit governments to use military force to protect their people from atrocities perpetrated by terrorists.

Pacifists can denounce all use of force. But those who accept that the use of force is sometimes necessary cannot deny that option to governments engaged in fighting a brutal insurgency that kills civilians without compunction.

Had the Tigers been amenable to letting civilians caught in the crossfire escape, outsiders could legitimately have asked for another pause or ceasefire in order to help evacuate them. Another means for avoiding a bloodbath was for the Tigers to surrender. Absent this, it was hypocritical and wrong -- morally, politically and militarily -- of westerners to fault Sri Lanka.

Ceasefires are not neutral in their impact on the warring sides. The Tigers used previous pauses to rest, recover, regroup, recruit, rearm and return to terrorism. Another 25 years of war would have killed many more civilians.

There is also the moral hazard of validating the tactic of taking civilians hostage as human shields. Calls for a ceasefire, without materially helping the Tamil civilians, infuriated the government and reduced space for those making the calls to establish their bona fides with the government for how best to move from a civil war into a post-conflict peacebuilding environment.

Canadian MP Bob Rae discovered the truth of this when, after landing at Colombo airport Tuesday night, he was detained and then expelled from Sri Lanka. Those who choose to be referees and award penalties against one team cannot switch to playing coach of that team.

Where R2P does apply to the government is in its preventive and rebuilding components. The fact remains that the Tigers were the after-product of systematic and institutionalized discrimination by the Sinhalese majority against the Tamil minority that quickly degenerated into oppression and then killings. Calls for equal treatment when ignored escalated into demands for autonomy and finally, a homeland.

A military victory, while necessary, will not guarantee a peaceful future for a united Sri Lanka. The responsibility to reconstruct and rebuild, with international assistance, shows the way forward. The best time for the state to adopt measures of accommodation and power sharing within a federal framework is in the flush of military victory, when

The world was wrong to oppose a military solution in Sri Lanka

no one can accuse it of weakness. The Sri Lankan Tamils as well as the international community will mark the government's noble magnanimity.

Conversely, should there be vulgar triumphalism, gloating and an atavistic return to oppression and killings, Sri Lanka will suffer a reprise of the brutal civil war.

Ramesh Thakur is director of the Balsillie School of International Affairs and distinguished fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo.

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Eating out there

Weekend Australian

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5 - Travel Edition

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Body

THE GLOBAL GOURMET

Restaurants come in some very strange guises, write Elizabeth Meryment and Rosa Jackson

A380 In-Flight Kitchen, Taipei, Taiwan: Apparently there's no such thing as too much in-flight food for some high-flyers. A restaurant in Taipei has been modelled on the A380 airbus, so people can ``enjoy" the in-flight experience while still on the ground. The restaurant, which opened in January and carries the moniker of the huge new plane, replicates the aircraft interior, with food served by women dressed as cabin crew. And while the menu is presented on an in-flight card, there are fortunately more than two choices for dinner. One thing though: these western-style meals are often served on plastic trays, just like on a real plane.

168 Dingzhou Rd, Sec 3, Taipei City.

Ithaa, Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, The Maldives: The exquisite aquamarine waters of the Maldives are home to an incredible array of marine life, so it's hardly surprising somebody came up with the idea of an underwater restaurant. Ithaa's tiny dining room, which seats 14, is attached to this luxe Hilton resort and positioned 5m below sea level. A perspex-domed ceiling permits unsurpassed viewings of the schools of fish, sharks, rays and other marine creatures that coast by in these warm tropical waters. It's a bit like dining in an aquarium, only the fish can come and go as they please (except those that end up on the plate, of course). Rangali Island, Maldives. +960 668 0629;

www.hiltonworldresorts.com.

Pisa prison restaurant, Vorterra, Italy: As anyone who's seen the film Goodfellas knows, the mafia is serious about food. A high-security prison near Pisa has decided to take advantage of this by creating an occasional restaurant open to the public. Diners sit in a deconsecrated chapel inside 20m-high walls while Bruno, a murderer serving a life sentence, serenades the packed dining room on the piano. Meanwhile, a team of prisoners -- comprising thieves, standover men and other assorted thugs -- proudly dish up frittatas, gnocchi and cheesecake on plastic plates. And these inmates certainly have good taste, as the food is reported to be so fabulous that there's a long waiting list to get a table. The only problem is that customers must undergo strict security checks to get in. After all, it's a prison. Via del Castello, Volterra, +39 058 886 099;

www.volterratur.it.

Eating out there

Icehotel Restaurant, Lapland, Sweden: This famous Icehotel is one of the world's coolest (so to speak) and quirkiest places to stay. At the start of each winter, architects and builders gather on the banks of the Torne River in Lapland to construct the igloo-like building out of ice, filling it with luxury appointments such as spa baths and chandeliers. It then melts away again in spring. If the thought of staying overnight in an igloo is too much, then there's always the restaurant, which serves Scandinavian fare (said to be very good for the health), including reindeer, Arctic berries and coldstream fish. The crockery is also often made of ice.

+46 980 66 800; www.icehotel.com.

Buns and Guns, Beirut, Lebanon: For those who have a quirky sense of humour and, well, nerves of steel, Buns and Guns is located deep in the Hezbollah-dominated suburbs of south Beirut. It is a humorous take on the region's ongoing turmoil (in fact, the street here was badly bombed in 2006). Waiters wear fatigues and camouflage helmets, burgers (called such things as the Kalashnikov or the B52) come wrapped in brown paper, and the restaurant's motto is "a sandwich could kill you". There are sandbags stacked at the front door, used shells for decoration and the sign out front looks like an oversized dog tag. Interesting, if a little weird. Dahlia, Beirut, Lebanon.

Le Spirite Lounge, Montreal, Canada: This quirky venture has been running for several years but it is certainly well placed for these new waste-not-want-not times. For at Le Spirite Lounge, you must finish each course (that means every morsel) before being permitted to order the next course. So, if dining here, pray you like what you're given, or you might go home hungry. Apparently, waitresses proclaim that any waste of food is a crime against humanity, and anybody who leaves scraps on their plate is forced to give money to charity. Fair enough. The meals are also strictly vegan, organic and entirely guilt (and some might say flavour) free. There's very little choice: only one entree, main and dessert are available each day. 1205 East Ontario, Montreal, Canada; +1 514 522 5353.

Kuappi, Iisalmi, Finland: It's more like a box than a full-blown eatery, but this button-cute outfit in Iisalmi, central Finland, carries the distinction of being the world's smallest restaurant (according to the Guinness Book of World Records). Inside the venue -- which has a floor space that measures 2.2sqm -- are a single table with two chairs, a bar and a washroom. Another table and a couple of chairs are squeezed on to a tiny porch out the front during clement weather. Food is cooked in the kitchen of a larger restaurant next door and brought in. Apart from its size, the restaurant also boasts a huge collection of miniature bottles. Open from June 1 to July31. Satama, Iisalmi, Finland. +358 17 192 6430.

Elizabeth Meryment

Dinner in the Sky, various locations: If no restaurant seems fancy enough, how about eating at a table dangling from a crane in front of a famous monument? This wacky concept, the brainchild of Belgian marketing whiz David Ghysels, has spread to 28 countries in the past two years, with suspended dinners taking place in cities such as Sofia, London, Las Vegas and Helsinki. Parties can hire the entire table (there's room for up to 22 people), with three chefs preparing the food from a central bar located inside the suspended table. Who knows how they deal with toilet breaks, but it would certainly make for an unusual day out to dine in mid-air at a table hanging over some of the world's most beautiful cities. Not recommended for those with a fear of heights. www.dinnerinthesky.com.

Dans Le Noir, London: An offshoot of a similar restaurant in Paris, this venue in Clerkenwell Green is run by visually impaired staff (except in the kitchen), and introduces diners to a world of complete blackness. Patrons are encouraged to smell and "sense" their meals rather than simply gobble them down, and to not worry about making a mess. It might sound gimmicky, but a meal here can be an enlightening experience as diners rediscover the more neglected senses and make contact with strangers. It also offers an invaluable insight into the daily struggles of those with visual impairment. +44 20 7253 1100;

www.danslenoir.com/london.

El Diablo, Lanzarote, Spain: Lanzarote, the most northerly Canary Island, knows how to host a barbecue. Its Parque Nacional de Timanfaya, accessible only by coach tour or guided walk, is home to the restaurant El Diablo,

Eating out there

overlooking the island's incredibly stark volcanic landscape. At this intriguing restaurant, much of the food is cooked on a barbecue that draws on the dormant volcano Islote de Hilario's oven-like heat. And while the spicy barbecued dishes (think whole spit-roasted pigs and chickens) are delicious, the views of these ancient volcanic plains are said to be otherwordly. Timanfaya National Park, Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain. +34 928 173 105.

Rosa Jackson

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Everyone should apologise during papal visit

Daily News Egypt

May 11, 2009 Monday

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Body

When the Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI would embark on a pilgrimage to Jordan, the occupied West Bank and Israel, senior cardinals mobilized a massive media campaign in anticipation of angry reactions from Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians.

They even went so far as to embed journalists on the ecumenical equivalent of Air Force One. Comprehending the herculean task of climbing Mount Public Relations, the Vatican embedded an Al Jazeera journalist on board, hoping that the channel once unfairly and maliciously associated with Osama bin Laden, could carry the papal message that he was a "pilgrim of peace".

But that has proven to be insufficient.

In Jordan, the first leg of the papal visit, the Muslim Brotherhood railed against the pontiff saying he was overdue for issuing a "public apology" for remarks he made about Islam and the Prophet Mohamed, which many Muslims at the time regarded as offensive and Islamophobic.

In 2006, while delivering a speech at the University of Regensburg in Bavaria, Germany, Benedict quoted a 1391 passage in which a Byzantine emperor had indicated that Islam, an evil and inhuman religion, was spread by the sword.

His remarks were ill-advised as they were self-righteous; during the Middle Ages, millions of people were put to the sword by 'Christ's soldiers' who marched through European villages murdering and pillaging Jews and non-Catholics. In hopes of bringing 'civilization' to the New World, they plowed through the Aztec and Incan jungles, eradicating entire societies in their wake.

After an international outcry, Benedict said he was "deeply sorry for the reactions" to his speech and that the passage did not reflect his personal opinion.

But many in Jordan say this did not come far enough and demanded a public apology.

Everyone should apologise during papal visit

While visiting the King Hussein mosque in Amman, Benedict said he had profound respect for Islam and called on Muslims to safeguard the rights of Christians in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq where the ancient community has been targeted and slaughtered in the war-ravaged country since the US-led invasion.

But Orthodox Christians in the region say the pope has ignored visiting their churches and holy sites and they accuse him of enflaming tensions between their beleaguered community and the Muslims.

Many Muslims in the region would agree. They say that if the Vatican can issue repeated public apologies for the Holocaust, it can do the same for offending Muslims.

Not so fast, say their Jewish cousins. Since World War II, the Jews have been angry with the Vatican for not condemning their slaughter, not intervening, and often offering what they say is implicit support for Nazi atrocities against their communities and a dozen or so other races and minorities.

Jews are also aghast that Benedict will beatify Pope Pius XII who ran the Church during World War II.

The fact that Benedict, a German, was a member of the Hitler Youth brigades, many of which were responsible for beating Jews in the streets of Berlin and Vienna, further enrages their sensitivities.

Benedict's supporters say that membership in the Hitler Youth was mandatory for all German boys.

Like their Muslim Brotherhood counterparts, Israel's Jews say such explanations are not enough.

Earlier this year, the Rabbinate in Israel severed relations with the Vatican after Benedict revoked an ex-communication order on Richard Williamson, a Holocaust-denying bishop, who will also be welcomed back into the fold of the Roman Catholic Church.

Hoping to reach out to Jews, the pontiff will visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem in one of the final stops in his pilgrimage, and in support of Palestinian Christians, visit Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, which the Bible says is the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

He is also expected to visit a Palestinian refugee camp but that act of "solidarity" with Arab suffering comes after he meets with Avigdor Lieberman, a radical rightist and the Israeli foreign minister.

Lieberman and other Israeli leaders were all gung-ho during the Israeli attacks on Gaza in January. Many Palestinians say that if the pope wants to express solidarity with Palestinians, he should visit Gaza, one of the most densely-populated places in the world where civilians continue to survive despite abject poverty and appalling conditions.

He is expected to call on Palestinian Christians to stay in the occupied territories echoing a similar appeal he made to Christians in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

Since 2000, emigration of Christian communities from the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Palestine, has surged. Unfortunate and shameful, as Arab Christians have been as much a fabric of the combined heritage of the Middle East as have Jews, Muslims, Druze and Mandeans.

"Certainly, the contradiction of tensions and divisions between the followers of different religious traditions, sadly, cannot be denied," Benedict said in Jordan. "However, is it not also the case that often it is the ideological manipulation of religion, sometimes for political ends, that is the real catalyst for tension and division?"

The pope has reiterated that his trip is not political.

This is astonishingly naive; one cannot visit the Middle East without expecting to be baptized in the geopolitical conflicts that have ruined this region for centuries.

During the Iran-Iraq war, both sides quoted verses from the Quran to justify attacking the other. Hamas calls itself the Islamic resistance movement; **Hezbollah** says it is the Party of God, although I must confess, I see no rationale

Everyone should apologise during papal visit

why God would require a party; Jews in Israel say God gave them the parched land to make a home in; Christian evangelicals urge massive support for Israel against Muslims; the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Egypt use Islam to justify opposition to their governments.

And recently, revelations that US troops in Afghanistan were proselytizing (similar news emerged in Iraq following the US invasion) do not bode well.

Religion and politics are one and the same in this part of the world; zealous bedfellows. The pope should have anticipated that his trip was as likely to succeed as it was to end in miserable failure.

However, those demanding apologies from the pope cannot claim any moral high ground. Muslims are yet to acknowledge and condemn the horrors of suicide bombings; the stoning, beheading, and setting on fire of young **women** on the mere suspicion that they have engaged in extra-marital and pre-marital sex; and the radical hate speech that is unfortunately uttered from many a pulpit. Jordan is itself not immune to criticism - honor killings continue to plague the social fabric there and the government has yet to seriously prosecute offenders.

Israeli society should also not cast stones, either - the continuing occupation, stealing of Palestinian lands, beating of Arab farmers at the hands of Jewish settlers (many of whom were not even born in the region) is appalling. The siege and wars on Gaza, the war against Lebanon; the list goes on and on.

One can only hope for better odds once Barack Obama addresses the Muslim World from Cairo on June 4.

Alex Gainem is a journalist and commentator who has been writing on Middle Eastern affairs since 2001.

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Islamic radicalism is casting a shadow on Morocco's liberal beacon

Yukon News (Yukon)

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Final Edition

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Byline: Steven Erlanger and Souad Mekhennet, New York Times Service

Dateline: CASABLANCA, Morocco

Body

Morocco has long been viewed as a rare liberalizing, modernizing Islamic state, open to the West and a potential bridge to a calmer Middle East that can live in peace with Israel.

But under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change. Power remains concentrated in the monarchy; democracy seems more demonstrative than real. While insisting that the king is committed to deeper reforms, senior officials speak instead of keeping a proper balance between freedom and social cohesion. Many discuss the threat of extremism in neighbouring Algeria.

Since a major bombing of downtown hotels and shopping areas by Islamic radicals in 2003, and a thwarted attempt at another bombing campaign in 2007, there has been a major and continuing crackdown on those suspected of being extremists here.

In 2003, anyone with a long beard was likely to be arrested. Even now, nearly 1,000 prisoners considered to be Islamic radicals remain in Moroccan jails. Six Islamist politicians (and a reporter from the Hezbollah television station, Al Manar) were jailed recently, accused of complicity in a major terrorist plot. The case was full of irregularities and based mainly on circumstantial evidence, according to a defence lawyer, Abelaziz Nouaydi, and Human Rights Watch.

In a rare interview, Yassine Mansouri, Morocco's chief of intelligence, said that the arrested politicians "used their political activities as a cover for terrorist activities."

"It was not our aim to stop a political party," he said. "There is a law to be followed."

Morocco is threatened, Mansouri said, by two extremes - the conservative Wahhabism spread by Saudi Arabia and the Shiism spread by Iran. "We consider them both aggressive," Mansouri said. "Radical Islam has the wind in its sail, and it remains a threat."

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, especially active in Algeria, remains a major problem for Morocco, Mansouri said. Officials say it is appealing to the young and has re-created a training route to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and it just sponsored a suicide bombing in Mauritania.

Islamic radicalism is casting a shadow on Morocco 's liberal beacon

Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said: "We know where the risks to our stability are. We know kids are listening to this Islamic song, so we have to act quickly."

Mohammed, who celebrated his 10th year on the throne this year, has vowed to help the poor and wipe out the slums, called "bidonvilles," where radicalism is bred. One such slum, Sidi Moumen, where the bombers lived, is being redeveloped. Half of it has already been ripped down, and some 700 families shipped to the outskirts of the city, where they are provided a small plot of land at a cheap price to build new housing.

Hamid al-Gout, 34, was born in Sidi Moumen and built his own hovel here. Nearly everyone has been to prison, he said, and Islamist political groups quietly hold meetings. "Sometimes we talk, 12 or 14 people, about our lives," he said, then added carefully, "But there is no radical thinking here now."

Abdelkhabir Hamma, 36, said that he had been told that if he and his family did not leave by the end of the year, they would be thrown out. He said that while many respect the king, few trust other authorities.

The king sees himself as a modernizer and reformer, having invested heavily in economic development, loosened restraints on the news media, given more rights to women and shed light on some of the worst human-rights abuses of the past. These are remarkable steps in a region dominated by uncompromising examples of state control, like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Because the king, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, is also revered as the "Commander of the Faithful," challenges to Moroccan Islam are taken very seriously.

In March, the king cut diplomatic ties to Iran, accusing Tehran of "intolerable interference in internal affairs" by trying to spread Shiism in Morocco and recruiting Moroccans in Europe, especially in Belgium, to participate in acts of terrorism, Mansouri said.

The king has tried to be more inclusive, traveling for instance to the north of Morocco, where his father had refused to go. The north is also a hotbed of extremism and home for many of the Qaida bombers of Madrid. The king held a traditional ceremony of mutual allegiance, or baiaa, this year in Tetouan and highlighted significant development funds there.

But Morocco's response has also been to slam the brakes on reform, even of the corrupt judiciary and of laws governing women's rights, in order not to inflame conservative and traditional views of Islam, especially in the countryside and among the poor, where extremists fish. For that reason, too, the king has not put Morocco forward as an interlocutor between Israel and the Palestinians, as his father did. The view here is simply that Israel - and other, harder-line Arab states - must move first, before Morocco exposes itself.

The crackdown has also damaged Morocco's human rights record. Muslim prisoners are treated roughly in jail, sometimes sodomized with bottles, said Abdel-Rahim Moutard, a former prisoner himself, his hands broken during interrogations. He runs Ennasir, a rights organization for prisoners. But when they emerge from prison, they get little help, even from the mosques or Ennasir.

"A lot of them are shocked that their country would treat them this way," Moutard said. "After the bottle treatment, every time he goes to the toilet he'll remember, and he will think of vengeance."

The main Islamist party, the Party for Justice and Development, is effectively neutered, but officials want to ensure that it does not combine with the Socialists. So for recent elections for local authorities, the palace created the Authenticity and Modernity Party, run by Fouad Ali El Himma, 46, who as a youth had been chosen, like Mansouri and other boys from varied backgrounds, to study with the young king. Himma is also a former deputy interior minister.

The effort is to provide an alternative - sanctioned informally by the palace - but also to try to mobilize Moroccans, who do not see their participation as having much effect on weak governments, to vote. The new party won, with 22 per cent of the vote on a turnout of 52 per cent; Himma is seen as a future prime minister.

Islamic radicalism is casting a shadow on Morocco 's liberal beacon

In an interview, Himma spoke passionately about the commitment of the king to aid the poor and reform the country. Morocco "has always been a country of transit, and we have found the cement for all this - our multifaceted monarchy," he said.

Critics, however, see the king and his friends as a closed, anti-democratic "monarchy of pals." The king has concentrated much economic power in the palace, argues Aboubakr Jamaï, former editor of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* - becoming Morocco's chief banker, insurer and industrialist. Moves toward a more democratic system, with more power to the parliament, or even a constitutional monarchy, are off the table, certainly for now.

The officials readily concede that poverty, illiteracy and corruption remain serious challenges. The king, they say, has made judicial reform a key goal.

Yet in a nationally televised address on his 10th anniversary as king, Mohammed spoke of poverty and development. But he did not use the word "corruption," and he spoke only once of "social justice," making no mention of judicial reform.

Graphic

Photo: Steven Erlanger, *The New York Times*; Ahmed Gueddou, a labourer, at his hovel in Sidi Moumen, Morocco, in July. Some 700 families there have been shipped to Casablanca's outskirts. ;

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Swat's descent into chaos

Guardian.com

February 4, 2009

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theguardian

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Highlight: Basim Usmani: Taliban militants have taken the Swat valley in Pakistan - why is the country turning a blind eye?

Body

Swat, once a resort for Pakistanis on holiday, has fallen to the Taliban. The battle for Swat began in 2007, while the country was distracted by ongoing operations in the tribally administered northern areas and the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Now, President Zardari's preoccupation with the Mumbai attacks has given the militants in Swat, Tehreek-e-Taliban, a chance to rap up their bombing campaign of girls' schools.

The Tehreek has blow up 170 girls' schools in Swat to date. Oblivious to Swat's descent into chaos, the government has been busy cracking down on Jamat-ud-Dawa, the humanitarian organisation that operates allegedly with militia in Kashmir, in a series of enthusiastic measures to abate Indian pressure post-Mumbai.

A week ago, the government took control of Jamat-ud-Dawa's public schools in their headquarters in Muridke, a small pit-stop city economically dependent on neighboring Lahore, the capital of Punjab. The Dawa's influence is striking: truckers coming through on the "Grand Truck Road" found no cigarettes or chewing tobacco, which have been banned from sale in accordance with the organisation's edicts.

Despite Jamat-ud-Dawa's standing, the protest that accompanied the government's takeover only consisted of peaceful faculty staff and students. There were no death threats issued to prominent politicians in Punjab and administrators of the Dawa's school system and adjacent hospital expressed hope that the change of heads would lead to more financial support from the government.

Interestingly, this is after the government handed over all girls' schools in the Swat valley to the Taliban, after being complicit to the militant's 15 January ban on **female** education. Currently, the "third phase" of military operations in Swat is taking place and live coverage of the military battling the Tehreek-e-Taliban is hopefully going to highlight the urgency of the situation. The military got wise to the media attention and the chiefs of the army, navy and air force held a meeting bright and early on Sunday morning where they praised their "operational readiness".

Sadly, this readiness was nowhere to be found a week ago when the body of Pir Samiullah, a famous Swati and government loyalist who was purportedly encouraged by the military to organise a lashkar (independent army), was killed by the Taliban. After discovering the grave where Samiullah's family secretly buried him, the Taliban exhumed his body and hung it from a major crossing in the area. Before that, the vice-president of the Awami National Party (the party with a majority in the North West Frontier Province, where Swat is located) was kidnapped and killed.

Swat's descent into chaos

Maulana Fazlullah, an influential Taliban spokesman, issued death threats over his pirate radio station that broadcasts throughout the valley, naming 40 politicians, who have mostly fled the valley.

Fazlullah warned of an army of suicide bombers to attack the Pakistani state if military operations continue, something that could find Zardari back-peddalling to the government's position last May, when Asif handed over the valley to the Taliban to enforce their version of sharia law in return for a ceasefire. The Taliban then got organised, set up parallel courts and a brutal police force that has turned Swat into Kabul circa 2001. The spokesman for the military Major General Athar Abbas still blames the Taliban for flubbing up the May ceasefire. Those pesky Talibans, they always surprise you!

This inability to promptly drive the radicals out of Swat is reminiscent of Musharraf's sluggish six-day siege of the Red Mosque. The militants began like those in Swat, with warnings against "un-Islamic" activities such as vending DVDs or being dressed inappropriately. In Islamabad's case, the veiled and stick-wielding Jamia Hafza threatened transgressors with violence. Then they occupied a library, issuing edicts and promising suicide bombing. The government then waited for the group, which included many misguided teenage religious students, to set up a fortress in Lal Masjid, which had been stockpiled with weapons since the 80s by its imam, Maulana Abdul Aziz. When the siege was one day in, the country went into mourning. Musharraf's drawn out Operation Silence gave the media ample time to project the human interest angle of a mosque filled with misguided religious students under fire. If the Swat operation continues to be as fumbling, with the 12,000 troops deployed there continuing to accrue their civilian death count in search of 3,000 fanatics, the Zardari government will be disgraced as Musharraf was. And a war of sentiments is what the fanatics are waging.

The public has not protested Swat yet. The only people who have protested are residents of Swat when children there were killed in crossfire and police opened fire on them. In place of the Taliban in Swat, people in every district of Lahore have protested the Israeli assault on Gaza. Shortly after Gaza was struck, the sectarian Imamia Students Organisation held a 3,000-strong protest down Mall Road, with posters of Hezbollah and Nasrullah on proud display. Some time last week, heavily made-up and westernised college students became a common sight at pro-Palestinian demonstrations, which were taking place multiple times a day. It seems popular to pick up Palestine the way Darfour became the issue of choice for university students three years ago.

After the government took control of Jamat-ud-Dawa's school system in Muridke, the charity office they ran in Lahore was replaced. The new name for what was the Dawa office is Tehreek-e-Tahafouz-e-Qibla-Awal, and instead of collecting donations for Pakistani mujahideen they are asking for money for Gaza. Ostensibly, the office is run by the same people. Somehow Gaza remains a more passionate issue than Swat, which has yet to see any aid offered to its residents. Why are Pakistanis turning a blind eye? Is it because those who are killing Muslims in Swat claim to be Muslims themselves? Or is it because Lahoris are scared to speak up because they're scared of being blown up?

If it's the fear of being blown up that decides what Pakistanis do, then they can expect to do a lot less in the future. Bombs recently blew up outside al-Falah cinema, where Punjabi stage shows are held on Lahore's Mall Road. Before that, the World Performing Arts Festival, three juice stalls and the only Punjabi-language radio station were hit by bombs. And don't think Lahore, or any city in Pakistan, can't be host to a Lal Masjid-esque debacle. In October, CD and DVD vendors in the main electronics market on Hall Road already enforced a ban on the sale of "inappropriate CDs" in accordance with an edict sent from local Islamists.

Lahore isn't any less likely a target for the Taliban than Swat is. Maulana Fazlullah has already promised a new army of suicide bombers - words it looks like he will make good on. Lahoris need to speak out on behalf of Swatis living under the Taliban because they may need someone to speak out for themselves soon.

Load-Date: February 4, 2009

Rappers who speak their minds in the name of peace; Hip-hop music is helping heal the wounds in post-conflict Lebanon. Katherine Butler in Beirut reports THE INDEPENDENT CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2009

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The  **INDEPENDENT**

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Byline: Katherine Butler

Body

John Lennon springs to mind, or perhaps a youth orchestra conducted by Daniel Barenboim. But hip-hop as the music of peace? It sounds implausible that a genre often associated with glorifying violence could help spread the "give peace a chance" message. Lebanese rap, however, is different.

In a small crowded bar in Hamra, West Beirut, an appreciative young audience is enjoying FZ's beatboxing and the rapping of MC Yassin (aka Yeah-Seen). The reconstructed Lebanese capital now has as many live music clubs, fashionable cafes and hedonistic party venues as it used to have bombed-out buildings. But this Beirut crowd is getting entertainment with added political commentary. Yassin's words express disgust at conditions that Palestinian refugees like him must endure in Lebanon. "I lived all of my life dreamin' but the dream is over. Whenever I ask for a job, they tell me, 'No you're Palestinian!'."

"Rap here has nothing to do with gang culture or bling," the event's organiser, MC Edd (aka Edouard Abbas) explains through a haze of cigarette smoke. A "very political emmcee" as he describes himself, Edd was born in French-speaking Ivory Coast but uses Arabic-language rap to attack the sectarian nature of Lebanese society.

It was precisely hip-hop's ability to reach across these sectarian divisions that drew the attention of Permanent Peace Movement (PPM). Founded by students in the aftermath of Lebanon's 15-year civil war and now among international peacebuilders promoted by Peace Direct - one of the charities in this year's Independent Christmas Appeal - the small NGO trains community leaders in defusing tensions and equips people with the skills to articulate grievances without resorting to violence.

One of its most eye-catching initiatives is to recruit the arts for the purposes of reconciliation. Last year PPM persuaded hip hop artists including Yassin and Edd to become unlikely (and sometimes unruly), messengers for non-violence.

Rappers who speak their minds in the name of peace Hip-hop music is helping heal the wounds in post-conflict Lebanon . Katherine Butler in Beirut reports THE IN....

The project resulted in probably the world's first hip-hop album about peace, itself a remarkable achievement, and the recording is now a valuable peace advocacy tool, according to Raffi Feghali, PPM's energetic arts coordinator. Peace Beats includes tracks such as Edd's "Salem Nafseh" (Inner Peace) and another by a group called BeiruTus which goes: "Salam keep your hands up, Salam, don't you ever give up, Salam put your white banners up".

The album's only **female** hip-hopper Chantal Harmouche (who calls herself Venus) said with her contribution "Entifada lal Salem" (Intifada for peace) that she wanted to "wake my people up!", while Zoog, a 19-year-old emcee raps sagely: "I still say it, some day it'll be OK, it's why I don't walk around with a mean old face".

The Lebanese are still recovering from a time when their country embodied the cliché "war-torn". So divided is the nation that there are 18 official religions. Those born after the civil war experienced the horrors of the 2006 Israeli attacks on **Hezbollah** in which nearly 1,000 Lebanese civilians died, and clashes between Sunni and Shia armed groups reached the streets of Beirut the following year. More than 400,000 Palestinian refugees, meanwhile, are barely tolerated and endure a tense relationship with Lebanese nationals.

Religious differences may not be so relevant for the younger, urban generation, Feghali points out. "We all have friends who are Muslims, Christians or Druze. But even the young Lebanese need to be educated about conflict, because it's so easy to be sucked into sectarianism here."

An actor and musician as well as a peace worker, Feghali admits that embracing hip-hoppers as ambassadors for peace was a gamble. "Hip-hop culture has a negative vibe around it. But we felt it could be great way to reach young people," he says.

Getting the artists to work together was not easy. "They could rap about anything as long as it came under the umbrella term 'peace'. We didn't want to censor them but I left it to their conscience that in their lyrics they would represent the values PPM espoused."

Yassin, who is one member of the Palestinian rap duo I-Voice (the I stands for Invincible) struck a more pessimistic note than the organisers expected, because realistically he doesn't expect the Israel-Palestine question to be resolved any time soon. That honesty doesn't worry Feghali. "The language on the album is not what you'd call 'soft', but the rappers learned that peace advocates are not weak; they can be aggressive in spreading a positive message." And the collaboration has influenced everything the artists have done since.

The hip-hoppers are "the pride and joy" of this small NGO's achievements he adds; they received training in conflict resolution, in the use of alternative media such as mobile phone videos, and they continue to help out by sharing their experiences with other cross-community arts groups like painters, poets and actors. Feghali is currently seeking funding for a project to apply the skills of improvised theatre to conflict prevention.

"One of the principles of 'Improv' is that you accept whatever your co-actor says to you with the words: 'Yes, and...'. Another is that each one's priority is to make his co-actor the star. In daily life this could be transformational. It goes way beyond positive thinking," he says.

Such ideas may sound fanciful amid the brutal realities of life in Shatila, a slum for Palestinian refugees in the south of Beirut, where overcrowding is shocking and violence between rival factions routine. But PPM is helping train camp residents in "life skills".

Disputes in the Palestinian camps are often over water, electricity or the dumping of garbage. But they can fatal consequences, Sonia Nakad, PPM coordinator, says. "It goes straight to guns. That is how people deal with things."

One idea she's working on is a scheme to get parents to reject plastic guns as toys. "If two kids are fighting over a ball," Nakad says, "One will pick up his toy gun and 'shoot' his friend because that is what he has seen his Dad or his uncle doing."

Yassin of I-Voice is proof that even in these bleak ghettos awash with real firearms, the young can find peaceful ways to articulate their concerns. He lives among 16,000 others crammed into the Bourj el-Barajneh camp for

Rappers who speak their minds in the name of peace Hip-hop music is helping heal the wounds in post-conflict Lebanon . Katherine Butler in Beirut reports THE IN....

Palestinian refugees near Beirut airport. Overcoming a lack of electricity and money, I-Voice have set up a makeshift recording studio in a converted shack and are starting to enjoy international attention.

Performing solo at the small hip hop event in Hamra, the self-taught Yassin, still just 20, is strikingly confident on stage as he lays into the big international rap stars over-glamorising and commercialising the genre. "Hip-hop is a way of defending yourself," he explains later at the bar. "It came out of the struggle of black people in America, but it's the same for the Palestinians. I want to tell people about what is happening to our people."

"Hip-hop has educated me," he adds proudly. "It's made me read the history of other peoples struggles." Yassin does believe in peace, he insists, "as long as it's peace with justice". And talking is always better than killing. As he raps on the album: "As far as a bullet goes, my voice goes further".

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No longer just about world peace

The Hill

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Byline: By Nanette Light and Katelyn Ferral

Body

Before moving to Washington, Sophia Davis was a cheerleading instructor and thought she might become a wedding planner. Now a staff assistant for Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), Davis has found a way to marry her pompom past with her political present. On July 12, she will compete for the 2009 crown in the Miss District of Columbia pageant. Beauty contests may not have been public-affairs hotbeds in the past, but Miss California Carrie Prejean learned in the Miss USA Pageant earlier this year that times have changed.

Though current political stars like Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin (R) won first runner-up and Miss Congeniality at the 1984 Miss Alaska Pageant and Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) took the Miss San Carlos (Calif.) title in 1977, it now requires a lot more than a melodic flute solo for a woman to feel the weight of a sparkling crown on her head. Luckily for those competing in the Miss D.C. contest - and there are three other congressional staffers besides Davis vying for this year's tiara - Washington's local pageant organization has a rich history in preparing its women to be politically minded beauties, pageant experts and participants say. Prejean demonstrated in April that beauty and politics can make an ugly mix. During the Miss USA pageant, she answered a question from a judge (celebrity gossip blogger Perez Hilton) about same-sex marriage and in doing so ignited both sides of a highly charged social issue. Her star rose and faded as she quickly became a spokeswoman for those against same-sex marriage but shortly thereafter was stripped of her Miss California title. Davis, whose Miss D.C. competition is affiliated with the older Miss America Organization rather than Donald Trump's Miss USA contest, is already bracing for judges to bring up controversial topics. "They purposely ask you questions like that to see how you respond when you're under the line of fire," said Davis, whose talent is a jazz dance routine to the Red Hot Chili Peppers song "Higher Ground." A native of Pickerington, Ohio, Davis has been competing in pageants for the last four years and has held three titles in her home state. In a fluorescent green dress with a crown-shaped crystal brooch pinned to her chest, Davis said it can be a struggle for contestants to craft answers to controversial, politically charged questions that strike a balance between telling the truth and not offending an entire demographic. "[It's] not a matter of right or wrong or who else thinks this. It's a matter of how well you can respond to a question," she said. Katie Robertson, another Miss D.C. 2009 contender and new staff assistant for Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), has competed in 15 pageants and placed in the top 10 in last year's Miss Alabama contest. Robertson, who came to Washington to follow a family tradition of working at the Capitol, said being attuned to current events and politics isn't a new trend in pageantry. She said the Miss D.C. competition focuses more heavily on current events than do other state pageants, since the titleholder is more similar to a diplomat than a hostess. "If you want to do well, you have to have an opinion, and you have to know what's going on. We should do that as citizens anyways. It's not just contingent to pageants," she said. Robertson, who also studies public relations at Georgetown University, weighed her words carefully when addressing the Prejean incident. She said Prejean should have been more tactful toward the innate human need for loving relationships. "But in the long run, you have to say what you believe," said

No longer just about world peace

Robertson, who will sing an opera song as her talent. While she may be a veteran of pageants, Robertson is new to politics. During an informal interview for this article, she gracefully attempted to hijack a couch from Sen. Daniel Akaka's (D-Hawaii) office in the Hart Senate Office Building when she couldn't find an available space in the lobby to field questions. After bypassing an introduction before sitting on the couch, the receptionist stared quizzically at her before asking, "Who are you?" Robertson then expressed her "deepest apologies" and tried to soothe the social faux pas by twice complimenting Hawaii's tropical scenery. As she walked out of the office, barely flustered, she stressed that grasping professionalism and communications skills, like crisis management, is essential when balancing a life in politics and pageantry. Sonya Gavankor, a producer of the Miss D.C. pageant and the 1997 titleholder, said most women who compete for the District's title understand current issues and know how to craft a message. Davis, for example, has spoken to lawmakers on behalf of her platform organization, America's Promise Alliance, a youth foundation started by former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Gavankor said contestants not only have to know current events these days, but also should be working to effect change in the issue areas they choose as their platforms, and Miss D.C. competitors understand that "It's more than charity events and speaking to kids; it's about really passing legislation," said Gavankor, who is also a Miss D.C. board member. Gavankor said diplomatically answering difficult, policy-focused questions under pressure has always been a primary focus of the Miss D.C. pageant. Besides understanding the issues, contestants must offer opinions and eloquently lay out coherent arguments to support them, she said. "We don't train contestants in the sense that we don't want them to be plastic or rehearsed," Gavankor said. But the Miss D.C. crown holder is the one who lives with the highest expectations for political savvy. Miss D.C. 2008 Kate Marie Grinold placed in the top 10 in this year's Miss America contest, and she said she felt the pressure to know her public affairs. "Obviously, politics plays a huge role in D.C. and divides the city in many ways," said Grinold, who is a Washington native. "[Miss D.C. contestants are] held to a higher standard." Miss D.C. 2006 and former congressional staffer Kate Michael expected to be grilled on national politics, particularly because of her work for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. During her questioning at the Miss America pageant, Michael remembered, there came a cavalcade of politically bent questions. She said MSNBC's Chris Matthews, a judge that year, asked her about Hezbollah, terrorism and racial profiling. Randie Levendusky, a staff assistant for Rep. Todd Platts (R-Pa.), and Sherry Langrock, a staff assistant for Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), are also contestants in this year's Miss D.C. pageant but declined to be interviewed, citing office policy. Davis admitted she was wary of informing her congressional office about competing for the Miss D.C. crown because she knows pageants come with a slew of stereotypes. But she said her office has been very supportive and said the two P's, politics and pageants, are intertwined. "Whether you're a politician or a pageant titleholder, you're representing your community," she said, hastily adding that she tries to keep the two separate. "For pageants, it's not supposed to be about your career. It's supposed to be about yourself."

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Accounts of Gaza Killings Raise Furor in Israel

The New York Times

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Byline: By ETHAN BRONNER

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

In the two months since Israel ended its military assault on Gaza, Palestinians and international rights groups have accused it of excessive force and wanton killing in that operation, but the Israeli military has said it followed high ethical standards and took great care to avoid civilian casualties.

Now testimony is emerging from within the ranks of soldiers and officers alleging a permissive attitude toward the killing of civilians and reckless destruction of property that is sure to inflame the domestic and international debate about the army's conduct in Gaza. On Thursday, the military's chief advocate general ordered an investigation into a soldier's account of a sniper killing a woman and her two children who walked too close to a designated no-go area by mistake, and another account of a sharpshooter who killed an elderly woman who came within 100 yards of a commandeered house.

When asked why that elderly woman was killed, a squad commander was quoted as saying: "What's great about Gaza -- you see a person on a path, he doesn't have to be armed, you can simply shoot him. In our case it was an old woman on whom I did not see any weapon when I looked. The order was to take down the person, this woman, the minute you see her. There are always warnings, there is always the saying, 'Maybe he's a terrorist.' What I felt was, there was a lot of thirst for blood."

The testimonies by soldiers, leaked to the newspapers Maariv and Haaretz, appeared in a journal published by a military preparatory course at the Oranim Academic College in the northern town of Tivon. The newspapers promised to release more such anecdotal accounts on Friday, without saying how many.

The academy's director, Dany Zamir, told Israel Radio, "Those were very harsh testimonies about unjustified shooting of civilians and destruction of property that conveyed an atmosphere in which one feels entitled to use unrestricted force against Palestinians."

The revelations caused an immediate uproar here, with some soldiers and reservists saying they did not recognize the stories being told as accurate.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak told Israel Radio that he believed such incidents to be exceptions, adding, "The Israeli Army is the most moral in the world, and I know what I'm talking about because I know what took place in the former Yugoslavia, in Iraq."

Accounts of Gaza Killings Raise Furor in Israel

It was clear that Mr. Zamir felt that his concerns, which he had raised earlier in a letter to the military chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, had not been taken seriously and that was why he published the testimonies.

Since the war ended, others have raised similar questions, generating a heated debate within military circles.

"According to the code, a soldier has to do his utmost to avoid civilian casualties and that involves taking some risk," said Moshe Halbertal, a Jewish philosophy professor at Hebrew University who, along with three others, rewrote the military ethics code eight years ago. "That is the question we have to struggle with. From the testimonies of these soldiers, it sounds like they didn't practice this norm."

Amir Marmor, a 33-year-old history graduate student in Jerusalem and a military reservist, said in an interview with The New York Times that he was stunned to discover the way civilian casualties were discussed in training discussions before his tank unit entered Gaza in January. "Shoot and don't worry about the consequences," was the message from the top commanders, he said. Speaking of a lieutenant colonel who briefed the troops, Mr. Marmor said, "His whole demeanor was extremely gung ho. This is very, very different from my usual experience. I have been doing reserve duty for 12 years, and it was always an issue how to avoid causing civilian injuries. He said in this operation we are not taking any chances. Morality aside, we have to do our job. We will cry about it later."

Some 1,300 people were killed in the Gaza war, but how many of them were combatants remains a matter of controversy. Israel lost about 10 soldiers in Gaza, some because of fire by its own forces.

The Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights, which has documented the Gaza deaths, says that about two-thirds of the 1,300 were civilians, among them 121 women and 288 children, which it defines as anyone 18 and younger.

But the Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel said Thursday that it had analyzed the Palestinian center's names and found that some that it listed as civilians were identified as combatants on Hamas-related Web sites. Some listed as children were 17-year-olds with guns, it said, adding that more than 500 of those described by the center as civilians it considered "unknowns" because most were men of combat age whose activities could not be easily traced.

It argued that the proportion of women and children among the dead was relatively low, showing that Israel had not killed in an indiscriminate fashion.

Gur Rosenblat, a company commander during the Gaza operation, said in an interview: "To say that people were killed without justification -- the opposite was true. We put soldiers at risk to prevent harming their civilians."

Israeli experts noted that Palestinian women had served as suicide bombers in the past so that soldiers in Gaza did not always know when a woman was approaching whether she was a threat.

One of the soldiers' testimonies involved the killing of a family. The soldier said: "We had taken over the house, and the family was released and told to go right. A mother and two children got confused and went left. The sniper on the roof wasn't told that this was O.K. and that he shouldn't shoot. You can say he just did what he was told."

Much of what happened in Gaza, some military experts said, was in reaction to the way events unfolded in the second Lebanon war in 2006 when Hezbollah caused many Israeli casualties.

In that war, when Israeli soldiers took over a house, they sometimes found themselves shot at from a house next door. The result was that in Gaza, many houses next to those commandeered by troops were destroyed to avoid that risk.

Still, Israeli ethicists say they are troubled by what they have heard.

"Unfortunately, I think that selective use of killing civilians has been very much on the agenda for fighting terror," said Yaron Ezrahi, a political scientist at Hebrew University who has been lecturing at defense colleges. "The army

Accounts of Gaza Killings Raise Furor in Israel

believes that a weak spot of Israeli deterrence is its strong commitment not to kill civilians, and there has grown the sense that it might have to temporarily overcome that weakness in order to restore deterrence."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTO: An elementary school in the Gaza strip that was heavily damaged during the Israeli bombardment that ended two months ago.(PHOTOGRAPH BY TYLER HICKS/THE NEW YORK TIMES)(pg. A9)

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Grim testimony on Israeli assault; Soldiers report killing of unarmed civilians in Gaza

The International Herald Tribune

March 20, 2009 Friday

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Byline: Ethan Bronner - The New York Times Media Group

Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

Isabel Kershner contributed reporting.

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Now testimony is emerging from within the ranks of soldiers and officers regarding a permissive attitude toward the killing of civilians and wanton destruction of property that is sure to inflame the domestic and international debate about the army's conduct.

On Thursday, the military's chief advocate general ordered an investigation into one soldier's account of a sniper killing a woman and her two children who by mistake walked too close to a designated no-go area, and another account of a sniper who killed an elderly woman who came within about 100 meters of a house commandeered by Israeli soldiers.

When asked why that woman was killed, a squad commander was quoted as saying: "What's great about Gaza, you see a person on a path, he doesn't have to be armed, you can simply shoot him. In our case it was an old woman on whom I did not see any weapon when I looked. The order was to take down the person, this woman, the minute you see her. There are always warnings, there is always the saying, 'Maybe he's a terrorist.' What I felt was, there was a lot of thirst for blood."

The testimony by soldiers, leaked to the newspapers Ma'ariv and Haaretz, which promised to release more such anecdotal accounts on Friday, appeared in a journal published by the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military academy in the northern town of Tivon. The academy's director, Dany Zamir, said in an interview on Israel Radio: "Those were very harsh testimonies about unjustified shooting of civilians and destruction of property that conveyed an atmosphere in which one feels entitled to use unrestricted force against Palestinians."

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Grim testimony on Israeli assault Soldiers report killing of unarmed civilians in Gaza

It was clear that Mr. Zamir felt his concerns, which he had raised earlier in a letter to the military chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, had not been taken seriously and that was why he published the testimony, which was given on Feb. 13.

Since the war ended, others have raised similar questions, generating a heated debate within military circles.

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Amir Marmor, 33, a history graduate student in Jerusalem and a military reservist, said in an interview that he was stunned in training discussions in the week before his tank unit entered Gaza in January at the way civilian casualties were discussed. "Shoot and don't worry about the consequences" was the message from the top commanders, he said.

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One of the incidents that the military institute testimonies highlighted was of the killing of a family.

"We had taken over the house and the family was released and told to go right," a soldier said. "A mother and two children got confused and went left. The sniper on the roof wasn't told that this was O.K. and that he shouldn't shoot. You can say he just did what he was told. He was told not to let anyone approach the left flank, and he shot at them."

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Grim testimony on Israeli assault Soldiers report killing of unarmed civilians in Gaza

soldiers took over a house, they sometimes found themselves shot from a house next door. The result was that in Gaza many houses next to those commandeered by troops were destroyed to avoid that risk.

Israeli soldiers were also afraid of being taken hostage like their colleague Gilad Shalit, who remains in Hamas hands. Hamas repeatedly issued blood-curdling threats about how prepared it was with terrible surprises for any Israeli soldiers who entered Gaza.

But Israeli ethicists said they were troubled by what they have heard.

"Unfortunately, I think that selective use of killing civilians has been very much on the agenda for fighting terror," said Yaron Ezrahi, a political scientist at Hebrew University. "The army believes that a weak spot of Israeli deterrence is its strong commitment not to kill civilians, and there has grown the sense that it might have to temporarily overcome that weakness in order to restore deterrence."

Amos Harel, defense correspondent for Haaretz, wrote in an analysis accompanying some of the testimony: "Underneath Israeli leaders who promise to teach Hamas a lesson and generals who adopt a policy of 'zero risks' and rabbis who preach about a war of religious obligation, there are the fighters who go deep into the built-up areas of Gaza. Their action is not divorced from everything they have heard around them - it is a direct continuation of it."

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End of Document

Obama reaches out to the Islamic world

Pretoria News (South Africa)

April 15, 2009 Wednesday

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 8

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Body

THE START of the Iraq war in 2003 marked a crucial break between the US and almost all the states of the region. "None of Iraq's neighbours, absolutely none, was pleased by the American occupation of Iraq," says the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari. Long-term US allies like Turkey astonished the White House by refusing to allow US troops to use its territory to invade Iraq.

US President Barack Obama, who made his first official visit to the country last week, is now trying to disengage from Iraq without appearing to scuttle, or leave anarchy behind. He is trying to win back old allies, and, as he made clear in a speech in Ankara last Monday, to end the confrontation between the US and Islam which was his predecessor George Bush's legacy.

It is not easy for Obama to reverse the tide of anti-Americanism or bring to an end the wars which Bush began. For all the Iraqi government's claim that life is returning to normal in Baghdad, the last few days have seen a crescendo of violence. The day before Obama arrived, six bombs exploded in Baghdad, killing 37 people.

And as much as Obama would like to treat the Iraq war as ancient history, the US is still struggling to extricate itself. The very fact that the Democratic president had to arrive in Iraq by surprise, as Bush and Tony Blair invariably did for security reasons, shows the conflict is refusing to go away.

The Iraqi prime minister and president remain holed up in the Green Zone most of the time. Obama could not fly into the Green Zone by helicopter because of bad weather, but the airport road is still unsafe and Baghdad remains one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

The Iraqi political landscape, too, was permanently altered by the US invasion and it will be difficult to create a stable Iraqi state which does not depend on the US. Opinion polls in Iraq show that most Iraqis believe it is the US, and not their own government, which is in control of their country.

One change which is to Obama's advantage is that the American media has largely stopped reporting the conflict, because they no longer have the money to do so, and a majority of Americans think the war has been won. But the danger for the president is that if there is a fresh explosion in Iraq, he may be blamed for throwing away a victory that was won by his predecessor.

The rhetoric with which the US conducts its diplomacy is easier to change than facts on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan. Obama's speech to the Turkish parliament in Ankara was a carefully judged bid to reassure the Muslim world that the US is not at war with Islam.

Obama reaches out to the Islamic world

Everything he said was in sharp contrast to Bush's bellicose threats post-9/11 about launching a "crusade" and to the rhetoric of neo-conservatives attacking "Islamofascism", or claiming that there was a "clash of civilisations".

The leaders of states with Muslim majorities appreciate the different tone of US pronouncements, but privately wonder how far Obama will be able to introduce real change.

Turkish students at a meeting with Obama in Istanbul voiced scepticism that American actions in future would be much different from what they were under Bush. Reasonably enough, Obama replied that he should be given time and "moving the ship of state is a slow process".

But he also cited the US withdrawal from Iraq as a sign that he would match actions to words.

Istanbul, on the boundaries of Europe and Asia, was a good place for the US leader to declare a more conciliatory attitude towards Islam. The city is filled with grandiose monuments to Christianity and Islam, though religious tolerance was more in evidence under the Ottoman empire than since the foundation of the modern Turkish state in 1923.

But the reality is that secularism is dying away in Turkey's rural hinterland and is on the retreat even in Istanbul itself. Butchers selling pork are few compared to 20 years ago.

Obtaining alcohol is quietly being made more difficult, except for foreign tourists, by high taxes on wine and expensive liquor licences for restaurants.

The old middle class, particularly in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, may be resolute in their defence of the secular state, but the so-called "Anatolian Tigers" - the new companies which have led Turkey's spectacular economic growth - are generally owned and run by more conservative families where the women wear the veil.

"Socially, Turkey is becoming far more Islamic," said one expert on Turkey, "although the ruling Justice and Development Party is moving cautiously."

Obama's effort to make a U-turn in American policy towards the Islamic world will ultimately depend on how far he changes US policy towards Israel and the Palestinians, the occupation of Iraq, the confrontation with Iran and Syria and the war in Afghanistan.

The Iranians, for instance, note that despite Obama's friendlier approach to them, the US official in Washington in charge of implementing sanctions against them is a hold-over from the Bush administration.

The American confrontation with Islam after 9/11 always had more to do with opposition to foreign intervention and occupation than it did with cultural differences; the most ideologically religious Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, supported the US and it is doubtful how far al-Qaeda fighters were motivated primarily by religious fanaticism.

The chief US interrogator in Iraq, Major Matthew Alexander, who is credited with finding out the location of the al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, says that during 1 300 interrogations he supervised, he came across only one true ideologue. He is quoted as saying: "I listened time and time again to foreign fighters and Sunni Iraqis state that the No 1 reason they had decided to pick up arms and join al-Qaeda was the abuses at Abu Ghraib and the authorised torture and abuse at Guantanamo Bay."

This diagnosis by Alexander is confirmed by the history of Islamic fundamentalism across the Muslim world over the past 30 years.

In Egypt, the nationalism of then president Gamal Abdel Nasser was discredited by humiliating defeat in the 1967 war with Israel.

In Iraq, for all his military bravado, Saddam Hussein was a notably disastrous military leader.

Obama reaches out to the Islamic world

All the military regimes espousing nationalism and secularism in the Arab world began, or ended up, turning into corrupt and brutal autocracies.

In contrast, political Islam has been able to go some way towards delivering its promises of defending the community.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah guerrillas were able to successfully harass Israeli forces in the 1990s where Yasser Arafat's commanders had abandoned their men and fled.

In Gaza this year, Hamas was able to portray itself as the one Palestinian movement committed to resisting Israel.

In Iraq, al-Qaeda got nowhere until it could present itself as the opposition to the US occupation and as an ally, though a supremely bigoted and murderous one, of Iraqi nationalism.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban has the advantage of fighting against foreign occupation.

Secularism in the Arab world and in Afghanistan, on the other hand, has the problem that it is seen as being at the service of foreign intervention.

It is why secularism and nationalism are ultimately stronger in Turkey than they were in almost all other Islamic countries.

Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish nationalists successfully defended the Turkish heartlands from foreign attack between 1915 and 1922. This gave secularism and nationalism a credibility and a popularity in Turkey which they never had in Iraq, Egypt or Syria.

Obama's aim of ending the confrontation between the US and the Muslim world is both easier and more difficult than it looks.

It is easier because the confrontation is not primarily over religion or clashing cultures.

But the confrontation is over real issues such as the fate of the Palestinians, the future of Iraq and the control of Afghanistan. And even if Obama wanted to change the US political relationship with Israel, it is not clear that he has any more political strength at home than Bush had to do so. If these concrete issues are not resolved, then America's relationship with the Muslim world may remain as confrontational and difficult as it was under Bush. - The Independent

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Obama gets serious on Middle East

Weekend Australian

August 1, 2009 Saturday

2 - All-round First Edition

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Byline: GREG SHERIDAN FOREIGN EDITOR

Body

CAN Barack Obama really bring peace to the Middle East? In the past week Obama sent his Defence Secretary Robert Gates, National Security Adviser Jim Jones and Middle East envoys George Mitchell and Dennis Ross to Israel and other points in the Middle East. These visits may mark something of a turning point. They suggest Obama is moving beyond his role of psychotherapist to the Arab world and getting down to business.

I still don't think Obama will bring peace to the Middle East, but a few interesting things are going to happen in the next few months.

The Americans were notionally in Israel to discuss a freeze on Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. But they also discussed Iran and Syria. They took a friendly and engaging tone with Israel. They know they are not going to get a complete freeze on the settlements, especially in East Jerusalem. They may get a temporary freeze that starts after existing building work is completed.

But the Americans are coming to realise they have oversold the settlements issue. It's not the roadblock to Israeli-Palestinian peace or the key to the Middle East. At most, it's a symbol. Obama is moving beyond symbols.

Here are three big dynamic-changers we'll get in the Middle East in the next few months.

* Decision time looms regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions. Obama has set a new tough deadline of September for a serious response to dialogue offer. The Iranian regime is weakened by the election it stole, but also enraged, savage, fearful and full of spite. It's not going to see its domestic humiliation replicated by the international humiliation of giving in to the Americans and Israelis on nukes. That means there will be tough sanctions against it or a military strike. Either way, it will mark a tough decision and the end of Obama's attempted universal love-in with all of America's enemies. Or, if the US response is meaningless, it will mark the beginning of a steep decline in Obama's international credibility.

* The international public face of the Israeli government will become friendlier. Controversial Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman will be indicted on corruption charges. He will then leave the government. Whether unfairly or not, he is a visual roadblock to a better look for Israel. With the Iran issue up for decision, Kadima leader Tzipi Livni, or some big faction of her party, may join Benjamin Netanyahu's government. This will make it easier for Obama to love the Israelis.

Obama gets serious on Middle East

* The emphasis will switch from the Israel-Palestinian track to the Israel-Syria track for possible peace talks. In some ways now is a good time to pursue Palestinian peace negotiations because all the Arab nations, except Syria, are scared of Iran and therefore would help the US. But in reality talk of a Palestinian peace is meaningless right now. Nearly half the Palestinian population is controlled by the ultra-rejectionist, terrorist death cult Hamas.

More important, perhaps, all of Israel's neighbours, including the Palestinians, are fed a diet of anti-Semitic propaganda and hate material. A permanent peace with Israel means an end to all territorial claims against Israel and the acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state. For the moment, that's impossible.

But the US has real business to transact with Syria. Above all it wants Syria not to interfere with Iraq. Syria-Israel negotiations could provide cover for the US's business with Damascus. Syria's motivation is that its economy is a basket case. It wants an end to US sanctions. But a comprehensive Israel-Syria peace deal is unlikely. The minority Alawite tribe that rules Syria bases its entire legitimacy and justifies its emergency rule (in place these many decades) by its conflict with Israel. One incentive for Syria to do a peace deal is to take back the Golan Heights, but these are of little significance in themselves to Syria and their possession by Israel gives Damascus all the benefits of a permanent complaint. But look at the negatives. Israel will not give back the Golan Heights just for a peace agreement with Syria.

There would need to be a strategic realignment. Damascus would have to stop supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, and would need to break with Iran. But Syria exerts regional influence only through its terror proxies and alliance with Tehran. Giving these levers of influence away is unlikely to look like a bargain to Damascus.

But engaging in a lengthy flirtation, a courtship destined never to be consummated, which allows all manner of minor functional co-operation, with reciprocal benefits, to take place -- that is a game Damascus understands.

Why do I say Obama has cast himself as psychotherapist to the Arab world? A key point of psychotherapy is for the therapist to enter with empathy into the world of the patient, even if that world is delusional.

You may remember the classic Cary Grant comedy, *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Cousin Teddy thought he was Teddy Roosevelt. Asking him to leave the room because he was embarrassing the guests never worked. Telling him he was needed in the White House in his bedroom upstairs produced instant results. To get him to co-operate, Grant had to enter his fantasy. This has been Obama's approach to the Arab world. Sadly, there are no Arab democracies (with the partial exception of Lebanon). The region's political culture is steeped in paranoia, conspiracy theories and a licence to blame Israel for everything.

In the soothing, therapeutic overtures Obama has made to the Arab world he has ambiguously embraced a good portion of the culture's irrationality. In his Cairo speech (which contained many good things) he repeatedly cited the inability, yes, inability, of Muslim women to wear the hijab as a terrible human rights violation and disrespect to Islam. But that is not remotely reality. In Saudi Arabia, in Iran for that matter, it is a serious crime with severe punishments for a woman not to wear the hijab. Hardly anywhere in the world (French public schools? Some Turkish offices?) are Muslim women prevented from wearing the hijab.

Thus, to enter into the Arab fantasy, Obama rebukes an imaginary world of conspiracies.

His whole riff on the Palestinians' situation being intolerable ignores far worse situations for Muslims in Chechnya or Xinjiang, or indeed for religious minorities, such as the Bahais in Muslim Iran. Making the Palestinian issue the central question of geopolitics validates a view of the world that exists only in minds untroubled by reality.

Similarly, Obama set the creation and sustenance of Israel entirely in the context of the European Holocaust. Yet Britain had been committed to a Jewish state in Israel decades before World War II. The Zionist movement had seen hundreds of thousands of Jews settle in Palestine before the war. The Jewish connection to Israel is undeniable. And Israel has a modern identity as the Middle East's only democracy. While Obama always speaks with sympathy and deep emotion about the Holocaust (a practice that endears him to American Jews), by casting

Obama gets serious on Middle East

Israel only within the context of the Holocaust he is again semi-validating a key line of Arab paranoia: that they are paying for the sins of the Europeans in the war.

Finally, Obama's obsession with settlements in the West Bank and even in East Jerusalem, as if the entire Middle East, no, the entire Muslim world, hinged on this minor matter, is in the deepest sense irrational.

All of this presumably served Obama's purpose of establishing a therapeutic bond between himself and the Muslim and Arab world. But it is time to move back to rationality. Entering a patient's fantasy life can be a helpful therapeutic tool, but it confuses other people who overhear you.

As he moves to a compromise with Israel on settlements, gets down to business with Syria and ultimately confronts Iran, Obama will sound less and less like a therapist and more and more like a President. Good thing, too.

Load-Date: August 1, 2009

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Islamic Radicalism Is Casting a Shadow on Morocco's Liberal Beacon

The New York Times

August 27, 2009 Thursday

Late Edition - Final

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Section: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; Pg. 4

Length: 1238 words

Byline: By STEVEN ERLANGER and SOUAD MEKHENNET

Dateline: CASABLANCA, Morocco

Body

Morocco has long been viewed as a rare liberalizing, modernizing Islamic state, open to the West and a potential bridge to a calmer Middle East that can live in peace with Israel.

But under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change. Power remains concentrated in the monarchy; democracy seems more demonstrative than real. While insisting that the king is committed to deeper reforms, senior officials speak instead of keeping a proper balance between freedom and social cohesion. Many discuss the threat of extremism in neighboring Algeria.

Since a major bombing of downtown hotels and shopping areas by Islamic radicals in 2003, and a thwarted attempt at another bombing campaign in 2007, there has been a major and continuing crackdown on those suspected of being extremists here.

In 2003, anyone with a long beard was likely to be arrested. Even now, nearly 1,000 prisoners considered to be Islamic radicals remain in Moroccan jails. Six Islamist politicians (and a reporter from the Hezbollah television station, Al Manar) were jailed recently, accused of complicity in a major terrorist plot. The case was full of irregularities and based mainly on circumstantial evidence, according to a defense lawyer, Abelaziz Nouaydi, and Human Rights Watch.

In a rare interview, Yassine Mansouri, Morocco's chief of intelligence, said that the arrested politicians "used their political activities as a cover for terrorist activities."

"It was not our aim to stop a political party," he said. "There is a law to be followed."

Morocco is threatened, Mr. Mansouri said, by two extremes -- the conservative Wahhabism spread by Saudi Arabia and the Shiism spread by Iran. "We consider them both aggressive," Mr. Mansouri said. "Radical Islam has the wind in its sail, and it remains a threat."

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, especially active in Algeria, remains a major problem for Morocco, Mr. Mansouri said. Officials say it is appealing to the young and has recreated a training route to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and it just sponsored a suicide bombing in Mauritania.

Islamic Radicalism Is Casting a Shadow on Morocco 's Liberal Beacon

Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said: "We know where the risks to our stability are. We know kids are listening to this Islamic song, so we have to act quickly."

King Mohammed, who celebrated his 10th year on the throne this year, has vowed to help the poor and wipe out the slums, called "bidonvilles," where radicalism is bred. One such slum, Sidi Moumen, where the bombers lived, is being redeveloped. Half of it has already been ripped down, and some 700 families shipped to the outskirts of the city, where they are provided a small plot of land at a cheap price to build new housing.

Hamid al-Gout, 34, was born in Sidi Moumen and built his own hovel here. Nearly everyone has been to prison, he said, and Islamist political groups quietly hold meetings. "Sometimes we talk, 12 or 14 people, about our lives," he said, then added carefully, "But there is no radical thinking here now."

Abdelkhabir Hamma, 36, said that he had been told that if he and his family did not leave by the end of the year, they would be thrown out. He said that while many respect the king, few trust other authorities.

The king sees himself as a modernizer and reformer, having invested heavily in economic development, loosened restraints on the news media, given more rights to women and shed light on some of the worst human-rights abuses of the past. These are remarkable steps in a region dominated by uncompromising examples of state control, like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

Because the king, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, is also revered as the "Commander of the Faithful," challenges to Moroccan Islam are taken very seriously.

In March, the king cut diplomatic ties to Iran, accusing Tehran of "intolerable interference in internal affairs" by trying to spread Shiism in Morocco and recruiting Moroccans in Europe, especially in Belgium, to participate in acts of terrorism, Mr. Mansouri said.

The king has tried to be more inclusive, traveling for instance to the north of Morocco, where his father had refused to go. The north is also a hotbed of extremism and home for many of the Qaeda bombers of Madrid. The king held a traditional ceremony of mutual allegiance, or baiaa, this year in Tetouan and highlighted significant development funds there.

But Morocco's response has also been to slam the brakes on reform, even of the corrupt judiciary and of laws governing women's rights, in order not to inflame conservative and traditional views of Islam, especially in the countryside and among the poor, where extremists fish. For that reason, too, the king has not put Morocco forward as an interlocutor between Israel and the Palestinians, as his father did. The view here is simply that Israel -- and other, harder-line Arab states -- must move first, before Morocco exposes itself.

The crackdown has also damaged Morocco's human rights record. Muslim prisoners are treated roughly in jail, sometimes sodomized with bottles, said Abdel-Rahim Moutard, a former prisoner himself, his hands broken during interrogations. He runs Ennasir, a rights organization for prisoners. But when they emerge from prison, they get little help, even from the mosques or Ennasir.

"A lot of them are shocked that their country would treat them this way," Mr. Moutard said. "After the bottle treatment, every time he goes to the toilet he'll remember, and he will think of vengeance."

The main Islamist party, the Party for Justice and Development, is effectively neutered, but officials want to ensure that it does not combine with the Socialists. So for recent elections for local authorities, the palace created the Authenticity and Modernity Party, run by Fouad Ali El Himma, 46, who as a youth had been chosen, like Mr. Mansouri and other boys from varied backgrounds, to study with the young king. Mr. Himma is also a former deputy interior minister.

The effort is to provide an alternative -- sanctioned informally by the palace -- but also to try to mobilize Moroccans, who do not see their participation as having much effect on weak governments, to vote. The new party won, with 22 percent of the vote on a turnout of 52 percent; Mr. Himma is seen as a future prime minister.

Islamic Radicalism Is Casting a Shadow on Morocco 's Liberal Beacon

In an interview, Mr. Himma spoke passionately about the commitment of the king to aid the poor and reform the country. Morocco "has always been a country of transit, and we have found the cement for all this -- our multifaceted monarchy," he said.

Critics, however, see the king and his friends as a closed, anti-democratic "monarchy of pals." The king has concentrated much economic power in the palace, argues Aboubakr Jamaï, former editor of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* -- becoming Morocco's chief banker, insurer and industrialist. Moves toward a more democratic system, with more power to the Parliament, or even a constitutional monarchy, are off the table, certainly for now.

The officials readily concede that poverty, illiteracy and corruption remain serious challenges. The king, they say, has made judicial reform a key goal.

Yet in a nationally televised address on his 10th anniversary as king, Mohammed VI spoke of poverty and development. But he did not use the word "corruption," and he spoke only once of "social justice," making no mention of judicial reform.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTOS: Sidi Moumen, a slum in Casablanca where bombers from attacks in 2003 and 2007 had lived, is being redeveloped. Half of it has already been ripped down. (PHOTOGRAPH BY JEHAD NGA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

King Mohammed VI, on horse, held a ceremony of mutual allegiance in July in Tetouan in the north, a hotbed of extremism. (PHOTOGRAPH BY ROYAL PALACE, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS) (pg.A4)

Ahmed Gueddou, a laborer, at his hovel in Sidi Moumen. About 700 families there have been shipped to Casablanca's outskirts. (PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN ERLANGER/THE NEW YORK TIMES)(pg.A11)

Load-Date: August 27, 2009

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Yearning for the Golan Heights: why Syria wants it back; The disputed territory is key to the broader US goal of Arab-Israeli peace. On Monday, Washington hosted the first high-ranking Syrian official in five years.

The Christian Science Monitor

September 28, 2009 Monday

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Byline: Julien Barnes-Dacey Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Body

The US demonstrated its commitment to reengage Syria as a partner for Middle East peace Monday, advancing a process that some Arab countries had declared dead in recent weeks. At Washington's invitation - the first one extended to a high-ranking Syrian official in five years - Deputy Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad came to town to meet US officials. Syria's cooperation is crucial to the chief goal of President Obama's Middle East policy: Arab-Israeli peace. With ties to three Israeli enemies - Iran, and the militant groups *Hezbollah* and Hamas - Syria says it can moderate the threats against the Jewish state and thus pave the way for reciprocal Israeli concessions to the Palestinians and their Arab allies. In return, Syria wants one thing: the Golan Heights.

Occupied by Israel since the 1967 war, the fertile territory on the Sea of Galilee's western shores is prized by both countries for its agriculture, high ground that serves as a military lookout, and abundant water; about one-third of Israel's fresh water supply currently comes from the Golan. Syria insists on the return of the full territory in exchange for peace. "We do want to get the Golan back on a silver platter," said Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem this summer. "Let's face it - it's our land and our right to have it back is the most normal thing in the world." Yet even as the Obama administration pushes for a renewal of peace talks between Syria and Israel, the Golan's original Syrian inhabitants worry that their situation is being neglected and are striving to instill in their children the same longing they feel for their ancestral land. While intermittent peace talks between Syria and Israel as well as international attention have long focused on the status of final-border boundaries, control over water, and security issues, little attention is given to the displaced Golanese population. In 1967 approximately 150,000 Syrians fled the Golan into mainland Syria as Israel began its occupation of the territory. Now, taking descendants into account, that number could be as high as half a million. If a peace deal is eventually reached, the Syrian government says that many of the Golanese refugees will return to the territory - a prospect that Omar Ali has been yearning for since he fled as a 9-year-old in 1967. 'Our children will not forget' Surrounded by Arab enemies that it believed were readying for war against the Jewish state, Israel had launched a preemptive strike against its neighbors. Amid the scrum of Syrians rushing to escape oncoming Israeli forces, young Omar lost his family. "When we left we didn't think we were fleeing. We thought it was just for a few days and so we only took a few simple things with us," recalls Mr. Ali, who was reunited with his parents after three days. "We should never have left." Forty-two years later, Ali has never returned to his home in the village of Rawiye. Instead he lives in a Damascus suburb known as Black Stone, one of the main concentrations of Golanese refugees. Today, most Golanese refugees live in the Syrian capital, in fact, spread throughout various suburbs. While fully integrated into Syrian society, they congregate together keeping alive old Golanese traditions and instilling in their young a longing to return. "My house in my village calls me back, the dream obsesses me," says Ali, adding that he purchased a second house on the Syrian border town of Quneitra just so he could gaze over at the Golan whenever he wanted. "Homelessness is for all

Yearning for the Golan Heights: why Syria wants it back The disputed territory is key to the broader US goal of Arab- Israeli peace. On Monday, Washington hosts....

generations. Our children will not forget." Like many of those who fled, Ali's family was ripped apart by the occupation. His uncles remained in the territory, and he and his parents never saw them again. With no direct phone lines existing between Israel and Syria, families would in the past meet on the border and use megaphones to communicate. Today, they talk using Skype, an Internet phone service. 328 feet short of a peace deal in 2000. Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis have moved in. Israel has constructed 32 settlements on the territory it annexed in 1981 - in violation of United Nations Resolution 242, which considers the Golan part of Israel's occupied territories. The Golan now has a population of 38,000, comprising about 21,000 Arabs loyal to Syria and 17,000 Jews. The territory has become a popular Israeli tourist destination and home to a thriving agricultural sector as well as military bases. Peace negotiations between the two sides have been sporadic over the past decades. In 2000, a US-brokered peace agreement was nearly reached but talks collapsed after Syria insisted on a return to the entire pre-1967 war border, which included 328 feet Israel would not give up. Turkish-mediated indirect peace talks broke up last December in protest over Israel's military offensive on Gaza. While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expressed a willingness to restart talks, he is opposed to a complete withdrawal from the Golan. In July Uzi Arad, a close aide to Mr. Netanyahu, told Israel's Haaretz newspaper that "if there is a territorial compromise, it is one that still leaves Israel on the Golan Heights and deep into the Golan Heights." But Syria has never given up its claim on the territory and says its full return is the only basis for peace with Israel. Mr. Mekdad was expected to press this argument while meeting with US officials Monday. If a peace deal is eventually concluded, Israel has indicated it would accept the return of Golan refugees so long as they do not drain water supplies from the Jewish state. Few can cross into the Golan. Meanwhile, Syria says it's doing everything it can to maintain ties with the Arabs still in the Golan Heights, most of whom have rejected Israeli citizenship and pledge allegiance to Damascus, says Methat Saleh, director of the Syrian government's Bureau of Golan Affairs. Mr. Saleh, who named his son Golan and spent 12 years in an Israeli prison for resistance activities, explained in a recent interview that Syria provides financial support to some living in the Golan, while trying to help the population maintain their Syrian cultural identity. The country's domestic television channel maintains a bureau in the territory and inhabitants can access Syrian TV. Yet with the border firmly closed, direct contact is almost impossible. Among the few who can cross are a group of students whom the two governments allow to study at Damascus University. The program was initiated in 1991 and there are currently about 250 students from the Golan studying in Syria. According to one who didn't want to reveal his name, the program strengthens the students to continue "daily mental resistance." "As long as we don't forget that we're Syrian and as long as we're speaking Arabic in our homes, [the Israelis] won't destroy our Arab identity," says the student, who also speaks fluent Hebrew and has spent past summers employed as a construction worker in Tel Aviv. The only others allowed across this border are Druze religious figures who make an annual pilgrimage to Syria, as well as a limited number of Syrian women who are permitted to marry men in the Golan but are then barred from returning. Despite these hardships, displaced Syrians from the Golan say they will ensure that their Golanese identity remains alive and that when the moment arrives they will be ready to go back. "When we return to the Golan we'll even take our dead back with us," says Ali.

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Comment & Debate: Seismic events in Iran and Israel have set a critical test of Obama's resolve: One weekend has seen the entire Middle Eastern landscape transformed - and the US president's critics are already circling

The Guardian - Final Edition

June 16, 2009 Tuesday

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Byline: Jonathan Freedland

Body

So there are limits to the magician's powers. For a moment there, when the footage from Tehran showed young women wearing Victoria Beckham sunglasses, peroxide hair poking from their hijabs, lining up to cast their votes in a record turnout election, it looked as if Iran was about to end the sullen estrangement of the last four years, turf out Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and present a new, more open face to the world. If that had been the outcome of Iran's election, it would have been notched up, in part, as an early triumph for Barack Obama: his allies would have declared that the hand the president stretched out to the Muslim world in Cairo less than a fortnight ago had unclenched the Iranian fist.

That's not how it turned out. Instead, the US president today surveys a Middle Eastern landscape that has changed over a single weekend, thanks to what looks like a stolen election in Tehran and a policy climbdown by the prime minister of Israel. These shifts raise searching questions about Obama's entire approach to foreign policy - and suggest that at least one key aspect of it is not working.

The at-a-glance view says Obama has been relying on the familiar combination of carrots and sticks: carrots for Iran, in the form of dialogue, respect and personal video messages bursting with praise for Iranian civilisation; and sticks for Israel, sharpened into explicit, no-wriggle-room demands to end settlement building on the West Bank. In this view, Obama should conclude that carrots don't work but sticks do - the latter prodding Binyamin Netanyahu to utter, at long last, the words "Palestinian state", even if the phrase emerged from his mouth, as one Israeli commentator put it, like a rotten tooth pulled without anaesthesia. He put the squeeze on Bibi and got results, he made nice to Tehran and got nothing. Time to draw the obvious conclusion.

But it might not be quite as simple as that. Start with Iran. It's true that the Obama administration had hoped that its policy of engagement - after the outer darkness treatment of the Bush years - would bring change. If the election results were legitimate, it would mean the Iranian people had heard Obama's honeyed rhetoric and were unmoved. That is not totally ludicrous: two US non-profit organisations ran an extensive, scientific opinion poll in Iran last month and did indeed find Ahmadinejad walloping his opponents.

Comment & Debate: Seismic events in Iran and Israel have set a critical test of Obama's resolve: One weekend has seen the entire Middle Eastern landscape transf....

But what if there was fraud? It certainly seems likely, given the freakish nature of some of the numbers, complete with Ahmadinejad outpolling his rivals even in their own home towns. If he, and the hardline clerical authorities whom he serves as frontman, did indeed steal the election, that confirms the nature of the regime Obama confronts. It also exposes the US president to the charge, already voiced on the right, that he was naive to think he could engage meaningfully with what is nothing more than a theocratic dictatorship.

The US administration has its counter-arguments ready. For one thing, the policy of dialogue was conceived on the assumption that Ahmadinejad would be a two-term president. True, one senior administration official confessed to me yesterday, some in the White House began to believe they were about "to catch a break" in Iran as they saw the excitement the opposition Mousavi campaign was generating: they dared to hope they were about to see a repeat of this month's Lebanese elections in which the pro-western coalition defeated Hezbollah and its allies. But that feeling did not last long.

Nor are Washington's policymakers feeling queasy about dialogue with a nation that lays on an outward show of democracy - complete with rallies and debates - only to crush dissent brutally when the people vote the wrong way. Such scruples have not prevented the US dealing with China, Russia, Saudi Arabia or a long list of others. As Obama explained repeatedly through the 2008 campaign, he does not believe diplomacy is a reward for good behaviour, but a tool to advance America's self-interest.

But it's not one Washington will deploy indefinitely. "We'll see if it bears fruit," says that official. "If it doesn't then, at some point, we'll have to try something else. It's not without limit." When might US patience run out? The answer is the end of this year: after that, western diplomats believe Tehran will reach the nuclear point of no return, when no one will be able to prevent it acquiring the bomb.

In this context, Team Obama can even spot an upside to Ahmadinejad's re-election. First, there's a Nixon-to-China calculation that says Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, would only feel confident enough to reach an accommodation on nukes if he was secure at home: he couldn't afford a reformist president vulnerable to accusations of treachery from the right. Second, Tehran might feel the need to offset the charge of election fraud with a reputation-redeeming gesture, softening the nuclear line. Should that not come, and Obama decides to replace diplomacy with something stronger, his chances of marshalling an international coalition will have been boosted: Washington expects to hear fewer arguments defending Iran's nuclear quest as the legitimate interest of a legitimate government.

All of which adds up to a conclusion that it is far too early to declare the Obama outreach to Iran a failure. The policy will continue for another six months, if only so that, should Iran eventually show Washington the finger, Obama can say what Bush never could: that he tried to do it the nice way.

What of Netanyahu? Here too nothing is quite as simple as it looks. Yes, the stick brought success, in that Bibi is now technically committed to a two-state solution. But the promise came laden with caveats and qualifiers: such a state must be demilitarised, with no control over its own airspace and foreign alliances, and will come about only if Palestinians first recognise Israel as the state of the Jewish people. All this was offered with no empathy for the Palestinians, none of the language deployed when Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert made their own reversals on Palestinian statehood - speeches that conveyed the sense of men who had made a difficult journey towards recognition of the other. Netanyahu's was grudging, the words of a man doing the minimum necessary to get a demanding US president off his back.

"The Americans see through that ruse," says the US-based analyst Daniel Levy, who does not expect Obama to ease the pressure on settlements just because Bibi has dared speak of a two-state solution. But there are opportunities here, too. Netanyahu lodged his objections to a Palestinian state solely in terms of Israeli security. Obama could respond to that, says Levy, by offering whatever Israel needs to allay its fears - even a Nato-led protection force, if that's what it takes. Netanyahu has framed the conflict in such a way as to give serious leverage to Obama.

Comment & Debate: Seismic events in Iran and Israel have set a critical test of Obama's resolve: One weekend has seen the entire Middle Eastern landscape transf....

This dramatic June weekend has set a test of the American president's resolve. Will he stick to his course, continuing to reach out to Iran even as he shows tough love to Israel? He should, partly to show that his policy was always about long-term strategy rather than short-term tactics. But also because the last 48 hours offer plenty of evidence that he's getting it right.

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Across the Mideast, Praise and Criticism for Obama

The New York Times

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Byline: By MICHAEL SLACKMAN; Reporting was contributed by Isabel Kershner from Jerusalem; Robert F. Worth from Beirut, Lebanon; Mona el-Naggar from Cairo; Taghreed El-Khodary from Gaza; Hwaida Saad from Beirut; Muhammad al-Milfy from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Nazila Fathi from Tehran; Omar al-Mani from Damascus, Syria; Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Karbala and Mosul; and Sharon Otterman from New York.

Dateline: CAIRO

Body

On one level, President Obama's speech succeeded in reaching out to Muslims across the Middle East, winning widespread praise for his respectful approach, his quotations from the Koran and his forthright references to highly fraught political conflicts.

But Mr. Obama's calibrated remarks also asked listeners in a region shaken by hatred to take two steps that have long been anathema: forgetting the past and understanding an opposing view. For a president who proclaimed a goal of asking people to listen to uncomfortable truths, it was clear that parts of his speech resonated deeply with his intended audience and others fell on deaf ears, in Israel as well as the Muslim world.

Again and again, Muslim listeners said they were struck by how skillfully Mr. Obama appropriated religious, cultural and historical references in ways other American presidents had not. He included four quotations from the Koran and used Arabic greetings. He took note of longstanding historical grievances like the stain of colonialism, American support for the Iranian coup of 1953 and the displacement of the Palestinian people. His speech was also embraced for what it did not do: use the word terrorism, broadly seen here as shorthand for an attack on Islam.

"He spoke really like an enlightened leader from the region, more than like a foreigner," said Mustafa Hamarneh, the former director of the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. "It was very unlike the neocolonial and condescending approach of the previous administration."

Mr. Obama structured his speech almost like a Friday Prayer, blending a political, social and religious message. In style and substance, some regional analysts said, it sought to undermine the message of radical terrorists like Osama bin Laden.

"Al Qaeda benefited from the previous rhetoric about the clash of civilizations in mobilizing and recruiting individuals as part of fighting a crusade," said Mohammad Abu Rumman, research editor at Al Ghad, a newspaper in Amman, Jordan. "The speech is positive and allows us to move from the religious-civilization title of the struggle to a political-realistic title."

Across the Mideast, Praise and Criticism for Obama

Perhaps inevitably, Mr. Obama angered some on both sides. Many Arabs and Israelis alike furiously rejected what they saw as his attempt to present their suffering as morally equivalent. They picked at the content of the speech almost like a biblical text.

"How dare Obama compare Arab refugee suffering to the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust?" asked Aryeh Eldad, a lawmaker from the rightist National Union Party in Israel.

Ahmed Youssef, the deputy foreign minister in the Hamas government in Gaza, said, "He points to the right of Israel to exist, but what about the refugees and their right of return?"

And in Jordan, Rohile Gharaibeh, deputy secretary general for the Islamic Action Front, the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood, rejected any reference to the Holocaust. "The Holocaust was not the doing of the Muslims, it was the Europeans, and it should not come at the cost of the Palestinian people or the Arabs and Muslims," he said.

The speech included a list of topics that have soured relations with Muslims. As each topic was addressed, from religious tolerance and women's rights to nuclear weapons and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he was greeted with warm applause or icy stares, depending on the listener.

In Iraq, after six years of occupation, missed opportunities and failed promises, there was a heavy dose of skepticism.

In cafes and restaurants, televisions were turned to sports or movies or blared music videos. When a man at a restaurant in Mosul tried to change the channel to the speech, diners shouted at him, "What a stupid speech!" In the Shorooq restaurant in Karbala, a small crowd heckled Mr. Obama as he spoke about Israel. "The most important thing is to accomplish things, not just say them," said Alaa Sahib Abdullah, a 30-year-old lawyer.

In Iran, some praised the explicit reference to the 1953 coup that topped a popular Iranian prime minister.

"The coup has become a symbol of nationalism for Iranians, and the fact that Mr. Obama acknowledged the United States had intervened sends a positive message to all groups," said Alireza Rajaei, a political analyst in Tehran. "Now those who favor better ties with the United States have no fear to publicly call for it because they can say that the United States has admitted to its historic mistake."

While many listeners generally agreed with Mr. Obama's comments about violence and extremism, some said they disliked his characterization of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which they described as bloody catastrophes.

"What is astonishing is that he condemned violence, but he didn't say a word about what the United States did in Iraq," said Khaled Saghie, the executive editor of Al Akhbar, a Lebanese daily newspaper that leans toward Hezbollah. "If you want to call for a new beginning, you should at least apologize for tens of thousands of victims in Iraq."

Political opponents of the region's autocratic governments also expressed disappointment. "What touched on democracy and human rights in the speech was far less than what we wanted," said Ayman Nour, Egypt's most prominent political dissident, who was imprisoned after challenging President Hosni Mubarak in the last election.

On the flashpoint of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Mr. Obama did little to impress his Muslim audience -- and barely enough to calm the anxieties of some Israelis. He angered Arabs when he equated shooting rockets into Israel with violence, a practice many here say is legitimate resistance against occupation.

From the Arab perspective, he did not offer any new proposals or suggest a time line for moving toward a Palestinian state. From the Israeli perspective, he criticized expansion of settlements and forcefully endorsed creation of an independent Palestinian state, which Israel's current government has refused to endorse.

Across the Mideast, Praise and Criticism for Obama

"As a legal specialist, he should know people are under occupation and cannot recognize the state while they are under occupation, only afterwards," said Mr. Youssef of Hamas. "Why put pressure on Arabs and Muslims to recognize Israel while it is not recognizing our existence?"

But Israelis and Palestinians also stepped back from their own concerns and said they understood the broader significance of the speech. Even Mr. Youssef hailed the speech as historic.

Israel said in a statement that it hoped the speech "will indeed lead to a new period of reconciliation between the Arab and Muslim world and Israel."

Politicians and analysts on both sides also highlighted statements they interpreted as shoring up their own causes.

Israelis were satisfied that Mr. Obama referred to America's bond with Israel as "unbreakable" and defined Israel as a "Jewish homeland"; they also appreciated his unequivocal rejection of Palestinian resistance through violence and his condemnation of Holocaust denial.

On the issue of Jerusalem, one of the most delicate and intractable in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mr. Obama avoided political confrontation, sticking instead to a theme of religious harmony. He did not call for the city, now under full Israeli control, to be divided into two capitals, Israeli and Palestinian.

"If anything, there was a hint for the unity of the city," said Yehuda Ben Meir of the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. "The speech should certainly be acceptable to Israelis."

Despite palpable longing for the president to change policies and not just tone, some seemed to understand he was trying to move the debate by balance and indirection.

"If I were in his shoes, what would I do?" said Mansoor al-Jamri, editor of Al Waast, a daily newspaper in Bahrain. "My closest friends are dictators, and the best strategic ally I have is viewed as a strategic enemy for the Muslim world. If he delivers on what he said, and it is a compromise, many people will ultimately be happy."

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTO: Iraqis at the Samir Amis coffee shop in Baghdad were able to keep tabs on President Obama's speech in Cairo on Thursday.(PHOTOGRAPH BY MOISES SAMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

Load-Date: June 5, 2009

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Obama gets serious on Middle East

Weekend Australian

August 1, 2009 Saturday

1 - All-round Country Edition

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 21

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Byline: GREG SHERIDAN, FOREIGN EDITOR

Body

CAN Barack Obama really bring peace to the Middle East? In the past week Obama sent his Defence Secretary Robert Gates, National Security Adviser Jim Jones and Middle East envoys George Mitchell and Dennis Ross to Israel and other points in the Middle East. These visits may mark something of a turning point. They suggest Obama is moving beyond his role of psychotherapist to the Arab world and getting down to business.

I still don't think Obama will bring peace to the Middle East, but a few interesting things are going to happen in the next few months.

The Americans were notionally in Israel to discuss a freeze on Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. But they also discussed Iran and Syria. They took a friendly and engaging tone with Israel. They know they are not going to get a complete freeze on the settlements, especially in East Jerusalem. They may get a temporary freeze that starts after existing building work is completed.

But the Americans are coming to realise they have oversold the settlements issue. It's not the roadblock to Israeli-Palestinian peace or the key to the Middle East. At most, it's a symbol. Obama is moving beyond symbols.

Here are three big dynamic-changers we'll get in the Middle East in the next few months.

* Decision time looms regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions. Obama has set a new tough deadline of September for a serious response to dialogue offer. The Iranian regime is weakened by the election it stole, but also enraged, savage, fearful and full of spite. It's not going to see its domestic humiliation replicated by the international humiliation of giving in to the Americans and Israelis on nukes. That means there will be tough sanctions against it or a military strike. Either way, it will mark a tough decision and the end of Obama's attempted universal love-in with all of America's enemies. Or, if the US response is meaningless, it will mark the beginning of a steep decline in Obama's international credibility.

* The international public face of the Israeli government will become friendlier. Controversial Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman will be indicted on corruption charges. He will then leave the government. Whether unfairly or not, he is a visual roadblock to a better look for Israel. With the Iran issue up for decision, Kadima leader Tzipi Livni, or some big faction of her party, may join Benjamin Netanyahu's government. This will make it easier for Obama to love the Israelis.

Obama gets serious on Middle East

* The emphasis will switch from the Israel-Palestinian track to the Israel-Syria track for possible peace talks. In some ways now is a good time to pursue Palestinian peace negotiations because all the Arab nations, except Syria, are scared of Iran and therefore would help the US. But in reality talk of a Palestinian peace is meaningless right now. Nearly half the Palestinian population is controlled by the ultra-rejectionist, terrorist death cult Hamas.

More important, perhaps, all of Israel's neighbours, including the Palestinians, are fed a diet of anti-Semitic propaganda and hate material. A permanent peace with Israel means an end to all territorial claims against Israel and the acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state. For the moment, that's impossible.

But the US has real business to transact with Syria. Above all it wants Syria not to interfere with Iraq. Syria-Israel negotiations could provide cover for the US's business with Damascus. Syria's motivation is that its economy is a basket case. It wants an end to US sanctions. But a comprehensive Israel-Syria peace deal is unlikely. The minority Alawite tribe that rules Syria bases its entire legitimacy and justifies its emergency rule (in place these many decades) by its conflict with Israel. One incentive for Syria to do a peace deal is to take back the Golan Heights, but these are of little significance in themselves to Syria and their possession by Israel gives Damascus all the benefits of a permanent complaint. But look at the negatives. Israel will not give back the Golan Heights just for a peace agreement with Syria.

There would need to be a strategic realignment. Damascus would have to stop supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, and would need to break with Iran. But Syria exerts regional influence only through its terror proxies and alliance with Tehran. Giving these levers of influence away is unlikely to look like a bargain to Damascus.

But engaging in a lengthy flirtation, a courtship destined never to be consummated, which allows all manner of minor functional co-operation, with reciprocal benefits, to take place -- that is a game Damascus understands.

Why do I say Obama has cast himself as psychotherapist to the Arab world? A key point of psychotherapy is for the therapist to enter with empathy into the world of the patient, even if that world is delusional.

You may remember the classic Cary Grant comedy, *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Cousin Teddy thought he was Teddy Roosevelt. Asking him to leave the room because he was embarrassing the guests never worked. Telling him he was needed in the White House in his bedroom upstairs produced instant results. To get him to co-operate, Grant had to enter his fantasy. This has been Obama's approach to the Arab world. Sadly, there are no Arab democracies (with the partial exception of Lebanon). The region's political culture is steeped in paranoia, conspiracy theories and a licence to blame Israel for everything.

In the soothing, therapeutic overtures Obama has made to the Arab world he has ambiguously embraced a good portion of the culture's irrationality. In his Cairo speech (which contained many good things) he repeatedly cited the inability, yes, inability, of Muslim women to wear the hijab as a terrible human rights violation and disrespect to Islam. But that is not remotely reality. In Saudi Arabia, in Iran for that matter, it is a serious crime with severe punishments for a woman not to wear the hijab. Hardly anywhere in the world (French public schools? Some Turkish offices?) are Muslim women prevented from wearing the hijab.

Thus, to enter into the Arab fantasy, Obama rebukes an imaginary world of conspiracies.

His whole riff on the Palestinians' situation being intolerable ignores far worse situations for Muslims in Chechnya or Xinjiang, or indeed for religious minorities, such as the Bahais in Muslim Iran. Making the Palestinian issue the central question of geopolitics validates a view of the world that exists only in minds untroubled by reality.

Similarly, Obama set the creation and sustenance of Israel entirely in the context of the European Holocaust. Yet Britain had been committed to a Jewish state in Israel decades before World War II. The Zionist movement had seen hundreds of thousands of Jews settle in Palestine before the war. The Jewish connection to Israel is undeniable. And Israel has a modern identity as the Middle East's only democracy. While Obama always speaks with sympathy and deep emotion about the Holocaust (a practice that endears him to American Jews), by casting

Obama gets serious on Middle East

Israel only within the context of the Holocaust he is again semi-validating a key line of Arab paranoia: that they are paying for the sins of the Europeans in the war.

Finally, Obama's obsession with settlements in the West Bank and even in East Jerusalem, as if the entire Middle East, no, the entire Muslim world, hinged on this minor matter, is in the deepest sense irrational.

All of this presumably served Obama's purpose of establishing a therapeutic bond between himself and the Muslim and Arab world. But it is time to move back to rationality. Entering a patient's fantasy life can be a helpful therapeutic tool, but it confuses other people who overhear you.

As he moves to a compromise with Israel on settlements, gets down to business with Syria and ultimately confronts Iran, Obama will sound less and less like a therapist and more and more like a President. Good thing, too.

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Ghandi comes to the fore as India decides

The Kingdom

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Body

THE world's biggest democracy is in the process of voting.

About 714 million are eligible to vote and voting takes place until May 13.

I speak of the 15th Indian general election since the country achieved its independence from Britain in 1948.

This election is going to be a tight affair, by all accounts. What else could you expect in a country with 100 million first time voters and where 80 per cent of the population is under 45?

In the Indian election the 714 million eligible voters there have the opportunity to elect 543 MPs from among 4,617 candidates representing 300 parties.

Those figures should give you an idea of the massive scale of the election.

Once again the name Gandhi features prominently in an Indian election.

This time it is Priyanka Gandhi who is a rising star in the political landscape over there. She is not among the candidates this time as she prefers to be the cheerleader for her brother Rahul.

Priyanka Gandhi and her brother have gone through turbulent times as both their father, Rajiv, and their grandmother, Indira, were assassinated.

Rajiv Gandhi was educated at Doon School and Cambridge University where he failed his engineering degree. He had little interest in politics and became a pilot with Indian Airlines. He married an Italian, Sonia Maino.

After his younger brother, Sanjay, was killed in an air crash he inherited his seat in parliament. He was killed by a bomb hidden in the clothing of a woman who handed him flowers during an election campaign.

His Italian wife, Sonia Gandhi, is now the leader of the ruling Congress Party in India. Having her husband's name, Gandhi, was magic. Is there any other country in the world where something similar could happen? I doubt it. The name Gandhi is still bearing that bit of magic in India.

Ghandi comes to the fore as India decides

It all began with Mahatma Gandhi but there is no relation to the present Gandhi.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, known popularly as Mahatma - meaning great soul - was born on 2 October 1869. In his lifetime he achieved independence from the United Kingdom by peaceful means.

He achieved more with his non violent approach than all the terrorists the world over succeeded in doing and saved millions of lives in the process. That was some feat. He won the affection and loyalty of millions. On 30 January 1948 he was shot and killed by a young Hindu fanatic. He was killed for doing good and it was a sad ending.

So much for the Gandhis for now. I'll be following with interest how the bearers of that famous name fare in the present context in India

Peace call in Sri Lanka

SRI Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is an island in the Indian Ocean off the South Eastern coast of India. It is just about three quarters the size of the island of Ireland with a population of more than 20 million.

For the past quarter of a century it has been in the news because of an ongoing conflict there between the Sinhalese comprising approximately 75 per cent of the population and the Tamils who are around one sixth of the population and want a piece of the island all to themselves.

Since the early 1980s the Tamils are demanding a separate autonomous state in North Sri Lanka and therein lies the cause of the conflict that has resulted in the deaths of around 78,000 since the fighting began.

In 1802 Sri Lanka became the British Colony of Ceylon. It gained its independence in 1948 and became the Republic of Sri Lanka.

In the 1970s Tamil protests escalated and extremist Sinhalese began attacking Tamil communities living in mainly Sinhalese areas. As tensions rose, violent Tamil groups formed, the Tigers emerging as the most fearsome.

From the various reports on the news over the past 20 years, people have been constantly warning about their violent deeds. The Tigers pioneered some of the violent aspects of modern terrorism.

The FBI credits them with the invention of the suicide belt and use of female suicide bombers, innovations copied by Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah and Palestinian militants. The Tigers are the only terrorist group to assassinate two world leaders - the prime ministers of both India and Sri Lanka.

Events in Sri Lanka seem to have reached a climax last week. The government there in an all out offensive to get the Tamil Tigers to surrender look like attaining that goal. The snag is that the government there are coming under enormous pressure to stop the fatalities, for the sake of the 50,000 civilians begin used as human shields by the Tigers.

Here, to give you an idea of what's happening , is a brief extract taken from a recent editorial in the Boston Globe headed: The Agony of Sri Lanka: "One of the world's longest, bloodiest conflicts is coming to a gruesome conclusion on the island nation of Sri Lanka. The United Nations estimates that some 6,500 civilians have died and 14,000 have been wounded in the government's merciless offensive against the Tamil Tigers in the northeast of the country. The Obama administration and other governments, particularly India and China, should pressure both the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers to halt the fighting and permit trapped civilians to escape".

Hopefully, the people of Sri Lanka will get a chance to live out their lives in peace once more.

Freud a winner alright

I HAVE been reading so much about Clement Freud since he passed away that it would never do to let the occasion pas without recording a few words about the man in my column.

Ghandi comes to the fore as India decides

On my last visit to Punchestown races, I travelled down from the enclosure in the special bus supplied to take racegoers down to have a close look at horses jumping the famous banks. Beside me on my way was none other than Clement Freud, one of the best known racegoers, among many other callings, in Ireland and the UK.

Years ago the man came to my attention when he stood as a Liberal candidate in a by election where no Liberal was ever elected. He was 33/1 in the betting and he backed himself to win and he was duly elected and collected the equivalent of a couple of years salary from his bet. His victory showed that he had something special which enabled him to be elected.

Freud was buried on April 24, on what would have been his 85th birthday. He died at home, sitting at his desk while writing his latest column for the Racing Post with the previous day's winnings from Epsom Races in his pocket, it kindly returned by the undertaker to his wife after he found the cash in his suit.

Present at Freud's funeral was Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his wife Sara. Mr Brown, who sat beside Bono, read the first lesson and broke off to claim Freud not only as an old friend, but as a national treasure and an institution.

The Prime Minister went further to praise the entire Freud family, including his son, Matthew, the PR tycoon who is married to Rupert Murdoch's daughter, Elizabeth.

Mr Brown finished off by reading the lesson from St John's Gospel about the wedding feast at Cana where Christ performed the miracle of changing water into wine, which the Prime Minister said was appropriate given Freud's reputation as a gourmet.

I'll leave the last word to Nicholas Parsons, chairman of the show Just a Minute, in which Clement Freud starred for many years: "It was the most brilliant funeral service I have ever been to," Parsons said, before adding: "Clement would have approved".

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Tehran launches its custard pie strike

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Body

If you attend a circus, you should expect to see a clown - and if you get into the ring with him, you shouldn't be surprised if he throws custard pies at you. You look even more ridiculous than the clown, however, if you then adopt an expression of injured dignity and complain about the mess on your jacket.

Unfortunately, that is the position of Peter Gooderham, our ambassador to the United Nations, who (in the company of a number of other apparently affronted emissaries) walked out during the Iranian president's address to last week's UN summit on "anti-racism". Even the ringmaster himself - the UN secretary-general - affected to be shocked by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks that "following the second world war [the West] resorted to military aggression to make an entire nation homeless on the pretext of Jewish sufferings and sent migrants from Europe, the United States and other parts of the world in order to establish a totally racist state in occupied Palestine . .

They have committed themselves to defend those racist perpetrators of genocide".

Ban Ki-moon, while sitting po-faced next to the Iranian president during the speech, later released a statement deploring Ahmadinejad's "use of this platform to accuse, divide and even incite ... At my earlier meeting with him I reminded the president that the UN General Assembly had adopted resolutions to revoke the equation of Zionism with racism and to reaffirm the historical facts of the Holocaust".

Ban's statement was as contrived as the walkout by our ambassador. The UN secretary-general had specifically invited the Iranian president to make the keynote address to the conference in Geneva. Given that a number of nations - the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Germany, Poland, Italy and Israel - had boycotted the event, in part because they had a pretty good idea of what the keynote speaker would make of his opportunity, Ban's expressions of injured surprise were unconvincing.

Naturally the secretary-general's bleating objections were not reported by IRNA, the official Iranian news agency; instead it published a back-up "historical" piece, which claimed that "the word 'holocaust' ... was originally coined to refer to a criminal incident in ancient Yemen committed by Jews who burnt alive a large group of chained and handcuffed men, women and children for their adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ (PBUH).

Tehran launches its custard pie strike

However, the bitter historical irony is that the word was later exploited by Zionists to establish a regime by building on the false claim that more than 6m Jews had been killed in Auschwitz ovens, thus triggering the sympathy of the western people".

As far as Israel is concerned, the true irony is that Ahmadinejad's speech was on the eve of its own Holocaust memorial day and also the 120th anniversary of the birth of Adolf Hitler. This concatenation of circumstances was encapsulated poignantly by the presence in Geneva of Elie Wiesel, the Auschwitz survivor and Nobel peace prize winner. In a corridor outside the conference centre this frail old man looked bewildered as he was confronted by members of the Iranian delegation repeatedly yelling at him: "Zio-Nazi! Zio-Nazi!"

One of the tragic aspects of all this is that a number of Iranians helped to save Jews during the Holocaust and Iran remains home to the largest Jewish community in the Middle East, outside Israel itself. After the failure of the Arab armies in their attempt to destroy Israel at birth in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Jews fled from riots and retribution in countries such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria; the people of Iran had never been involved in this conflict and did not seek to become so.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, has observed how its Arab neighbours have long deflected internal anger at corrupt and incompetent administrations by blaming Israel - or "the Zionists" - for all the troubles that afflict them. That is why the anti-semitic forgery known as the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" (which purports to reveal the Jewish plot to rule the world) has had such wide currency throughout the Middle East; and in the text of Ahmadinejad's Geneva speech you can see it almost quoted verbatim.

The cause of the Palestinians has been adopted by the Iranian government with equal cynicism: it cares nothing for their particular plight but understands that if it wants to challenge the Sunni regime of Saudi Arabia for leadership in the Middle East, then to appear as the vanguard of the struggle against "the Zionists" is a sure way of appealing to what we might call the Muslim street.

This was observed with great clarity by Victor Kattan, a Palestinian academic based in Britain, who reported in his blog from Geneva: "There was a clear attempt by the Iranian delegation at the UN to hijack the Palestinian event I was attending. They brought their own literature and leaflets with them in which they equated the Star of David with the Nazi swastika. Their literature was promptly removed by one of the Palestinian organisers ... It was clear the Iranians had little if any interest in Palestine or its people ... and they made little attempt to inquire about the situation in the occupied territories." If the Iranian government were entirely cynical, then Israel would have less cause to feel existentially threatened by Tehran's clear intention to develop nuclear weapons.

Given that Israel has scores of nuclear warheads, is Ahmadinejad actually crazy enough to invite the destruction of his own people by attempting a first strike against Tel Aviv? Meir Javedanfar, author of *The Nuclear Sphinx* of Tehran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the State of Iran, is possibly the right person to ask: he was born and brought up in Iran through the period of the Islamic revolution but now lives in Tel Aviv.

Javedanfar tells me that he personally does not believe Iran would use nuclear weapons against Israel, but he adds that the very fact that Israelis have such a fear would have profoundly damaging consequences for national morale and the economy - many families would urge their children to emigrate, rather than live under the shadow of an Iranian nuclear capability.

In other words: the Israeli government will not let it happen.

It is, after all, the case that Ahmadinejad has called for what he calls "the Zionist entity" to be "wiped from the pages of history" and that Iran supplies the openly antisemitic *Hezbollah* with its missiles. It's easy for us in Britain to say this is mere posturing: we're not the ones who stand to be annihilated if it turns out to be more than that.

At the least it would have been good to see the British ambassador to the UN take to the platform to reject Ahmadinejad's Holocaustdenying tirade face to face - as the Norwegian ambassador managed to do. Better still, we should have played no part at all in a farcical endeavour in which a conference sponsored by a UN human rights

Tehran launches its custard pie strike

council boasting Saudi Arabia, China and Cuba as members takes over every five-star hotel in Geneva to pass 143 non-binding resolutions in favour of greater tolerance for diversity.

Such declarations have all the force of the 1936 Soviet constitution, promulgated by Comrade Stalin, whose article 125 guaranteed: "a) freedom of speech; b) freedom of the press; c) freedom of assembly, including mass meetings; d) freedom of street processions and demonstrations".

Even if Ahmadinejad had not been invited to make the keynote speech in Geneva on his favourite topic, like so much of the UN's activities this whole state-sponsored "anti-racism" process is a circus in which we pay to have custard pies pushed in our faces. It might even be funny - if it weren't so tragic.

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'IRAN KNOWS THAT OPPOSING "THE ZIONISTS" APPEALS TO THE MUSLIM STREET'

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Iraq war is over, for the U.S. anyway

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Byline: By Greg Jaffe

Body

The Iraq war is over - for the U.S. But that doesn't mean that the United States won or achieved all of its aims or that fighting among Iraqis will stop. It doesn't mean that Iraq is stable, democratic and relatively free of corruption.

The war is over for the United States because the Iraqis don't really need or want American forces around anymore. Every time U.S. troops roll out of the gate with their Iraqi counterparts in Baghdad, they discredit the Iraqi forces in the eyes of their people. They make their Iraqi partners' jobs harder. Although senior U.S. commanders understand and accept this fact privately, they will never admit it.

Last month in Baghdad, Gen. Ray Odierno, the top commander in Iraq, blanched when a reporter asked him whether the war is "functionally over."

"There are still civilians being killed in Iraq," Odierno replied. "We still have people that are attempting to attack the new Iraqi order and the move towards democracy and a more open economy. So we still have some work to do."

In the Iraqi capital last week, Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates mouthed the standard line that there will still be "tough days ahead" for U.S. and Iraqi troops as the "enemies of a free Iraq try to derail progress."

On the same day Gates spoke, Iraqi forces stormed the camp of an Iranian opposition group that U.S. forces had spent the past six years protecting. The Mujaheddin-e Khalq, or MEK, had made common cause with Saddam Hussein against Iran, but the new Iraqi government, which sees Tehran as a potential ally, decided it could no longer allow them a haven.

Odierno suggested that it wasn't the U.S. military's job to intervene in what was essentially an internal matter. "This is about the Iraqis," he said. His tone marked a big change from the days when U.S. commanders would press the Iraqi government to fire or replace commanders they thought were incompetent or overtly sectarian.

Earlier the same day, Gates visited Tallil air base southeast of Baghdad to chat with U.S. soldiers and Iraqi police commandos as they prepared to head out on a joint patrol. The Iraqis, clad in camouflage uniforms and do-rags, huddled around their Humvees in the 115-degree midday heat. The American soldiers gathered in a separate cluster around Gates. The Pentagon chief thanked them for their sacrifice and service. "The training and partnering missions that you are doing are the next step in our success," he said.

Iraq war is over, for the U.S. anyway

A few feet away, Maj. Sean Kuester admitted that the Iraqi police in the area were largely self-sufficient and his own soldiers were more than a little bored. The Iraqis had asked for some help with evidence collection and forensics, but that was about it. They conducted their own patrols and interrogations with little to no oversight from U.S. troops. "Honestly, they seem to have a very firm grasp on things," Kuester said.

By early afternoon, Gates had jetted to Baghdad, where he and Iraqi Defence Minister Abdul Qadir Muhammed Jassim met at the Iraqi military headquarters, a marble building with elevators that haven't worked since the early days of the American invasion. At the post-meeting news conference, virtually all of the Iraqi journalists' questions were directed at Jassim.

Only a couple of years ago it would have been unthinkable that the Iraqi minister would be the main attraction at a news conference with his U.S. counterpart. Everyone assumed that the Americans were really in charge and that the Iraqis were there solely to put an Iraqi face on a U.S. military endeavor.

Even more surprising, the Iraqi press had no questions about the insurgency or internal strife. Instead they asked whether the Americans were going to sell the Iraqis F-16 fighter jets. Two Iraqi journalists had questions about ongoing tensions with Kuwait. One of the Iraqis was atwitter with rumours that the Iraqi army and navy were massing on the border in preparation for a clash with the Kuwaiti military. Welcome to 1990!

Retired Gen. John Abizaid, who led U.S. forces in the Middle East from 2003 to 2007 and had serious doubts about invading Iraq, saw this day coming. Abizaid had flaws as the commander of Mideast forces. But his understanding of the Arab world ran deeper than that of just about any general in the U.S. military. In the late 1970s Abizaid learned Arabic and spent two years studying at the University of Jordan in Amman during a time of tumultuous change for the region. He was a United Nations observer in southern Lebanon in the mid-1980s, when the radical Shiite group Hezbollah emerged as a major power. In the early 1990s his battalion was dispatched to northern Iraq to safeguard the Kurds from the Iraqi army during the Persian Gulf War's messy aftermath.

Abizaid knew there were massive historical, religious and cultural forces in Iraq that the United States could never alter. The U.S. military could shape the situation on the margins, he believed, but ultimately Iraq's future belonged to the Iraqis. "If you try to control the Middle East, it will end up controlling you," he often said.

Gen. David Petraeus, Abizaid's longtime friend and rival, thought this was nonsense. A nine-page PowerPoint briefing that he prepared in 2003 after the Mosul elections captured his attitude during the war's early days. "Don't let up, must outlast them," one slide read. "Them" meant the Iraqis who had agreed to co-operate with Petraeus.

Abizaid's somewhat fatalistic attitude hindered his effectiveness in the beginning of the war, when there were no Iraqis capable of imposing order and only the United States had the capacity to stave off the chaos that was enveloping the country. Instead of using U.S. forces to seize control, he oversaw a strategy that focused on transitioning responsibility to fledgling Iraqi units that were nowhere near ready.

Today, though, Abizaid looks prescient. The moment that he long predicted has arrived.

In Afghanistan, which makes Iraq look a bit like a desert version of Switzerland, it is likely to be years before the U.S. military is pushed into the background. Afghanistan has few roads, little government capacity, almost no economy and a jaw-dropping illiteracy rate. Without the U.S. military pushing the Afghan government and security forces to act, little happens. Not surprisingly, most ambitious U.S. officers these days are doing all they can to land in units that are likely to deploy to Afghanistan instead of Iraq. One U.S. colonel in Iraq even suggested in a memo, first reported last week by The New York Times, that it is time "for the U.S. to declare victory and go home."

But U.S. forces still have a role to play in Iraq. Their presence serves as a check on Iraqi military and political leaders' baser and more sectarian instincts. In the case of the raid on the MEK camp, U.S. officials have leaned on the Iraqis to treat the camp members humanely. A small number of American soldiers are based outside the camp, though it is unclear if their presence made any difference. MEK leaders and the provincial governor said late last week that hundreds of camp residents were wounded and several were killed in the assault.

Iraq war is over, for the U.S. anyway

The Americans can also act as honest brokers to resolve disagreements over the distribution of oil revenues and territorial boundaries in northern Iraq. These two issues were a major focus of Gates' trip last week.

Even Petraeus' celebrated counterinsurgency doctrine, which was finished in 2006 when the general was stuck in the wilds of Fort Leavenworth, Kan., recognized that there would be a point when the U.S. military's efforts to improve the situation in Iraq would only erode the credibility of Iraqi officials and make things worse. "Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction," one of its Zen-like maxims read.

After six years, more than 4,300 deaths and 31,430 wounded, the moment for doing nothing in Iraq has arrived.

Graphic

Iraqi women and their children grieve at the site of a double truck bombing which tore through the minority Shiite community in the northern city of Mosul Monday, killing at least 40. Associated Press

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Israel: Jewish city turns 100, parties through crisis

The New Zealand Herald

April 7, 2009 Tuesday

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Body

TEL AVIV, Israel - Well past the Sabbath midnight, hours before the Middle East erupted once again into war, Tel Aviv was doing what it loves most - partying.

For a place founded a century ago to be the modern world's first Jewish city, the atmosphere was decidedly un-kosher.

Christmas decorations lined the bars and the delis were open, selling pork. In the clubs, the dancers dripped sweat. Outside, tipsy women in revealing fashion stumbled in the streets, and at 2am drivers were hunting in vain for parking spots.

Inside the "Zizitripo" lounge, Omer Gershon downed a shot of vodka.

"The nightlife here is crazier than anywhere in the world. I've got people drinking here all night long," the 34-year-old owner yelled over the thumping electronic music.

"There's a lot of escapism involved. Carpe diem (seize the day) takes on a whole new meaning here."

And there was plenty to escape from that night. An hour's drive south, Palestinian militants were firing missiles at Israeli communities, and Israel would shortly invade the Gaza Strip with air and land strikes to stop the barrages - an operation that ultimately claimed well over 1,000 lives by both sides' count.

It was hardly an auspicious prelude to a year in which Tel Aviv has begun celebrating its 100th birthday with art shows, outdoor concerts, a marathon and the inevitable all-night street party. But this is a city hardened to the shocks of Middle East conflict.

In the 1991 Gulf War it was hit by Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles. A decade later it suffered an onslaught of Palestinian suicide bombings. In the 2006 war against Hezbollah the fear loomed that Tel Aviv might be hit from Lebanon by Iranian-supplied missiles, and during the Gaza war similar fears were felt.

But whatever threats may loom, the party goes on.

Tel Aviv was founded on April 11, 1909, on deserted Mediterranean sand dunes north of the Arab port of Jaffa.

Its name, which it took later, means "Hill of Spring", and is drawn from the writings of Theodor Herzl, modern Zionism's visionary founding father.

Israel : Jewish city turns 100, parties through crisis

Its first inhabitants were Jews from Russia, Germany and Poland. Successive waves of European anti-Semitism culminating in the rise of Nazi Germany swelled the immigrant population.

In 1934 it was declared a city. After World War II came Holocaust survivors and Jews from the Middle East.

The founders built theatres, museums, promenades and universities. The political and military bodies of the state-to-be were born here and today, nearly 61 years after Israel became a state, Tel Aviv is a world-class, high-tech metropolis and financial capital of 400,000 people.

With its suburban sprawl, the population swells to 3 million, more than half the Jews in Israel.

Baruch Kipnis, a geography professor who recently published a book celebrating Tel Aviv's centennial, said the city "controls almost every aspect of life" in Israel and has become "an enormous head on a shrivelled body".

Some critics say Tel Aviv's dominance has cut a wedge between it and the rest of the country. Some deride it as "the bubble," detached from the "other" Israel of religious purists, kibbutzniks, the communities under missile attack from Gaza and the military occupation of 2.4 million Palestinians in the West Bank, just 32 kilometres away.

Sixty-four kilometres southeast, in the mountains, is Jerusalem, the capital recognised as such by no government but Israel itself, and divided among secular Jews, Orthodox Jews and Arabs.

While Jerusalem suffers from bouts of religious and Arab-Israeli strife, Tel Aviv's defenders counter that their city is leaping forward into the future.

"Tel Aviv is the model for what Israel needs to be," said Yael Dayan, chairwoman of the city council and daughter of the late war hero, Moshe Dayan.

"Jerusalem is not a city, it's a symbol, it's a place people are leaving. We are the exact opposite. We are a city of live-and-let-live."

Tel Aviv has always prided itself on being both a bastion of secular Jewish life and a place where the religious live in peace alongside their bohemian neighbours.

Trendy Sheinkin Street has an unwritten agreement: On Fridays it's open to gay parades, tattoo parlours and fresh fruit juice stands; on Saturdays it shuts down to respect the Sabbath.

It's a city where young religious men on street corners beckon secular Jews to say a prayer to the beat of Techno music. It has separate beaches for religious women, religious men and gays.

Religion in Tel Aviv often comes with a touch of irony, like the elegant woman strolling on a small street wearing large sunglasses and a low-cut tank top that quotes from the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife."

It is a city of refuge for Arab homosexuals rejected by the conservative societies in which they have grown up. But while there is nothing to bar Arabs from living in Tel Aviv, only a few hundred do, city officials say.

The Arab population is concentrated in Jaffa - Yafo in Hebrew - and the two are merged under the formal Hebrew name Tel Aviv-Yafo.

In last year's mayoral election, a third of the vote went to Dov Khenin, a Jewish member of a mixed Arab-Israeli party.

Seated on a motorcycle outside the cafe he runs, 31-year-old Oren Chen says "living in a bubble" is not necessarily a bad thing.

"People say 'bubble' in a negative context, but this is actually an island of sanity," he said.

Israel : Jewish city turns 100, parties through crisis

"It's a place of freedom, in the most Israeli way possible."

For all of Tel Aviv's desire for normalcy, it can never truly escape the troubles around it.

The Hassan Bek mosque, built by the last Turkish ruler in the Holy Land before World War I, is virtually unused today by Muslim worshippers.

Wedged between Tel Aviv and Jaffa, lit up in green as part of the night time seaside skyline, it serves as a stark, mute reminder of the absence of Arabs in the neighbourhood it stands in.

After Israel's independence, Tel Aviv spread to encompass several Arab villages whose inhabitants had fled or been driven out in the 1948 war.

Still, having been founded as an entirely Jewish city on empty land purchased from its Arab owners, "In that regard it is not a Zionist city, because in no way was it based on the oppression of the Arabs," said Khenin, the mayoral runner-up.

Tel Aviv is where the young state of Israel nearly came to civil war in 1948, when its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, ordered the army to fight the Jewish militant Irgun group unless it laid down its weapons.

One of Ben-Gurion's officers was Yitzhak Rabin, the future prime minister, assassinated in 1995 by a Jewish extremist in front of City Hall.

Unlike biblical cities such as Jerusalem, where Jews resettled after thousands of years of exile, Tel Aviv was the first attempt to build a Jewish city from scratch, and Dan Karmon, a 33-year-old marketing manager, is glad of it.

"It's a place where you can live a secular life, without having to escape your Jewish past," he said.

"Tel Aviv best represents the struggle to live a normal life in Israel."

But never completely normal.

Paul McCartney recently gave a concert in Tel Aviv, joined by the audience in singing Give Peace A Chance. Three months later the Gaza war broke out.

Even music can be a sensitive subject. The Tel Aviv-based Israel Philharmonic Orchestra doesn't perform music by Richard Wagner because of its associations with Nazi Germany.

However, the city has a powerful German heritage, on vivid display in the 1930s Bauhaus-style buildings designed by Jewish architects who fled Nazi Germany.

The 4,000 boxy white structures have earned Tel Aviv a rare UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site.

- AP

Load-Date: April 7, 2009

Moderates and extremists

Edmonton Journal (Alberta)

February 5, 2009 Thursday

Final Edition

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Section: LETTERS; Pg. A17

Length: 126 words

Byline: Abe Silverman, The Edmonton Journal

Body

Re: "Obama sets out to build bridges with Muslims," by Syed A. Rahman, Letters, Feb. 2.

Syed A. Rahman's observations about President Barack Obama reaching out to Islam by saying, "America is not your enemy" are correct. He should have added that radical Islam is the enemy of the Muslim world.

The leadership of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaida and the Taliban has brought death and destruction to the Muslim world. It is time for Muslims of goodwill to stand up to this evil ideology that is the worst abuser of civil and women's rights and say "enough."

For Rahman to suggest that Israel is dictating U.S. foreign policy is laughable. Maybe, just maybe, it is the truth and what's right that drives the decisions of the free world.

Abe Silverman, St. Albert

Load-Date: February 5, 2009

World Report

Windsor Star (Ontario)

November 10, 2009 Tuesday

Final Edition

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Section: NEWS; Pg. C2; World Report

Length: 1301 words

Byline: Star News Services

Body

EUROPE

NAZI-STOLEN BIBLE RETURNS TO AUSTRIA

NEW YORK - A nearly 500-year-old Hebrew Bible stolen by the Nazis shortly before the Second World War was returned to the Jewish community of Vienna on Monday, U.S. officials said.

The Bible, which dates to 1516, disappeared after the Nazis seized and sealed the

library of the Jewish Community of Vienna on Nov. 9, 1938, said U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara and the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Officials recovered the Bible, which had been donated to the Jewish Community of Vienna in 1908, after it was put up for sale at a New York City auction house this year.

The unidentified Swiss owner agreed to return the Bible after being told of its history. The book was handed over to the Jewish Community of Austria at a repatriation ceremony at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City on Monday.

POLICE RECOVER CASH IN FRENCH VAN HEIST

LYON, France - French police have recovered most of an \$17.4-million cash haul that they suspect was stolen by a security van driver last week, a state prosecutor said on Monday.

Prosecutor Xavier Richaud said police found almost all the money hidden in a garage that the driver, Toni Musulin, had rented under a false name.

Musulin was working for a security firm in the southern city of Lyon when he vanished on Nov. 5 in an armoured van loaded with cash from the Bank of France.

Police originally thought he might have been kidnapped by gangsters, but soon found out that that Musulin's flat had been cleared and his bank account emptied days before the robbery.

"He (Musulin) is still on the run with more than two million euros," Richaud told reporters.

World Report

Musulini has become a household name in France, with fan clubs popping up across the Internet.

BRITON BURIED 30 YEARS AFTER DEATH

LONDON - A British woman who died in Saudi Arabia more than 30 years ago was finally given her funeral Monday after her father relented in his bid to prove she was murdered.

Helen Smith, a 23-year-old nurse, died in May 1979 when she apparently fell from a sixth-floor balcony in the Red Sea port of Jeddah in western Saudi Arabia.

Her father, former police officer Ron Smith, refused to believe official reports that her death was an accident and would not allow her body to be released from a mortuary for burial.

The nurse's body was held in a mortuary in Leeds, northern England, for what is believed to be the longest time that a body has not been buried in Britain.

CENTRAL AMERICA

ZELAYA DEAL ENDS; BACKERS BLAME U.S.

CARACAS, Venezuela - A U.S.-brokered accord that was supposed to return ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya to power has collapsed and his supporters pinned much of the blame Monday on the Obama administration.

Honduras' Congress has made no plans to vote on whether to enact the agreement following remarks by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon that seemed to remove U.S. pressure.

Shannon said last week that the deal meant that the Obama administration would accept the outcome of the Nov. 29 presidential and congressional elections, regardless of whether Zelaya was back in power.

Senator Jim DeMint, R-S.C., lifted a hold on Shannon becoming U.S. ambassador to Brazil after Shannon and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton privately reiterated this view on the elections, DeMint said.

Analysts said Monday that Shannon's statement in a television interview Wednesday undercut most of Zelaya's leverage, gave Congress a good reason to dodge a tough vote and strengthened the resolve of de facto President Roberto Micheletti to remain in power.

FLOODING KILLS 130 IN EL SALVADOR

VERAPAZ, El Salvador - Floods and landslides had killed at least 130 people in El Salvador and forced 10,000 from their homes Monday after a late-season hurricane devastated swaths of mountainous Central America.

Landslides and overflowing rivers swept away entire homes, while a raging torrent ripped through an large section of the town of Verapaz, where bodies were stored in a local chapel to be identified.

"All we heard in the morning was the growl of the loud noise," said Arnolando Paz, a resident of Verapaz in the central region of the country.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. HAD AL-QAIDA INFO ON SHOOTER

WASHINGTON - U.S. intelligence agencies learned an army psychiatrist tried to contact people linked to al-Qaida and they gave the information to federal authorities before the man allegedly went on a shooting spree in Texas last week, U.S. sources said on Monday.

It is unclear what federal law enforcement authorities did with the information.

World Report

Thirteen people were killed in the Fort Hood shooting by the suspected gunman, Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, a Muslim born in the United States of immigrant parents.

Authorities have decided to charge Hasan, a U.S.-born Muslim of Palestinian descent, in a military court following Thursday's shooting at the Fort Hood Army post where 30 others were also wounded, two of the government officials said.

IRAN CAN'T SEAL DEAL QUICKLY: OBAMA

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama said on Monday an unsettled political situation in Iran may be complicating efforts to seal a nuclear fuel deal between Tehran and major world powers.

Obama told Reuters in an interview that the United States had made more progress toward global nuclear non-proliferation in the past several months than in the past several years.

"But it is going to take time, and part of the challenge that we face is that neither North Korea nor Iran seem to be settled enough politically to make quick decisions on these issues," he told Reuters in an interview at the White House.

MIDDLE EAST

NEW GOVERNMENT FOR LEBANON

BEIRUT - Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri formed a government of national unity on Monday, ending more than four months of tough negotiations with his Hezbollah-led rivals.

"Finally, a government of national unity is born," Hariri told reporters after a presidential decree announcing the new cabinet lineup was announced. "We have turned a new page and there is no turning back.

"I want to be honest from the start: this government can be a chance to renew faith in the state and its institutions ... or it can turn into a replay of our failures."

The new lineup includes 15 ministers from Hariri's bloc and 10 from the opposition.

The remaining five ministers were appointed by President Michel Sleiman, including the holders of the key interior and defence portfolios.

IRAN CHARGES THREE AMERICANS AS SPIES

TEHRAN Iran charged three Americans it captured in July near the border with Iraq with espionage on Monday, prompting Washington to demand the release of what it says are innocent hikers.

Tehran's chief prosecutor Abbas Jaffari Doulatatabadi said investigations were continuing against the trio, Shane Bauer, 27, Sarah Shourd, 31, and Josh Fattal, 27, the official IRNA news agency reported.

A statement on their case is to be made in the near future.

"The three Americans arrested near the border of Iran and Iraq are facing charges of spying and the inquiry is continuing," he said.

The United States called for the swift release of the three, insisting they were wrongly detained.

ASIA

DEATH SENTENCE FOR NINE IN CHINA

BEIJING China said Monday it had put to death nine people involved in deadly ethnic unrest in far-western Xinjiang region, the first executions since the violence erupted in July.

Authorities convicted 21 defendants in October.

Nine were sentenced to death, three were given the death penalty with a two-year reprieve -- a sentence usually commuted to life in jail -- and the rest were handed various prison terms.

"The first group of nine people who were sentenced to death recently have already been executed in succession, with the approval of the Supreme Court," Hou Hanmin, spokeswoman for the Xinjiang government, told AFP.

It was not clear when the executions took place.

Graphic

Colour Photo: Ulet Ifansasti, Getty Images; PLACE TO PRAY: Transgender people pray at a special prayer school for transgender Muslims or "waria" on Monday in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The Koran school, called Senin-Kamis meaning Monday-Thursday, the two days the school operates, was founded in July 2008 by 48-year-old Maryani as a place for waria to pray. Islam strictly segregates men from women when praying, leaving nowhere for "the third sex" waria to pray before now. ;

Load-Date: November 10, 2009

Iran the world leader in abuse of human rights

Irish Examiner

December 2, 2009 Wednesday

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Body

Mr Rahimpour represents a country whose president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has repeatedly called for Israel - a state 80 times smaller than his own with one-twelfth of its population - to be "wiped off the map".

His country supplies Hezbollah and Hamas with the rockets they use to attack Israeli civilians.

As the representative of a country that is a world leader in the abuse of human rights, the Iranian ambassador should hesitate before he invokes international law against a small democratic state forced to defend its citizens. Iran has ignored calls from the council of the EU to halt its wholesale use of the death penalty (317 people were executed in 2007 alone, the second highest figure in the world, including scores of juvenile offenders).

It has for many years persecuted its Baha'i religious minority and its Kurdish national minority as well as routinely imprisoning women's rights activists and those who criticised the recent rigged elections.

Before he meddles in the Israel-Palestinian issue, the Iranian ambassador should address the welfare of his own citizens.

Pat O'Sullivan

South Circular Road,

Limerick

Load-Date: December 2, 2009

Clerics' supremacy under siege

Australian Financial Review

June 20, 2009 Saturday

First Edition

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Section: PERSPECTIVE; International News; Pg. 32

Length: 1572 words

Byline: Tony Walker WASHINGTON. Tony Walker is the AFR's international editor.

Body

Former president Hashemi Rafsanjani looks likely to be a key figure in the search for a solution to Iran's unrest.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former Iranian president, is what might be called a worldly cleric. A favourite of the late Ruhollah Khomeini, embodiment of the Islamic revolution, he is reputedly the richest man in Iran.

Rafsanjani made it on to the Forbes rich list in 2003. His fortune comes from vast landholdings, oil and pistachios. He is a significant benefactor, having founded the biggest network of private Islamic universities in Iran.

The revolution has been good to the 75-year-old son of a poor family of pistachio farmers from Kerman Province, south-east of Tehran.

The question is whether Rafsanjani is about to assert himself in the stand-off between the status quo forces of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the insurgent campaign of Mir-Hossein Mousavi, or whether he, too, will be swept away by those responsible for an electoral coup d'etat.

Karim Sadjapour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has no doubt a moment of reckoning has arrived for Iran that is unprecedented in the history of the Islamic Republic.

Sadjapour identifies Rafsanjani as a critical element in an evolving story involving tens of thousands of Iranian demonstrators pitted against a regime they've accused of "stealing" the presidential election held last weekend.

"In the past, all of these demonstrations have been the people against the regime," Sadjapour says. "This time, you see unprecedented fissures among the revolutionary elite themselves. Someone like former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was one of the founding fathers of the Islamic Republic, is now in the opposition."

Abbas Milani, director of Iranian studies at Stanford University, concurs.

"What makes this moment different from past incidents of confrontation between the regime and the people is that, this time, many pillars of the regime are part of the opposition," Milani writes in The New Republic.

"Aside from Mousavi, who was prime minister for eight years, Rafsanjani, former president Mohammad Khatami, former speaker of the parliament Mehdi Karroubi, and many other past ministers and under-secretaries are now leading the movement demanding new elections."

Clerics' supremacy under siege

Rafsanjani, with his muffin face and earthy demeanour, embodies the complexities and paradoxes of the Iranian revolution. At a press conference in Tehran in the 1980s, he joked with the Australian journalist Geraldine Brooks, then working for The Wall Street Journal, about the black top-to-toe chador she had donned for the event, as a parody of the requirement that all women in Iran wear a headscarf.

"You didn't need to go that far," Rafsanjani said, laughing, or words to that effect.

Alternately conservative and liberal, accommodating to the West and intensely nationalistic, the former president has emerged as a possible key to a resolution of the impasse threatening Iran's 30-year-old Islamic Revolution.

Rafsanjani, president from 1989 to 1997, is far from impartial. He loathes Ahmadinejad, clearly regards his former ally Ali Khamenei, the so-called "Supreme Leader", with disdain, and has many detractors among Iranians who look askance at the wealth he has accumulated during the past 30 years.

Akbar Shah, he is called, a play on his first name and that of the late and extremely corrupt Shah, whom Rafsanjani was instrumental in ousting in 1979.

But as Iran teeters, the entrepreneurial Rafsanjani finds himself drawn towards a facilitating role.

The demonstrators have made it clear they will not yield, at least not for the time being.

What is in prospect, then, is either a bloody confrontation with the security forces, or a negotiated compromise involving the religious leadership itself.

The rules of the bazaar in Iran, where much is negotiable, are not absent from the country's political life. Of all the members of the clerical elite, there are few who have proved themselves quite as adept as Rafsanjani in behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing.

It is interesting to recall that Rafsanjani was a hidden presence in Tehran when representatives of Ronald Reagan's administration negotiated the shipment of anti-tank missiles from Israel to Iran for use in the Iran-Iraq war in return for funds that were funnelled to the Nicaraguan Contras in the so-called Iran-Contra scandal.

Reagan wanted Iran's assistance to secure the release of American hostages being held in Lebanon by associates of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah "party of God". The secret arms shipments were aimed at circumventing congressional oversight and were against the law. Rafsanjani recalls, in one of his memoirs, that Reagan's national security adviser, Robert McFarlane, arrived in Tehran in September 1986 bearing a cake in the shape of a key to symbolise the opening of relations between the US and Iran.

Rafsanjani is no stranger to back-door dealings.

Circumstances have not progressed beyond the presentation of the key-shaped cake, but that may be about to change, driven by the extraordinary scenes on the streets of Iran's capital.

Reports during the week that Rafsanjani had gone to the holy Shi'ite city of Qom to confer with senior clerics (Khamenei may be the Supreme Leader but in the clerical hierarchy he ranks well below the "grand ayatollahs") are a possible sign of senior clerical involvement in efforts to defuse the crisis that is threatening the entire Islamic enterprise.

As Gary Sick, professor of international affairs at Columbia University in New York and a former staff member of the National Security Council, puts it: "This is a real turning point. The whole idea of the Islamic Republic was to have a mixture of Islam and Islamic rule, but with the voice of the people, a form of democracy, republicanism. That has broken down.

"Today, the people simply don't trust the government and the government does not trust the people. It's gone further than the ruling elite ever thought it would."

Clerics' supremacy under siege

What Khamenei and Ahmadinejad and their security advisers will be debating this weekend is whether the genie can be returned to the bottle without massive bloodshed and further damage to the legitimacy of the regime.

As Milani notes: "When people defied Khamenei's orders by gathering en masse on Monday, the regime's armour of invincibility - so central to authoritarian control - was cracked. Without it, the regime cannot survive, and re-establishing it can come only at the price of greater bloodshed."

Khamenei has asked the Guardian Council to review the election result (widely regarded as a ploy to buy time), and, in the latest development, to interview participants in the election. The purpose of this is not clear.

The Guardian Council, made up of 12 members, including six clerics, all hand-picked by Khamenei, is not regarded as a power centre. It provides advice to the Supreme Leader on matters temporal and spiritual.

Rafsanjani is head of the much more powerful - in its own right - 86-member Assembly of Experts which, in extreme circumstances, could strip the Supreme Leader of his authority derived under the system of *velayat e faqih*, which approximates the divine rule of the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church.

In other words, the Assembly of Experts, comprising prominent regime figures, including clerics, could express loss of confidence in Khamenei.

The point is that this is not North Korea.

There is no indication that Rafsanjani is manoeuvring towards such an outcome, but the fact that he heads a body with these sorts of powers (he was reconfirmed as chairman in March this year) provides him with potentially a formal role in the search for a resolution to the crisis.

It is possible that Ahmadinejad's hardline supporters will seek to stage a pre-emptive strike against Rafsanjani and Mousavi's other allies in the historical leadership.

Rafsanjani was responsible for one of the more intriguing contributions to debate in Iran in the entire history of the revolution when he released an open letter to Khamenei just days before the election, in which he criticised the Supreme Leader.

He complained that Khamenei had done nothing to rein in Ahmadinejad, who had publicly accused Rafsanjani of corruption during the campaign.

"One expects Your Eminence to resolve this problem and eliminate dangerous plots," Rafsanjani wrote. "Put out the fire whose smoke is already visible and prevent its flames from rising and spreading through the elections and beyond."

The bad blood between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani is hardly surprising. Rafsanjani's son ran Mousavi's campaign, millions of Rafsanjani riyals (Iran's currency) poured into the insurgent's coffers, and, since the election, Rafsanjani's newspaper-owning daughter has addressed the demonstrators.

Implicit in Rafsanjani's extraordinary letter, published widely in Iran, was the warning to Khamenei himself that his own position was being threatened by his association with the reckless Ahmadinejad. Khamenei had made a bad bet, Rafsanjani implied.

In the meantime, demonstrations show no sign of letting up. The Iranian regime is facing its biggest crisis in 30 years. As Mohammad-Reza Djalili, an Iran expert at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, put it: "The structure of the system has been shaken, and now it has cracks."

In all this, there is a key detail that should not be forgotten: Rafsanjani is the "father" of Iran's nuclear program.

Graphic

THREE PHOTOS: Mir-Hossein Mousavi, above, addresses his supporters at a mass rally in Tehran. But it may be Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, left, from the clerical elite, who will help bring about political change. Photos AFP, Bloomberg

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End of Document

A very public death; FOCUS

The Age (Melbourne, Australia)

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First Edition

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Byline: Daniel Flitton - Daniel Flitton is diplomatic editor

Body

The death of a teenager caught on camera and posted on the web may be the defining moment of the Iranian protest. Daniel Flitton reports.

HER eyes. White, large and haunting. For just a moment, she seems to stare directly at the camera. A man cradles her face, another pair of hands are pushed flat below her neck. Her blood. Streams of red erupt from her mouth, her nose. Her life, gone.

"Neda" is the name given to this young Iranian woman, apparently shot in protests that have gripped the world's attention. The shaky footage of what appears to be her last seconds has swept across the internet and galvanised demonstrators. Neda has become a rallying cry - in Farsi, the name translates as "voice call" - and, in the online realm at least, that call is growing louder.

The social network website Twitter has become synonymous with the outpouring of anger in Iran following the disputed elections. Protesters are reportedly using the system - based around short messages of no more than a few words sent from either a mobile phone or computer - to muster groups, spread information and circumvent government controls. The identifying tag "#Neda" marks out a message about the protests: "neda did not die so we could go back to being dogs . . . we are free .. forever now", reads one tweet. Other notes are equally poignant: "just watched the #neda video . . . sad. very sad," says one. "If an innocent girl gets shot halfway across the world, does she make a sound? Yes, the whole world hears her."

Neda was supposedly killed on Saturday. The 40-second footage shows her collapsing backwards, with two men on either side trying to cushion the fall. People yell and whoever is holding the camera rushes forward, giving a clear view of her blue jeans and white running shoes splattered with blood. More people crowd around and a woman in the background screams as the blood pours. A man cries over and over. The outcome looks clear.

A story of Neda's life and death has taken hold - but as with many stories emerging in a time of great tumult, the sketchy outlines of her tale are being painted in by those people carrying an interest.

The gruesome video was supposedly sent to an Iranian expatriate in the Netherlands who posted it on the web. It apparently came via a doctor friend in Tehran who tried to save the victim. According to some reports, she was Neda Soltani, a 16-year-old philosophy student at the protest alongside her father. To some she is a martyr for the cause of freedom, a life extinguished by a regime unable to recognise its own end. She was killed by one of the feared Basij, it is said, a loyalist regime thug.

A very public death FOCUS

But the truth is much harder to determine. The regime has severely curtailed foreign reporters from moving around the country and the local media are careful not to prompt any official ire. And in this information vacuum, protesters - and perhaps more importantly, those supporting the protests in the online community outside Iran - have seized on Twitter to generate a deluge of material, much of it repetitious and self-reinforcing. Some enthusiasts for the technology have even pronounced it a more reliable means of understanding what is happening in country than traditional sources.

There is no doubting the horror the footage of Neda has prompted. But to step back from this case, what is happening in Iran is part of a profound change to the way information on world events is spread. The consequences of this shift are not yet well understood - nor is the potential for misunderstanding.

Mostly, there is great optimism that technology will limit the prospects of an authoritarian crackdown on citizens. "The world is watching" is a common refrain in the short tweets about the situation in Iran, while warnings of police moving in one direction or another can be relayed.

Mobile phones with cameras make it much harder for regimes to hide brutal acts. Another video from Iran posted on YouTube over the weekend shows a young man lying on the ground, apparently shot in the stomach. As the crowd mills around, hands are held high in the air, holding mobile phones pointed at the victim to record fellow protesters as they move to carry him away. At least a dozen phones are visible in the crowd - presumably the footage comes from another one.

"If the movement is successful, they could spread the idea that the regime is evil," Fatimah Haghighatjoo, a former reformist member of the Iranian parliament, told The New York Times. Every time anyone inside Iran opens a website and sees the images of a teenage girl shot dead in a demonstration, it chips away at the government's claim to being moral.

But while each person's experience, shared through websites such as Twitter can help expose specific acts of cruelty, alone they cannot capture an entire movement. To try to obtain an accurate picture of the events in Tehran by reading Twitter messages is akin to taking a drink from a fire hose - the rushing stream might wet your mouth, but it could just as likely choke you.

The raw power of reports and footage from the front line has long been acknowledged. Media outlets strive to outdo one another to get there first, yet put a premium on accuracy. If reporters are not able to witness events, they talk to those who did - and judge the veracity of the claims. A person posting on Twitter can be questioned - if they choose to respond - but the relentless barrage of messages makes the challenge all the more difficult.

When The Age logged on to Twitter over the weekend, the identifying tag "#iranelection" - or hashtag as they are known - spouted thousands of messages. Start reading and not long after a note appears on the screen: "25 more results since you started searching. Refresh to see them." Press the refresh button, and receive more messages. Started reading, another alert. 78 more, 110 more - a break from the computer to eat dinner, and 1994 tweets had arrived in the interim.

Many pointed towards helpful longer analysis elsewhere, especially in the mainstream news, yet a lot of the messages were dross. Barely any added to an understanding of events as they were unfolding on the ground.

"Certainly, there is a powerful new force developing here," the authors of a Harvard University study of Iran's online political community wrote in The Washington Post at the weekend. "Citizens who previously had little voice in public are using cheap web tools to tell the world about the drama that has unfolded since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of Iran's presidential election, an outcome many disputed."

But, as the authors go on to explain, communication does not automatically result in action: "There are so many messages streaming through at any moment that any single entry is unlikely to break through the din, and the limit of 140 characters - part of the service's charm and the secret of its success - militates against sustained argument and nuance." The Harvard study looked at the use of blogs before the election. It found the principal users of this technology were the wealthy, English-speaking and well-educated class of Iranian society. While Vladimir Lenin

A very public death FOCUS

long ago recognised an elite was required to guide the revolution, the rural poor in Iran have few chances to connect online.

But importantly, the authors of the Harvard study challenged the often-held assumption that the online community is dominated by agitators for democratic change: "While the Iranian blogosphere is indeed a place where women speak out for their rights, young people criticise the morality police, journalists fight censorship, reformists press for change, and dissidents call for revolution, it is also a place where the supreme leader is praised, the Holocaust denied, the Islamic Revolution defended and Hezbollah celebrated."

And while pro-regime groups are just as likely to mobilise online in support of their leaders, the report found the most popular topic on Iranian blogs was poetry.

Twitter also threatens to become a powerful tool for an authoritarian regime to track dissidents. Many messages urge other participants to ignore this user or another as impostors. One claims a user is a "probable government agent urging violence" - another warns, "Please do NOT take advice on action from new ppl on twitter, there r many gov agents trying to trap u."

No doubt there are official efforts to compromise the system - but there is also risk in choosing to accept information selectively. Twitter is a tool for connecting people, but they can still pick and choose whom to connect with.

Yet the shocking footage of Neda may become the defining image of this protest - just as the footage of a Japanese reporter being cut down by Burmese troops during the 2007 Saffron Revolution, or the lone man standing before the tanks after Tiananmen Square. As one tweet put it: "Just speechless watching Neda lose her life on TV and feeling for the people of Iran fighting for their rights. Pray their hopes come true."

Daniel Flitton is diplomatic editor.

Graphic

TWO PHOTOS: The "death" footage (top) has become part of worldwide protests, including in Germany where crowds carry posters of the girl.

Load-Date: June 22, 2009

End of Document

BRITAIN BARS 'RACE HATE' EXTREMIST

DAILY MAIL (London)

February 12, 2009 Thursday

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Length: 1601 words

Byline: BY STEVE DOUGHTY SOCIAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

Body

AND AS HE THREATENS TO DEFY ORDER, FEARS OF MASS PROTEST BY MUSLIMS

A DIPLOMATIC row threatened to escalate into a religious and racial confrontation last night, after Jacqui Smith banned an extremist Dutch politician from entering Britain.

Geert Wilders, who is a far-Right political leader, had been invited to Westminster by Lord Pearson, of the UK Independence Party, to show an anti-Islamic film.

But using powers to ban foreigners thought likely to incite hatred, the Home Secretary forbade Mr Wilders from entering Britain.

On Tuesday her officials told the politician he would be excluded as his visit 'would threaten community harmony and therefore public security in the UK'.

Mr Wilders, 45, has spent the last four years under police protection in his own country. He is a little-noticed activist who usually has the backing of just a handful of Dutch MPs.

But Miss Smith's actions provoked an immediate complaint from the Dutch government. Mr Wilders is thought to be the first elected EU politician to be excluded since 1973, when Britain joined what was the Common Market.

Dutch Foreign minister Maxime Verhagen telephoned Foreign Secretary David Miliband to protest.

Yesterday the situation became more heated as Wilders tried to turn his exclusion into a demonstration. He said he will attempt to board his scheduled flight to Heathrow today and defy immigration officers to turn him back.

'I was very surprised and very saddened that the freedom of speech that I believe was a very strong point in UK society is being harassed today.

'I am seriously considering just trying it out and just getting on the plane. Then I'll see what happens. Let them handcuff me.'

There were reports of a mass protest by up to 10,000 Muslims if he does defy the ban.

Even if he fails to enter the UK, there are fears that protests may occur. Mr Wilders has the support of the peers who are his hosts, their supporters and the backing of freedom-of-speech campaigners.

BRITAIN BARS 'RACE HATE' EXTREMIST

The history of rows over perceived insults to Islam – such as the demonstrations in London about Danish cartoons published in newspapers three years ago, suggests there may be a risk of confrontation if he enters the country.

Mr Wilders was to present his 15-minute film *Fitna*, which means 'strife' in Arabic, in a committee room in the Palace of Westminster.

The footage cuts pictures of the September 11 terror attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, with verses from the Koran. Mr Wilders has also compared the Islamic holy book the Koran, to *Mein Kampf* and has described Islam as 'retarded'. His Freedom Party calls for the Koran to be banned.

The politician's hosts, Lord Pearson and Baroness Cox, said: 'We do not agree with Geert Wilders that the Koran should be banned. We don't want it banned but discussed – particularly by the majority Muslim community. We are therefore promoting freedom of speech. Geert Wilder's *Fitna* film, which is available on the web, is not a threat to anyone.

'It merely suggests how the Koran has been used by militant Islamists to promote and justify their violence.' They said they would show the film 'with or without Mr Wilders'.

Liberal Democrats supported the ban. Home affairs spokesman Chris Huhne said: 'There is a line to be drawn even with freedom of speech, and that is where it is likely to incite violence or hatred.'

However, Labour peer Lord Ahmed, who is among leading opponents of Mr Wilders's visit, pointed out that the politician faces prosecution in Holland for inciting hatred against Muslims.

'We should be very careful when we are parliamentarians that we don't invite someone in who incites hatred.

'We need freedom of speech of course. But what about my freedom of speech, and what about my freedom of belief?'

Stephen Glover – Page 17

BOUFFANT HAired LIBERAL WHO TURNED HARDLINER

GEERT Wilders is the latest and most extreme face of anti-Islamic sentiment to claim leadership of the growing political far-Right in Holland.

The 45-year-old has based his appeal to voters on loathing of the Koran and the attempt to make a direct link between Islam and terrorism.

Previous populist anti-immigration leaders have been a little more ambiguous.

For instance, Pim Fortuyn, murdered by a leftist activist in 2002, was gay – and his liberal approach to sex tempered his hard line on Islam.

By contrast, Mr Wilders pumps out the simple message that the Koran is bad and that Muslims must abandon it.

Lawyer Gerard Spong, a friend of Fortuyn's, has persuaded Dutch appeal judges to prosecute Wilders for his film.

'Geert Wilders incites hatred against Muslims, and Pim did not do that: he had sex with Moroccan boys in dark rooms,' he said.

Mr Wilders, who is married to a Hungarian, was born to a middle-class Catholic family, the son of a printing company director in the town of Venlo.

Despite his regular pronouncements on the Judaeo-Christian heritage of his country, he is no longer a religious man.

BRITAIN BARS 'RACE HATE' EXTREMIST

He began working for a health insurance company before shifting into politics as a speechwriter for a liberal party.

Some say his experience of being mugged as a city councillor in Utrecht in the late 1990s may have made him more Right-wing.

In 2002, Mr Wilders broke with the liberals over their support for Turkish entry into the EU.

He formed his own Freedom Party following the 2004 murder film maker Theo van Gogh.

He was killed by an Islamic radical after making a film called Submission, showing an actress in see-through clothing with Islamic verses written on her body. In 2006, Mr Wilders campaigned for a ban on the burqa and secured nine seats in the Dutch parliament.

The message of the Freedom Party is that the Koran is akin to Hitler's Mein Kampf, that Islam is a 'fascist ideology' and that Dutch society is being engulfed in a tidal wave of Islamisation.

It calls for an end to immigration by Muslims and for payments to encourage Muslims to emigrate.

As part of this, Wilders has produced the 15-minute Fitna film, which contains footage of victims of the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre and the sound of those caught in the buildings calling emergency services for help and victims of the 2005 terror attacks in London.

The film ends with the sound of tearing pages and urges Muslims to do the same to the Islamic holy book, the Koran.

In some cities in Holland, Muslims make up a third of the population. Mr Wilders's call for less tolerance of immigrants is receiving a hearing among growing numbers who are becoming alarmed at the direction their country is taking.

There is also a sense of deepening unease in other European countries, where political leaders are only too aware of the potential for reactionary mass politics in a time of recession and unemployment.

AND JUST LOOK AT THOSE WE HAVE LET IN...

THE Home Secretary may consider Geert Wilders too much of a threat to public safety to be allowed into Britain. But by contrast, these are some of the characters who have been let in:

FIREBRAND CLERIC

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI, 82 VISITED London in 2004 at the invitation of Ken Livingstone, then the city's mayor, who considered him a 'progressive force for change'.

Egyptian-born spiritual leader of Muslim Brotherhood, which embraces the Hamas organisation that controls Gaza. Has justified suicide bombing, which he calls martyrdom, and the killing of Israeli women and children, on the grounds that they are 'militarised'.

HOMOPHOBIC SINGER

BOUNTY KILLER, real name Rodney Price, 36 PERFORMED in East London in November despite appeals to the Home Secretary from gay activists who wanted him banned from the country. The Jamaican reggae singer is accused by critics of glorifying gang violence and guns and of inciting murder against gays. One song, translated from the Jamaican patois, calls on listeners to 'burn a fire on poofs and faggots'. Another claims: 'We need no promo to rub out dem homo'.

BILLIONAIRE CULT LEADER

BRITAIN BARS 'RACE HATE' EXTREMIST

REVEREND SUN MYUNG MOON, 89 LABOUR Home Secretary Charles Clarke overturned a 27-year ban against the cult leader and allowed him 24 hours in Britain to address a rally in London, in 2005. The Korean-born billionaire declares himself to be the messiah. His movement, famous for its mass weddings of thousands of couples, is said to brainwash the young people it persuades to become followers. It has been a failure in Britain since 1981, when the Moonies lost a milestone libel case against the Daily Mail. The Mail had called Moon's Unification Church 'the church that breaks up families'.

SERIAL PAEDOPHILE

RAYMOND HORNE, 62 A SERIAL paedophile with a long jail history in Australia for offences against boys from 13. Horne, who emigrated to Australia with his parents in 1952, when he was five, has a criminal record in Queensland stretching back 43 years. He was released last year from a 12-year sentence for 14 offences against two homeless boys he met while posing as a charity volunteer. British ministers made no objection when Australian authorities deported him to this country after he finished his sentence, on the grounds that because he never took out Australian citizenship, he is British.

ANTI-SEMITIC AGITATOR

IBRAHIM MOUSSAWI, 43 Propagandist for Hezbollah cleared to enter the country by Jacqui Smith in November, despite fierce Tory objections. He is the head of a TV station that routinely describes suicide bombers as 'martyrs' and which has broadcast a 30-part series on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a an anti-semitic forgery produced in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century that pretends to present a Jewish conspiracy for world takeover. Moussawi is alleged to have said that Jews are 'a lesion on the forehead of history'.

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Our Enemies Are Still Plotting Against Us

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Times-Dispatch Columnist

Body

No Americans old enough to remember will soon forget where they were and what they were doing when four airplanes were used on a late summer day in 2001 to murder nearly 3,000 of our fellow citizens. Americans demanded swift retribution be visited upon those who had planned the massacre. The determination to end the ongoing terror attacks that had been perpetrated against the U.S. since the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon was sincere and strong.

Sept. 11, 2001, happened more than eight years ago. Most of us recall the terror and the pain of that day. But it is fast fading into the recesses of memory. Already, more than 20 percent of Americans were either not yet born or were too young to remember those events. Life has moved on.

But the forces behind the horrific attacks are still here. They are not finished with their work. And the threat of another event - perhaps something far worse - is just as real as it was on Sept. 12, 2001. In fact, the danger of a second attack continues to grow, and America has much to do to stop the countdown toward what could be our Armageddon.

In a report released in December 2008, titled "World at Risk," the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism concluded that "unless the world community acts decisively and with great urgency, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by 2013."

It has been one year since that report was released, and while the U.S. government has taken some of the actions the report recommended, much remains to be done. Our enemies continue to gain in the strength and capabilities necessary to cause grave harm to this nation.

I recently attended a seminar on this topic sponsored by The Heritage Foundation and El Pomar Foundation in Colorado Springs. The seminar, "The WMD Threat and America's Communities," looked at the threat of a terrorist attack employing a weapon capable of causing large numbers of casualties and massive structural, psychological, and financial damage.

Our Enemies Are Still Plotting Against Us

The 12 panelists participating in the seminar are among the country's leading experts on WMDs. Included in the lineup were Paul Bremer, the former ambassador at large for counterterrorism, member of the Homeland Security Council, and one-time presidential envoy to Iraq; Col. Randall Larsen, executive director, Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism; Michael Allen, consultant, Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, and a former member of the National Security Council; and Gen. Victor E. Renaut Jr., commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, Peterson Air Force Base.

The panelists discussed the very real scenarios of a nuclear or biological attack on U.S. soil. The seminar looked at federal, state, and community preparedness and response capabilities, focusing on the need for better localized readiness as the key to surviving any disaster - man-made or natural. While the topic was grim, it was well-presented, and the panelists all stressed that vigilant deterrence and an educated, well-trained, and prepared citizenry at all levels - national, local, and individual - are our best defense.

Who are these terrorists who seek to destroy us?

According to Bremer, Islamic extremists are a threat not only to the U.S. but to the entire globe. These extremists have a vision of a world converted to Islam and an established universal caliphate. They seek to destroy everything that America and her ideals of individual freedom and democracy stand for.

Osama bin Laden has stated that democracy is a satanic concept that must be abolished. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has plainly stated his dream of a world with no Israel and no United States.

For the past 30 years, Iran has been home to some of the world's most extremist Muslims. Until 9/11, Hezbollah had killed more Americans than all other terrorist groups combined. It is funded by Iran.

So, why can't we eradicate the root causes of radical Islam? Why can we not provide funding to better educate Islamic peoples so they will come to appreciate and benefit from the financial blessings and the less tangible rewards of freedom and democracy?

Unfortunately, radical Islam is no longer an ideal that attracts only the poor and uneducated. Most of the 9/11 hijackers had some university training. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed holds a degree in mechanical engineering from a North Carolina college.

According to Bernard Lewis, a Princeton University professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies, Islamic terrorism exists because of the hatred radical Islamists have for the success of Western civilization - and their continuing anger at Islam's long-ago fall from power. This is nothing short of a holy war.

The vast majority of Muslims would never dream of becoming a radical jihadist or a suicide bomber for Islam. But for many desperately poor Muslims in distant, ancient lands, the havoc created by 9/11 and other acts of terrorism have been rallying calls, giving them hope that their faith might one day become the dominant world religion.

The night of Sept. 10, 2001, Americans went to bed still confident that our nation was safe. We had huge oceans to the east and west and friendly neighbors above and below us. Few Americans had any idea that a new type of war was brewing against our cherished freedoms, religious liberty, and equal rights for women.

Our old concepts of war involved identifiable enemies in military uniform. Wars were waged on battlefields and attempts were made to keep civilians from harm.

But this is a new struggle in the age-old battle of religion. Our enemies want us either converted to their faith or dead - all of us. And modern technology has made their goal much easier.

Obtaining deadly weapons is not difficult. With Pakistan teetering on the brink of chaos, the security of its nuclear arsenals could be compromised. North Korea and Iran have nuclear ambitions that, if attained, would radically alter the safety of the entire world. Keeping nuclear materials out of the hands of rogue nations and terrorists would become nearly impossible.

Our Enemies Are Still Plotting Against Us

Even a tiny amount of unaccounted-for uranium or other radiological material in the wrong hands could have catastrophic consequences. A small nuclear device, known as a "dirty bomb," if detonated in an urban area such as Los Angeles or New York, would not even have to inflict massive numbers of casualties to cripple this nation financially, constitutionally, and psychologically.

Biological weapons are even easier to obtain than nuclear weapons (and considered by most a more likely scenario). Infectious diseases make fearsome weapons - few people are immune from the havoc they would unleash. Consider that more soldiers died in WWI from influenza than from battlefield casualties. In October 1918, more than 12,000 people in Philadelphia alone died from the flu.

The materials, the facilities, and the knowledge needed to create a biological weapon can be obtained for about the price of a luxury automobile. Technology has advanced to the point that disease spores such as anthrax and smallpox can be easily aerosolized and dispersed over large areas. Pathogens such as E. coli, botulinum toxins, and even the Marburg virus are available in nature, sick people, and many medical laboratories.

During the anthrax scare of October 2001, the postal service did an outstanding job (unintentionally, to be sure) of delivering the deadly letters to their intended recipients.

So, how does the United States meet these challenges? What is the key to protecting us?

There is no one answer.

For protection from a nuclear attack, certainly the No. 1 answer is preventing nuclear proliferation. Iran must not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. Time is running short. If the Obama administration and the U.N. are not able to circumvent Iran's nuclear ambitions through sanctions and statesmanship, then the military option will have to be used. The federal government must deal with this crisis now.

Preventing a biological attack is more complicated. On a local level, the best option is not so much prevention as rapid response. The key to survival is improving the United States' ability to quickly recognize a biological disaster, respond immediately, and recover swiftly. We must be able to produce vaccines and therapeutics rapidly and relatively inexpensively - and do so here, in the U.S. We cannot rely on other nations to provide us desperately needed vaccines and other immunizations in a crisis.

State and local governments must develop thorough training programs and have well-practiced plans on what to do in the event of a disaster - man-made or natural.

The American people must become active players in the ongoing prevention of domestic terrorist attacks. A well-informed and well-trained citizenry is the best defense against widespread panic and massive chaos.

Every American family should develop a basic preparedness plan. Even young children should know what is required of them should the unthinkable happen. A good plan should include evacuation routes, a meeting place for the family, and communications methods. An emergency kit containing enough food, water, first aid, and other necessities to last several days is imperative. FEMA and the American Red Cross Web sites provide lists of what should be included.

Finally, an informative and upbeat brief from Gen. Arnaut of U.S. Northern Command spelled out many things that are already being done to prevent and respond to disasters and protect Americans.

The primary mission of Northern Command is to provide command and control of homeland defense efforts and to coordinate defense support of civil authorities. The role of the military command is to provide supplies, equipment, and trained personnel in supporting roles. (The arrival of Navy divers in the aftermath of the Minneapolis, Minn., bridge collapse is an example of the assistance the military can provide.)

Ultimately, this is a matter of protecting and preserving our homeland, our freedoms, and our lives. It is up to every American to stay informed, get educated, and protect this great nation of ours.

Our Enemies Are Still Plotting Against Us

Contact Robin Beres at (804) 649-6305 or mberes@timesdispatch.com

Graphic

PHOTOS

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Body

MIDDLE EAST

SUSPECTED SPY DEVICES BLOWN UP

HULA, Lebanon - Three suspected Israeli spy devices have been blown up in south Lebanon, two detonated remotely by the Israeli army and one destroyed by the Lebanese army, a military official said on Sunday.

"One explosion occurred before midnight in a hilly part of the Hula border zone and a second happened in the same district (on Sunday) morning," the official told AFP.

It "seems the two detonations were triggered by Israel which exploded two spying devices it had planted in the sector a long while ago," she said.

Israel "feared for one reason or another that they might be discovered and proceeded to destroy them by exploding them remotely," the official said.

Lebanese troops "located another device and exploded it on Sunday morning" after going to the area on Saturday night with UNIFIL peacekeepers, she added.

A security official in south Lebanon told AFP the devices were used for "surveillance of communications by the resistance," referring to the Shiite Hezbollah movement which fought a bloody 34-day war with Israeli in 2006 that devastated the south of the country.

SIX KILLED IN BAGHDAD VIOLENCE

BAGHDAD - Shootings and bombings in and around Baghdad killed six people on Sunday, one of them a child, security officials said.

In the deadliest attack, three people were killed and 15 wounded in a bombing in the predominantly Sunni Arab north Baghdad neighbourhood of Adhamiyah, a medic at the Al-Nurman hospital said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Among the dead was a boy in his young teens, the official said.

World Report

"I was walking along the street and suddenly I found myself in the hospital," said 45-year-old Ayad Hassan, who suffered minor leg injuries in the attack and was being treated in Al-Nurman hospital.

In the town of Al-Asriyah, around 60 kilometres south of the capital, one person was killed and nine wounded when a bomb exploded at a bus station in the afternoon, a security official said.

Near Baghdad University in the southwestern neighbourhood of Jadriyah, a roadside bomb killed the driver and wounded three others, police said.

In south Baghdad, a sniper killed a policeman, a medic said.

KILLED MILITANTS PLANNED ATTACK

RIYADH - Two men killed in a gunfight in southern Saudi Arabia were known Al-Qaeda militants who carried a store of explosives and four suicide vests for use in an "imminent" attack, the government said Sunday.

Saudi authorities have arrested six Yemenis in the wake of the shootout in Jizan province on Tuesday, and are searching for more people believed involved in the planned attack, according to the interior ministry.

The ministry said the two men, along with a third, their driver who was captured after the gunfight, had snuck into the country from Yemen and were carrying RDX explosives, Kalashnikov assault rifles, grenades, pistols, and four suicide vests in their car when they were intercepted.

"They had infiltrated into Saudi territory from the border to undertake an imminent criminal act," the government said.

The two dead men had disguised themselves as women wearing conservative head-to-toe black abayas and suicide vests fully ready for use, according to the interior ministry.

Ministry spokesman General Mansur al-Turki said there were still no details available on the planned target or targets of the men.

ASIA

NO CASUALTIES IN BRIDGE BOMBING

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines - Suspected Muslim militants bombed a bridge before dawn Saturday in a southern Philippine island where two U.S. soldiers were killed recently, the military said.

The blast damaged one of the lanes of the bridge in Talipao town in the island of Jolo but caused no casualties, military spokesmen said. Despite the damage, the bridge was still passable, the military added.

The attackers were believed to be either members of the Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim extremist group linked to Al-Qaeda, or rogue members of the Moro National Liberation Front, a former Muslim separatist group that made peace with the government in 1996.

EUROPE

POPE PRAISES VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday praised two priests who were victims of violence while working abroad.

Italian priest Ruggero Ruvoletto was shot dead in Brazil last month, and Irish priest Michael Sinnott was abducted by gunmen in the Philippines on Oct. 11.

World Report

"I want us to remember the missionaries, priests, members of religious orders and those who are not religious who dedicate their lives to spread the gospel in the world," the pope said during his weekly Angelus service.

The Philippine military has said a local pirate was behind the abduction of the Irish priest, aged 79, and they believe he may have been turned over to a Muslim separatist group.

Brazilian police found the body of Ruvoletto on Sept. 19 at a parish where he worked in the suburbs of Manaus, a city in the country's Amazon region.

SECURITY IN BOSNIA DEPENDS ON WORLD

SARAJEVO - The international community must maintain its powers in Bosnia to guarantee peace and security in the country if its leaders fail to break a political gridlock, former top envoys said Sunday.

Three former high representatives of the international community in Bosnia urged the 55-nation Peace Implementation Council, which sponsors and directs the peace process, to keep a "reserve power" if crisis talks fail on Tuesday.

"The Peace Implementation Council must maintain reserve power to internationally guarantee Bosnia-Herzegovina's peace and stability," diplomats Paddy Ashdown of Britain, Wolfgang Petrisch of Austria and Christian Schwarz-Schilling of Germany said in a statement.

"The reserve power is the ultima ratio in extremis if the peace, stability and territorial integrity of the state were endangered," they said, comparing the situation in Bosnia with that in Germany after the Second World War.

The council was created in 1995 to support the peace process by assisting Bosnia financially, providing troops for a NATO-led stabilization force, or directly running operations in the country.

THINK TWICE ABOUT CHEAP GOODS

GENEVA - Why is that tomato so cheap?

Campaigners are asking shoppers to find out where the food and goods they buy come from to avoid unwittingly supporting a modern form of slave labour with their purchases.

The "Buy Responsibly" television advertising campaign, designed by M&C Saatchi SAA.L and which will run in Europe, features exploited workers trapped under an upside-down shopping trolley.

"They're just here to pick the tomatoes we buy everyday," the 30-second spot says of the encaged people.

Trafficked and trapped migrants provide cheap labour in construction, agriculture, fishing, textiles and other sectors whose products end up on rich-country shop shelves, according to the International Organization for Migration.

"They are picking agricultural produce or producing consumable items that we all go and buy," said Richard Danziger, head of IOM's global counter-trafficking program.

As many as 12.3 million people worldwide are caught up in forced or bonded labour and sexual servitude, according to IOM estimates. To find out about how consumer habits can support -- or fight -- human trafficking, shoppers can visit a website www.buyresponsibly.org.

AUTHORITIES TO QUESTION RUSSIAN

MADRID - Spanish authorities plan to question Russia's one-time richest man, Oleg Deripaska, in a money laundering probe allegedly involving the Russian mafia in Spain, El Mundo newspaper reported Sunday.

Deripaska's office immediately denied any involvement in the alleged scheme and said he would be willing to answer questions from the authorities over the matter.

World Report

"As part of a trial in Spain, certain people questioned have mentioned Oleg Deripaska's name," a statement from his office said.

"In that context, Oleg Deripaska has asked Russian prosecutors to clarify this information and has declared himself ready to respond to all questions from Spanish authorities."

It added that "we consider the Spanish authorities' conclusions erroneous and we hope that this misunderstanding will be cleared up very quickly."

Top Spanish investigative judge Baltazar Garzon will visit Moscow the first week of December to question Deripaska, who owns a majority stake in UC Rusal, the world's largest aluminum producer, the report said.

AFRICA

SOMALI REBELS OFFER AK-47 GIFT

KISMAYU, Somalia - The 17-year-old winner of a Koran recital and general knowledge competition organized by al Shabaab rebels in southern Somalia got an AK-47 gun, two hand grenades, a computer and an anti-tank mine as prizes.

The runner-up in the month-long competition aimed at 10-25 year olds, a 22-year-old, received an AK-47 and ammunition at the ceremony, where the rebels urged parents to allow children to learn how to handle weapons and fight against the enemy.

OCEANIA

SCIENTIST WARNS PACIFIC RESIDENTS

MAJURO Many Pacific islands in danger of being obliterated by rising sea levels should seek relocation aid at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, a Fiji-based scientist said.

"By 2100, I don't see how many islands will be habitable," professor Patrick Nunn, a climate change researcher at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji said on the weekend.

Nunn is chairing the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable meeting in the Marshall Islands capital Majuro opening today where 14 Pacific countries and territories are devising their strategy for the December conference.

New scientific projections show the pace of sea level is faster than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projected in its 2007 report, Nunn said.

"We're now looking at a more than one metre (three feet) sea level rise by the end of the century," he said.

For low-lying coral atoll nations such as the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu habitation will become impossible.

Graphic

Colour Photo: Asif Hassan, Agence France-Presse ; Getty Images; HONOURING BHUTTO'S MEMORY: Activists and supporters of the Pakistan People's Party light candles in Karachi in front of a portrait of late former premier Benazir Bhutto on Sunday on the second anniversary of the deadly bombing at the welcome rally of Bhutto. Bhutto survived the October attack, but was assassinated in another suicide attack in the garrison city of Rawalpindi on Dec. 27. ;

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FOUND GUILTY BY THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

DAILY MAIL (London)

March 3, 2009 Tuesday

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Body

HAVING discovered that the Government can't legally strip disgraced banker Fred Goodwin of his 6 693,000- a-year pension, Harriet Harman announces an appeal to the 'court of public opinion'.

Labour's deputy leader says she is determined Fred the Shred won't see a penny of his retirement fund, whatever the law says.

Ministers have been told that any attempt to stop his pension would fall foul of their own precious yuman rites legislation. But that won't stop Hattie. She declared: 'It might be enforceable in a court of law, but it's not enforceable in the court of public opinion and that's where the Government steps in.'

This is an intriguing development. In most other circumstances, this Government fights tooth and nail not to give in to public opinion. When they force through unpopular measures, ministers pride themselves on resisting the wishes of the people who pay their wages. In those cases, the 'court of public opinion' is dismissed as 'mob rule'.

If this is indeed a sincere change of heart then, frankly, I'm all for it.

In the court of public opinion, for instance, Jacqui Smith would be convicted of stealing, for fraudulently misrepresenting her sister's back bedroom as her 'main' residence for parliamentary expenses purposes.

In the court of public opinion, Peter Mandelson would have been banged up for dishonestly obtaining a mortgage by lying to his building society. He certainly wouldn't have been handed a first-class return on the gravy train, elevated to the peerage and appointed to a key role in government.

In the court of public opinion, Tony Blair would find himself accused of war crimes after sending troops to Iraq on the basis of a dodgy dossier cooked up by his co-conspirator Alastair Campbell. The court of public opinion would have convicted him of selling honours and taking bribes from Formula One.

In the court of public opinion, Two Jags would have been found guilty of assault after punching a punter on the campaign trail.

In the court of public opinion, Gordon Brown would be convicted of criminal negligence for selling off Britain's gold reserves at car-boot-sale prices. He could always ask for a separate count of stealing 6100 billion from private pensions to be taken into account, sentences to run consecutively.

Most of the time, ministers are so contemptuous of public opinion that they ignore it completely. They're even prepared to renege on election promises, as in flatly refusing to hold a referendum on the EU constitution sell-out.

FOUND GUILTY BY THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

Left to the court of public opinion, we'd bring back hanging, restore the grammar schools, end immigration and force councils to empty the dustbins once a week, every week.

We'd pull out of Europe, scrap the yuman rites act and put every foreign criminal and terrorist on the first plane to Timbuktu.

There'd be police stations open day and night in every High Street and bobbies on the beat. Serial burglars, car thieves and anyone carrying an offensive weapon in public would face automatic, exemplary prison sentences.

Ludicrous elf'n'safety laws would be scrapped and the legions of five-a-day co-ordinators and diversity managers would have their contracts torn up and be told to get a proper job.

Those preposterous windmills scarring the landscape would be torn down; speed cameras would be dismantled, except in genuine accident blackspots, and traffic humps would be bulldozed flat.

In the court of public opinion, the Prime Minister would have resigned months ago, instead of clinging to office by what remains of his fingernails until the last possible moment.

Harriet Harman's ruthless, vindictive attempts at social engineering would be laughed out of the court of public opinion. And, yes, Fred the Shred would lose his pension and would probably end up swinging from a hastily erected gibbet outside the Bank of England.

Once ministers start resorting to the court of public opinion to get their own way, they're on dangerous ground.

Soon we'll get round to asking why we need politicians at all. Why not just pass laws by pressing a button on our Sky remote?

Most politicians, and Hattie in particular, wouldn't last five minutes in the court of public opinion.

Guilty as charged. Take them down.

richard.littlejohn@dailymail.co.uk

MANDY'S PEERLESS HYPOCRISY

LEAST welcome intervention in the Fred the Shred pension row came from that odious creep Mandelson, criticising Goodwin's lack of shame and selfawareness.

Given that Mandy has built a career being rewarded for failure -- twice paid off after being forced to resign in disgrace, profiting from a dodgy property deal to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds at taxpayers' expense, collecting a slew of pensions, an EU parachute payment worth a small fortune and an ermine-clad meal ticket for life in the Lords -- you might have thought that, for once, he'd have kept his mouth shut. But then shame and self-awareness have never been Mandelson's strong suits.

IN THE latest assault on the traditional family, the Government has decided that single women will be able to nominate anyone they like as the 'father' on their baby's birth certificate.

The 'dad' doesn't have to be the biological father, or even in a romantic relationship with the mother. It could be another woman.

I can't help being reminded of Trigger's birth certificate on Only Fools And Horses. Under 'father's name' was written: 'Some soldiers.'

I'VE BEEN sent further correspondence on the acronym 'Chimps', used by proper coppers to describe their police community support colleagues.

Mail reader Tony Nicholls tells me the correct version is: 'Completely hopeless in most policing situations.'

FOUND GUILTY BY THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION

IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? NO, IT'S NORMAN BROWN

GORDON BROWN today becomes the first European leader granted an audience with President Barack Obama. With excitement mounting, we tune in once again to Eyewitness News, Palm Beach, for a special preview of this historic meeting.

Good morning, America, how are you? This is your favourite son, Chad Hanging, back with another three hours of news you can use. Our top story this hour is the arrival of the President of Englandland in our nation's capital. Joining me now live from London is our special correspondent, Brit Limey.

Good morning, Chad. I'm standing outside Buckingham Palace, the world-famous home of soccer star David Buckingham and his wife, Queen Victoria.

Great to see, you, Brit. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought President Tony Blair had already met with President Obama at the National Prayer Breakfast a coupla weeks back.

That's affirmative, Chad. But President Blair isn't President of Englandland any more.

He's not? Then what was he doing in Washington?

Beats me, Chad. Perhaps it was something to do with his new role bringing peace to the Mid East.

How's that going?

Pretty good, Chad, if you don't count the war between Hamas and Israel, Hezbollah firing rockets at civilians and the crazies in Iran going nuclear.

So who's the new guy?

He's called President Norman Brown. This isn't his first visit, Chad, he met with President George W. Bush last year.

I must've been watching baseball that day. Funny, I don't remember seeing any coverage of an election in Englandland.

There wasn't any, Chad.

No coverage?

No election, Chad.

How did this Norman Brown get to be President, then?

Some kind of a coup, I guess. There certainly seem to be more armed policemen around these days, and there are surveillance cameras everywhere.

Jeez-o, sounds like a Commie dictatorship.

Feels like it some days, too, Chad.

So why is Norman Brown in Washington today?

He's come to tell President Obama to join his crusade to save the world. He thinks he's Superman and has all the answers to the economic crisis.

Englandland has to be doing real good if this guy thinks he can fix the credit crunch.

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Not so, Chad. The IMF says Englandland is worst placed of all developed economies to cope. The currency has collapsed, unemployment is headed towards three million and the country is saddled with 62 trillion of debt, which it will take generations to pay off.

So who's responsible for that?

Norman Brown.

Brown's the guy who got Englandland into this mess in the first place?

Affirmative, Chad. When he was Treasury Secretary he encouraged the banks to go on a reckless lending spree which has bankrupted the country, he let public spending rip right out of control, and destroyed Englandland's private pension system, which was once the envy of the world.

Does he admit he screwed up?

Far from it, Chad. He blames America.

Blames America, Chad, for selling sub-prime mortgages, which were then bought by banks in Englandland and turned out not to be worth the paper they were printed on.

No one forced these banks to buy them.

No one stopped them, either, Chad. Ten years ago, Englandland tore up the rules designed to stop banks getting into trouble.

Who was the genius behind that cockamayme scheme?

He does what?

Norman Brown.

So let me get this straight. This Norman Brown guy wrecks Englandland then flies to Washington to tell us that he's saved the world. And he blames America for his own incompetence?

America and a guy called Sir Fred Goodwin.

Who's he?

Ran the Royal Bank of Scotlandland into the ground.

And they made him a 'sir'? Whose idea was that?

Norman Brown. Now he wants Goodwin to lose his pension.

Can he do that?

No, but seeing as Brown's stolen everyone else's pension in Englandland, it won't stop him trying.

So what's happening in Washington today?

There's a formal meeting at the White House, followed by lunch.

Better tell President Obama to count the spoons.

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From Tripoli to Damascus

The Jerusalem Post
March 20, 2009 Friday

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Byline: Sarah Meltsner

Highlight: An American Israeli describes her travels though countries that don't exactly welcome bearers of either passport

Body

I'd spent five days in Beirut partying too hard and sleeping on a friend's small couch. I needed a respite from the city lined with bullet-pocked buildings and booming nightclubs. I considered Tripoli, a coastal city that has been swept by waves of successive empires, including the Phoenicians, Persians and Romans. But Tripoli has been swept by waves of recent violence as well and I'd come at a bad time-just two weeks before, Tripoli had been rocked by a series of explosions.

My host recommended a day trip to Byblos instead.

I boarded the half-empty northbound bus in central Beirut armed with a book, a cup of coffee and a wristwatch. I usually don't wear a watch, but my host had insisted, "Byblos is hard to spot, so be prepared to get off the bus about 20 minutes out of the city. Keep an eye on the time, or you'll miss the stop."

As the bus pushed its way north through gridlock, I glanced at my watch again and again. I couldn't remember exactly what time we'd left the station, wasn't sure how many minutes I should tack on to the trip to account for traffic. I felt my head drop forward, snap back up, that telltale sign that my body wanted to give in to fatigue. I looked out the window, sure I could stay vigilant. The landscape passed quickly as we broke free of the city. I watched for the word Byblos. It shouldn't be long now.

I woke up to an army tank blocking half the road. A checkpoint. The bus was stopped, the door was open, the driver was shouting in Arabic to someone, presumably a soldier, I couldn't see. The door clapped closed, the bus picked up speed again. Words on a sign: Tripoli, 5 km. Clearly, I'd missed my stop.

We slowed for another checkpoint and then eased into the city. There were tanks on street corners. Armed soldiers stood on the sidewalks, looking like statues among the pedestrians that buzzed past them. The bus inched through the city, passing gutted buildings that looked like they'd been hit by rockets. I'd entered a war zone.

I was rattled and not just because of the condition I found Tripoli in. I thought of Lebanon's proximity to Israel. I felt like I was teetering on the edge of an eventual avalanche that was sure to engulf everything around it. If Lebanon crumbled, surely the ashes and stones would fall from the north.

One by one the other passengers disembarked until I was alone on the bus. The driver stopped, opened the door, looked back at me expectantly.

From Tripoli to Damascus

"Do you speak English?" I asked.

He stared at me.

"Are you going back to Beirut?" I said.

Still nothing.

"Can you tell me where the bus station is?"

"No ingleezi," he said and he motioned for me to get off.

So I did.

I thought the best thing to do was to get oriented immediately, so I pulled out my Lonely Planet, walked to the corner and matched the street to the map.

But what now?

It was afternoon already. In the guidebook, the bus station looked far away and difficult to find. I didn't want to wander around and get lost, end up missing the last bus, and be stuck looking for a hotel at dusk or in the dark.

I decided to find a hotel sooner rather than later.

Eventually I found the nameless alley and then the small, easily missed entrance to the family-run pension I was looking for. I walked up the stairs and into the common room. Stone walls, reminiscent of Jerusalem, stretched to the high ceilings. Broad windows were capped with curved lines. A small doe-eyed boy sat in a chair watching a Disney show, dubbed into Arabic, blaring from the TV. A young woman with black hair and milky white skin, so pale it was luminescent, picked at a lunch of pita and cheese at the dining table.

I stood for a moment, not sure if these people were part of the owners' family or if they were guests.

"Are you looking for a room?" the woman asked me, her accent very American and a bit Southern.

"Yes," I said.

She looked toward an open doorway and shouted in Arabic.

"Do you work here?" I asked.

"No," she said. "But I do look like I could be the disgruntled daughter or something, huh?" She laughed. "Actually, I'm a journalist."

She'd come to Tripoli in the wake of the explosions, but she hadn't come to Lebanon just to write. Though she was Christian and hailed from the US Bible Belt, she had faint roots in the area - her father, whom her mother had never married, was Lebanese and Muslim. Miriam was their love child from college days. Searching for something to anchor her to the father she'd never met, she drifted through the Middle East unmoored.

Emboldened by Miriam's presence, I passed the rest of the day sightseeing with her. The tourist destinations were empty, and there was only a trickle of locals on the sidewalks. Taxi drivers leaned against their parked cars, waiting for the customers who weren't likely to arrive anytime soon.

We wandered through the Old City's tangled slivers of alleys and streets. We walked through souk after souk, lit windows lined with sparkling jewelry, the heads of bodiless mannequins wrapped in bright hijabs, barrels of inky black olives, silver fish with glassy eyes on neat display. Above the storefronts, apartments' green shutters open and pinned to stone walls or clamped shut, serving as a tight guard against the afternoon sun.

From Tripoli to Damascus

TRIPOLI IS famous for its soap and we made our way, stopping frequently to ask for directions, to the Khan as-Saboun (soap khan). We found an empty courtyard dotted with neat but dusty stacks of rose and sky blue. Eager salespeople offered remedies - for anxiety, a lagging love life, and other ills - in the form of colorful, fragrant blocks of soap.

Miriam and I didn't linger long in any one place and eventually we passed into a residential area. The crescent moon and star was etched into the faade surrounding faded rust-toned shutters. An unsmiling young woman watched us from an open window, her head and neck swathed in white - her long face, almond-shaped eyes, full lips and sharp chin similar to my own.

A pair of school-aged boys with black hair ran past us, toy guns in their hands. Laughing, one slammed another against a stone wall. He pushed his friend's shoulder hard with one hand, held the barrel of the pistol to his head with the other. A third boy joined them - the fake shotgun he carried as long as his small torso.

In the morning, Miriam and I boarded a bus back to Beirut. As we rolled past the tanks and out into the country, the grim mood of Tripoli dissipated. We decided to celebrate leaving Tripoli with a girls' night on the town. We agreed I'd collect my things from my host's small couch in Beirut's Hamra neighborhood and we'd take a room at a hostel closer to Gemmayze, the district where Beiruitis go to party.

My host's studio apartment was perched atop a tall apartment building on a quiet street that could be mistaken for a Tel Aviv side street - save for the occasional Hamas flag jutting over a doorway or hanging from a windowsill. Green with white letters, the Hamas flags stirred in the slight wind, rippling their greetings to Miriam and me as we passed. I pictured the Hizbullah takeover, as my host had described it. Masked gunmen lining the streets. The residents peering down from above, thin sheets of glass all that separated them from falling into the chaos below.

When we arrived at my host's studio apartment, he gave Miriam a quick handshake and an equally brief hug to me. His breath was tinged with Limoncello, a lemon liqueur, and he raked his hands through his dark brown hair.

"Listen," he said. "I've been getting some phone calls about you. From strangers. They're asking if I've got an Israeli journalist, a Zionist, sleeping here."

"What did you tell them?"

"I said that you're not a Zionist."

"But I'm not really Israeli, either," I said.

"You're a citizen. That's good enough for them."

Who was them? My host didn't know, I didn't know and Miriam didn't know. Either way, the three of us agreed that maybe it was time for me to leave Beirut and Lebanon altogether.

Miriam and I packed my mochilla and headed back to the bus station, this time in search of a gypsy cab that would take us to Damascus. Miriam's Lebanese visa was expired anyway, and she needed to exit and then reenter the country to obtain a new visa. Making a run for Syria seemed like the best thing to do, for both of us.

After more than five hours of waiting for our visas on the no-man's-land of the Lebanese-Syrian border, we took another gypsy cab to the city locals call Ash-Sham. Miriam made conversation with the driver and his male companion and they broached a topic that is normally taboo in Syrian culture - politics. The words "Bush" and "Obama" popped out of what was, for me, an otherwise indecipherable discussion that filled the car as we journeyed out of the mountains and into Damascus.

It was past midnight and the streets were empty and dark.

From Tripoli to Damascus

The driver and his companion didn't know the hotel we were looking for and the street was unmarked on our map. Miriam told them it was close to the train station downtown, so they dropped us off there. We paid them and their rambling 1980s model car slid off into the night.

We entered the hotel and faced a disinterested, mustached, heavysset clerk. He offered us the only remaining room and led us up the narrow stairwell. He opened the door, flipped on the light and we stepped into the small room.

Miriam flicked two baby cockroaches off a bed.

"How much?" I asked.

"I'm not sleeping here," Miriam whispered to me as we followed the clerk back to the small lobby.

"Look, it's almost 1 a.m. Maybe the bugs can get us a discount," I said.

They didn't - the clerk quoted us a price double that listed in our guidebook and his disinterest morphed into sourliness as we argued with him in English and Arabic.

"Including breakfast?" I asked.

"No."

"A cup of tea?"

"No."

"Wait a second," Miriam said. We all paused. She pointed to a framed document behind the counter. "It says there that the price is..."

"Get out! There's no room here for you!" the clerk shouted and pointed to the door.

And so we walked toward the glowing sign down the street.

The clerk there was thin, young, pleasant. His dark hair was slicked back.

Miriam spoke to him in Arabic and then she turned to me. "He wants to know how many hours we need the room for," she said.

I looked around. Couches lined the mirror-walled, marble-floored lobby. A handful of men sat, eyeing us up and down, up and down.

It appeared, perhaps, that we were in a hotel of ill repute.

"We need it for the whole night," I said and Miriam translated.

He raised his eyebrows.

"Look, we just need somewhere to sleep," I said.

He flipped through his ledger and glanced at the clock on the wall. "There is a room that will be open at four," he said.

Miriam and I took stock of the men and decided to move along to the next hotel.

"It's high season right now," a **female** clerk with a long black ponytail and kohl-rimmed eyes told us. "We have many, many tourists here from Iran." She walked with us through the revolving doors and pointed down the street. "Try them," she said. "Good luck."

From Tripoli to Damascus

We went to hotel after hotel only to find they were full. It was nearing 2 a.m. The streets were deserted.

"OK. So we won't sleep," I said. "We'll just keep moving, until dawn. It's only a few hours away."

But then what?

WE WERE standing at Martyrs' Square, which we'd passed several times already. We were tired and disoriented. We couldn't remember exactly which direction the last clerk had sent us in. I saw a tiny green neon sign high up on a building. Hotel.

We walked down the side street, stopped at the entrance below the sign. Nothing indicated that there was, indeed, a hotel there. The litter-strewn stairwell was decorated with graffiti and less ornate scribbles. Ahmed was here, a sign of life in what seemed like an abandoned building.

Heavy with the weight of our mochillas, we climbed the stairs. First floor - nothing. Second floor - nothing.

But we kept going. Strains of Arabic music floated down to us. We stopped on the next landing and looked up into the empty space at the center of the stairwell. A green light glowed above.

Several more flights and we were at the simply named "Hotel." The walls were a crisp, sky blue. Three old men, all mustached, sat in the common area, smoking cigarettes and sipping tea. The TV was blaring classical Arabic music.

"We. Need. A. Room," I said as I tried to catch my breath.

They chuckled at me and gestured to the chairs.

"No, no," I said and I mimed sleep.

They conferred with each other, speaking rapidly in Arabic. I looked to Miriam. She shrugged. "They're talking too fast," she said. "And I'm not very familiar with the Syrian dialect."

They turned to us. One spoke. "We have a room," he said, offering it to us for the Syrian equivalent of \$10.

We paid and received a gentle smile. No key. The door to our room, which was on the far side of the common area, didn't have a lock.

At that point, we didn't care. After Tripoli, Beirut, hours in no man's land, a surly clerk and a brush with a whorehouse, we just wanted some sleep. Miriam picked one of the three beds and tucked herself under the thick brown blanket. She readjusted her pillow and gasped.

"A knife," she said, raising a switchblade into the air.

I looked around. The room was small. There was a shirt draped on the open door of the armoire. A half-used bar of soap, a razor and a cup lined the edge of the sink. A pair of men's slippers at the end of each of the three beds, a wristwatch on the nightstand.

That's when I realized - there weren't any rooms left. The old men had given us the room they sleep in and they'd given it to us for a pittance. I realized then that all this time I'd been terrified of having to surrender myself to the mercy of the people around, but that every step of this journey had been a supreme act of faith, from the moment I stepped off the bus in Tripoli.

I turned off the light and got into bed. I slept soundly that night, knowing that three old men were sitting guard on the other side of an unlocked door.

Graphic

7 photos: Young boys play with toy guns in the Tripoli market. The courtyard of Umayyad Mosque in Damascus also serves as a gathering place for families. Old men survey olives in the fruit and vegetable market in a poor area of downtown Damascus. An abandoned building in downtown Tripoli. Men smoke nargileh and sip tea at a cafe in Damascus's old city. (Credit: Sarah Meltsner)

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The bigger picture

The Jerusalem Post

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Byline: MYA GUARNIERI

Highlight: Iranian expats interviewed by the 'Post' describe the parallels they see between the violent postelection protests of the past few weeks and certain 'key events' that took place a full decade before Khomeini and the Islamists deposed the shah in 1979

Body

At night, cries of dissent like "Allahu akbar!" and "Death to the dictator!" rise from the rooftops of Teheran. The protesters' calls are punctuated by shattering glass as Basiji on the streets below smash car windows in retribution. But the people persist, turning their voices to the sky, an Iranian-American in Teheran, who asked to be called Reza, tells The Jerusalem Post in a phone interview.

"The scare tactics, like killing protesters, have worked," he says, "When there were thousands of people out, [the protesters] felt safe. But because the crowds have thinned, it's not like it was before."

But in many ways, Iran is as it was before - for this now-simmering resistance was a long time coming. And many, like Reza, anticipate that there is still more to come.

Although the protests were focused on the election results, he is certain the election was merely the spark in the powder keg, igniting years of frustration and disillusionment. "Last time I was here, in 2007, literally everyone - from taxi drivers to my family - was very angry and was openly cursing the president and the government, mostly because of the economic situation."

Reza explains that though Iranians readily aired their discontent to one another, no one did so in public and never in the streets.

He was shocked when the protests began, unexpectedly walking into one of the first rallies on a main street in Teheran. "There were a couple of hundred people completely blocking traffic and yelling 'Death to the dictator!'" he recalls. He joined in, but the protest was quickly dispersed by the Basiji. "People started running up the street, screaming. The Basiji were beating everyone, even random people on the sidewalk who were not involved in the protest. Old people, women, were being beaten ruthlessly."

Reza wanted to hold his ground and throw bricks and rocks at the Basiji like some others. But his anger and excitement were tempered by fear. Instead of staying, "I ran home and told my family, 'There's a revolution on the streets!'"

Before the protests were effectively smashed by the government, Reza says, the masses echoed his optimistic mood. "People absolutely felt that this was huge and unstoppable and would have an effect."

The bigger picture

While the people's desires stopped short of an actual revolution, they hoped that much-wanted change was on the horizon. "The Iranian people just want a responsible government that respects other countries and, most importantly, is respected by other countries. We want a healthy economy and we want to be part of the world."

These sentiments are widely felt by Iranians and Iranian-Americans who, while maintaining close touch with family and friends in Iran, watched the events unfold from the US.

ON A dripping hot Friday afternoon in the university town of Gainesville, Florida - a dot on north central Florida's map commonly referred to as "The Swamp" - a small but spirited group of protesters gathers on a busy street corner. A few elderly Iranian women arrive and an Iranian man with green eyes, red hair and the stubble of a blond beard smiles. He comments, "Look, grandmothers are showing up." He grips a sign that reads: "We wrote Mousavi, they read Ahmadinejad." He tells the Post that he drove hours to cast a ballot in the election. "I feel like I've been cheated. I either want my vote back or I want my country back," he says.

He insists that the tumult is about the elections and not about the Islamic Republic itself. "You won't see any shah flags here," he says, referring to the symbol of the regime that was deposed in 1979. "This [protest] is about maintaining democracy."

He admits, however, that the Iranian people are upset about more than the vote; Mousavi also represented hope for a freer, more open Iran. When asked what a changed Iran would mean for the Middle East, he took the opportunity to voice his opinion on the nuclear issue, emphasizing that his opinion was typical in Iran. "The government says we don't want the bomb and I believe them. But even if we do want it, I think we should have it. Why should Israel, India and Pakistan have nukes and not Iran?"

He turns his attention back to the other protesters as they lift their voices to sing the Iranian national anthem. Next, the protesters chant "Ahmadinejad needs to be washed away!" in Farsi, jabbing the air with peace signs, their wrists wrapped in scraps of green cloth.

KAVEH, A highly educated Iranian who hails from wealthy north Teheran and now calls New York City home, sees the recent events as part of a long view in regards to both history and the Middle East. The protests in Iran could have a trickle-down effect, reshaping the region. "The Arab countries are afraid that similar things will happen in the streets, in the UAE, in Saudi Arabia, in Egypt," Kaveh says.

Further, if Mahmoud Ahmadinejad loses power, giving way to a centrist government that better reflects the sentiments of the Iranian people, the Palestinian movement could be destabilized. Kaveh explains that many Iranians harbor a deep resentment for Hizbullah fighters as they are often imported into Iran to help quash local dissent. "These militant groups in Lebanon and Palestine won't have as much support," Kaveh says. "A more moderate government will make it harder for extremists, including those in the Israeli government, to push for war."

Could these protests mean peace for the region?

"No one knows how it will end... but if there is no recount, this signals the end of the Islamic Republic in the next few years." Kaveh stops and corrects himself, "Well, it's not really a republic."

Although Iran might not be a republic in the perfect sense of the word, people had some faith in the vote, particularly in this election. According to Kaveh, who is the only member of his family who lives overseas, "A lot of people didn't vote for a long time. But Mousavi seemed like a revolutionary, someone who would bring about reform and modernize things. Before the election, people were dancing in the streets... everyone thought things were going to change."

But when the government announced the results, which seemed obviously rigged, the dancing feet took to marching. "Many people wanted to see this happen for a long time. It's not just about Mousavi," he comments. "It's anger. It's frustration. It's the expense of the government telling lies to people."

The bigger picture

Kaveh has kept in constant contact with his family and friends in Iran, who tell him that from day one, the situation on the ground was much worse than it seemed on the news. "On the first day [my friends] were describing it as 'a war within the city.'"

These words resonate with what Reza witnessed and raced home to tell his family about - a revolution.

"This is not a revolution," Kaveh says. "But here's the big picture - there were events that happened 10 years before 1979." For instance, the failed "White Revolution" reforms instituted by the shah in 1963 sparked an opposition and paved the way for Khomeini to take power over a decade later. The postelection tumult we've been watching recently will prove to be, he asserts, "one of those key events."

It is important, according to Kaveh, to let the current events in Iran run their course. "This is Iran's problem and it must be solved by Iranians. Freedom can't be imported. It has to be organic," he says, "and it is finding its way in Iran."

MANIJEH NASRABADI, an Iranian-American writer who serves as codirector of the Association of Iranian American Writers, offers a similar assessment. "The idea that the Iranian people are embracing American values or that this movement means they want to be more like the West isn't so. In the media there's been a spin that Mousavi is pro-West and Ahmadinejad is anti-West. But this is wrong."

In fact, Mousavi was one of the founders of the revolution that toppled the British- and American-installed shah.

It would be overly simplistic, however, to label both Mousavi and Ahmadinejad as anti-West. To the contrary, resuscitating a relationship with the West is important to both sides, a reflection of its importance to the Iranian people.

"This is a battle, in part, over which faction of the ruling elite will get to cut a deal with the US, something both groups want to take credit for," Nasrabadi says.

Though this political power struggle has fed the tumult, the unrest is also a natural outgrowth of Iranian history and culture.

"The Iranian people have a long history of struggling for democracy," Nasrabadi says. "If you look at the classics of Persian literature, struggle and resistance to oppression are indigenous." She points out that Iranians memorize poems that are heavy with these themes, bringing these ideas into the fabric of the society.

"I will never be mistaken for a native Iranian because I can't quote these poems; I can't weave lines of poetry into conversation casually like so many people there can," Nasrabadi says.

Despite the fact that her American accent sets her apart, Nasrabadi, who is the daughter of an Iranian Zoroastrian father and an Ashkenazi Jewish mother, feels a deep connection to Iran - she has traveled to the country six times in the past five years, staying for an extended period to study Farsi. She reflects on her time in Iran, "There was a palpable sense of despair hanging in the air. [Iranians] felt their futures were being frittered away by inept, corrupt leaders. When I asked people, 'Why not protest?' they pointed to how students were crushed in the past."

There was another refrain Nasrabadi heard when she spoke with Iranians. "Again and again, I heard the word suffocating. And now," she says, "people are taking long breaths of air in the streets."

At the height of the protests, Nasrabadi's cousins told her from Teheran, people were chanting, "Don't be scared, don't be scared, we're all together" to encourage those who were too frightened to join in. Although the protests have waned, Nasrabadi believes the seeds of change have been sown.

THE PROTESTS also highlighted the deep rifts in the Iranian system and society. Though these divisions have been present for a long time, the cracks took a while to come fully into the light. And Iranian women have, perhaps, played a key role in bringing them from the bottom up.

The bigger picture

"When I was there in 2005," Nasrabadi recalls, "I met with a group of young women's rights activists, all in their 20s. They had a clandestine feminist cultural center and library and these women went into the streets and risked arrest to get one million signatures on a petition for women's rights in parliament."

A New York City based Iranian woman, who asked to be called Maryam, also attended a women's meeting on one of her most recent visits home - but it was Basij-led. "They were complaining that the prices are going up and that we have nothing to eat. The Basij responded that we had the revolution for thoughts, not stomachs."

Maryam says that while this kind of "brainwashing" works in small towns and villages, urban Iranians grew increasingly discontented under Ahmadinejad. She points to the brain drain that has thinned Iran's middle and upper class as evidence. "The people gave up... people who I thought would never leave are going."

But Mousavi stood for change, as former president Mohammad Khatami once did.

Maryam, who was a part of Khatami's campaign, recalls that he ran while she was in college. The Iranian people, particularly the youth, were energized and optimistic by the potential they saw in this new leader. "Khatami was talking about dimensions of the revolution that had never been discussed," she says. "He represented hope."

His eight-year presidency, however, was viewed as largely ineffective, according to Maryam. "After that, the people were confused." And along came the unknown, Ahmadinejad.

Today, the Iranian people are "suffering from a collective depression," Maryam says. "We're not looking for a revolution. Revolutions are exhausting."

She explains that many of the Iranian protesters in NYC grew up in the regime, as did she. She says that Iranians who left before and around 1979, on the other hand, have different sentiments and goals. "The older generation comes [to the protests] and they say things like, 'Down with the Islamic Republic!' But we fight with them. It's important to focus on [the election] for now."

Like Nasrabadi, Maryam sees the current struggle as part of a longer history. "When a lot of people look at Iran, they are only thinking about the past 30 years. I look at it as another wave in a 100-year struggle," she says, referring to the constitutional revolution that occurred in Iran between 1905 and 1911.

But the constitution has effectively created a Catch-22, says Nayereh Fallahi, a Farsi professor at the University of Utah. Fallahi, who was held as a prisoner for 11 months in Iran in 1979, explains that the constitution dictates who is eligible for the presidency, and one of the requirements is that the candidates support the country's religion. So when Ayatollah Ali Khamenei says the election is legitimate and the candidates rail against his word as supreme leader, they have, in a roundabout way, violated the constitution.

THOUGH FALLAHI is a Muslim, as are all the other interviewees with the exception of Nasrabadi, she says that Iran desperately needs a separation of religion and state. "The best-case scenario would be that [the election] was out of the hands of the mullahs."

Regardless of the fallout from the protests, Fallahi believes that the message remains the same - the Iranian people, religious and secular, are "asking for a rule of law" based on elections and the constitution. This resonates with past events. The triumph of democracy over dictatorship is precisely what groups like the secular-minded National Front and its more religious counterpart, the Freedom Movement of Iran, called for in the late 1970s when they advocated an overthrow of the shah.

That Ebrahim Yazdi, the Freedom Movement of Iran's current leader and an important figure of the reform movement, was arrested during the June protests speaks volumes about the current government and its fears.

Fallahi says such arrests also point to an overarching issue that is sometimes forgotten. "All of these issues - the elections, the suppression of protests, political prisoners, and women's rights - are human rights issues," she says. Fallahi feels that it is not enough for the world to focus on Iran during times of crisis; the world and the UN need to remain ever-vigilant when it comes to human rights in Iran.

The bigger picture

"Death brings the world's attention, unfortunately," Reza says from Teheran. "The world has seen the true face of the government. Now that Ahmadinejad has been unmasked, people in Iran want the international community to not recognize him as president."

Though feelings of gloom and defeat hang thick in the air, Iranians also feel that the protests made a lasting impact. "People think the internal wheels are turning," Reza comments.

Widening rifts among Iran's religious establishment - as revealed by some clerics' criticism of both the elections and the government's handling of the protests - indicate that the people might be right.

Whether these cracks will cause the Ahmadinejad regime to fall remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the Iranian people wait impatiently.

Graphic

3 photos: Mir Hossein Mousavi speaks to supporters during his election rally in Teheran on June 8. In this photograph posted on the Internet, a protester recoils after throwing a projectile at Iranian riot police in Teheran. A women walks past election posters for incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Teheran. In this citizen photograph taken June 28, a Mousavi supporter holds paper signs in Farsi, identifying with the opposition and its victims during a gathering at Ghoba Mosque in Teheran, the site of serious clashes between protesters and riot police. (Credit: AP; Ramin Talaie/Bloomberg News)

Load-Date: October 4, 2011

How masters of chaos thrive on bombs and charity; Guerrillas are exploiting the divisions caused by ineffectual and corrupt government to rebuild the Taliban's influence, writes James Hider

The Times (London)

September 25, 2009 Friday

Edition 1, Ireland

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THE TIMES

Section: NEWS; Pg. 12,13

Length: 1872 words

Byline: James Hider

Body

Next to the mud huts of a refugee camp on the edge of Kabul the bright clothes of displaced Helmand tribesmen look incongruous. The men, eyes rimmed with kohl and hands stained henna-red, wear their best robes for the festival of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan. Little girls in spangled dresses sparkle like mermaids. But the hovels they live in are barely fit for the sheep that they once herded in their troubled homeland far to the south, now a battleground between British troops and Taliban guerrillas. The men cluster round visitors, begging for money to feed their families or look for their kidnapped children. One shows a photo of dead infants, relatives killed in a US airstrike. The 800 families in the camp live entirely off charity, with no running water, sanitation or other facilities.

"We are starving, no one is helping us," shouted Wakil, a farmer. "If the Government does not help us, we'll go back and join the Taliban." As his neighbours angrily denounced President Karzai's rule, Wakil admitted that he did not like the Taliban. But he added: "We just want anyone who can bring security."

The Taliban have changed a great deal since the US-backed Northern Alliance drove them from power in 2001. No longer the rulers of the land, their leadership lives in exile across the border in Pakistan and their enforcers of strict Islamic codes are now fighting a bitter insurgency in the mountains, deserts and farmlands.

But in one thing they have not changed since they swept in from the refugee camps and madrassas of Pakistan and Kandahar 15 years ago: they are still masters at exploiting the chaos, division and corruption that have blighted Afghanistan for decades.

For years, the Taliban have been taking advantage of an impoverished population disillusioned with the corruption of Mr Karzai's Government, which is propped up by Western troops whose very presence is an affront to many in this insular country. According to the gloomiest estimates, the Taliban now have a permanent presence in 80 per cent of the country.

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Insurgent leaders have gloated that the Government controls only the cities and that the President hides in his palace, afraid to venture out. Mullah Muhammad Omar, the one-eyed "Commander of the Faithful", recently offered Nato safe passage out of the country, as the Mujahidin once did for the defeated Soviets.

General Stanley McChrystal, the overall US commander in Afghanistan, said in his recent strategy review that "the insurgents control or contest a significant portion of the country, although it is difficult to assess precisely how much due to a lack of [Nato] presence".

The drawn-out fiasco of last month's elections has only bolstered the Islamists, with evidence of massive fraud undermining the concept of democracy in the eyes of millions of Afghans who once dared to hope for better times ahead. "The political paralysis helped us a lot," said Mullah Ghulam Muhammad Akhund, a Taleban commander in Helmand. "The Government will be too busy dealing with their own problems, giving us time to create plans and recruit more people and attack government facilities." Several Taleban leaders said that the movement was already attracting more recruits and was drafting plans fully to exploit the post-election power vacuum. They declined to specify them, but hinted that part of their strategy was to expand into the north to attack Nato supply lines from Central Asia. On the ground, the Taleban have refined their guerrilla warfare, avoiding many of the stand-and-fight battles that they had been losing so heavily to Nato's superior firepower. Instead they have become a sophisticated insurgent force, relying heavily on roadside bombs, ambushes and the intimidation of anyone suspected of collaboration, including the use of death threats known as "night letters".

They have studied Western counter-insurgency tactics that emphasise defending the population and winning over hearts and minds - the very change in approach adopted recently by US forces. This summer, the Taleban produced a 13-page "code of conduct" ordering fighters to avoid civilian casualties where possible and abstain from the summary executions that lost them so much popularity in the past.

With the Afghan Government incapable and often uninterested in providing even basic services in rural areas, the Taleban have stepped into the breach, copying the successful "bombs and charity" approach pioneered by **Hezbollah** and Hamas.

David Kilcullen, the Australian counter-insurgency expert who advised the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan, warned that the Taleban's shadow government - calling itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan - is providing a parallel system of courts, clinics and policing. They even have an ombudsman's office near Kandahar, where people can complain about excesses by Taleban commanders. "Sometimes they fire or even execute Taleban commanders for breaking the code of conduct," he said. "A government that is losing to [an insurgency] isn't being out-fought, it is being out-governed ."

The exact command structure of the new Taleban remains shrouded in mystery. Many analysts and Taleban field commanders say that overall strategic planning comes from the Quetta Shura, the council of exiled Taleban leaders in Pakistan, including Mullah Omar. But day-to-day attacks are firmly in the hands of local commanders. Arsalan Rehmani, a former Taleban fighter who joined the Government and who now negotiates with his one-time comrades, said that the Quetta Shura was influenced strategically by al-Qaeda.

Another major group is run by the veteran, anti-Soviet guerrilla Jalaluddin Haqqani in southeastern Afghanistan. According to the McChrystal report, this hardline faction is financed and manned "principally from Pakistan, Gulf Arab networks and from its close association with al-Qaeda and other Pakistan-based insurgent groups".

The report added: "Al-Qaeda's links with HQN [the Haqqani network] have grown, suggesting that expanded HQN control could create a favourable environment" for associated extremist movements to re-establish safe havens in Afghanistan.

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General McChrystal said that while the Taleban made money from heroin trafficking, they were also "clearly supported by Pakistan". Al-Qaeda and other extremist movements "based in Pakistan channel foreign fighters, suicide bombers, and technical assistance into Afghanistan, and offer ideological motivation, training, and financial support".

The options

While some branches of the Taleban appear intent on fighting to the end, many may be guns for hire with no ideological motivation. More must be done to reach out to these elements. Arsalan Rehmani, an ex-Taleban fighter, said: "They want to live in peace and stability, and have their names eliminated from the blacklists. And they want a traditional and Islamic government." He said they had toned down their vision of such a regime from the days when they closed girls' schools, confined women to the home, banned football, kite-flying and music and carried out endless executions and amputations. "I believe if they were in government they would be more tolerant."

Efforts to rehabilitate former Taleban fighters have had limited success, in part because the economy means there is little for a fighter to come back to: when unemployment and poverty are the norm, the prospect of three square meals a day and a modest salary as an insurgent often seems a better prospect.

Building up a larger army would provide jobs, increase security and extend the writ of the Government. "You can buy an insurgency if you have enough money," said Lieutenant-General Sir Graeme Lamb, the British commander in charge of dealing with disaffected Taleban. "It is a case of changing people's minds [and] perceptions."

Foreign Affairs magazine also articulated this view, arguing that it was in the nature of Afghan war for factions and commanders to change sides according to who best served their personal and ethnic interests. "So far Afghan leaders and their US backers have made only half-hearted efforts to exploit the willingness of Taleban commanders to switch sides," it said. "A focused campaign can succeed."

With the Taleban gaining strength, however, they may be less inclined to negotiate. British commanders say rapid results from a military surge are essential.

The recommendations

The Taleban will not surrender any time soon. The leadership live in relative security and comfort in Pakistan and must be targeted there. Nato has enjoyed some significant successes so far in killing more extreme leaders, but little progress has been made in offering others a way out apart from victory or death. They must be offered a third, real choice: reconciliation.

As in Iraq, deals may have to be done with very dangerous people with blood on their hands. One of those unsavoury characters could be Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, now aligning himself with the Taleban but who has ideological differences with them.

Efforts must be made to woo footsoldiers with promises of reconciliation and jobs. Approaches must likewise be made to their leaders inside Pakistan: Islamabad can open channels to offer the guerrilla leaders a political option if they renounce violence.

Building up Afghanistan's armed forces is the most direct way of tackling the insurgency and creating jobs. But they must be better trained: Afghans are wary of their security forces, often accusing them of theft and taking bribes. There is a clear need for more troops - and better commanders - but they also have to be put to better use to deny the Taleban the freedom to move in a friendly environment. Politicians in the West have to understand that many Pashtuns - the country's largest ethnic community - see the Taleban as a way of restoring their group's prestige.

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The Taleban use the threat of violence and the promise of home comforts to win hearts and minds, particularly in refugee camps, left

Photographs by Peter Nicholls

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Load-Date: September 25, 2009

'The revolution in Iran has just begun'

The Jerusalem Post

July 5, 2009 Sunday

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 8

Length: 2675 words

Byline: RUTHIE BLUM LEIBOWITZ

Highlight: ONE ON ONE. Israel Radio's Farsi broadcaster Menashe Amir believes that the uprising in Iran has not died down. Interview

Body

"There were two days a couple of weeks ago when the call-ins stopped," says Menashe Amir, Israel Radio's Farsi broadcaster, whose shows have attracted millions of listeners in Iran for the past 50 years. "But then they resumed."

The going-on-70-year-old, who officially retired five years ago, yet continues to transmit on a daily basis, attributes this to the courage of his former countrymen (Amir made aliya in 1959).

In a September 2006 interview in these pages, Amir asserted that a majority of Iranians opposed their regime, yet were helpless in the face of the repression under which they were living. Amir quoted Iranians who told him that if they had someone to lead them in their struggle, "it would be possible to topple the regime very quickly."

This week, in light of the popular uprising that began in the streets of Teheran after the results of the June 12 election were falsely called in favor of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad - when the real victor was reformist candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi - I asked Amir for his latest assessment.

In our last interview, you said that the Iranian people would not go against the regime without a leader. Is Mousavi now that leader?

That's still unclear. I'm doubtful about whether Mousavi will be able to hang on. Also, don't forget that Mousavi is part of the regime, so he certainly does not want to bring about its collapse. However, a combination of circumstances has caused him to stand and struggle, which is something I couldn't have anticipated.

Two things got him really angry - one political, the other personal. Politically, he is certain he won the election - and I can confirm that he did. According to all the information I have received, he garnered twice the amount of votes as Ahmadinejad, for whom he has great contempt. He thinks Ahmadinejad has destroyed Iran, both internally and in terms of its foreign relations.

On a personal level, he is furious because Ahmadinejad dishonored his wife. During the televised election debate, Ahmadinejad produced documents supposedly proving that Mousavi's wife received her doctorate fraudulently, and took advantage of her husband's standing to achieve her position in academia. And this is while Ahmadinejad and his henchmen are the epitome of those who take advantage of their positions to further their interests. The elections are a perfect example of how Ahmadinejad manipulated the system in order to declare himself the winner.

'The revolution in Iran has just begun'

Do you think that the popular uprising turned Mousavi into an unwitting leader of a movement that began one way and turned into something else? Has it caused him to change his perspective on actual freedom for the people who are rallying around him?

There are two levels on which figures like Mousavi operate - internal Iranian issues and foreign relations. Where foreign relations are concerned, I don't see a big difference between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad. Furthermore, it is not the president who determines policy. That is done by the Supreme National Security Council. The president's role is to carry out its decisions. On the nuclear issue, for example, it makes no difference whether the president is Mousavi or Ahmadinejad. In any case, even Mousavi declared openly that, if elected, he would continue Iran's nuclear program, as well as its policy of supplying weapons to Hizbullah and Hamas.

But where Iran's internal affairs are concerned, there is a big difference between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad. Mousavi believes that Iran's economic policy has to be completely overhauled, and promised to give women greater freedom and more rights. His own wife is an intellectual, after all. He also promised greater rights for the young, and things like that. He even hinted that he would lower Iran's involvement in international conspiracies.

Is this because Iran's international involvement costs so much money, and he wants to try to rescue its economy?

That's certainly part of it. I would say that the real battle in this election was over the economy, not freedom and equality.

From an economic standpoint, who is Ahmadinejad? The one who failed to solve Iran's economic difficulties, in spite of the fact that during his four years in office, Iran earned more money than in all eight years of [Seyed Mohammad] Khatami's presidency [1997-2005]. Where did the money go?

So who received more sympathy among the people during the campaign? The one who headed Iran's government for eight years [as the fifth and last prime minister of the Islamic Republic], from 1981 to 1989, during its war with Iraq - and during a period of austerity. Indeed, Mousavi managed, with almost no money, to handle the Iranian economy. That was the source of his popularity, and what tipped the scales in his favor.

You say that it was Mousavi's economic policies and prowess that gained him public support, but as soon as he was declared the loser of the election, he suddenly became the leader of a spontaneous revolution whose focus is freedom for the Iranian people. Is it that he hadn't meant for this to happen, but once it did, he took the ball and ran with it?

Yes, but the root of the problem is that those who determine policy in Iran decided a year ago that Ahmadinejad was going to win the election. To this end, the interior minister - who is in charge of executing the election law - was replaced, and other such things, all of which were approved by [Supreme Leader Ali] Khamenei.

As election day approached, they pulled a trick to raise voter turnout. Why? Because there is a new president in the White House, and he has to be shown that the Iranian regime enjoys the support of the people. So they set up a televised debate, in which each candidate freely raised issues and expressed criticism, thus creating the illusion that this time the elections in Iran would be free ones - something they have never been in Iran. This raised the expectations of the people, and brought a whopping 85 percent of the public to the polls. Well, the level of disappointment was as great as the level of expectation. This 85% of the public turned out to vote, and afterward felt the victory had been stolen from them. This is what caused the people to protest, en masse. And these people today have a leader in Mousavi.

The protests have been extremely sophisticated as a whole. Half a million people who took to the streets and didn't even chant slogans, so as not to give the security forces an excuse to kill them. This has made it necessary for the regime to create a justification to suppress the demonstrators, so it sends in its Basij militia, as well as plainclothes police, to destroy homes and go after protesters, some of whom have been killed. Of course, we know all this, thanks to the technology that has been enabling the citizens to document the goings on there with the cameras on their cellphones.

'The revolution in Iran has just begun'

But then came Khamenei's Friday sermon, in which he declared his complete support for Ahmadinejad. At that moment, the people understood they had no chance - that change cannot come about through demonstrations, because when the supreme leader rules, his ruling cannot be appealed. What Khamenei said was, "If you people have complaints, submit them through the legal channels."

But what are the "legal channels" in Iran? The legislative council that is Khamenei's puppet, which itself was complicit in the election fraud. This is why Mousavi said that this body wasn't acceptable to him, and that he would only trust a neutral committee.

Over the past two weeks, I have been asked by every reporter from every TV and radio station and every newspaper whether the protest is petering out. And my answer is always a decided no. And it won't peter out as long as Mousavi remains steadfast.

But you yourself began by questioning whether Mousavi would persevere, and also said the Iranian people understood they had no chance once Khamenei declared his support for Ahmadinejad. Are you saying that this protest won't die out in spite of all that?

Yes, it won't die out, in spite of all that. Because something else has happened, as well. The people have seen that with this regime, nothing is possible. It won't make the slightest compromise. Thus, since that speech of Khamenei's, the slogan has become, "Death to the dictator," and the demand has become to change the regime.

In this case, the "dictator" is not only Ahmadinejad, correct?

During the first few days, it was directed at him. But after that Friday sermon, it became directed against Khamenei.

Do you think Ahmadinejad and/or Khamenei will be assassinated?

Assassinations won't solve the problem. It's hard to predict the future, but there are many efforts going on there to try to solve the problems, and I don't see how they can be solved. Khamenei climbed a tree from which he can't come down, by saying that everything was OK in Iran; Mousavi did the same, by saying that nothing in Iran was OK; and in between them is [Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi] Rafsanjani, who is very worried about his own personal fate, the fate of his family and fortune, on the one hand, and on the other, he is worried about the future of the regime, that might collapse. So, he's saying, "Come and let's find a solution involving a compromise that will satisfy everyone."

That's impossible, because if Khamenei makes even the slightest concession, it will harm his status. A supreme leader can never make a mistake, and if he admits to one, it will bring about the end of his reign. Then there's Ahmadinejad, who is a merciless fanatic. One of his past jobs was as a final executioner. He would fire the last bullet into the heads of people put to death. His nickname is "the man of a thousand bullets," since he used to boast that he had shot bullets into the heads of 1,000 executed people. He will not concede on anything. Nor will he ever forgive Mousavi or his family.

Already, they are holding Mousavi responsible for the deaths of innocent citizens, killed during the protests. It's a case of turning the victim into the aggressor. And Mousavi knows that if he gives in on anything, his life will be in danger.

This is why I keep saying that the events in Iran have not begun to die down; they've only just begun. This is because the Iranian people have proved that they finally understand the nature of their regime, which is why their demand has become regime change, rather than reforms.

In the 30 years since the last revolution, during which I have been following Iran closely - and understanding the psychology and mentality of its people - I have come to the conclusion that what mainly interests the people is their ability to make a living. And, with the events going on there now, coupled with a bad economy that will only get worse, the next time the people take to the streets, it will not only be the students and middle class doing so, but also the farmers and lower classes. The soldiers of the revolution of 1979 were the lower classes. If this time around, they join the middle class and students - and have a leader - the current regime is sure to collapse.

'The revolution in Iran has just begun'

Is that a good thing? The last time there was regime change in Iran, the ayatollahs came to power. Who and what will replace the current regime?

It's impossible to predict what will happen. There are a few possible scenarios. One is that the Iranian people will revolt, the regime will fall and then free elections will be held, under international supervision, and the people will elect democratic leaders. That one's not easy.

Another scenario is that the members of the current regime will fear for their lives - because if they are toppled, they will have nowhere to run - and they will respond by reaching some kind of compromise or agreement, and this will put an end to the current crisis.

A third possibility is that there will be massive intervention on the part of the Revolutionary Guards, who will lead a military coup, and instate a reign of terror that will eliminate any remaining freedoms the Iranians enjoy today.

Since the first scenario would seem to be the most desirable, why have the people been shouting "Allahu akbar" ["God is great"] from their balconies?

It's a political maneuver. If they shout slogans against the regime, they'll be killed. But no one can do anything against a religious cry. And it is the very same cry that the Ayatollah Khomeini shouted to rally the masses around toppling the shah. So this is like saying that history is repeating itself.

Speaking of history's repeating itself, let's talk about US President Barack Obama. Do the Iranian people feel betrayed by him for his lack of outright support against the regime?

Obama worries me very much. Watching him on TV on June 12, when the election in Iran was held, I was amazed to hear him praise the welcome process going on in Iran. Here I am, a small fry with no access to classified material, who simply reads what is going on, and I have known for an entire year that these would be fraudulent elections. Since then, I have briefed the Mossad, as well as written and lectured extensively to this effect.

So, I ask myself, if I understood the situation, how is it that the leader of this superpower doesn't get it? It's true that he retracted his statements a few days after the election, when he saw he was wrong, but still...

And then there's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whom I greatly respect. But, when asked why the US would want to engage in dialogue with Iran, she said, "We'll have to wait and see what the regime wants and expects."

Now tell me: Do we not know what Ahmadinejad wants and expects already? Furthermore, I would like to warn the American policy-makers that there is a group in Iran who will never, ever allow open talks between the US and Iran. All attempts by previous American administrations to engage in dialogue have failed because of this. And even now, Ahmadinejad has said that until Obama apologizes for statements he made "against the Iranian people" - as though it was the Iranian people who fixed the elections and killed protesters - "we won't begin talks."

But even if such talks were to begin, which they won't, they won't bring about any real results that could serve American interests.

I blame president Jimmy Carter for being among those responsible for the 1979 revolution and the toppling of the shah's regime. And I sincerely hope and pray that Obama won't be another Carter.

Speaking of former presidents, what is your view of George W. Bush?

I actually met him a year and a half ago in Los Angeles, on the eve of the congressional elections, and told him the following story: After the US invaded Iraq, during our broadcasts to Iran, we received numerous call-ins from listeners, saying: "Please ask Bush to come and rescue us."

In response, I asked them, "Haven't you heard of the Persian saying, 'Only my own fingernails can scratch my back'? Why don't you do the job yourselves?"

'The revolution in Iran has just begun'

The answer was: "Saddam Hussein fell only after foreign intervention; the Taliban regime in Afghanistan fell only after foreign intervention; we, in Iran, need active support from the US in order to change the regime. And the head of the snake is Iran, not Iraq. It's Iran that's stirring up the entire region, and thus Bush should have taken care of Iran first."

So, when I met Bush, I told him that I had a message from the Iranian people, who ask that he intervene to rescue them. Bush opened his eyes wide, as though someone had handed him the heavens on a silver platter. He then cracked a broad smile and said, "But, sir, surely you are aware of the difficulties we are having dealing with Iraq."

Anyway, American intervention is the expectation of the Iranian people. I am not in favor of a military operation. But the US could be helping the uprising in many other ways.

As I said, what is going on in Iran has only just begun. And if the world grasps the enormity of this moment, and does what it can to help the Iranian people in their struggle, it will not be necessary to bomb the nuclear facilities, because the Iranian people will rise and do the job themselves.

Graphic

Photo: MENASHE AMIR. 'I sincerely hope and pray that Barack Obama won't be another Jimmy Carter.' (Credit: Ariel Jerozolimski)

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'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

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Byline: PROF. DANIEL FRIEDMANN

Highlight: EXCLUSIVE. Goldstone: A rebuttal. Former justice minister Daniel Friedmann takes aim at the UN Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission to Gaza, and in so doing exposes a mission that, he says, was created with a dubious mandate, populated by biased members, influenced by Hamas observers, and conducted with a disregard for Israeli evidence and witnesses. The author is a professor of law (emeritus) and a former justice minister of Israel.

Body

'I don't think there has ever been a time in the history of warfare when any army has made more efforts to reduce civilian casualties and deaths of innocent people than the IDF is doing today in Gaza,' Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of the British forces in Afghanistan, said during an interview with the BBC during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in January.

Kemp later appeared before the UN Human Rights Council on October 2009 and reiterated: "[T]he Israeli Defense Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare. Israel did so while facing an enemy that deliberately positioned its military capability behind the human shield of the civilian population."

"The [...] IDF took extraordinary measures to give Gaza civilians notice of targeted areas, dropping over 2 million leaflets, and making over 100,000 phone calls. Many missions that could have taken out Hamas military capability were aborted to prevent civilian casualties. During the conflict, the IDF allowed huge amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza [...] the civilian casualties were a consequence of Hamas' way of fighting. Hamas deliberately tried to sacrifice their own civilians..."

This is a fair description of what happened. But to see how white is turned into black, how truth is twisted, justice perverted and falseness prevails, take a good look at the Human Rights Council and its Goldstone report.

A commission created in sin gives birth to an aberration

Israel has suffered from terrorism since its establishment, long before it was blamed for having conquered territories from which attacks against it were launched. The war of terror changed phases, becoming more and more sinister. From "simple" murder of women and children, it turned into airplane hijackings, murdering hostages, suicide bombers and global terror - including the mass murder of members of the Israeli team during the Olympic Games in Munich. During the past eight years a new mode of terror has developed - that of firing rockets on civilian targets from the Gaza Strip. Some 12,000 rockets have been fired, terrorizing hundreds of thousands of Israelis and causing tremendous damage to the economy.

'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

None of these actions triggered UN intervention. Moreover, other countries involved in the war against terror elsewhere in the world - such as in Iraq, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey - have remained immune to fact-finding missions by the Human Rights Council, despite the thousands of civilians killed or wounded in these conflicts, and the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced. Israel, the victim of incessant rocket attacks and endless acts of terror, has been singled out for special treatment.

The Human Rights Council's obsession with targeting Israel is common knowledge. Since its establishment in 2006, five out of its 11 special sessions have been devoted to matters involving the Jewish state. Yet in its resolution to establish the fact-finding mission in Gaza, the council outdid itself. Employing extremely biased wording, the council's charge directed its mission "to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying power, Israel, against the Palestinian people... particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, due to the current aggression..."

Israel is thus declared culpable even before the investigation begins.

Many states on the council refused to support this one-sided resolution, including the member states of the European Union, Switzerland, Canada, Korea and Japan.

The council never changed its outrageous mandate, but its president stated the mission's mandate in more moderate terms: "To investigate all violations of international human rights and international human rights law that might have been committed [...] in the context of the military operation in Gaza..."

Despite the reworded resolution, it seems that the mission acted in the spirit of its original mandate.

The composition of the mission

The prejudicial nature of the mission led several distinguished individuals, including former high commissioner for human rights Mary Robinson, to refuse invitations to chair it. Justice Richard Goldstone was, however, happy to comply. Other members of the mission included Hina Jilani of Pakistan, a country that has no diplomatic relations with Israel, and Prof. Christine Chinkin, who was one of the signatories of a letter, published in the Sunday Times on January 11, 2009, and entitled, "Israel's bombardment of Gaza is not self-defense - it's a war crime."

The amazement at Chinkin's appointment is dwarfed by the way Goldstone justified the refusal to disqualify her. In an interview on Israel TV, he was asked about Chinkin serving on the mission. He had no qualms explaining that "it is not a judicial inquiry. It's a fact-finding mission." Further, he said that he found Chinkin "to be an intelligent, sensible, even-handed person," and he was "satisfied that she's got a completely open mind."

"She is one of four people on the committee," he continued, adding that he did not "believe that any prima facie views she might have held at an earlier stage is going to [...] affect [...] the report."

Goldstone thus justified an appointment that militates against basic rules of fairness, due process and natural justice. His untenable reasoning, which would have failed a first-year law student, casts grave doubts about the justice himself.

Moreover, Goldstone's claim that he was leading "a fact-finding mission" is refuted by the report, which is highly judicial, replete with purported legal analysis of international law, detailed legal findings and reaching judicial determinations on "war crimes."

The inescapable conclusion is that the whole report is invalid and cannot form a basis for any decision or action.

It is also not surprising that Goldstone's report became what it is - a complete aberration.

The mission's general approach

The report makes every effort to downplay Hamas crimes. Hamas and other terrorist entities are described by the benign term "Palestinian armed groups." In some cases, the mission simply declines to examine Hamas misdeeds.

'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

One example of this inaction regards Shifa Hospital in Gaza. Despite ample grounds indicating that a Hamas command center was located in the hospital, the report states that it did "not investigate the case of Al-Shifa hospital and is not in a position to make any finding with regard to these allegations" (p. 466).

Clear evidence unfavorable to Hamas is either discarded or "reinterpreted." For instance, during the operation, Islam Shahwan, spokesman for the Hamas police force, stated that "police officers received clear orders from the leadership to face the [Israeli] enemy." However, this clear admission as to the role of the Hamas police takes on new meaning when the mission uncritically accepts Shahwan's explanation that his intention was that in the event of an invasion, the police would continue to uphold public order and ensure the movement of essential supplies (p. 414). A statement by the commander of Hamas's Executive Force (p. 410) that his group acted as "resistance fighters" received similar benign interpretation (p. 416).

Reliable evidence supporting the Israeli position received completely different treatment.

In an effort to explain its targeting of sensitive locations, Israel submitted to the mission photographic evidence showing the launching of rockets from within or near residential buildings, schools, mosques and hospitals. However, the mission had no qualms in discounting them on the grounds that it could not determine whether the photos showed what is alleged, and that many photos related to firing of rockets from Gaza before the operation (p. 449).

The mission even denied requests to invite witnesses such as Col. Kemp, who was likely to support the Israeli position. The explanations offered by Goldstone for this unbalanced treatment are not much stronger than those he provided for keeping Chinkin on the mission.

Much of the evidence gathered by the mission was most likely tainted. Members of the mission were accompanied during their visit to Gaza by Hamas officials, a group which deliberately and consistently pursues a policy of disinformation. It is highly improbable that the mission could get a true picture of Hamas's misdeeds and of what really happened. Indeed, the report admits that the witnesses interviewed appeared "reluctant to speak about the presence or conduct of hostilities by the Palestinian armed groups" - a reluctance which "may have stemmed from a fear of reprisals" (p. 438).

This behavior by the Islamic group has been aptly described by Kemp:

"Hamas, like Hizbullah, are expert at driving the media agenda. Both will always have people ready to give interviews condemning Israeli forces for war crimes. They are adept at staging and distorting incidents."

The scope of this article does not allow for a full exposition of all the falsenesses and distortions included in the report. However two examples will be briefly discussed - that of the civilian casualties and that of the use of human shields by Hamas. In addition, a few words will be devoted to the damage suffered by the Gazan infrastructure.

The civilian casualties

According to the IDF 1,166 Palestinians were killed in the operation, and the great majority, 709 of them, were members of the Hamas and other terrorist groups. An additional 295 were civilians. It is unclear whether the remaining 162 (all male) fatalities were involved in the fighting. It is also not clear how many of the noncombatants were killed by Hamas fire, a possibility which was even raised by the mission (p. 361).

The mission did not bother to inquire about the number of civilian casualties, nor about the ratio between civilian and combatant casualties in recent wars, which could indicate the degree of care taken by the IDF to avoid civilian casualties as compared to other armies in the world.

One of the most vicious, false accusations leveled by the report against Israel is that civilians were deliberately targeted. This falseness is based on the fact that the IDF receives legal advice and possesses advanced technology, and that its operations are carefully planned. In addition, the misinterpretation of statements made by Israeli officials (p. 61 and p. 1182-1188) further twisted the mission's conclusion, which runs contrary to a large body of available evidence.

'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

It is well known that a number of Israeli soldiers were killed in the operation by friendly fire. According to the reasoning of the mission, these casualties must have been killed on purpose. Moreover, the mission's reasoning applies to all other armies engaged in the war against terror, in which thousands of noncombatants have been killed. The Americans, the British, NATO, the Russians and the Turks all employ sophisticated weapons, and their operations are all carefully planned. Does this mean that the civilians killed in their operations were intentionally targeted, as well?

The mission disregarded the fact that Israel has a clear policy of protecting civilians. It also disregarded the myriad of statements made by the IDF regarding this policy and its implementation in the Gaza operation. Kemp, whose evidence the mission declined to hear, also described this.

Israel made great efforts to issue warnings to the civilian population through thousands of telephone calls, leaflets and radio broadcasts. While the mission acknowledged these facts (p. 37), it immediately attempted to show that the actions were insufficient. Regardless, these warnings clearly refute the unfounded allegation that there was a purposeful intention to target civilians.

The use by Hamas of human shields

It is common knowledge that Hamas uses civilians as human shields. Even the mission could not escape the facts that Hamas fires rockets from urban areas (p. 446-447), that its gunmen mingle with the civil population and that "members of Palestinian armed groups were not always dressed in a way that distinguished them from civilians" (p. 481). The use of human shields is openly admitted by a Hamas member who states that:

"[Hamas] created a human shield of women, children, the elderly and the mujahideen, against the Zionist bombing machines" (p. 475).

Nevertheless the mission incredibly states that it has not been able to obtain any direct evidence that the firing of rockets from urban areas "was done with the specific intent of shielding the rocket launchers from counterattacks by the Israeli armed forces" (p. 480). Similarly "the mission found no evidence that Palestinian combatants mingled with the civilian population with the intention of shielding themselves from attack" (p. 481).

A more blatant example of a double standard can hardly be imagined. False accusations against Israel are made in the absence of evidence or even contrary to the evidence, while the innocence of the terrorists is presumed even in the face of convincing evidence of guilt.

Damage to Infrastructure

The mission also discusses the destruction of infrastructure in Gaza, notably a flour mill, a wall of one of the raw sewage lagoons, and chicken farms that "reportedly supplied over 10 percent of the Gaza egg market." (p. 51) The discussion is replete with harshly- worded language denouncing Israel, and ends with a malicious conclusion as to Israel's culpability. Apparently, the mission did not even bother to hide its prejudice against Israel. The destruction of the flour mill was "wanton," and the mission has no scruples in jumping to the conclusion that this was done "for the purposes of denying sustenance to the civilian population" (sic.) which "may constitute a war crime" (p. 50). Such a conclusion, of course, is contrary to the clear evidence available to the mission that during the operation, as well as before and after, Israel allowed ample supply of food to be brought into Gaza, and that Israel did and continues to do its best to prevent a shortage of essential supplies in the Strip.

In this respect, the report seems to be in line with the propaganda of Hamas, which created the false impression of total destruction in the area.

Such findings may be contrasted with a report by British journalist, Tim Butcher, which was published in the Telegraph, on January 20, 2009. Mr. Butcher who arrived in Gaza shortly after the end of the operation, says: "I knew Gaza well before the attacks [É] One thing was clear. Gaza City 2009 is not Stalingrad 1944. There had been no carpet bombing of large areas, no firebombing of complete suburbs. Targets had been selected and then hit,

'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

often several times, but almost always with precision munitions [...] for the most part, I was struck by how cosmetically unchanged Gaza appeared to be."

No less important is the fact that the great majority of infrastructure installations in Gaza were not hit and remained unscathed. A conspicuous example is the power plant in Gaza. It is obvious that had Israel intended to destroy infrastructure, the plant would have been targeted. It was not. Even in the case of the flour mill, the mission concedes that "no other buildings in the industrial compound belonging to the Hamadas (owners of the mill) were damaged at the time of the strikes" (p. 924). This is in line with the clear policy of Israel to avoid damaging civilian property. To the extent that the mill and few other installations were destroyed, it was presumably either a result of a mistake or because they were suspected as being used for military purposes. The mission clearly could not get reliable evidence clarifying this matter, as the reluctance of a witness to give evidence detrimental to Hamas which "may have stemmed from a fear of reprisals" (p. 438) already demonstrated. In any, event the evidence clearly suggests the absence of any intention by Israel to destroy civilian infrastructure.

Iran and the failure to investigate

The mission failed to examine highly relevant topics such as the use of Shifa Hospital in Gaza as a Hamas command center, and the use of mosques to store weapons. The mission also failed to investigate the major role played by Iran in supporting and instigating terror, such as by training gunmen and supplying weapons and rockets intended to be used against civilians. Is Iran's involvement in line with international law? Such an investigation would have enabled the mission to better understand what it terms "the blockade" - the closure imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip which attempts to prevent illegal arms smuggling while simultaneously allowing for the influx of food and other essential supplies.

The recommendations

I shall not elaborate upon the mission's biased recommendations which are not devoid of a ludicrous aspect. "The mission recommends that Palestinian armed groups undertake forthwith to respect international humanitarian law, in particular by renouncing attacks on Israeli civilians" (p. 1770). This recommendation is a plea to fundamentalist terrorists for whom terror against civilians is their *raison d'être*, who regard suicide bombers and murderers as heroes. Is this recommendation, which seems like recommending to the Mafia to respect the law, a lip service to objectivity, naivete, or evidence of complete detachment from reality?

One wonders whether this kind of recommendation should not also be sent to the Taliban and al-Qaida. Why should they be deprived of Goldstone's learned advice?

The aftermath

Goldstone's report is well on its way to becoming the Magna Carta of the terrorists, who will regard it as their guardian angel. But the world community cannot allow international law to be hijacked by terrorists, nor appropriated by biased scholars or naive jurists who are detached from reality. International law must be interpreted, implemented and developed to deal with terror launched from populated areas behind human shields.

The report is likely to damage the cause of peace and increase violence in the area, while the operation in Gaza brought a lull in rockets attacks against civilians. But the terrorists may now feel that they can renew the terror since the report gives them immunity. The report also strengthens extremism, thus hindering efforts by the Palestinian Authority - whom the extremists strive to topple - to make peace with Israel.

Graphic

3 photos: A HAMAS gunman trains in the Gaza Strip. According to a Hamas police spokesman, "police officers received clear orders from the leadership to face the [Israeli] enemy" during Operation Cast Lead. Daniel

'Goldstone report - the terrorists' Magna Carta'

Friedmann. 'Truth is trusted, justice perverted.' Richard Goldstone. 'Detached from reality'? (Credit: Bloomberg. Ariel Jerozolinski. AP)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Weekend Australian

June 20, 2009 Saturday

1 - All-round Country Edition

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 16

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Body

Wong's push for renewables now seen as empty words

MOST TALKED ABOUT

CLIMATE AND THE ETS

I FIND it hard to believe how petty Penny Wong has been over the renewable energy target legislation, which the Coalition was happy to support ("Climate delay to cost jobs", 19/6). Attempting to link this with the legislation for the emissions trading scheme was bound to fail and has undermined her own principles.

Now her stated aim of having solar panels on all houses is shown to be empty words. Large numbers of people wanting them, and others wanting to make and supply them, are understandably furious.

The facts are (a) we want renewable energy but (b) there are significant doubts about the ETS. She should hurry up and find a reason for introducing the RET legislation. Doing it on the last day of the current parliamentary session should enable her to avoid questions about why she changed her mind to do the right thing.

Geoff Dunsford

Lindfield, NSW

IT'S disappointing to see the political games that are being played out in Canberra around the renewable energy legislation.

The Rudd government's attempt to wedge the Opposition by linking the renewable energy target to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme has meant that Australians will have to wait even longer for the wave of investment that will result from giving renewable energy innovators and investors the certainty they need. The government could have had strong Senate support for the renewable energy legislation if it had not linked these two bills.

There are enormous job opportunities in renewable energy for Australia just waiting for the right legislative support. There is no reason to continue to build coal-fired power stations when we have technologies such as wave energy, as well as baseload solar, thermal, wind and geothermal energy alternatives. We just need the political will at both federal and state government levels.

Dawn Jecks

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Safety Bay, WA

SIR Ernest John Pickstone Benn, an uncle of the British Labour politician Tony Benn, stated that "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy." And so it is with Malcolm Turnbull and his stance on emissions trading. The Coalition is allegedly in opposition. Thus, it should vigorously oppose all facets of an emissions trading scheme until there is clear and irrefutable evidence that man-made carbon dioxide emissions are directly responsible for affecting climate.

J.Keith Mercer

Orchards, Vic

BOB Carter, David Evans, Stewart Franks and Bill Kininmonth ("Wong's silent treatment clouds emissions credibility", Opinion, 19/6) list three questions posed to Climate Change Minister Penny Wong by Senator Steve Fielding regarding global warming.

The questions (edited for brevity), and their answers, are:

1. Has the world cooled since 1998, despite a five per cent increase in atmospheric CO2 concentrations? No, it has not cooled. The global surface temperature has increased about one-tenth of a degree over the decade since 1998 (1999-2008). The warming over land areas has been even stronger.

2. Is the late 20th century warming unusual and, if not, then why is the current warming a problem? There have been warmer periods in the past. About 125,000 years ago, for example, temperatures were several degrees higher than today, comparable to the warming projected for the end of this century. Sea levels then were about 5m higher than today. A sea level rise of this magnitude could be a problem.

3. Did all computer models project a "steady" increase in temperature for the period 1990 to 2008?

No computer model predicted a steady increase in temperature over this period, because models include processes that can cause cooling in short periods, as happens in the real world. But most models predicted warming over the 1990-2008 period because of increased concentrations of CO2. The world warmed about three-tenths of a degree over this period, an amount similar to that predicted by the computer models.

Professor Neville Nicholls

School of Geography and Environmental

Science, Monash University

Clayton, Vic

THE Australian is to be commended for publishing the article by Carter et al, as is Senator Steve Fielding for bringing to public attention three of the many flaws in the speculative anthropogenic global warming model. As a geologist, I'm dismayed at the lack of scientific rigour demonstrated by the proponents of this speculation and by the damage that ultimately will be done to science when the public realises the fraud that has been perpetrated.

Dan Wood

Pullenvale, Qld

COULD someone in the Labor Party please explain why they expect every Australian family to pay \$4000 per year, plus inflation, for a carbon dioxide tax of \$30 a tonne to potentially limit a temperature increase of one-tenth-thousandth of a degree by 2100? This when they cannot even give Senator Fielding a coherent response to three simple questions on the issue?

James Hein

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hackney, SA

Children and weighty issues of government don't mix

GREENS party members often display a lack of common sense and their latest stunt -- young children in the Senate chamber -- is yet another example ("Outcry as senator's daughter, 2, ejected", 19/6).

The Australian parliament sits at the pinnacle of power and decision-making in this country. It's fundamental to the good order and running of our parliament that the representatives we send there are always giving their undivided attention to the important matters under consideration.

Having a young child at one's elbow when grappling with the weighty issues of state, is no more appropriate than it would be were the mother a surgeon, air traffic controller, bus driver, company director or school teacher.

There are suitable alternatives for the children of mothers who serve as parliamentarians. They would do well to pursue those alternatives rather than feign moral indignation and self-righteousness. Their stunt, and its associated attempt to bully fellow MPs into submission, should be rejected.

Rob Davies

Point Lonsdale, Vic

WE should consider the subconscious effect that early exposure to a parliamentary atmosphere may have on a child of tender years. Slander, lying, prevarication, vilification, smears and scandals are hardly a desirable grounding for an impressionable mind, although they may be thought appropriate qualities should one eventually stand for parliament!

Gerry Cohen

Carine, WA

IF this was not a stunt, then it was the act of a very silly, immature woman. Being a senator is her "job", it's what she is paid for. How many working women or men are able to take their children into the workplace with them? There is no reason why Senator Hanson-Young should be an exception. Next, parliament will be teeming with teenagers! Oh, have I hit the nail on the head?

Maureen Jefferies

Tandur, Qld

WHAT on earth does Senate President John Hogg have against children? If Senator Hanson-Young's daughter had been crying or disruptive, it might have been inappropriate for her to be there, but in the circumstances it just seems to have been a case of bullying tactics. If parliament can tolerate the bad behaviour, raised voices and trading of insults that is regularly seen, I'm sure it could tolerate the presence of a two-year-old girl for a few minutes.

Donella Peters

Aldgate, SA

PARLIAMENT is not a depository for unwanted children; one hopes it's the place where serious debate and decisions are formulated. If Senator Hanson-Young cannot find somebody to look after her child, she should stay at home and do what mothers do -- look after it herself.

David Edwards

Wangi Wangi, NSW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Breaking down the doors

DURING a recent visit to my country of birth, Scotland, I attended a 50-year school reunion. A tour of the school revealed a gym and swimming pool which had not changed in that 50 years and classrooms that were essentially the same.

At the same time I was reliably informed that parents were breaking down the doors to get their sons and daughters enrolled despite the fact that other schools in the area commanded better physical resources. There was a simple explanation. The school's academic record was one of the best in the country as a result of an outstanding group

of teachers. This is surely a clear lesson for us here in Australia at the present time when money is apparently being thrown at bricks and mortar rather than ensuring that the teachers are the best in the world in terms of academic standards and that the student-teacher ratio is of an ideal order.

Bill Roy

York, WA

RECENT articles in The Australian have referred to school principals complaining about wasted resources and duplication under the federal government's Building the Education Revolution stimulus package.

I'm the chairperson of the parents' association of a small public primary school in Burnie, Tasmania. We are happy; our school is to receive a new multi-purpose room and some redevelopment of our administration area. It will be enormously valuable for our students and our community going into the future. Like other schools, we had to apply for our grant. If some principals believe their projects are a waste of money, why did they put their hands up in the first place?

Mark Briggs

Burnie, Tas

Iran's power struggle

THE amazing protests we are witnessing now on the streets of Tehran are the outpouring of real anger and frustration, especially by educated urbanised youth, after 30 years of theocratic repression. They also represent an internal power struggle among the ruling clerics that may eventually weaken the tight grip of the Islamist regime.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's main opponent, Mir Hossein Mousavi, is certainly more of a reformist on some local and women's issues, but as one of only four candidates selected from thousands by the regime, he is unlikely to be a real moderate in foreign policy. Furthermore, he was one of the instigators of the early work on Iran's nuclear weapons program, which is by far the most pressing issue that the West should be focusing on in the Middle East today.

The current turmoil questions the wisdom of President Obama's conciliatory approach to the hard-line Iranian regime and also his attempts to artificially link rapprochement with Iran to progress on the Israel-Palestine conflict. In fact, there seems to be little sympathy for the Palestinians on the streets of Tehran, and the reported attacks on protesters by imported Hamas and Hezbollah thugs have caused additional anger.

Mary Werther

Camberwell, Vic

Unmeritorious litigation

YOUR article ("Changes to court rules risks flood of litigation", 19/6) omits important information and is wrong on a key point.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The article fails to mention that, win, lose or draw, litigation by businesses is already subsidised by the great Australian taxpayer. Legal expenses for companies are tax deductible, regardless of their merits. The ongoing Gunns litigation against various members of the public is being partly funded by those same members of the public. No similar deduction is available to private citizens or community groups, no matter how strong their claims are.

Moreover, it's simply wrong to say that UK law will not provide costs protection to a litigant if they have a private interest in the outcome of the litigation. Several recent cases have demonstrated this (for example,

R (Compton)v Wiltshire PCT in 2008).

There is no evidence that the availability of public interest costs orders will lead to an increase in unmeritorious litigation. The spectre of floods of litigation is raised every time it is proposed to make it easier for ordinary people to have access to justice. And every time it fails to materialise.

Rupert Watters

Lawyer, Environment Defenders Office

(Victoria) Ltd, Melbourne, Vic

FIRST BYTE

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Wouldn't it be easier just to convene parliament in the creche?

John Francis

Lauderdale, Tas

If being asked to remove her child from the Senate chamber is the most humiliating experience Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young has had, what is she doing in politics? What next, children in the law courts?

Steve McKenna

Lutwyche, Qld

Ah, Queensland justice: bellicose and befuddled one day, perverse and perfidious the next ("Taser victim died from heart attack", 19/6).

Bob Curren

Kensington Park, SA

Dear leader Kevin said, "I'll end the blame game between the commonwealth and the states." He did but now, at every opportunity, he blames the Opposition. The states, which have responsibility for many of the ills in health and education, get showered with largesse.

Graham Blackman

Banyo, Qld

Parents serving vegetables to their children (Letters, 19/6) might like to familiarise themselves with the promise that "whoever eats the most vegies gets the most dessert".

Chris Boaden

Concord, NSW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Inside the Times, March 13, 2009

The New York Times

March 13, 2009 Friday

Late Edition - Final

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Section: Section A; Column 0; Metropolitan Desk; Pg. 2

Length: 2201 words

Body

International

U.S. ENVOYS REACH OVER A DIVIDE

To Urge Reconciliation in Pakistan

The American ambassador to Pakistan and the Obama administration's special envoy reached out to rival leaders there to urge them to reconcile. The move prompted speculation that the American government was trying to ease tension in the area. The Obama administration appears to think that instability in the region will distract from battling a growing Taliban and Al Qaeda insurgency. Page A5

IRAQI JOURNALIST SENTENCED

An Iraqi journalist who threw his shoes at President Bush during a news conference has been sentenced to three years in jail. His sentence was announced to the sounds of weeping and to cries of hero. It is clear that whatever this decision means for the Iraqi judiciary system, it has become a symbolic moment of the United States' war in Iraq. Page A5

POPE SEES INTERNET AS RESOURCE

Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged in a letter that the Vatican had made mistakes in its handling of a bishop who denies the Holocaust. The pope said that he had recently been told that information available on the Internet could have helped bring the issue to the Vatican's attention earlier. The Holy See, Benedict wrote, would be paying closer attention to that particular source of news from now on. Page A5

Lucca Journal

Cultural Preservation in Italy

Lines have been drawn in Lucca, Italy, but across a menu, not in the sand. The city has prohibited any new ethnic restaurants from opening within its historic center. The decision has drawn considerable local protest and accusations of racism. Page A6

CHINA'S OFFICIAL HISTORY OF TIBET

Inside the Times, March 13, 2009

With Tibet largely closed to visitors and foreign journalists, the only option for a glimpse of the region is through the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing. With its exhibits of mutilated faces, torture devices and photographs of liberated and happy Tibetans, the museum is a propaganda powerhouse. Page A8

China Opposes Tibet Resolution A8

U.S VEXED BY BRITISH INITIATIVE

The Obama administration expressed displeasure over Britain's announcement that it was re-establishing contact with Hezbollah's political wing. Page A9

AID WORKERS ABDUCTED IN DARFUR

Three aid workers from Doctors Without Borders were abducted from their compound in Darfur, according to the organization. Two Sudanese guards were also taken along but were later released. Page A12

National

ARETHA'S HAT, 'TIS OF THEE

And the Milliner Behind it

At President Obama's inauguration, Aretha Franklin wore a hat that caught the nation's attention. It will be on display at the Smithsonian until it moves to Mr. Obama's presidential library, and its creator, Luke Song, who operates Mr. Song Millinery in Detroit, has been flooded with orders. PAGE A13

STEELE UNDER FIRE, AGAIN

Michael Steele, the beleaguered new chairman of the national Republican Party, found himself yet again explaining what he had meant to say, this time after a lively interview with GQ in which he seemed to suggest, among other things, that women should have the right to decide whether to have an abortion. PAGE A13

STILL-PUBLIC LIFE FOR BRISTOL PALIN

Gov. Sarah Palin's teenage daughter, Bristol, and her boyfriend have called off their engagement, about 10 weeks after the birth of their child. The news highlights where the private becomes the public and how, in campaigns, there is often no choice but to turn personal information into something politically advantageous. Political Memo. PAGE A13

First Lady Visits Fort Bragg A14

TOWN GRAPPLES WITH KILLINGS

Samson, Ala., was a place down on its luck before Michael McLendon raced through town with a rifle sticking out the window of his car, gunning down nine of its residents. Now the taciturn blue-collar town in rural southern Alabama must cope with this incomprehensible massacre. PAGE A15

A GENEROUS GIFT IN TIGHT TIMES

In this worldwide economic decline, gifts of \$1 million or more fell by 33 percent in the last half of 2008. But Charles F. Feeney, the iconoclastic philanthropist, is giving \$125 million to the University of California San Francisco, Medical Center to support development of a complex to provide medical services to children, women and cancer patients. PAGE A16

OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH BRIBERY

Inside the Times, March 13, 2009

Federal authorities arrested two Washington, D.C., officials and charged them with bribery and money laundering. The application for the arrest warrants describes tens of thousands of dollars that the men stole by overcharging for products in a fixed bidding process and in use of "ghost employees" on contracts. PAGE A16

SPACE STATION EVACUATED FOR DEBRIS

The three-member crew evacuated the International Space Station and climbed into the Soyuz spacecraft lifeboat for 11 minutes as a small but potentially dangerous piece of an old rocket motor whizzed past the station. PAGE A16

Eastern Ski Resorts Thrive A16

New York

VALUE OF 9/11 LAWSUITS

Is Still a Debated Issue

Following the 9/11 terror attacks, thousands of people had a choice: seek compensation in the form of an early, assured payment or take their chances in court. A new court report suggests that the small minority of those who took their chances and sued did better financially. Exactly how much better has been cause for some debate. Page A20

GOVERNORS ISLAND CHANGING HANDS?

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg warned that Governors Island, the former military base in the New York Harbor, may be closed because of a lack of money. The city and state have been running the island jointly, but Mayor Bloomberg has offered to take over the island's operation so the state can focus on other projects. Page A20

Business

FEDERAL RESERVE'S GRIM REPORT

On Household Income Loss in '08

Over the last few months, Americans have felt poorer. Now, the Federal Reserve reports some hard numbers that show it was not their imaginations. Households lost 9 percent of their wealth in the last three months of 2008, the most ever lost in one quarter in the 57-year history of record keeping by the central bank. Page B1

THE SECRET IS OUT ON STING

It was a federal sting with an unusual target: companies that oversee the safety of participants in clinical trials. And it was a secret too, until a Colorado company got caught in the net and called foul via news release. Page B1

A BANK AND ITS TOWN

The Bank of America building in Charlotte N.C., towers over the town, as much an economic fixture as a lynchpin for town pride. Good or bad, whatever affects Bank of America affects the town, and there have been a few too many bad days. Page B1

High & Low Finance

A Messenger in the Crosshairs?

Blaming mark-to-market accounting for the financial crisis is a bit like blaming the weathermen for Hurricane Katrina, Floyd Norris writes. But bankers are insisting that very thing and Congress is listening with a sympathetic ear. Page B1

Ad Column

A Hybrid Marketed to the Masses

As wallets get thinner, so does the advertising for big ticket items, particularly when it comes to cars. So American Honda Motor thinks the timing might be right for a more mainstream hybrid. With a ticket price of under \$20,000, the Insight might just be what the ad slogans style it as: the people's hybrid. Page B3

Obituaries

STEVE BERNARD, 61

He was a restless adventurer and an uncommitted entrepreneur until 1980, when he abandoned a business installing sun roofs in cars and founded Cape Cod Potato Chips in a storefront in Hyannis, Mass. Page B10

Sports

WITHOUT BLAIR, PITTSBURGH STUMBLES TO AN UPSET

After DeJuan Blair picked up his second foul in the first four minutes of Pittsburgh's Big East quarterfinal against West Virginia, he spent the rest of the half on the bench. His absence spurred the seventh-seeded Mountaineers on their way to a 74-60 victory against the second-seeded Panthers at Madison Square Garden. In other games, Villanova defeated Marquette, 76-75, and Louisville beat Providence, 73-55. PAGE B15

U.C.L.A.'S ABOYA REACHES HIGHER

As Alfred Aboya's college basketball career approaches its end (with his fourth Pacific-10 tournament and his fourth trip to the N.C.A.A. tournament), his journey is not nearly over. He plans to return to his homeland, Yaounde, Cameroon, someday for a career in politics. PAGE B14

Weekend

Music Review

The Show Must Go On, Forcefully

"The Circus Starring Britney Spears" arrived Wednesday night at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y. Throughout the concert, though she spoke little, Ms. Spears appeared radiant and unfettered, often smiling and never uncommitted, Jon Caramanica writes. PAGE C1

Television Review

The Good Book on a Small Screen

A new drama from NBC, "Kings," begins with an unusual premise for a television show: an Old Testament tale. This narrative of power and corruption is based on the story of David and Goliath, complete with a dashing young protagonist named David. A review by Alessandra Stanley. PAGE C1

Film Reviews

Firing Upends a Japanese Family

The latest film by the Japanese director Kiyoshi Kurosawa to hit the American big screen, "Tokyo Sonata," looks like a family melodrama. But there is more than a touch of horror to its story. PAGE C1

SAVE THE ALIENS, SAVE THE EARTH

Inside the Times, March 13, 2009

A. O. Scott, a Times critic, took his 10-year-old daughter to see "Race to Witch Mountain." Both had similar reactions to the movie, which stars Dwayne Johnson as Jack Bruno, a Las Vegas taxi driver who becomes the unwitting protector of two aliens. PAGE C5

2 Vikings Lost in the NewWorld C11

Art Reviews

Viewing the Pre-Future

"Krazy! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games," at the Japan Society, addresses a specifically Japanese set of approaches to visual storytelling. A review by Ken Johnson. PAGE C26

Escapes

HITCHING UP THE DOGS

For Travel Out West

Anybody who read "The Call of the Wild," by Jack London and heard a call of their own may care to try a dog-sledding trip. It takes more effort than experience and can be a great way to enjoy the scenery of the Montana-Wyoming border. It's easy to get the dogs running, but getting them to stop? Just make sure you stay on the sled. Page D1

Away

Heating Up the Desert Nights

Not content with vacation trips to hot springs, Scott Griesbach wanted to take the experience home with him. Or rather, take his home to the experience. After an eight-year search, he resides in Twentynine Palms, Calif., the proud owner of a personal spa on his very own scrap of desert. Page D1

Your Second Home

Building in Absentia

Trust. Understanding. Compromise. Patience. These are all words one finds in conjunction with healthy relationships. Now that you've settled on building a second home, it's time to forge a healthy relationship with your builder. Patience. Compromise. Perhaps a 24-hour Web cam? Page D2

Havens

Skiing and Almost Nothing Else

Angel Fire Resort, N.M., started as 70 runs of ski resort and in 1987 became incorporated as a town. There's not much else in its 39 square miles but ski slopes. But it is much less expensive to buy there than in other ski towns in New Mexico and Colorado, and temperatures are relatively mild year round. Page D3

Ski Report

A Ski Spot Hampered by Lodging

Gore Mountain in New York is one of the biggest ski areas on the Northeast. It has great terrain, 90 trails, 12 lifts and it is about a four-hour drive from Manhattan. So what has kept this skiing giant from the spotlight? Convenient lodging. But that may soon be changing. Page D4

Rituals

Inside the Times, March 13, 2009

The Fire Must Not Go Hungry D4

Editorial

WHILE EVERYONE FIDDLES

The world economy has plunged into what is likely to be the most brutal recession since the 1930s, yet policy makers in Europe and Japan seem to believe there are more important things for them to do than to try to dig the world, including themselves, out. PAGE A26

CLOSER TO THE CLIFF

Pakistan's rival political leaders seem determined to push their already unstable country over a cliff. Their increasingly out-of-control power struggle spilled out of the halls of government and the courtroom this week and onto the streets. PAGE A26

NOW ALABAMA

Spraying bullets from military-style, semiautomatic assault rifles, a deranged 28-year-old gunman killed 10 people and wounded 6 others before fatally shooting himself. In a sane world, this bloody rampage would at last persuade Congress to reinstate, in tightened form, the national assault weapons ban. But this is not a sane world, at least on Capitol Hill. PAGE A26

Op-Ed

DAVID BROOKS

President Obama hopes to change incentives in education so districts do the effective things instead of the easy and mediocre things. The question is whether he has the courage to follow through. PAGE A27

AN AFGHANISTAN 'HOW-TO'

President Obama seems to believe that sending more troops to Afghanistan is the best way to eliminate the Taliban threat. In an Op-Ed article, Leslie H. Gelb, a former editor and columnist for The Times, argues that Mr. Obama should instead withdraw most American forces and refocus our power on containing and diplomatically encircling the terrorist threat. PAGE A27

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTOS

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Australian

June 10, 2009 Wednesday

1 - All-round Country Edition

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Body

MOST TALKED ABOUT

EMISSIONS TRADING

Fielding should have been reading The Australian

YOU quote Senator Steve Fielding ("Fielding back from Washington with list for Wong", 8/6) as saying, "The idea that climate change is a result of the variation in solar activity and not related to the increase of CO₂ into the atmosphere is not something that I can remember ever being discussed in the media", an astonishing admission of ignorance.

This is one of the most hotly debated topics and also one of the most misrepresented by opponents of climate science. All standard climate models include solar variation, and it's not true that solar variation accounts for all temperature variation.

Over the past 10 years, the trend in solar output has been strongly down, while the temperature trend has been slightly up. The only way this can be happening is if some other effect has been raising temperatures contrary to the solar trend.

As much as I disagree with this paper's presentation of climate science, the matters he claims have had no public airing have been extensively covered in The Australian. If he is not aware that such a debate exists, I wonder what else he is unaware of. Maybe a trip to Washington has made him feel important, but reading the newspapers every day would have saved him the expense.

Philip Machanick

Taringa, Qld

CONGRATULATIONS to Steve Fielding for taking such care and diligence in his approach to the emissions trading scheme legislation ("I kept an open mind on the road to Washington", Opinion, 8/6). It has been obvious since the election 18 months ago that the government made up its mind that CO₂ causes discernible global warming (climate change), without undertaking any scientific due diligence in the public arena.

Meanwhile, overwhelming evidence to the contrary has been steadily accumulating, summarised not only by Ian Plimer's recent book but importantly also in the 880-page report *Climate Change Reconsidered* by the

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change and released only last week in Washington by the Heartland Institute. This key document (download at <http://www.nipccreport.org/index.html>) demonstrates that the IPCC findings are false but has, as yet, attracted little or no mention in the Australian media.

Consequently the foundations of the ETS policy are built on sand and the government is attempting to sell us all a pup.

Jim Brooks

Toorak Gardens, SA

I'M glad that Senator Fielding wasted his own money and not mine travelling to the US to review the evidence for global warming. There are many highly qualified Australian scientists who, I'm sure, would have been happy to brief the senator for free.

George Innes

Epping, NSW

I NEVER believed I would be compelled to congratulate Senator Steve Fielding for anything. Nevertheless, I must congratulate him on this article calling for healthy debate on the science of global warming and indicating that the government should give careful consideration to the wisdom of implementing a carbon trading scheme without the participation of the big carbon-emitting nations.

Bob Reid

Fig Tree Pocket, Qld

SENATOR Fielding will ask Climate Change Minister Penny Wong the basic question why rising CO2 levels haven't been matched by rising temperatures. The Rudd government has never admitted any doubt on this issue, whereas solar scientists acknowledge that the sun and its effect on Earth's climate isn't completely understood. Certainty is inversely proportional to knowledge.

Simon Kelly

Glen Forrest, WA

IF Steve Fielding's recent trip to the US has given him doubts about the contribution of humans to the current trend in global warming, to the extent that he will vote against the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, then to be consistent he should also demand the sacking of Australia's climate scientists.

Obviously if the Heartland Institute could so quickly demonstrate to Fielding that anthropogenic global warming is wrong for the simplest of reasons, it must follow that the current crop of professional climate scientists are incompetent. What went wrong, how did so many professional climate scientists miss the sun, or water, or cosmic rays, or gravity, or volcanoes? The answer is that they didn't Steve; they didn't.

Donald Oats

Murray Bridge, SA

THANK goodness we have one parliamentarian who has the guts to shout out, ``The emperor has no clothes." Whether Senator Fielding is correct or not, what Australian citizens need before we embark on an expensive course of radicalising our economy is the truth. Not the prognostications of computer models; not the bullying statements of those committed to either side of the argument; not the mindless following of our leaders, but the truth of what has happened and what is happening, all of which must be measurable.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Over eons, our climate has varied. What we need to know is whether the ups and downs in temperature since the Industrial Revolution are merely a part of the normal climate cycle or something caused by man.

Patrick Moore

Hawthorn, Vic

Reporter is being `vilified'

for coverage of family law

MEN'S groups are urging people to lodge complaints with the Press Council against Caroline Overington for her coverage of issues relating to shared parenting in Family Court legislation. The reality is that some Family Court judges have made decisions that could not possibly be in any child's ``best interests". Overington is to be congratulated for having the courage to expose what has been happening (``Lives torn asunder", Features, 9/6; ``Court allows mums to take kids overseas", 9/6).

For far too long the media has been too afraid of Section 121 of the Family Law Act to investigate and disclose some of the court's bizarre decisions. For example, a mother secretly imprisoned for refusing to hand over her child to the father who broke into their home, bashed and raped her in the presence of children; a child placed with a father who had not disclosed HIV/AIDS to the mother and had two convictions for child sex offences and one for violence; a boy removed against his wishes from his grandparents and his father to live far away with his nightclub stripper mother, whose partner had just been released from jail for downloading a record number of child-porn images; and children removed from fathers to live with drug-addicted mothers and their sexual-abuser boyfriends.

This is not, and should not be, a gender issue. Child advocates, both women and men, are demanding that children's safety should take precedence in the Family Court. It's sad that one of the few journalists prepared to expose child protection and family law issues is being vilified by men using other branches of the media.

Freda Briggs

Adelaide, SA

REGARDING Caroline Overington's recent coverage of the shared parenting laws, it's refreshing to see views other than those of the fathers being aired. For 15 years it seems that fathers' groups have been able to set the agenda, claiming most allegations of abuse against fathers are false without supporting evidence, when there is much research showing that more than 90 per cent of allegations of abuse in custody cases are true.

These groups also claimed five fathers a day committed suicide because they lost access to their children after divorce. They have not produced any credible evidence of this and yet the shared parenting laws were introduced because of their claims.

Children are suffering. The best interests of children are not being served. While fathers continue to fight for their rights, the rights of children are being trampled.

I applaud Overington's attempts to balance this and wish more journalists would consult experts and research in their reporting, as she is doing.

Barbara Biggs

Convenor, Safer Family Law Campaign

Greenwich, Vic

Ramsay is a ratings boor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRACY Grimshaw may feel aggrieved by Gordon Ramsay's comments, and she is probably correct in her assessment of him as an "arrogant narcissist" ("Grimshaw roasts 'bully' Ramsay", 9/6). However, Grimshaw's response needs to be put in perspective. Commercial TV channels employ Ramsay to be an insulting boor. It's what gets the viewers in -- after all, when was the last time we actually saw this bloke cook?

Grimshaw regularly participates in character assassination via her evening current affairs program, a show based not on journalistic integrity but on achieving ratings. Thus she has little moral ground to stand on when she cops some of her own medicine.

Until A Current Affair offers every victim of its overzealous and biased pursuits a full right of reply, unedited and uncensored, there should be no sympathy for someone who shows herself to be nothing more than a thin-skinned hypocrite.

Stephen Morgan

Runcorn, Qld

TRACY Grimshaw has every right to be upset over the vile and unprovoked attack by Gordon Ramsay. However, she failed in her response by dismissing Ramsay as an "arrogant narcissist". Narcissistic Personality Disorder is very real and has sufferers living a sociopathic existence destroying the lives of many people they claim to love; in short, NPD is emotional rape.

If Grimshaw knew Ramsay suffered from this mental turmoil, then a far more responsible use of her national prime-time TV spot would have been to recommend he (and others) seek help to manage his condition.

Rob McCasker

Coomera, Qld

Laver deserves more respect

I READ with interest Simon Barnes's article ("Federer is the greatest of all", (9/6) arguing that after his French Open triumph, "Roger Federer really is the greatest tennis player of all time".

The French Open win is Federer's 14th grand slam title and completes a career grand slam. However, Barnes, like other journalists striving for reader attention this week, does not do justice to the great Rod Laver. Laver won two career grand slams, one as an amateur and one as a professional, and both in the same calendar year. And the great American Pete Sampras, while winning 14 grand slam titles, never was able to win the French Open to complete a grand slam in the same calendar year.

So when we are talking about greatness on a tennis court, please can we pay proper respect to Laver. He stands apart for his grand slam achievements and dominance over his peers. Many Australians treasure our tennis heritage and we should not underplay the achievements of our grand slam champions.

Tim O'Shannassy

Murrumbidgee, Vic

Genius needs elbow room

SHANE Budden (Letters, 8/6) thinks that most aspiring cricketers acknowledge the need to "abandon partying hard ... long before they make the Aussie team". Our healthy stocks of batsmen and fast bowlers don't appear to have a problem meeting this criteria, but where does it leave quality spinners whose paucity is palpable?

Over a long career, burning the candle at both ends didn't appear to affect Shane Warne's on-field success, so perhaps Budden's across-the-board call for less colour off the field is inherently flawed. Genius often needs some elbow room.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Max Vallis

Wembley, WA

The haves get the gongs

THERE is something extremely disconcerting about reading a Queen's birthday honours list which is so obviously biased in favour of the haves rather than the have-nots ("Queens birthday honours", 8/6).

The list is not just an embarrassment of riches: it's an embarrassment, full stop. A preponderance of professors leads the list with 38 of 127 recipients of the OA, or 30 per cent of all recipients in this exclusive section, being gonged for work in their own academic field of speciality. Aren't they already paid for this and thus receiving benefits that place them at an advantage to others?

Rules should prevent judges, former parliamentarians or professors receiving awards for work already paid for, especially if paid for out of the public purse. Cloistered academics receive more holidays than most people with a lot double-dipping as individual consultants, yet, obviously, there's no shortage of their valuable time for self-promotion, whatever the good outcomes from their academic or research duties.

Andrew Woodhouse

Potts Point, NSW

Tolerance starts at home

I NOTE with interest that Ameer Ali, a leading Australian Islamic scholar, is upset about the Rudd government's inaction on funding to counter homegrown Islamic extremism on Australian soil ("PM urged to tackle extremists", 9/6).

The use of the descriptor "homegrown" is interesting as it is usually in the home first and in the school second, that teenagers absorb the values of the culture in which they live. Asking for funding to this end is one thing, but I hope and trust that the Islamic leaders themselves are doing all they can to counter extremism by taking personal responsibility for the pastoral care of their offspring. In Lebanon this week, thankfully, the majority opinion of the Lebanese is to say no to the extremist group Hezbollah.

Perhaps Ali and other Islamic parents, leaders and scholars should lead by unequivocally condemning all acts of intolerance and extremism within their society.

Bev Green

Yokine, WA

FIRST BYTE

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Presumably at the next IPL auction the Irish and Dutch cricketers will secure larger fees than the Australians?

Charles Eller

Northcote, Vic

Brett Lee, please, I'm begging you. For the sake of the Ashes, retire -- today!

Fran McKenzie

Daw Park, SA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

When tennis players win a big match, women leap in the air and men sink to the ground. Mostly.

Eric Marsh

Pacific Paradise, Qld

Is it just me or do other people see a delicious irony in footy players being quarantined with swine flu?

Robert Constable

Noosaville, Qld

Has anyone in Australia actually fallen ill from swine flu?

Ian Paterson

Hawker, ACT

I have read the headline in The Australian ("MCC takes hit from within as election is ruled a `charade'", 8/6) and am concerned that, as a long-time member of the MCC, I did not receive any notice of the AGM or forthcoming elections.

Please explain!

Belinda Kendall-White

Bellerive, Tas

In answer to Martin Graville (First Byte, 9/6) the Air France Airbus A330 wasn't operating on Microsoft Windows, it was operating -- as all new airliners do -- without a flight engineer. The flight engineer doesn't send error messages, he deals with problems as they occur.

Michael Stanbridge

Bonnet Bay, NSW

Senator John Faulkner's safety goggles will certainly come in handy in the defence portfolio.

Jan McCauley

Bowral, NSW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Body

I WRITE regarding Gwynne Dyer's article "A nuclear puzzle" (*Kalgoorlie Miner*, June 1). Gwynne Dyer speaks from a background in the military, as a historian and as a journalist. It is sad to see these credentials abused in order to belittle the nuclear threat facing Israel.

In his latest column for the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Dyer implies Israel is a coward twice over; because the Iranian threat is not so real and because most Israelis would run away if the balloon really did go up.

And all this written from the comfort of his spacious, quiet London home, miles from any Middle Eastern sandpit. It is the cricketing equivalent of telling Andrew Strauss Brett Lee really does not mean to rough him up at 90mph.

It is time to set the record straight. First, you cannot compare the situations of South Korea (or previously Northern Ireland) with Israel. Because even if there are similarities and both have clear enemies, those enemies are not looking to wipe the country off the face of the map.

The second "minor" issue Dr Dyer ignores is that Iran, through proxies, runs Hamas to Israel's south and Hizbollah to the north. Both are pledged to destroy Israel, along with its citizens, preferably through means of violence. And both have rained sufficient Iranian-funded rockets on Israel's civilians to be credibly believed.

To be blunt. If North Korea were to win a war, South Koreans would face a totalitarian regime, but they would not be slaughtered. In comparison, at the start of the January 2009 engagement when Israel entered Gaza, more than 100 Fatah supporters met their deaths at the hands of Hamas. Palestinians punished with death for being members of a political party that held (intransigent and failed) peace talks with Israel.

No doubt Dr Dyer will call this a "Holocaust-based" irrational reaction. Really? He forgets that during the aforementioned Gaza campaign, Hamas launched approximately 1000 rockets against Israeli targets. All of them landed in or near population centres such as the city of Ashkelon. Dyer may have missed this fact because he is a military analyst and none of the missiles fell on the Israeli troops massed near the Gaza border.

And here really is the gross ineptitude of Dr Dyer's selective use of facts. He ignores the biography of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who cut his teeth organising the siege of hundreds at the American embassy.

Dr Dyer fails to question why Iran wants to possess an offensive nuclear capability. He ignores the constant violent anti-semitic hostility and his threats to wipe Israel off the map, which countries like Australia have publicly denounced.

One is left to ponder the motivation for Dr Dyer's mischievous rant.

Iran funds and arms Hamas and Hizbullah - encouraging them to commit the double war crime of shooting at civilian targets while using their own civilian populations as human shields. Can there be any doubt that nuclear arms in Iranian hands would be a danger to Israel and to the world?

David Frankfurter,

Israel.

ONE can only have the deepest sympathy for Arnold and Frimet Roth over the loss of their daughter in a senseless terrorist attack (*Kalgoorlie Miner*, June 1).

However, it must be remembered that Palestinians are being killed by the State of Israel at a rate of about 10 to one. Sadly, a large proportion of those killed are women and children.

I have visited Iran on a couple of occasions and I believe I have some understanding of the country.

The people are for the most part literate, intelligent and friendly. I found a great scepticism about religion and no enthusiasm for the mullahs.

They are, however, a very proud and patriotic people. They are aware Israel has a large nuclear arsenal and obviously

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Letters to the editor

The Australian

October 6, 2009 Tuesday

1 - All-round Country Edition

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Body

MOST TALKED ABOUT

TURNBULL'S TROUBLES

Political saviours must be made of sterner stuff

ACCORDING to Glenn Milne ('`Liberals' rising star hobbled by Nationals', Commentary, 5/10), Peter Dutton is a possible future Liberal Party leadership contender. Where's the evidence for that? Dutton has done little, if anything, to merit such great press.

He was a lacklustre junior minister in the Howard government who rarely rated a mention. He has been unable to lay a glove on Nicola Roxon in the health portfolio, in fact he often fails to even appear in parliament when Roxon introduces legislation. On a similar note, he walked out of the House of Representatives during the Stolen Generations apology, an act exhibiting a severe lack of grace and compassion. All Dutton seems to have done is ride the Howard tide up in 2001 and 2004; and down in 2007, as well as score endorsements from other mediocrities such as Malcolm Turnbull.

Lately, having lost confidence in his ability to defend his own seat of Dickson, he couldn't convince branch members on the Gold Coast that he was worth preselecting for the safe seat of McPherson. Here's the kicker -- having failed, he now appears ready to give up on politics altogether. Saviours are made of sterner stuff.

Ian Hutcheon

Seven Hills, Qld

WHEN the government is emphatically returned at the next federal election, it will doubtless claim to have a mandate for every loony tune the Left has ever played, but the reality will simply be that the ineffectual rabble masquerading as the opposition was wholly incapable of providing any, with or without Peter Dutton.

Richard Fisher

Sinnamon Park, Qld

MALCOLM Turnbull clearly spends too much of his time on the ETS, which his Queensland Liberal National Party allies take to be the Embarrass Turnbull Scheme.

Letters to the editor

Vivian McDonnell

Cook, ACT

WOW! A great practical demonstration of Karen Andrews' mechanical engineering skills to expertly remove the wheels from Peter Dutton's fast-track re-election vehicle and replace them with skids.

Andrew Wyminga

Bicheno, Tas

WAS the Liberal National Party preselection for the Queensland seat of McPherson meant to be an example of succession planning or secession planning?

Peter Wall

Ascot, Qld

I'VE heard of some women who are too posh to push when it comes to the travails of giving birth, but is Peter Dutton too slight to fight in the perfectly good seat he already had? What sort of a ``potential" Liberal leader refuses to stand against the odds and fight honourably for a difficult seat but runs around looking for the easy option? Future leader indeed.

Judy Hardy-Holden

Balgol Beach, Qld

MALCOLM Turnbull and the media are mortified that Peter Dutton missed preselection for McPherson, but nobody bothered to ask the constituents. I, for one, am delighted that a local candidate won the right to represent the electorate instead of a blow-in who is interested only in the Liberal Party and furthering his political career in that party. A great win for the people.

William Hill

Benowa, Qld

The ``Death Wish" Liberals are hard at work again, this time refusing to give the winnable seat of McPherson to Peter Dutton. I guess it wasn't ``his turn", because that's how these turkeys work. Labor has nothing to fear from these clowns who, if they keep chucking out talent like Peter Dutton, will have nothing left but party hacks and will be totally unelectable. When John Howard left the parliament, so did the Liberals' last brain cell.

C. Dicker

Bracken Ridge, Qld

YOUR editorial (``A passionate belief", 5/10) suggests that Malcolm Turnbull ``has shown he is passionate about his belief in man-made climate change ...". Yes, about as passionate as he was a few years ago about the need for Australia to become a republic. His reaction to losing that cause was to walk away. I expect that he will do the same on climate change.

E.L. Fisher

Kambah, ACT

MALCOLM Turnbull has at last made his position crystal clear: he leads the Coalition down the road to a sensible approach to an ETS, or he goes off to get a real job, and I doubt he will have much difficulty there.

Letters to the editor

What would probably happen then is that the Coalition would be comprehensively beaten at the subsequent election and much of the deadwood eliminated from the next parliament. Hopefully, some new blood would emerge and eventually we would have the real opposition that we badly need. It almost sounds like an attractive outcome.

Peter Arlidge

New Farm, Qld

IF Malcolm Turnbull cannot carry his party in key public policy areas, how can he hope to win the support of the broader electorate at the next general election? His threat to resign as leader of the Liberal Party if he doesn't get his way on emissions trading policy, is a desperate ploy -- a bluff that one day may be called by those in the party who oppose him. Leadership by coercion is no formula for political longevity in a democracy.

Michael Gamble

Belmont, Vic

All the alarm bells rung by

Ebony's case were ignored

EBONY, a seven-year-old autistic girl starved to death in 2007. She had suffered chronic neglect and severe maltreatment at the hands of her parents ("No mercy for grisly killing of daughter", 3-4/10).

We would all like to believe that all children in Australian homes are loved, nurtured and cared for as is their right. This case highlights the sad reality that some parents are not capable of caring for their children and keeping them safe. In fact, the vast majority of cases of child abuse, child sexual assault and neglect are perpetrated in the domestic domain by those charged with the child's care.

The federal government's National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children states that protecting children is everyone's business. In Ebony's case, neighbours had alerted authorities and a number of NSW government departments had been alerted. Yet no one intervened appropriately and removed the starving child to safety.

There's no doubt that Ebony's parents failed her in the cruelest and most fundamental of ways. No jail sentence for the parents could ever match the sentence Ebony received in life, or in death. However, it's the systemic failure of our child protection system to protect another of the most vulnerable children in our society, in a case which rang all the alarm bells, which must be addressed.

Cathy Kezelman

Chairperson, Adults Surviving Child Abuse

Bellevue Hill, NSW

THE (unregretted) absence of a death penalty in Australia leaves life imprisonment without parole as the most severe judicial penalty. Logic then requires that it be reserved for criminals who have committed the worst crimes and who have the least chance of reform. This sentence was recently passed on a drug-addicted mother who starved a child to death, while Leigh Robinson, as noted by Lauren Wilson ("The killer and his crime are all too similar", Focus, 3-4/10), joins a list of girlfriend killers who have re-offended.

Years on a parole board convinced me that probationary officers are under-resourced, so parolees get inadequate supervision and little in the way of rehabilitation. I wonder whether the possibility of life-long orders for violent offenders with a high risk of recidivism has ever been considered. Any further conviction could result in a long prison sentence.

Under this regime, Robinson would probably have been in prison for some of the violent offences he continued to commit and his latest victim saved from a terrible death.

Letters to the editor

As an aside, I wonder whether the mother convicted of murdering her child is at any risk of recidivism if in prison for long enough to be beyond the child-bearing years. If there is no or minimal risk, what is the point of keeping her in prison for the rest of her life?

David Pincus

Chapel Hill, Qld

The value of anonymity

THE spectacular success of the Melbourne Storm NRL team throughout the mere decade of its existence bears testimony to the value of anonymity ("Storm troopers end Eels fairytale", 5/10). As Victorians treat rugby league with the same contempt the rest of the football-playing world treats Australian Rules, the Melbourne Storm has relished the benefits of its personnel being able to function away from the glare of the media and public adulation. There has to be a lesson to be learned from this experience, a valuable lesson that various sporting codes could benefit from.

Based upon the Melbourne Storm experience, I expect the following to happen: the NZ Warriors to relocate to Flinders Island; the Sydney Roosters to Rottnest Island; the Queensland Reds to Norfolk Island; Collingwood to the Sahara Desert (and take Eddie McGuire along as well; in order to retain The Ashes, the English cricket team should relocate to Ankara; and, to win the 2011 World Cup, to be played in New Zealand, the All Blacks should pack up their jockstraps and hakas and immediately jet off to Murmansk.

The original intent of basing an NRL team in Melbourne was to spread the word of the rugby league gospel to the AFL Bible belt of Victoria. This has been an abysmal failure. Some savages are simply beyond redemption. However, a quite accidental benefit has been that Sydney-based rugby league teams can rarely get their hands on the NRL premiership which, in itself, is something for the rest of Australia to rejoice about.

Crispin Walters

Chapel Hill, Qld

There's no equivalence

YOUR correspondents' criticism of Israel's nuclear stockpile and the claim that this somehow entitles Iran to weapons of mass destruction (Most Talked About, 3-4/10)

is fallacious in that it ignores a number of

key factors.

Benjamin Netanyahu is not a meglomaniac dictator who has called for the destruction of all Islamic states (compare with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), nor is he in a position to be overruled by a superstitious theocratic absolute ruler with no lesser hatred of Israel (Ali Khamenei). And before people start trying to invoke Israel's at times unacceptable treatment of Gaza or Lebanon, let us remember that the terrorist organisations which invoked such responses from Israel -- Hamas and Hezbollah -- are both Iranian proxies working to further the latter's plans of Middle East domination. This goal has other Middle Eastern Islamic states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia worried, so Iran is not simply a small-minded concern of Israel and the West.

If Israel is to be held responsible for Iran's actions because of her own in the Palestinian territories, let us not forget that it is the Iranian President who has, this year alone, stolen an election and murdered, imprisoned, tortured and raped hundreds of his own people for the "crime" of questioning his insane desire to repress them, stamp on their right to democracy and then demand that they spill their blood in order to avenge terrorists and their victims in Palestine.

Francis Cardell-Oliver

Chapel Hill, Qld

Obama's Afghan dilemma

I WAS very impressed by Paul Kelly's analysis of the dilemma faced by the US, and by extension Australia, in Afghanistan ("Obama to confront spectre of Vietnam", Focus, 3-4/10).

Those of us who lived through it cannot help but see clear and ominous parallels between the Vietnam war and the current situation in Afghanistan: the reasons for invasion then were hysteria about the spread of radical communism, the reasons now are hysteria about the spread of radical Islam; untold money and lives were squandered in futile attempts to prop up corrupt governments which were despised by the local population and made the Viet Cong look more attractive, which currently appears to be happening in Afghanistan after the farcical "democratic election".

But by far the most tragic parallel lies in the hatred and non-cooperation of the local population; they distrust and dread the foreign invaders, who are perceived as infidels and apologists for Zionism, more than they do the local extremists. In this climate there can be no winning of hearts and minds, and there can never be a military victory without merciless and morally unthinkable destruction of towns and villages and the killing of thousands of hapless civilians in the attempt to flush out and defeat the stated enemy.

I suspect the military chiefs and hardline war supporters know this and are ready to justify the means to achieve their holy grail of victory over the Taliban. But in the end, that is never going to happen. The enemy is not a regular armed force and there is no defined battlefield, as we have seen in Vietnam and the so-called war on terror. Al-Qa'ida comprises terrorist cells worldwide, and the Taliban almost certainly thrives throughout at least the sub-continent.

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos suffered heart-wrenching chemical attacks and "carpet" bombing, and still threw out the hated invaders. Thus I believe the parallels are clear, and the US and its allies have just got to rethink their whole mindset. Revenge for the September 11, 2001 attacks has to be set aside, and the military and intelligence gurus set the task of protecting people from terrorists by closely monitoring potential cells among migrants in our own communities. Accept, basically, that we cannot force people in other countries to follow the democratic principles that we live by, least of all by invading them.

Therein lies Obama's dilemma. He wants to withdraw and rethink, but his country is likely to see that as weakness rather than strength and wisdom.

H. Neill

Southport, Qld

First Byte

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When surveyed about health preventative initiatives, a majority of Australians " ... disliked the prospect of their health being micromanaged by government", according to Julie Novak of the Institute of Public Affairs ("Backlash looms on smoking, drinking", 3-4/10). Good. If we can avoid having to micromanage their long-term healthcare as well, we should be able bring the state and federal budgets back into surplus by 2011.

Peter Hallahan

Coorparoo, Qld

Coincidence? The 2009 NRL grand final was won by the same team that won it a couple of years ago, defeating a team that hasn't won it for decades. The 2009 AFL grand final was won by the same team that won it a couple of years ago, defeating a team that hasn't won it for decades.

Letters to the editor

Jonah Jones

Princes Hill, Vic

Christopher Hitchens should not presume to speak for all atheists (or those indifferent to all things religious) in Australia or elsewhere. Even among atheists, there are diverse opinions about the meaning of life, what constitutes a good society and the blueprint for its betterment. So, let's not assume that killing God and religion would lead to a utopian society. It's been tried before and the experiment failed.

Hendry Wan

Matraville, NSW

The "l'affaire Polanski" is not about culture, it's about language and "no" meant "no" in 1977, every year before that and every year since. No exceptions.

Pamela Attwood

Glenside, SA

Could The Australian please lead the way for other media and start spelling Brasil with an "s" instead of "z" to conform with the way it's pronounced?

David Stark

Fairfield, Qld

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman meets Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner

The Guardian - Final Edition

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theguardian

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Byline: Oliver Burkeman

Body

The man once described as the Indiana Jones of economists arrives for our interview in a bit of a shambles, which isn't the kind of entrance one associates with Indiana Jones. Steven Levitt has just left his suitcase in the back of a New York taxi, and now his container of apple juice is leaking all over the Manhattan office of his collaborator, journalist Stephen Dubner. "Do you think I'll ever get it back?" Levitt wonders absently, in a tone that suggests no personal investment in the outcome, while Dubner mops up the puddle.

To be fair, of course, the action-hero analogy was never intended to describe Levitt's personal bearing: it was a reference to the swashbuckling spirit of the two men's bestselling book, *Freakonomics*, which took economics into uncharted territory, explaining such riddles as why sumo wrestlers deliberately lose matches, why estate agents don't get the best deals for their clients and why crack dealers, instead of growing rich, end up living with their mothers. Somewhere, no doubt, there are statistics on the fate of items abandoned in New York City cabs; Levitt, one of his generation's most ingenious economists, could presumably use them to ferret out proof that more suitcases get returned in sunny weather, or at Christmas, or when the taxi driver is the oldest child in his family.

Haughty academic colleagues, poring over unemployment rates and balance-of-payments deficits, accuse Levitt of cutesiness. He has no big unifying theme, they say, and nothing to say about the world financial crisis: he would rather spend his days showing how winning the Nobel prize seems to increase your longevity, or explaining the changing price charged for oral sex by prostitutes on the streets of Chicago. Picking a fight with Levitt is a dissatisfying business, though, because he tends to agree with his accusers. "To have a unifying theme, you need to be a big thinker, and that's just not the way I think," says the 42-year-old, who speaks with a slight lisp. "I think small." When Dubner, 46, interviewed him for the New York Times article that led to their collaboration on *Freakonomics*, which has now sold more than 3m copies worldwide, Levitt was even blunter. "I just don't know very much about the field of economics," he said.

There is plenty more cutesiness - as well as much that's genuinely fascinating - in the sequel to *Freakonomics*, published this month, which labours under the title of *Superfreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes, and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance*. But there are also arguments that promise to expose its authors

G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman....

to a new kind of controversy. Levitt and Dubner may have nothing to say about the financial crisis, but they have much to say about climate change, and why, in their analysis, economics shows that trying to change people's polluting behaviour is utterly pointless. The real solution, they maintain, involves pumping large quantities of sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere through an 18-mile-long hose, of which more later. "We could end this debate and be done with it," Levitt says, with a sigh, "and move on to problems that are harder to solve."

People will object to this, they acknowledge, just like they objected to the claim, in *Freakonomics*, that the legalisation of abortion in the 1970s was the reason for the precipitous drop in crime levels in America in the 1990s. (Unwanted children, according to this theory, are more likely to turn into criminals, so when they don't get born in the first place, crime falls.) But to Levitt and Dubner, such objections are pure emotionalism. Their job, as dispassionate analysts, is to take a cold-eyed look at how things really are, not how we would like them to be, and to deliver difficult truths with no regard for hurt feelings. "The data," they write, in the kind of phrase that recurs throughout *Superfreakonomics*, "don't lie."

Prostitutes, suicide bombers and swimming-pool deaths

Thus in the new book we learn, for example, that more deaths are caused per mile, in America at least, from drunk walking than drunk driving - so when you drive to a party and get plastered, it's not necessarily a wise decision to leave the car and walk home. We discover that **female** emergency-room doctors are slightly better at keeping their patients alive than male ones, and that **Hezbollah** suicide bombers, far from being the poorest of the poor, with nothing to lose, tend to be wealthier and better-educated than the average Lebanese person. There's an artful takedown of the fashionable "locavore" movement: transportation, Levitt and Dubner argue, accounts for such a small part of food's carbon footprint that buying all-local can make matters worse, because small farms use energy less efficiently than big ones. And we learn that at some point in the last 80 years, the cost of a blowjob from a Chicago prostitute went from being more expensive to less expensive than vaginal sex, as the societal taboo against oral sex - which gave it scarcity value - declined. (The average price of each, in case you were wondering, is currently \$37.26 versus \$80.05.)

Levitt had a thing for statistics long before his passion made him a tenured professor of economics at the University of Chicago at just 36, and won him the prestigious John Bates Clark medal, awarded to the best American economist under 40. "I was an odd child," Levitt says, and perhaps some kind of oddness was to be expected: his mother is a psychic, his father the world's leading expert on the science of farts. "My favourite thing to do was always just to go play in my room by myself, and it was always data-related . . . Every day, when my father came home from work, my job was to report the correlation coefficients between various baseball statistics."

As a Harvard undergraduate, he wrote a computer program to help his classmates decide how to pair off into groups of roommates, though it turned out that everybody disliked the same people - "and so the optimal thing to do was to put all the people who were hated together, even though they hated each other worse than everybody else did." He made an academic name for himself with quirky studies on crime, sports and politics, identifying useful patterns in mountains of data that nobody had bothered to examine. Economic analysis, as a pastime, even seemed to provide him with a measure of solace in the face of the most searing loss. Shortly after he came to Chicago, he and his wife Jeanette lost their first child, Andrew, to pneumococcal meningitis at the age of one. They joined a support group for bereaved parents. Levitt was surprised by the number of attendees whose children had died in swimming-pool accidents, and became absorbed in a new research project, which revealed, when completed, how much more dangerous it is to have a swimming-pool at your home than a gun. Such findings caught the media's imagination. When publishers began to pressure him to write a mass-market book, he said he would only do so if he wrote it with Dubner, a magazine journalist with two book-length memoirs under his belt, whose 2003 piece on Levitt had convinced him that not all journalists were destined to misunderstand and misrepresent his work.

Their mission to explain the world through numbers alone can give *Superfreakonomics* an oddly detached feel: major social issues are addressed, then instantly reduced to a statistical parlour game. An interesting section on the transactions between pimps and prostitutes, for example, shows that working with a pimp confers great financial

G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman....

advantages: they're much more helpful to prostitutes than estate agents are to house-sellers, for a start. But it neglects to consider the notion that there might, just possibly, be some negative aspects to the pimp-prostitute relationship. (The authors, apparently aware that they have made it look as if selling sex is the business plan to beat all others, add a helpful clarification: "Certainly, prostitution isn't for

every woman.")

Based on interviews with a pseudonymous source in the British banking industry, they also suggest that a mathematical algorithm could be developed that would identify "potential bad guys" in advance, with reference to certain behavioural and demographic characteristics. Those arrested on charges of terrorism, they explain, are disproportionately likely to rent their home, have no savings account or life insurance, be a student, and have both Muslim first and last names. Superfreakonomics makes no mention of the possibility that the police might simply be targeting Muslims disproportionately, and Levitt seems genuinely baffled that anyone might object, on civil-liberties grounds, to targeting all those who fulfilled the relevant criteria.

"Isn't everyone in favour of that? How could you not be in favour of that? I'm not saying we should lock them up," he says. "But would it not make sense for MI5 to take a close look at those people? Of course, it's a slight inconvenience to those innocents who have MI5 scrutinise them. But economics is all about trade-offs." Incidentally, this is why, according to the book's subtitle, "suicide bombers should buy life insurance": it doesn't pay out in cases of suicide, so buying it would help evade suspicion.

Self-interest: an uncomfortable fact

Despite the lack of a unifying theme, there's an underlying message to both books, according to Levitt and Dubner, which is that "people respond to incentives". Fundamentally, we're self-interested. This doesn't necessarily mean that we're always greedy and selfish: our self-interest can include a desire for the warm glow of acting in a moral or charitable way. But people, they write, "aren't 'good' or 'bad'". People are people, and they respond to incentives. They can nearly always be manipulated - for good or ill - if only you find the right levers." Or, as Levitt puts it: "You could put Mother Teresa in a situation where she might not act altruistically, and you could put Charles Manson in a situation where he might act altruistically."

The problem with trying to reduce carbon emissions, they argue, is that the incentives are all wrong. Too many of the benefits are "externalities", from which the people making the sacrifices will never benefit - and the whole history of economics demonstrates that such completely unself-interested behaviour is impossible to implement on a large scale, especially when so many people suspect that their sacrifice would not, in fact, make a significant difference to the outcome. "Behaviour change is hopeless," Levitt says. "It's just completely pointless to think that you're going to get six billion people, the poorest people around and the richest people around, to work together, when every individual person has no impact on the problem. That's a fundamental issue that economists have thought about, and recognised the hopelessness of, for hundreds of years . . . One thing we know is that I'm not going to sacrifice, materially, my own life, to help an anonymous person in Bangladesh who might not even have been born yet, when I know that there will be no help for that person anyway." Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions, the authors write, "is a noble invitation. But as incentives go, it's not a very strong one."

This, of course, is desperately tricky territory. My immediate personal response is that Levitt's view is irresponsible defeatism, which I find repugnant. The Superfreakonomics response to that, though, would be to ask about the source of my repugnance. Is it really because I have any hard data to suggest that such massive behavioural change might be feasible - that it wouldn't, in other words, entail a historically unprecedented transformation in human nature? Or is it just because I don't want to confront the fact that people are the way they are, which is to say fundamentally self-interested?

Sulphur dioxide: the quick fix

for global warming

G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman....

A large chunk of *Superfreakonomics* is given over to what Levitt and Dubner present as a simple, cheap alternative to all this depressing futility. They profile Nathan Myhrvold, the former chief technology officer of Microsoft, whose company, Intellectual Ventures, is exploring the possibility of pumping large quantities of sulphur dioxide into the Earth's stratosphere through an 18-mile-long hose, held up by helium balloons, at an initial cost of around \$20m. The chemical would reflect some of the sun's rays back into space, cooling the planet, exactly as happened following the massive 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo, in the Philippines. The primary objection to this plan, as with other "geoengineering" schemes, is that there's no predicting the unknown negative effects of meddling in such a complex natural system. And it's strange, given how much is made in both *Freakonomics* books of the law of unintended consequences, that they don't mention this in the context of Myhrvold's plan. Still, it's hard to object to the authors' argument that this kind of potential solution should have more profile, among politicians and in the media, than it currently does.

It certainly feels wrong to deal with pollution by polluting even more. But what, Levitt and Dubner would ask, is the hard, empirical basis for that feeling? Isn't it just more emotionalism, more wishful thinking? "When you read the actual scientists' reasoning for how this could work, and might need to work," says Dubner, "it's really hard not to come to the conclusion that it's idiotic to discount it. Not to say that it's a slam-dunk to do it, but idiotic to discount it entirely."

"It's just common sense," Levitt says, with the faint exasperation of a man who sees the world in the harsh light of data, and can't quite understand why everyone else does not. "Much of economics is just common sense. What's so surprising is that it is so rarely actually applied in daily life."

SuperFreakonomics by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner is published by Allen Lane, price £20. Levitt and Dubner will be speaking at the LSE, Peacock Theatre, London on Monday 9 November at 6.30pm.

Dubner's day

6.30am Get up, sneak in a bit of work. Take my kids to school around 8. Have some coffee.

9am Spend the day working at a computer, analysing data, or with my research assistants, reviewing their work. If I'm lucky, I'll sneak off to the driving range. I've become a golf nut.

6.30pm I made a deal with my wife that I'd be home by 6.30. She often plays high-stakes online poker in the evenings, which frees me up to work and put the kids to bed. I like betting on horses, so I review the day's racing.

11pm Bed.

5.30am Pour coffee, read news, answer emails, moderate blog comments.

7am Go for a run.

8.35am - 11am Go to my studio. Write. No phone or internet.

11am Catch up on calls and emails.

11.30am Lunch! Starved, as I don't eat breakfast.

12.30-3pm Write.

3pm-6pm Catch up on emails, read, blog.

6.05pm Home for dinner, then the four of us read in bed. If writing has been particularly good or bad, a whisky. Ready to sleep soon after kids doze off.

9pm Program the coffee machine . . .

G2: The G2 Interview: Calling on people to reduce their carbon emissions is a noble invitation, but as incentives go, it isn't a very strong one: Oliver Burkeman....

Levitt's day

6.30am Get up, sneak in a bit of work. Take my kids to school around 8. Have some coffee.

9am Spend the day working at a computer, analysing data, or with my research assistants, reviewing their work. If I'm lucky, I'll sneak off to the driving range. I've become a golf nut.

6.30pm I made a deal with my wife that I'd be home by 6.30. She often plays high-stakes online poker in the evenings, which frees me up to work and put the kids to bed. I like betting on horses, so I review the day's racing.

11pm Bed.

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Townsville Sun (Australia)

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Body

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The Moon and Beyond

Australia's space experts could be a lot closer to playing a part in the return to the moon, when the NASA program to extend human presence in the solar system comes to fruition.

During Peter Lindsay's visit to the Johnson Space Centre in Houston, Texas, Australian astronaut Andy Thomas made it very clear to him that he believed that Australia should be participating in the space program.

" Andy indicated to me that it is likely that the next mission to the moon will in fact be an international mission, clearing the way for Australia to play a major role," Mr Lindsay said.

" Such a program must be backed by a host of programs including the development of software, hardware and interestingly for Australia, testing robotics, vehicles, habitats and in-situ resource utilisation in realistic environments that will aide all those involved to defi ne ways to combine efforts to enhance scientific exploration."

Multiple sites across the world are needed for this testing and Mr Lindsay is confident Australia could earn a stake in the Space Program by undertaking to design and manufacture a specific hardware necessary for the mission.

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" The cost of our investment could be as low as \$10 million but this is a small price to pay for the returns we would get," Mr Lindsay stated.

" The inspirational avenues this would open for young aspiring Australians to be a part of a world leading scientific program such as this are invaluable.

" On the financial side, the money needed for the investment would in fact be spent in Australia, supporting Australians and supporting our aeronautical industry.

" As a result, in return, Australia could well be invited to fly one of our people on the mission."

Mr Lindsay said he raised the issue of Woomera Test Range with Andy Thomas noting that the range had fallen into disrepair and disuse and questioned why this had been allowed to occur.

" Andy has a very clear opinion that Australia is missing the opportunity of the century by not modernising the test range.

" His views are that the area has benefits that do not exist anywhere else in the world and that Australia should invest in modernising the range.

"The rest will happen naturally providing a basis for a major investment in the World Space Program with the potential for a strong bilateral relationship to emerge between Australia and the US.

"Essentially, if we build it, they will come."

OBSERVATIONS

Mail from Malta

The transition of Malta Post from government ownership to private ownership has been very successful. During my meeting with Mr Joseph, Chairman of Malta Post, he told me services have improved and staff are happier.

If Australia ever contemplates the privatisation of Australia Post, then the Malta model will provide an ideal case study.

A Home for Everyone

Even Trinidad has a better Affordable Housing program than

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Australia. We really need to lift our game in this area.

I visited a South African Affordable Housing program which appears to be working successfully.

Australia should embrace the South African principles and partnerships that enable everyone to have their own home, irrespective of income.

Some owners may have to accept a lower standard, but this is preferable to no home at all.

Trillion dollar mistake

The Zimbabwean dollar has become a laughing stock. When the A \$100Z trillion note was recently introduced it immediately became effectively useless.

The country was in the grip of world-record hyperinflation which has left the Zimbabwean dollar virtually worthless inflation of 231 million per cent in July 2008, the most recent figure released.

The Transitional Government has allowed Zimbabweans to conduct business in other currencies. They chose the US Dollar, a move which halted the countrys runaway inflation and brought stability back to the economy.

Magnetic North

Townsville should be the site of a Magnet High School for Health Professionals. The Michael de Blaky school for health professionals inside the Texas Medical Centre would make a great model for a similar institution in our region. Australia needs to graduate many more health professionals to take the pressure off allied health and hospitals.

The school should be a partnership between Education Queensland, James Cook University and Queensland Health and

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should be built in the current health precinct.

A Popular Defence

A noteworthy visit to the South African Naval Festival at Simon's

Town Naval Base secured my belief that a more hands-on

approach is necessary for successful defence recruitment.

Each year the navy opens its doors to the public for three days.

A huge number of people attend to witness a comprehensive

program where virtually the whole base is open to the public.

I noted that the hand-outs prominently carried the message: "SA

Navy - The Peoples Navy".

The ADF should most definitely run a program of open days on

major Defence bases across Australia. In particular Lavarack

Barracks should be open to the Townsville public annually.

Crossing Borders

It's important for all world leaders to disengage terrorism from

religion. That's the message I received from a senior Islamic leader

in Beirut. He went on to say It's the duty of all Muslims to fight

terrorism.

He also observed it is impossible to think about a unified Islam

although Lebanese passionately want to live in peace with Israel.

With Palestine being the 'cause' that unites Islam throughout the

world, fixing this single problem will take away much of the angst in

the Islamic community.

The Australian Military Observers in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt

perform a valuable and worthwhile role and OP Paladin should

continue to be supported.

Also, I was pleasantly surprised to see that women are very

welcome in the Omayyad Mosque - the third most important in the

world. This is in great contrast to the hard line views in Pakistan

and Afghanistan.

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Unexpected Ideas, Unexpected Places

Mauritius

For a country which has a very basic flag layered with four horizontal stripes - there is nothing basic about their approach to women's rights, child development, family welfare and consumer protection.

Peter Lindsay wants Australia to adopt the "rights of grandparents" law that operates in Mauritius. When a marriage breaks down, grandparents in Australia are sometimes denied access to their grandchildren.

This can be devastating. Mr Lindsay will be campaigning to have the successful Mauritian law introduced in Australia.

Their government sponsored recycling of furniture and school books is a model that Australia could also adopt to help poorer families, to provide employment and to benefit the environment.

" It is very apparent that there are so many emerging opportunities for Australian education institutions to partner with training providers in Mauritius."

Mr Lindsay met with professors and academic directors in the island nation - which lies off the coast of the African continent - to determine how Australian educational institutions have already impacted on their country's students and how the relationship can be further developed.

" Australia has a reputation for high quality courses and our degrees are very well regarded and respected.

" Discussions involved the real possibility of establishing an Oceanographic Institute in Mauritius based on their pristine St Brandon island group. This would be privately funded.

Mr Lindsay pushed the case for James Cook University to be the Australian partner in this exciting new research partnership.

Trinidad

The concept of a National Identity Card has been debated in several countries including Australia. The debate has been very emotional but the Trinidad experience proves the value of a common identity document.

Peter Lindsay reports Trinidad has a National Identity Card which, while it is not mandatory to be in

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possession of, everyone does have one due to its convenience.

Its accepted as a primary form of identification and can be obtained by any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who is 15 years of age or older.

"The National ID card is also an electoral document and anti-fraud device thats used to identify voters on polling day," Mr Lindsay said.

" Instead of relying on a driving licence, all Australians should embrace the benefits of a National ID card."

In a meeting with the country's Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Lindsay discussed the benefi ts of establishing a national DNA database for all citizens.

DNA is a valuable tool for the police in fighting crime, identifying victims, bringing criminals to justice and obtaining successful prosecutions.

Anything that keeps our community safer is a good policy Mr Lindsay said.

While in Trinidad, Mr Lindsay also met with the Director of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, which has set a comprehensive 2020 Vision Program for the country.

" An interesting program that could be adopted in Australia is the Tobago Youthbuild Program," Mr Lindsay said.

" It provides free classes to young people that teach useful skills that will help them earn a living and lead more fulfi lling and productive lives.

" Participants enrol in a six month training program in attitudinal development, skills training and service learning.

"They receive a daily stipend \$50TT.00 while they are trained in areas such as customer service, anger management, creative expression, sexual and reproductive health, literacy and numeracy.

"I believe Youthbuild gives young people an alternative to socially destructive behaviours and is a significant tool in crime reduction."

Jamaica

Mr Lindsay's meeting with the Commissioner of Police saw some tough talking with no punches pulled.

The commissioner was scathing of governments that try to treat lawlessness through tough on crime and zero tolerance programs. He said these political knee jerk reactions do not work and cannot work unless governments understand what factors predispose so many young people to turn to a life of

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crime.

Instead the commissioner says that governments should be talking about zero tolerance of poor governance, poverty, poor parenting, poor education and inappropriate cultures.

Mr Lindsay intends to propose a radical new policy along these lines seeking to implement a whole of government long view approach to making our community a safer place.

Middle Eastern Misconception

Influence pedalling, corruption and the need for change to a modern democracy... Peter Lindsay travelled securely into the heart of a region plagued by all of the above to research the current state of play in the Middle East.

He was able to look through the eyes of academics, UN chiefs, religious leaders and Members of Parliament.

" The Middle East is a key area in relation to world security with so many elections that have the possibility to colour the future," Mr Lindsay said.

" However I discovered that Hezbollah, closely aligned with the Iranians, is not interested in restarting war with Israel. In fact, they are not seen as corrupt but they are seen as an alternative government because they deliver.

"Properly engaged, they can be a force for good in the Middle East."

A Middle East analyst from the American University of Beirut, Professor Timur Goksel, told Mr Lindsay that the US will always be a key player in the region, while the EU has no credibility.

" Mr Goksel expressed to me that the long term worry in the region is that non-state activities are becoming stronger than government activities and in relation to Gaza, the Israelis seem to get away with everything," Mr Lindsay explained.

" Most states have hope that the US under Obama will be a power for good in the region."

In Beirut, Mr Lindsay met with Jack Christofides, Chief of Staff, Office Co-ordinator of Lebanon (UNSCOL), United Nations.

"Mr Christofides expressed to me his view about Afghanistan," Mr Lindsay said.

"The feeling was that US President Obama will make a real difference, that more troops will be sent and the right kind of civilians.

" Too often, the west enters the fray with a great splash, attention then wanders and

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the population back home clambers for withdrawal.

" Our in-country forces must focus on protecting the population and that will deliver the greatest success."

Wherever the Weather

Somewhere between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans lies the Table Mountain National Park at Cape Point in South Africa. It's located at the junction of two of Earth's most contrasting water masses - the cold Benguela current on the west coast of Africa and the warm Agulus current on the east coast.

Peter Lindsay visited the global atmosphere watch station at Cape Point which is maintained by the South African Weather Bureau, together with the Frunhofer Institute in Germany.

" The research lab was architecturally designed to blend into the western slopes of Cape Point," Mr Lindsay explained.

" It monitors environmentally important air components, as well as solar radiation and various meteorological parameters."

The Cape Point Global Atmosphere Watch Station monitoring and research program entails a comprehensive in-situ and regional research and sustained systematic monitoring of atmosphere parameters, which in the event of human interferences of the atmosphere could result in harmful effects to mankind.

" The pristine location of Cape Point enables measurements to be made in air that has passed over the vast clean southern ocean," Mr Lindsay said.

"Such long-term observations are representative of background conditions, making it possible to detect changes in the atmospheres composition."

Mr Lindsay said that a UV-Biometer network was installed in 1994 forecast regular ozone and ultraviolet radiation levels.

" The main purpose of the UV-Biometer network is to make the public aware of the hazards of excessive exposure to biologically active UV-B radiation, while contributing to the schools awareness programs for education.

" With the challenges of global emissions, it is now more important than ever to maintain the worldwide chain of atmospheric monitoring stations."

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Thoughts on Ports

With the local debate about allowing residential development adjacent to the Port of Townsville, Mr Lindsay wanted to visit a port where adjacent residential development had been allowed and to be briefed on the consequences.

Peter Lindsay's visit to Cape Town focused on meetings with the port manager, the manager of corporate affairs and the key accounts manager.

" I'd like to begin with my conclusion; residential development adjacent to an operating port is not compatible," Mr Lindsay stated.

" My prime purpose for visiting the port was to investigate the impact of intensive residential development at the port itself.

" The V&A area contains five star hotels, other residential components, a shopping mall and restaurants. The hotels have continuing complaints of noise, odour and light. This would happen if the State Government's plan for Townsville were to proceed.

" The Townsville Port Authority, the port users, the Townsville City Council and the community at large have always believed a residential development to be inappropriate because of the detrimental impacts it will have."

Mr Lindsay also reports that the Cape Town Port is experiencing a growth in business due to the change of freight mode to containerisation, with even iron ore going in containers for small exports.

" This is something of interest to our very own port here in Townsville because of the iron ore export potential from the mine at High Range," Mr Lindsay indicated.

" My visit to the Port of Cape Town confirmed my decision to oppose residential development adjacent to the Port of Townsville.

" Incidentally, ports should be used by the government as a mechanism to stimulate employment and growth in the economy," Mr Lindsay said.

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The battle of the boycotts

The Jerusalem Post

September 25, 2009 Friday

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Byline: Yocheved Miriam Russo

Highlight: A call by Ben-Gurion University professor Neve Gordon to boycott Israel has led donors to question their funding of the institution

Body

On August 20, an opinion column published on page A-31 of the Los Angeles Times unleashed a firestorm that continues to blaze in California, and in the normally placid city of Beersheba, home of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU).

The op-ed, entitled "Boycott Israel," was written by Neve Gordon, head of BGU's Department of Politics and Government. Gordon's published plea was for "all foreign governments, regional authorities, international social movements, faith-based organizations, unions and citizens to suspend cooperation with Israel."

"Nothing else has worked," Gordon lamented. "The most accurate way to describe Israel today is as an apartheid state."

Such allegations, when made by Israel's foreign enemies, are hardly unique. But when the denouncement comes from a Jewish Israeli who, just last January, was promoted to head BGU's Politics and Government Department, battle lines form quickly.

It's hardly the first time "post-Zionist" academics have clashed with the traditional Zionist crowd, but Gordon's op-ed pushed the debate into new territory. Gordon's words even closer to home in that his proposed boycott would do irrevocable harm to a popular university, specifically one which pays his salary.

When the horrified "traditional Zionists" turned out to be wealthy Jewish Americans who donate tens of millions of dollars to keep BGU alive and growing, the dispute was raised to a new level. Many of the donors find themselves saying, "If BGU professors feel free to invite the world to boycott Israel, then perhaps the time has come to boycott BGU. Next time around, maybe we should sit on our checkbooks."

Ari Bussel, for years a pro-Israel, pro-BGU activist and a leader in the local chapter of American Friends of BGU, was among the first to spot Gordon's LA Times op-ed.

"It was Thursday morning," the Beverly Hills-born Bussel recalls. "The LA Times was delivered to our doorstep as usual. I saw Gordon's piece, read it, and at first I wasn't all that surprised. It's not unusual for the LA Times to print this sort of anti-Israeli rhetoric. I've come to expect it. But a few minutes later, I began to see that there was something qualitatively different about this article."

The battle of the boycotts

"The local reaction was unbelievable," he continued. "An absolute avalanche of opposition erupted, and our phones were ringing off the hook. People who, on August 19, wouldn't have given each other the time of day, were calling each other and everybody else they knew. They all asked the same question: 'Who's giving money to BGU?' There are some big donors in this area. Very big. I've never seen anything like it.

"Before this hit, I'd never heard of Neve Gordon," says Bussel, who lived in Israel for years and served in the IDF during the First Gulf War. "For an American, even for someone involved in Israeli affairs, Gordon hadn't seeped into the American national consciousness. But this anti-Israel commentary hit home.

"For some of us, it may be the first blossoming of the idea that President Obama has become our downfall," he speculates. "Clearly, things are changing. Something is happening to alter people's perception and approach to this kind of Israel bashing. And it's not over - people are still calling, talking and writing. Three weeks afterwards, the LA Times was still printing readers' reactions. Something important happened when this piece was published."

Unless one is a news junkie, an academic, or closely involved with BGU, the name Neve Gordon may not ring many bells among mainstream Israelis, either. Even so, within 48 hours, 4,000 emails protesting Gordon's remarks had landed in the inbox of BGU President Rivka Carmi. Several days later, Carmi responded to her department head's call for a boycott through her own LA Times op-ed, admitting that she was "shocked" at what Gordon had written, suggesting that even she hadn't been fully aware of what she called Gordon's "destructive views."

"We are shocked by Dr. Neve Gordon's irresponsible statements, which are morally deserving of full condemnation," she wrote. "We vehemently shake ourselves free of the destructive views [advocated by Gordon], who makes cynical use of freedom of expression in Israel and Ben-Gurion University."

NOT EVERYONE was shocked. For years, watchdog organizations like Campus Watch and IsraCampus had monitored Neve Gordon's words and activities, even before Gordon made international news during the "Siege of Ramallah," when, in 2003, he joined Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, holed up in his Ramallah compound. Defying IDF orders which forbade his entry to Ramallah, he moved in to protect Arafat, taking up a position as a "human shield." During the height of the intifada, when suicide bombers belonging to the military wing of Arafat's movement were blowing up Israeli cafes and buses, a photo of Gordon and Arafat, hands joined and held high in solidarity, splashed across the front pages of Israeli newspapers.

According to documents compiled by watchdog IsraCampus (www.IsraCampus.org.il), Gordon's dissident career was politically consistent. Calling Israel an "apartheid" state had long been part of his anti-Israel rant. Last December, at the height of Operation Cast Lead, as Hamas rockets and missiles slammed into Israel - including striking the BGU campus - Gordon again spoke out, denouncing not Hamas but Israel.

Over the years, Gordon's commentary attracted an unusually diverse crowd of supporters. Despite being Israeli and Jewish, he regularly published his highly controversial views on websites and magazines accused of Holocaust-denial, and ultimately became a regular columnist for Al Jazeera, a Qatar-based Arabic media outlet. From there, he preached that Israel was opposed to peace and was plotting to steal Arab lands.

Some of Gordon's antics went beyond theory. In one incident, Gordon defended Azmi Bishara, the disgraced former Israeli-Arab MK, a man still wanted by the Israeli authorities for alleged spying and assistance to the terrorist group, **Hizbullah**. In his impassioned defense of Bishara, Gordon falsely accused his former Army commander, Aviv Kochavi, a decorated officer, of being a war criminal. As a result, Kochavi's career was sidelined when he was barred from entering Great Britain where he'd previously been accepted for study.

In left-wing circles and academia, all of this was well known, but none of it seemed to matter to BGU. Shortly after the public hand-holding with Arafat, Gordon was promoted at BGU and granted tenure. Just last January Gordon was again promoted, this time to department head, immediately after completing a highly controversial sabbatical year at the University of Michigan. In Michigan, according to local students, Gordon exacerbated anti-Israel tensions by always referring to Israel as an "apartheid regime," suggesting Israel may be even worse than South Africa.

The battle of the boycotts

During "Palestinian Awareness Week" Gordon gave a talk "From Colonization to Occupation," in which he expressed support for a "one state solution."

THROUGH ALL this, Gordon remained popular at BGU, both with the administration and among his fellow professors. When he occasionally attracted unfavorable publicity, Carmi defended him as a "serious and distinguished researcher into human rights," lashing out at his detractors by calling them "Kahanists."

Nor was Gordon alone in his views at BGU. Shortly after the BGU president pleaded in her op-ed response for the continued support of the university despite the "egregious remarks of one person," evidence emerged to the effect that Gordon wasn't just "one person." Prof. Fred Lazin, who teaches political science within that department, acknowledged that before Gordon submitted his op-ed to the LA Times, Gordon submitted his remarks to the department as a whole, offering to step down as chair if they thought his words would prove too embarrassing. "There was a unanimous decision not to let him do that," Lazin said.

David Newman, Gordon's BGU colleague, championed Gordon's remarks. "This is something which Israel's universities can be proud of," Newman wrote in a Jerusalem Post op-ed. "It is this level of democracy, pluralism and freedom of speech which few in the world, not least many of those proposing boycotts from abroad, can share."

Indeed, other BGU departments - geography, history and sociology - also harbor professors who share Gordon's anti-Zionist, anti-Israel views. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, who teaches in BGU's Department of Jewish History, had also denounced Israel as an "apartheid regime" in Tikkun magazine.

Students were supportive, too. A contingent sent their own letter to Carmi, expressing support for Gordon's "welcome efforts to bring important issues to the public regarding the future of Israeli society - issues that are absent from the legitimate public dialogue."

"We are taught history but it seems we are not allowed to learn from it," the student letter read. "We're allowed to learn, but not to think, not to reach practical conclusions"

Nor is Gordon's support limited to just BGU. Petitions supporting Gordon began circulating not only at Beersheba University, but at other academic institutions as well. At one point, over 185 Israeli professors, from several institutions, signed petitions defending Gordon.

ON THE other side of the ideological divide, among both Israelis and Americans, the reaction to Gordon's comments ranged from pure fury to thoughtful consideration of what could be done.

Haifa-born Nurit Greenger, now living in Beverly Hills, for many years a BGU supporter, was among those who were furious. In a letter to fellow Israel supporters, Greenger wrote, "For years this Israeli citizen, Gordon, walked a marginally seditious line, but with his call to boycott Israel he crossed that line monumentally."

"His call," the letter went on, "to boycott Israel raises the question: How many more 'Gordons' live in Israel and are teaching the next generation to undermine their own homeland's existence?"

In a phone interview, Greenger spoke bluntly. "I'm very angry about Gordon's call to the whole world to boycott Israel. It's a very serious problem."

Greenger is among those calling for a boycott of BGU. "It's an oxymoron," she says. "BGU comes to us all the time, asking for money - 'Support the University! Support BGU! We make the Negev bloom! We have all these wonderful projects to help our beautiful Israel' - but then they allow professors to publish articles in the LA Times, begging the world to boycott Israel? That's crazy! Then they get upset when we question them? They want our money, but at the same time they're telling us we shouldn't look at what their professors are doing and saying? The time for that is long over."

Encouraging "key donors" to support other Israeli institutions instead of BGU is one of Greenger's missions. "It's time for us to exercise some 'academic freedom' of our own," she says. "We need to decide which of Israel's academic institutions we wish to support. The way to cure anti-Israelism is to redirect benefactors' funds from the

The battle of the boycotts

kind of places that hire people like Neve Gordon, and channeling it instead to educational institutions that hold strong Zionist sentiments, Ariel University, the Jerusalem College of Technology, the Sami Shamoon College of Engineering."

There were students among the traditional Zionists, too. "Im Tirtzu" ("If You Will It"), a pro-Israel student organization at BGU, began circulating a petition against Gordon. Within two days, 54 instructors at BGU had signed.

The petition criticized Gordon for exploiting academic freedom and freedom of speech, noting the BGU's funding comes from the very country he's asking the world to boycott. They characterized Gordon's view as that of a "fringe group of daydreamers among Israeli academia in general, and BGU in particular," adding that Gordon's leftist activities made them ashamed to have him on the staff.

THE IMMEDIATE impact of the Gordon piece resulted in community meetings where BGU supporters - and former BGU supporters - gathered to discuss strategy. They also contacted Israel's Consul-General in Los Angeles, Yaakov (Yaki) Dayan, who ultimately sent a letter Carmi, advising her that Gordon's statements were proving "detrimental" to the university.

"Since the article was published I've been contacted by people who care for Israel," Dayan wrote. "Some of them are benefactors of BGU. They were unanimous in threatening to withhold their donations to your institution. My attempt to explain that one bad apple would affect hundreds of researchers turned out to be futile."

PART OF what irks traditional Zionists about Gordon's tactics is his demand for complete freedom of speech for himself, but not for anyone who disagrees with him. Gordon went so far as to file a SLAPP suit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), designed to discourage critics, against University of Haifa professor Steven Plaut.

For anyone lucky enough to be watching from the sidelines, the Gordon vs. Plaut litigation ranks as one of the more entertaining chapters in the annals of Israeli legal history. Not so for Plaut, presumably, since he was paying his own legal bills.

It began when Plaut, himself a tenured professor and a long-time critic of Gordon's politics, took Gordon to task by publishing an op-ed on the website of a now-defunct California organization. Plaut criticized Gordon's long history of publishing in Holocaust-denial websites and magazines.

"It was right after the Ramallah incident," Plaut says. "I called him a 'Judenrat wannabe.' I didn't attack him personally - I attacked his politics. Look, Gordon writes his own columns, he's a public figure. Criticizing his politics is what freedom of speech is for. I also called him 'a groupie of the world's leading Jewish Holocaust denier, Norman Finkelstein.'"

Gordon could hardly dispute that, Plaut notes. "Gordon had compared Finkelstein to the prophets of the Bible. But somehow Gordon came across my internet column, hired an Arab lawyer to represent him, and filed suit for libel. He didn't like being in the same sentence with the words 'Holocaust denier,' even though I'd said that about Finkelstein, not about him."

Plaut, like Gordon, believed himself to be exercising his basic right to freedom of speech. "In Israel, there's supposed to be absolute freedom of speech in terms of criticizing another person's politics. No one has ever been punished for that. I was just making fun of his politics."

Although lawsuits are normally filed in the hometown of either the plaintiff or defendant, Gordon filed his suit in Nazareth. "Gordon lived in Jerusalem, teaches in Beersheba, and I live in Haifa," Plaut says. "I can only suppose that by filing in Nazareth, Gordon hoped to get a favorable Arab judge - which he did. When the decision came down, I think everyone was astonished to see how Judge Reem Naddaf used her decision to attack Israel.

"She wrote into her opinion that all of Israel - all, not part - was built on land stolen from other people," he continues. "Then she went on to justify Holocaust revisionism. In her decision, the judge wrote things not even Neve Gordon had said."

The battle of the boycotts

She also imposed a whopping fine. "Gordon hadn't alleged any financial losses," Plaut says. "But in a libel suit, Israeli law permits the award of NIS 50,000. She fined me NIS 100,000."

That's when Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz, a major player in the US legal community, jumped in with his incisive commentary. In a column published in the Jerusalem Post on November 8, 2006, Dershowitz addressed the issues and then wrote, "It is my opinion that Neve Gordon has gotten into bed with neo-Nazis, Holocaust justice deniers, and anti-Semites. He is a despicable example of a self-hating Jew and a self-hating Israeli, whose writing consists of anti-Israeli propaganda designed to 'prove' that the Jewish State is fascist."

Then Dershowitz issued his own make-my-day challenge to Gordon: "Sue me, too."

Gordon didn't sue Dershowitz, brushing off his challenge as "a cheap dare," while Plaut appealed the Nazareth decision. In a stunning reversal, a three-judge panel rejected every demand made by Gordon and agreed to almost all of Plaut's. Legal decisions are rarely characterized by speculation, but one of the appellate judges, Judge Abraham Abraham, offered unique commentary in his written opinion. "Even if Plaut had described Gordon as a 'Jew for Hitler,' (which Plaut had not) he would have been within his rights," the judge wrote.

While the most recent court decision was a victory for Plaut, the litigation continues, with the case set to be heard by the Supreme Court on October 13.

SOME COMMENTATORS claim that the real danger of this internal Israeli call for a boycott against Israel is that it encourages and provides cover for anti-Israel sentiments in the international community.

Gerald Steinberg, a political science professor at Bar-Ilan University who heads the Jerusalem-based NGO Monitor, sees Gordon's call for a boycott as part of a series of events designed to "demonize" Israel.

"Neve Gordon and his pro-boycott article is another example of the Durban [an anti-Racism conference which was largely seen as anti-Israel] demonization strategy based on total international isolation of Israel through boycotts and sanctions in order to follow the South African anti-apartheid model," Steinberg said, referring to Israel's recent clashes with Sweden over their "stolen organ" blood libel and Great Britain, whose funding of "Breaking the Silence" encouraged Israeli soldiers to admit to IDF war crimes.

There were those who, while angered by Gordon's call for boycott, took a more philosophical approach, seeking a way to balance "academic freedom" with the best interests of the community.

In any communal organization, no one enjoys unrestricted rights, they note. Just as the right to swing your arms stops where the other fellow's nose begins, why can't there be some limit on the things anyone - professor or not - is entitled to say, if his words will prove detrimental to the community as a whole?

The Zionist Organization of America has not yet issued a policy statement regarding the Neve Gordon/BGU affair, but Jeff Daube, Director of the Israel ZOA office and a life-long Zionist activist, articulated a common sentiment. "My desire is not to constrain anyone's freedom of speech," Daube said. "But I think there's nothing at all wrong with a university saying, 'This is a Zionist institution. Statements (like Neve Gordon's) do actual harm to the collective, to the Jewish people living in Israel. Just as most societies limit free speech when the speech will prove harmful - libel or slander - then if some speech brings harm to the society as a whole, why can't that be limited as well?'"

Other suggestions were put forward, such as encouraging BGU to hold a public meeting on the topic, to allow everyone to have a right to exercise their freedom of speech, or establishing campus "Zionist Centers" to teach Zionist principles. Daniel Gordis of the Shalem Institute advocated a wholesale revision of the education system.

"A century ago, who could have imagined that the Jewish state would one day have a world-class army but a failing, collapsing education system?" he wrote. "(Israel) needs a liberal arts college, and the young people prepared to speak constructively about Jewish sovereignty, its challenges, its failures and its future that only that kind of college can produce."

The battle of the boycotts

THE CALL to "boycott BGU" threw university officials into a panic, resulting in a flurry of commentary, as well as a quickly-scheduled trip to the US by Carmi and other faculty members hoping to stem the tide of opposition.

Their position: Boycotting BGU - or any other Israeli educational institution - isn't the answer.

Ronni Strongin, another member of the American Associates of BGU, stressed that since Gordon "has tenure and cannot be fired," the university finds itself in an impossible position. The University, she noted, includes some 25,000 students, faculty and staff with many different missions. To inflict collective punishment by withholding funds from the university as a whole "allows the fulfillment of Gordon's wishes." Within a week, BGU issued statements to the effect that Gordon will not be fired, although BGU officials are still considering their options regarding removing him as department head.

Carmi insists there's little the university can do to a tenured professor. "Like it or not, Gordon cannot be readily dismissed. The law in Israel is very clear, and the university is a law-abiding institution," she wrote in her LA Times response, and in a later statement to YNet, she said that "the demand for (Gordon's) resignation (as department head) is legitimate and I hope that after this tough week he will reach the right decision."

University Rector Jimmy Weinblatt, following a meeting with the professors who had signed petitions supporting Gordon stressed that Gordon's status as faculty member will not be compromised, and that the university administration will not violate his civic and academic freedom of expression. Weinblatt, who said he believes "it is not appropriate that Gordon continue in his position" and hopes "he (will) reach the proper conclusions," said of university policy, "we are a democratic country with freedom of expression for everyone, even if his opinions are unacceptable to the rest.

"We support freedom of expression and academic freedom which are at the heart of any university," he added.

Jonathan Rosenblum was among those who upheld the legitimacy of a donor boycott. In a Jerusalem Post op-ed, he wrote that "while an academic has the right to his opinions, private donors who find his views or research repugnant are equally entitled not to support that research. Given the fungibility, of money that might mean withholding support from the university that employs him."

Professors, Rosenblum suggests, cannot be held immune from criticism. "Professors, like everyone else, should expect to have their work evaluated. Just as parents and students have an interest in knowing which professors have a tendency to get too friendly with female students, so do they have a right to form judgments about which professors are using their classrooms for political indoctrination."

"In general," Rosenbaum continues, "it would be foolish to refrain from contributing to a university based on the views of one faculty member one finds repugnant. Doing so would eliminate virtually every potential recipient. But Neve Gordon is not a solitary rogue professor on the BGU campus. The BGU Department of Politics and Government, which he chairs, fits the description of former Minister of Education Amnon Rubinstein of academic departments in Israel, in which no traditional Zionist could be appointed."

NEITHER SIDE is happy. BGU officials rue the fact that they're under pressure from two sides. "We have heard the calls by those who demand that the university ignore Israeli law and fire Gordon, a tenured faculty member," Carmi said, "And we are also under attack by others who champion Gordon on the basis of freedom of speech."

Given the fact that BGU officials insist Gordon will remain as a member of the faculty, those who oppose Gordon's continued presence on the teaching staff at BGU were also unhappy.

Jeff Daube suggests the tension is far from over. "It's obvious that President Carmi would very much like to sweep this whole affair under the carpet, move on to something else, make believe it never happened - up until the next insult. From here on, it's only going to get worse. If those who hate Israel see they can get away with this kind of speech, I hate to think what else they'll do next.

"Once you've called for an international boycott, what's left?" Daube asks. "Maybe a call for the unilateral dismantling of the State? Followed by that line, 'Would the last one to leave please turn off the lights?'"

The battle of the boycotts

Nor does Ari Bussel believe any significant donor boycott of BGU will take place. "The major donors will be persuaded to go on giving money," he says. "It will be life as usual. The difference this case made is that it set off a fundamental change in the attitude of American Jewry. Now the red line has been crossed. So the next time this happens - which it will - it's going to be much more difficult to persuade donors to keep supporting BGU.

"There's only so much one person can do," Bussel laments. "I know that at the end of the day, people pay the price for what they do - we all will. But one thing I know for sure. The next time I go to someone and ask for money for Israel, I know it's going to be that much harder. How are we - how are any of us - going to fight the next call for divestment, or for a boycott, if Israel itself is calling for it?"

Graphic

18 photos: PRO-ISRAEL advocate and fundraiser, Ari Bussel. 'This anti-Israel commentary hit home.'

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No Headline In Original

The Star (South Africa)

September 25, 2009 Friday

E4 Edition

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Section: Pg. 4

Length: 681 words

Body

BANGKOK: Scientists discovered £ new species in Southeast Asia's Greater Mekong region last year, but all are at risk of extinction due to climate change, says the WWF. The newly discovered creatures include a bird-eating frog with fangs, a bird that would rather walk than fly and an alien-looking gecko. The report was released ahead of UN talks on climate change in Bangkok next week.

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The Star (South Africa)

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Israel still looks good, warts and all

The Australian

May 6, 2009 Wednesday

5 - Australian Literary Review Edition

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Section: FEATURES; Pg. 12

Length: 4025 words

Byline: GREG SHERIDAN

Body

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The alliance between the Western Left and Islamic anger is perplexing

I HAVE my very own Israel problem and it is this: the Israel I know, which I have visited for weeks at a time, which I experience through its literature and media and the Israeli citizens I have met, bears no relation to the Israel I see in most of the Western media. That Israel seems almost to dominate Western intellectual life. It is commonly held that Israel lies at the heart of the widespread Muslim hostility to the West and much of the ideological conflict in the Middle East. But Israel must surely also lie at the heart of the West itself; it is so often the centrepiece of raging ideological debate, shrill mutual denunciation, ferocious polemic, emotional demonstrations, university activism and academic boycotts.

That Israel of the Western mind (and indeed of the Arab mind) is a hateful place: right-wing, militaristic, authoritarian, racist, ultra-religious, neo-colonial, narrow-minded, undemocratic, indifferent to world opinion, indifferent especially to Palestinian suffering.

Yet the Israel I know is mostly secular, raucously, almost wildly democratic, has a vibrant left wing, having founded in the kibbutz movement one of the only successful experiments in socialism in human history. It is intellectually disputatious; any two Israelis will have three opinions and be happy to argue them to a lamp post. It is multi-ethnic, there is a great stress on human solidarity, there is due process. And I've never heard an Israeli speak casually about the value of Palestinian life. I've heard Israelis voice a desire to neutralise Hezbollah or remove Hamas from leadership in Gaza, but I've never in any context heard an Israeli express the view that the value of a human life is determined by race.

The Israel I know is a Western democracy, often under siege, often making mistakes, sometimes moral mistakes. But I also see its institutions, its courts, its free press and vigorous academics challenging those mistakes and trying to correct them, sometimes exaggerating them in the process. I see a society striving for the good, sometimes doing the wrong thing, certainly not beyond criticism, but overall behaving as well as any comparably sized Western society would or could in all the circumstances.

How to explain this contradiction between the Israel I see and that other, evil Israel that dominates so much Western intellectual life?

Israel still looks good, warts and all

One reason Israel generates such passionate responses is because of the multiplicity of its identities and the variety of functions it fulfils in political debate. Each of these identities or roles is affected by all the others, but it's helpful to disentangle them conceptually.

First, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. Turkey is a democracy but is not technically in the Middle East. Lebanon is no longer a full democracy, its politics dominated by armed militias and Syrian interference. Israel is the only society in the Middle East with all the institutions of a democracy: a media that reveals all its secrets, a free parliament, independent courts, independent universities and the rest. This earns it a lot of support, especially in the US, but it also means that Israelis generate much of the most damaging criticism of Israel.

This is a singular quality of Israel but it also discloses a singular quality of the Middle East. Is there another region in the world in which there is only one democracy? This fact alone demonstrates how utterly at odds with its own region Israel is, but also how very odd that region is. The Jewish people, as Walter Russell Mead has written, are an old people but the Israelis are a young people. And deeply imprinted on their DNA is the culture of democracy.

Israel is also the only Western nation in the Middle East (with the exception of substantial but minority parts of Lebanon). Israel is the only national expression of Western values, and indeed Western power, in today's Middle East. These terms can be confusing. The West aspires to universal values of democracy and human rights that can be as well observed in Japan, South Korea or India, nations with very different cultural traditions from the West. Nonetheless these values, while universal, define Western nations in their polities.

This leads to the third of Israel's distinctive roles. Second only to the US, Israel is the most acute object of the hostility to the West that flourishes in Western intellectual life. Official Iranian propaganda has described the US as the "Big Satan" and Israel as the "Little Satan". In the West, this is a view mostly found on the ideological Left but it has echoes more generally. Much of it is heir to traditional Marxism, which saw the structure of capitalist societies as inherently unjust and built on exploitation. This ideology was expanded to incorporate the international economy: Western nations are rich because they exploit poor nations. This is not the social democratic critique of neo-liberalism recently articulated by Kevin Rudd. It is instead the view that capitalist societies, and the international system, are of their essence irredeemably and intolerably unjust.

If you add to this inheritance the polemic of Noam Chomsky and his disciples against Western militarism, of Edward Said against Western scholarship and understanding of the Middle East and indeed of all formerly colonised peoples, and of the epistemological assault on traditional Western knowledge mounted by French critical theory from the 1960s onwards, you have a paradigm for understanding the West into which Israel fits all too neatly.

This paradigm can be reduced to four propositions: Western societies are inherently evil and unjust in their economic order; they are inherently racist both as successors to European colonialism and in their treatment of their own racial minorities; their knowledge is inherently false, they labour under false consciousness; and they maintain global hegemony through military and financial power.

It is easy to see where Israel fits in this analytical grid, and why it has a starring role. It is capitalist, Western, an ally of the US and uses military force when necessary to maintain its security. It rules, if temporarily, over an occupied Arab population and despite its own racial diversity is a mostly non-Arab population in a predominantly Arab region.

Of course a lot of people in the West are hostile to Israel without embracing this intellectual world view but the coherence and strength of some version of it in the most politically active minorities in the West -- academe, media, many church bureaucracies -- gives great added force to the generalised hostility to Israel.

But there is another factor, probably as important as these, and this is Israel's role as the homeland of the Jewish people. Israel's founders decided that it would be a Jewish state and a democracy, a home and a refuge for Jewish people, but which also gave full political, civic and human rights to all its citizens regardless of their religion or racial background.

When you come from a predominantly Western, immigrant society such as Australia or the US, you know some groups well but you know them only as minorities. When you visit their homelands, it is a strange experience; you

Israel still looks good, warts and all

see them no longer as minorities but as the setters of social, cultural, even religious norms. I had this experience when I first visited India, Vietnam and Israel. You see the minority as the majority and it's at first slightly disconcerting, then exhilarating.

Israel's role as the Jewish homeland, when Jewish civilisation was nearly wiped out by the Holocaust, gives it a special place in the estimation of those who love and admire Jewish culture. It is an inherent part of Israel's purpose and identity, which is little remarked in mainstream media because there is an understandable focus on covering the occupied Palestinian territories rather than the life inside Israel.

But it is the central reality for those motivated by anti-Semitism. And the evidence is strong that anti-Semitism is once more a growing force in the world. Anti-Semitism has a long, shameful and astoundingly resilient history in Western civilisation. You can make a case that Western anti-Semitism predates Christianity because of Jewish resistance to ancient Rome. In a sense, the world owes monotheism to the Jews.

But classical Western anti-Semitism begins with the view of the Jews as the people who rejected Jesus, and indeed were responsible for his death, thus being guilty of deicide.

This Christian hostility to Jews was not present among the first Christians but took some centuries to develop fully. Many of the finest Christian thinkers struggled to work out their religion's relationship to the Jews. Were the Jews at best the chosen people who rejected Christ? Were the Jews no longer the chosen people, with that mantle transferring to Christians who accepted Christ's incarnation as the messiah? The greatest of the early church fathers, St Augustine, in the fourth century titled one of his last works *Sermons Against the Jews*.

Through the Crusaders to the Spanish Inquisition and beyond, the persecution of Jews, to varying degrees of intensity, was a factor of Western life, culminating in Hitler's Final Solution. It was not until the Second Vatican Council that the Catholic Church issued its definitive instruction: "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf John 19.6); still, what happened in his passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the holy scriptures."

That was a welcome statement by Vatican II but a culture cannot easily eradicate something as ingrained as Western anti-Semitism, even after the horror of the Holocaust and the clarity of modern church teaching.

What can be surprising to the modern consciousness is how pervasive anti-Semitism was in Western culture, and not very long ago. Recently I spent a summer holiday self-indulgently reading Victorian literature. I made my first direct acquaintance with the works of Charles Dickens. Consider this description of Fagin from *Oliver Twist*:

Standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old, shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair.

Dickens was a writer of genius and a man of prodigious moral and political imagination. Yet throughout *Oliver Twist* Fagin is almost always referred to as "the Jew" and presented as the embodiment of moral depravity and manipulation, whose only interest is money and whose chief activity is the corruption of the young.

I also read Maise Ward's biography of G. K. Chesterton, who straddled Victorian and later periods in English letters. Ward's biography is the only serious study of Chesterton to be written before the Holocaust. She airily admits and dismisses Chesterton's relatively mild anti-Semitism, unlike later sympathetic biographers who hide it or explain it away. Chesterton was a man suffused with decency and gentleness, and the greatest English proponent of the Catholic vision, yet he was also a kind of mildly anti-Semitic Zionist who believed Jews could not live well in a Christian kingdom such as England and therefore should all go and live in Palestine.

What has this to do with today?

Apart from the deicide charge, the most powerful elements of classical Western anti-Semitism were the contentions that Jews wielded vast and malign "money power", manipulated politics for their own benefit, corrupted, generally

Israel still looks good, warts and all

in some sexual way, the morals of Western societies, were disloyal to the nations they lived in and, later, were behind the rise of international communism.

This resulted in an operational double standard towards Jews. Any crime, and many harmless actions, by an individual Jew tended to be seen as part of a Jewish conspiracy. And Jews were held to standards no one else was held to.

There are clear echoes of this in modern attitudes to Israel. In 1975 the UN passed an infamous resolution equating Zionism with racism. More than 15 years later this was rescinded. Now, Israel is frequently called an apartheid state. The foundational basis of Israel is argued to be illegitimate.

But this, surely, is remarkable. Nobody declares Saudi Arabia an illegitimate state because it has no democracy or human rights, and its doctrinaire Wahhabi Sunni establishment rules over a marginalised Shia minority. Nobody declares Turkey an illegitimate state because it has a disgruntled Kurdish minority, some of whom certainly aspire to statehood. Even North Korea, the most extreme Stalinist gulag on earth, is constantly reassured that the West accepts not only the legitimacy of its state, but does not even seek regime change. Only the legitimacy of Israel is routinely questioned: a special standard for the Jewish state.

Similarly, a malign Zionist or Jewish influence in the media is frequently asserted, even though the Western media is full of criticism of Israel.

Increasingly, anti-Israel demonstrations in the West include direct references to Jews as well as to the state of Israel. Even in a peaceful society such as Australia, the Jewish community routinely has to take security precautions at religious, educational and social functions that no other religious community has to. In Jewish suburbs in London, the graffiti could not be more direct: "Kill the Jews". British novelist Howard Jacobson has written of how he now feels uncomfortable as a Jew in Britain. He has written of "the slow seepage of familiar, anti-Semitic calumnies into the conversation".

Every American Jew who supported the US intervention in Iraq was suspected, without evidence, of doing so because of consideration for Israel, thus reviving the old canard that Jews cannot be loyal citizens of the states they live in because of their over-arching loyalty to Israel.

Even where hostility is directed specifically at Israel rather than at Jews, when this hostility is extreme and beyond reason, it affects the social atmosphere for Jews. As Jacobson comments, there is "a deranged revulsion, intemperate and unconcealed, which nothing Israel itself has done could justify or explain were it 10 times the barbaric apartheid state it figures as in the English imagination".

However, even as classical anti-Semitism has had to make its reappearance in the West in mostly disguised form, it is raging without any disguise at all across the Arab world. The examples are limitless but let me offer just a few. The government-aligned Al-Gomhuria newspaper in Egypt published a cartoon of a serpent strangling Uncle Sam. The caption read: "The Jews taking over the world".

An Egyptian cleric, Ahmad Abd al-Salam, on Al-Nas TV, said: "I want you to imagine the Jews sitting around a table, conspiring how to corrupt the Muslims ... The Jews conspire how to infect the food of Muslims with cancer."

Also on Al-Nas TV, another Egyptian cleric, Safwat Higazi, revealed the wholly fictitious scoop that the female figure in the Starbucks logo was really Queen Esther of the Jews.

Throughout the Arab world, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a notorious tzarist forgery, figure in popular culture. The Iranian Government, famously, sponsors conferences in which the sole purpose is to deny that the Holocaust took place.

Throughout Gaza and the West Bank an extravagant anti-Semitism is a central part of the Palestinian discourse. Anyone who doubts this should Google the Hamas charter, where they will learn that even Rotary and Lions clubs are part of the worldwide Jewish conspiracy.

Israel still looks good, warts and all

One of the most telling examples of this Arab anti-Semitism is provided in Martin Indyk's brilliant new book, *Innocent Abroad* (Simon & Schuster, 494pp, \$49.95 hardback). Although focused predominantly on the '90s Middle

Continued Page 18

From Page 13

East peace process, when Bill Clinton was US president and Indyk one of his senior advisers, it is one of the best recent books on the modern Middle East, with a compelling narrative, shrewd insider accounts, engaging personal insights and a sense of the broad sweep of history.

But for the purposes of this analysis, a meeting Indyk describes in 1998 between Clinton and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is most instructive. This was at the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Indyk writes:

Abdullah leaned across the table and explained to Clinton in a hushed voice that he had information that Monica Lewinsky was Jewish and part of a Mossad plot to bring the president down because of his efforts to help the Palestinians. He told the president that he intended to share this intelligence with senators he would meet after lunch in an effort to help forestall his impeachment.

This anecdote echoes one of a generation earlier told in Henry Kissinger's memoir, in which Kissinger holds a formal meeting with a Saudi ruler who tells him the world is beset by a global communist conspiracy, which is a mere part of the broader global Jewish conspiracy.

The Indyk and Kissinger anecdotes, each astonishing in its way, confirm the pervasiveness of Arab anti-Semitism and that it is not wholly a construct of Arab regimes for internal political purposes but is to some extent genuinely believed in Arab societies.

Nonetheless it would be wrong to underestimate the benefits that anti-Semitism can provide Arab regimes. Israel is the licensed grievance for these societies. By theologising the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and presenting it as a case of Western and specifically Jewish persecution of an Arab minority, Arab regimes, even those allied with the US, can offer an outlet to anger on the street and attempt to channel both Islamist and pan-Arab sentiments in a direction that does not challenge their rule.

This exploitation of anti-Semitism fits a broader political narrative of the Arab world. A few years ago a committee of Arab intellectuals working under the auspices of the UN produced a devastating indictment of the Arab encounter with modernisation. Middle East scholar Bernard Lewis recounts and updates some of their most shocking findings in the March-April 2009 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Here are a few of the depressing highlights. In the previous quarter century, real per capita gross domestic product has fallen in the Arab world. Combined Arab GDP in 2000 was less than that of Spain. One-fifth the number of books are translated every year into Arabic as are translated into Greek in Greece. Between 1980 and 2000, Egypt registered 77 patents in the US, South Korea 16,328. And so on.

As a matter of mere logic, the presence of 5.5million Jews in Israel cannot be responsible for the economic and political development of hundreds of millions of Arabs. But the Arab mind is presented with a disagreeable conundrum. The Arab world possesses, in its view, the one true religion, the greatest culture and much of the world's oil, yet its societies are impoverished and dysfunctional. How can this be explained? In societies that do not allow searching criticism of ruling regimes, the answer has to come in the form of anti-Arab conspiracies, centred on the West generally, but more specifically on the US, Israel and the Jews.

This Arab anti-Semitism, popular and official, is incidentally a huge obstacle to peace. If Israel is not just a nation like any other but the most visible and offensive manifestation of a giant Western and Jewish conspiracy against Islam and the Arabs, then making peace with it is not honourable but despicable.

What is perplexing is the emerging strategic alliance between the Western Left and Islamist anger. This is evident especially in Western demonstrations where left-wing protesters carry banners saying things such as "We are Hamas".

Israel still looks good, warts and all

But it is also to be observed in the general silence of the Western Left on human rights abuses throughout the Arab world and in Iran. One of the most arresting sights in Israel is the magnificent Bahai headquarters in Haifa. The Bahais have an equally beautiful temple in New Delhi. The Bahais fled to Israel and India, two states where minority religions are not subject to official persecution, because of the murderous repression they suffer in Iran. Yet the Western Left is infinitely more active about Israeli human rights abuses, real or alleged, than Iranian human rights abuses. Similarly, the more left-wing the Western feminist, the less will be said about the routine abuse of women's rights in much of the Arab world.

The strategic alliance of the Western Left and Islamist sentiment, on the basis that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, is evident at the UN. There, Arab and African majorities in league with the UN bureaucrat class constantly formulate condemnations of Israel's alleged human rights abuses while no resolution is moved regarding human rights in Iran or Saudi Arabia or China. Much criticism of Israel is genuinely concerned with Palestinian welfare and the injustices numerous Palestinians have suffered. It is the exaggeration of Israel's sins, some of them real enough, and the hysterical criticism and denunciation of Israel, that owes so much to meta-rational factors.

Similarly, the assumption that Israel does not seek peace and a just solution for the Palestinians is flawed. Again, Indyk is most instructive on this. He provides the crispest account so far of the 2000 Camp David peace conference and the offers that Israel's prime minister Ehud Barak, under Clinton's influence, made to Yasser Arafat. It is clear that Clinton and Barak offered Arafat a Palestinian state on more than 95 per cent of the West Bank and all of Gaza, as well as a territory transfer from Israel proper to make up for the less than 5 per cent of the West Bank that would be taken in the main Jewish settlements. The Palestinian state was to embrace all the Palestinian suburbs of East Jerusalem and even have a form of sovereignty over the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

It may be a long time before Israel feels enough confidence in a Palestinian interlocutor to make such an offer again, as such a settlement would involve grave risks to Israeli security.

Whatever the reasons for Arafat's blanket rejection, the offer flatly rebuts the idea of Israel as determined never to make peace. Since 1977 Israel has given up territory equivalent to three times its size in exchange for peace with various neighbours. This was land acquired in defensive wars that made a contribution to Israeli security. Israel may be guilty of many things but a refusal to compromise is not one of them.

There are also several positive identities that Israel projects. Israel's successful economy, built from nothing, ought to be an inspiration to the rest of the Middle East. Israel is also a front-line state in the conflict with terrorism. Israeli policymakers are forced to confront and think through the political and moral dilemmas all democratic states face in the age of terror. Israel's agonising internal debates are of interest to all democracies. Israel does not have the option of not taking terrorism seriously, yet its diverse and feisty people are determined to remain democratic. Beyond security, its multicultural and multiracial peoples, and the compromises they need to make to forge a common nation, are relevant to a society such as Australia.

Both the intense hatred and in other circles the affection that Israel inspires have little to do with the actions any Israeli government could reasonably take. It is rather Israel's multiple identities, going to the heart of Western history and contemporary Arab politics, the hostility among intellectuals to Western society, the inheritance of anti-Semitism and the search for scapegoats for the Arab world's troubled encounter with modernity, that ensure that the Israel of the mind will remain at the forefront of international concerns.

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PRETTY DANGEROUS

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Body

London socialite Lady Renouf courts global attention as the attractive face of Holocaust denial. Who would guess she was once plain Michele Mainwaring, a beauty queen from the NSW central coast? Peter Wilson meets her.

At 22, Michele Mainwaring was a beauty queen from the NSW central coast whose titles included "Miss Zhivago" for being judged the local woman who looked most like Julie Christie in the biggest film then showing. By 42, she was a London socialite with a grand house and ballroom who called herself "Countess Griaznoff" and posed for family portraits with her Russian husband and two daughters in costumes that could have been designed for Omar Sharif's film.

Now, at 62, she is known as Lady Renouf, from her short-lived second marriage, and on the wall of her apartment in upmarket Kensington, London, is a photo of her being kissed by Omar Sharif during the brief period they dated about a decade ago.

But it is not her glamorous social life that has recently made Miss Newcastle-Hunter Valley 1968 mildly famous in Britain, Germany and Australia. "This woman is especially dangerous," says Dr Efraim Zuroff, the chief Nazi-hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem, "because she is so attractive and can put a pretty face on a very ugly movement."

That movement is Holocaust denial, a decades-old attempt to play down the Nazi atrocities against Jews and other minorities.

After showing no interest in Jews or World War II until her 50s, Renouf now travels the world speaking at conferences, alongside former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and other extremists, arguing that the Holocaust has been massively exaggerated and that in any case the Jews are to blame. The only prominent ***female*** denier, the girl from The Entrance, NSW, has met Iran's Holocaust-denying president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and lauded him as a champion of free speech and democracy despite charges by human rights groups that his regime tortures dissidents and stifles free speech.

Some experts are worried that, as the last witnesses of the Holocaust die, the deniers could gain ground in the West by focusing their propaganda on students at university and high school. The deniers were bolstered last month by Pope Benedict's acceptance back into the Catholic Church of ultra-conservative British bishop Richard Williamson, who claims that historical evidence is "hugely against six million having been deliberately gassed in gas chambers as a deliberate policy of Adolf Hitler ... I believe there were no gas chambers". The political and public

PRETTY DANGEROUS

outcry across Europe at the pope's decision - not least in his native country, Germany, where Holocaust denial is a crime - shows the depth of feeling that surrounds the issue.

Other Holocaust historians such as Zuroff say the deniers' biggest impact is in the Arab world and among Muslims in countries such as Britain. "For political and religious reasons there is just a closed mindset [in the Arab world] and that is where people openly say the Holocaust never happened," he says. "Or they invert it against Israel - that we are the new Nazis and the conflict right now is us committing a Holocaust against the Palestinians."

With fears of rising anti-Semitism in Europe, and Israel under growing pressure over its conflict with the Palestinians, the denial movement is becoming more than "a loopy fringe group that can be ignored", says Zuroff. "That is why this woman is just perfect for people like the Iranians ... they have this blonde, pretty woman speaking in an English accent in Tehran [at a 2006 Holocaust denial conference] and on Iranian TV telling them they are right and the Jews are evil. This is a dangerous person."

My first contact with Michele Renouf is via the intercom of her Kensington apartment. I had just learnt that Dr Fredrick Toben, Australia's best-known Holocaust denier, had been released after 50 days in London's Wandsworth prison and was staying in Renouf's apartment.

British police had used a European Union arrest warrant, issued by Germany, to pluck Toben from a plane transiting through Heathrow last year. A legal team organised by Renouf beat an attempt to extradite him to Germany, where he is wanted on charges carrying a five-year jail sentence. Renouf tells me through the intercom in her posh English accent that Toben is standing beside her but will not talk to me until he has safely returned to Australia. (Adelaide-based Toben, once back on home soil, would announce his intention to return to Germany to "thrash it out" with prosecutors.)

Several days after talking through the intercom with Renouf she invites me to a press conference that she is holding in the small Cranley Gardens Hotel, near her apartment, to discuss Toben's victory. Smiling and immaculately groomed in a woollen pantsuit, she is as handsome as one would expect of a woman who has for decades worked as a model in TV and print commercials, now often cast as a well-to-do woman of a certain age.

The British press has stayed away and the small conference room she has rented holds about a dozen Toben supporters, including David Irving, the British historian who was labelled an anti-Semite and a falsifier of history by a High Court judge in a 2000 libel trial.

Renouf announces that Toben has left for Australia "but in his stead we have an expert who has come especially from France". Dr Robert Faurisson will discuss "the meat of the issue", the deniers' rejection of the mainstream account of the Holocaust. At this news Irving scurries from the room - fearful, Renouf explains later, that being involved in such a conference would threaten his ability to visit the US.

"Conference" is a loose description. I am the only reporter listening to Faurisson's 80-minute speech, which Renouf films for the internet. Like every other dedicated Holocaust denier outside the Arab world, Faurisson is not a professional historian. An 80-year-old former professor of literature, he began disputing the Holocaust in the '70s and has been repeatedly convicted in France, one of 10 countries that outlaw Holocaust denial. Faurisson's basic claim is that Jewish leaders invented the Holocaust to win sympathy and gain a homeland in Israel. There is no proof that Hitler and the Nazis planned genocide, he says, the toll of six million dead does not add up, and the gas chambers at Auschwitz were not used to kill people. Instead, he insists, the gas chambers were aimed at helping the Jews by using the poison Zyklon B to kill lice in order to fight typhus.

"In Auschwitz I visited by myself what is called Crematorium One," he says. "I immediately saw that it could not be a gas chamber." The room was not sealed properly, one of its doors had a fragile glass window, and the holes in the roof through which the Nazis supposedly dropped gas pellets had been added after the war, he says.

He claims that a plaque displayed at Auschwitz in the '70s stated that four million people had been killed there. That number has now been revised down to just over one million but the "Holocaust industry" still claims that six million Jews died, even though the plaque's toll was out by three million, he says.

PRETTY DANGEROUS

Not long after hearing Faurisson I visit Auschwitz. All the time I am there, ringing in my head are Faurisson's claims that the "Hollywood version" of its terrible history is untrue. The camp, in Poland, does have a powerful effect on a visitor but not the one claimed by Faurisson and Renouf.

The Nazis dynamited the largest gas chambers as Soviet soldiers approached in January 1945 and the surviving chamber that Faurisson refers to is the oldest, smallest and most primitive. His arguments crumble a few seconds after one enters that grim, dark room. The thin glass window that he cited proves nothing: it is obviously a reconstruction.

A guide at the camp confirms to anyone who asks that what one now sees in Auschwitz was largely rebuilt after the war by the Polish communists. The four holes in the roof that Faurisson talks about were also part of a clumsy postwar reconstruction but it is easy to see the outlines of the original holes, which are now sealed up.

Renouf wants a televised debate between Faurisson and Laurence Rees, a BBC documentary-maker who did a six-part series on Auschwitz in 2005. Rees tells me he would never take part in such a debate, a position shared by almost all leading historians, who say it is valid to debate details of the Holocaust but not the basic fact that the Nazis deliberately killed something like six million people, 90 per cent of them Jews, and largely with gas chambers.

"It is pointless discussing history with Holocaust deniers," Rees says. "It would be like discussing climate change with members of the Flat Earth Society. My experience is that they do not want to know the answers and they want to suck you in so as to publicise themselves and pretend this is a 'legitimate debate'. It isn't legitimate and it isn't a debate.

"Since the existence and working practice of the gas chambers has been established as a 100 per cent historical fact, getting involved with these questions is like trying to debate the Norman Conquest with someone who maintains that the Battle of Hastings never happened and that William the Conqueror might have been a Martian.

"Can you 'prove' that William the Conqueror wasn't really a Martian? How can you 'prove' he didn't have a funny green pointed head - in fact, isn't that almost certainly why the Normans wore those funny helmets?"

A few days after Renouf's press conference I sit down with her in the foyer of the Cranley Gardens Hotel for what turns out to be a five-hour interview over several cups of tea. Polite and friendly but with a well-mannered reserve, she is quite guarded at first. When she appears on extremist and anti-Semitic radio programs and Iranian TV shows she is billed as a "human rights activist", "political commentator", or "filmmaker", as she has begun making and selling her own films questioning the Holocaust and slamming Israel.

She says she is not anti-Semitic because, while she criticises Judaism, she has nothing against Jews. Her critics "always say I am charming but sinister. But if you meet me you actually don't find this hate that they speak about. You find criticism but you don't find hate ... Jews who know me like me."

That's a view not supported by my conversations with several Jews who know her. Their anger is not hard to fathom. Over a few hours of conversation an increasingly relaxed Renouf expresses views that do not make her popular in polite society, Jewish or otherwise.

Jews, she says, follow a religion which is dishonest, inhumane, supremacist, hate-fuelled, predatory and treacherous. In fact "it does not deserve to be called a religion at all".

"The definition of a Jew is antigentile," she insists, and it is their own selfish behaviour which has provoked anti-Semitism over the centuries, making them responsible for their own persecution.

While we share biscuits with our tea she trots out cliches - how Jews control Hollywood, the media, banking, advertising, academia and Western foreign policy. "Australia, like Britain, is an occupied country: occupied by proZionist policy," she says. What is more, Hitler had no choice but to put Jews into concentration camps because international Zionist leaders had "declared an economic war on Germany in 1933 to try to destroy Germany".

PRETTY DANGEROUS

"So you have to, to protect your own people, put the enemy into the camp. And when you put people into a camp, the risk in close quarters of disease and so on are multiplied. So there were gas chambers, sure, but for delousing. Whether there were gas chambers for murderous intent I cannot say because I have not heard a proper debate."

A shared view of Judaism has made her something of a fan of hardline Islamists. Israel has no moral right to exist, she insists, Hamas and Hezbollah are "wonderful and noble", and jihadist suicide bombers "are reacting to our appalling decision to go to war [in Iraq] on a lie. So we are the culprits".

Praising Muslim attitudes to women, she volunteers that she "would be on the side of the Muslim leader in Australia who said our women are looking like meat" - a reference to Sheik Taj Din alHilali, who provoked a storm in 2006 by saying that women who did not dress conservatively were like "uncovered meat" and invited sexual attack.

The life-long advertising model says she disagrees with compulsory burqas but feels that "the way Muslim women dress basically is better for us than the way women are encouraged to dress in the Western, Judeo-influenced societies, consumer societies which promote the baseness of us ... The Jewish influence in fashion, in Hollywood and so on creates the ethos of this kind of womenserving-men value system."

Renouf, who has received death threats, expresses these views without any open anger or venom, and often seems surprised when people take offence. She complains that she has been cast as "the most notorious woman in London".

That clearly rankles with someone who values social status - she mentions more than once that she can trace her father's family back to 1086 and the Domesday Book - but it does not worry her enough to make her tone down her views. In 2003 she was expelled from London's prestigious Reform Club for using the club to champion Irving and his views on Hitler, and she has been kicked out of other social groups.

She admits her two adult daughters disagree with her views and "can't bear what I do ... because they obviously don't want me to be at risk, and also they have been conditioned like anybody else".

She met their father, Daniel Ivan Zadeh, an Australian psychiatrist of Russian descent, during a trip to the Gold Coast in 1968 as part of her prize for winning Miss Radio 2HD Newcastle Beach Girl. The couple shifted to London in 1970, where they married.

IvanZadeh had always been plain "Mr" or "Doctor" but Renouf says the family had once claimed a title through his great-uncle, so she began styling herself as Countess Griaznoff "for my charity work". No such title exists in the major lists of European noble families such as the Almanach de Gotha or Burke's Royal Families of the World.

They divorced in 1990 and the following year, at 44, she married Sir Frank Renouf, the Kiwi financier 28 years her senior who'd recently emerged from an acrimonious split with Susan Rossiter-Peacock-Sangster-Renouf.

The press swooped, obtaining a copy of the new wedding certificate. Michele had listed her father, Arthur, as a deceased hotelier but the press found him alive in NSW. The retired courier driver and photographer for the Port Macquarie News said he had never owned a hotel.

Sir Frank felt humiliated and the marriage did not survive the six-week honeymoon in New Zealand.

Asked about the misleading marriage certificate, Renouf says her grandparents owned a country pub in NSW. Her parents separated when she was 10 and she never really knew what her father did for a living, she says. She'd had no contact with him for several years before the wedding and "I knew that he was dying of cancer and someone had sent me a condolence card so I assumed that meant that he had died".

She says Sir Frank tried to patch things up but she refused and he divorced her in 1995 on the grounds of her alleged "unreasonable behaviour" with a Bulgarian fencing champion, an allegation she denies. Sir Frank died three years later.

PRETTY DANGEROUS

She says she did not ask for a settlement and she now funds her activities "with some difficulty". Jewish advertising executives have been giving her less work due to her Holocaust views, she says.

She devotes much of her time to the cause of Holocaust "revision", travelling to Austria, Canada, France and Germany to witness trials of deniers and speaking at a Holocaust review conference held by the Iranian Government in Tehran in 2006.

At that conference she gave a fiery denunciation of Israel and Judaism and afterwards was elected to a committee to organise another conference, alongside Toben and Dr Christian Lindtner, a Danish Holocaust-denier to whom she was briefly engaged in 2007. There was a romance launched by Holocaust denial - they first met early in 2006 at a Danish conference and they next spent time together at the Tehran conference.

What I kept wondering, though, was where her obsession with Judaism had come from. By her own account, "growing up in Australia I never heard anybody even talk about Jews. I certainly had no predisposition, my world was not divided into Jew and gentile. In fact, I thought they all died out like the Pharisees and all the other Biblical sects that you heard about in school."

She says she first became interested in the Holocaust in 2000 when David Irving lost his high-profile libel action against an American historian for branding him a Holocaust-denier.

But she had already been interested for several years in "the anti-gentile nature of Judaism". In 1997 she wrote and published a booklet that appalled academics by rejecting the widely held view that Hitler's favourite composer, Richard Wagner, had expressed anti-Semitism in his operas. She met Toben the following year when she was promoting her booklet at the Adelaide Festival.

In 1999 she enrolled in a master's degree in the psychology of religion at the University of London's Heythrop College to pursue her obsession.

But where did it all start? According to Renouf, it was a 1997 argument about a dish of suckling pig. She'd set up a committee of 25 friends to help her organise a dinner to fund a new dressing room for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, but trouble blew up over the menu.

"I had asked the caterers, The Ivy restaurant, if they could give us perhaps a choice in the main course," she says. "And they suggested for an Elizabethan feast why don't you have suckling pig, a good vegetarian choice and perhaps sea bass, because sea bass is sort of regarded as a glamorous dish.

"When I presented that choice to my coterie one Jewish girl said, 'We regard your offering a choice in the main course as tyrannical and if you are going to insist upon it I am going to resign.' Eventually she said, 'You cannot expect Jews to sit at the table where others might choose pork ... '

"The really interesting thing was the fear in the room of the other 24 people. They said, 'Please let's not pursue this issue,' and I said, 'Why, what is your fear?' They said, 'It is anti-Semitic.' I said, 'But for heaven's sake, what is anti-Semitic about discussing food?' We weren't eating eyeballs or something that was frightful to us, it wasn't such an astonishing thing, we weren't eating horse or cat or something outrageous.

"It got me terribly interested because it meant that sensible people were being dictated to by this woman's religion even though I happen to know that she eats bacon and eggs. She resigned from the committee and the two other Jews in the room resigned with her."

She refuses to name the woman who objected to her menu, but mentions that she had been prominent in the International Churchill Society. Through that Churchill link I later track down the woman, a retired American art gallery owner named Wylma Wayne, and I speak to her and two other women who were on Renouf's fund-raising committee.

PRETTY DANGEROUS

Wayne says Renouf's version of the fight is nonsense. "From what I can remember that [argument] was not really about religion or eating pork at all. She was just being domineering and I objected to her behaviour. I thought it was ridiculous and selfaggrandising to spend all this money on an elaborate menu when the aim was to raise money."

Another member of the committee tells me that at least one of the other women who resigned in support of Wayne was not Jewish.

I put this to Renouf when I meet her for a second extended interview, a four-hour session in her apartment over smoked salmon and cucumber sandwiches, tea and scones. She stands by her version of the suckling pig affair, saying she believes that those who resigned from the committee were indeed Jewish.

I raise another question from the past: while she claims to have graduated from Sydney's prestigious National Art School, I understand that she studied in Newcastle. She says she did some classes in Newcastle but that she definitely graduated from the NAS. The NAS has no record of her studying there, but other archives show that in 1968 she graduated under her maiden name, Michele Suzanne Mainwaring, with a Diploma in Art (Education) from Newcastle Technical College.

Another question concerns her speech to the Holocaust conference in Tehran, in which she said she had been expelled from Heythrop College for criticising Judaism in her essays.

"I was 'asked to study elsewhere'," she told the conference, lambasting Christian "collusion" with Judaism.

The Reverend Dr John McDade, the principal of Heythrop College, remembers things differently and checked Renouf's file to confirm that her account was inaccurate. "She was not expelled at all," he says. "She failed. She simply did not submit her work so she was failed. I have the letter here in which she was formally told that she could not come back because for two years in a row she did not submit her core work for assessment."

When I put that to Renouf she is adamant she'd been expelled. She says the Jesuit-run college had appointed a Hasidic Jew with the power to veto any student and that person had rejected her essays. The college's registrar tells me later it had never had any Jewish person in such a position.

Finally we return to the Holocaust, and the great store she places in Robert Faurisson's nonsense about the plaques at Auschwitz. Time and again she argues that "there is a deficit now of three million people but it is called Holocaust denial if you point out that six minus three equals three, not six".

The fact is that the figure of four million on the '70s plaque was part of Polish communist propaganda and has nothing to do with the current consensus among historians that about six million died in the Holocaust.

Experts say up to 3.4 million were killed at the main death camps - 1.1 million to 1.3 million at Auschwitz, 875,000 at Treblinka, 600,000 at Belzec, 250,000 at each of Chelmno and Sobibor, and 100,000 at Majdanek. At least 1.5 million more were killed by mobile SS death squads in eastern Poland and the Soviet Union, while the rest were killed in various ways such as shootings in Poland and deaths in smaller camps around Europe.

Renouf listens politely but after I have cited those figures she seems not to have heard me. She just repeats that "six minus three does not equal six" then changes the topic.

Perhaps sensing my frustration in the ninth hour of our interviews, Lady Renouf becomes more direct. Her main reason for not believing "the Hollywood version" of the Holocaust, she says, is that she doubts anything said by Zionist leaders. "I loathe Judaism ... and I see things through that prism."

She certainly has no plans to drop her obsession. In fact, she intends to move on to what she considers "the new front line" of the Holocaust issue, the school system. Deniers in Denmark have set up a website encouraging schoolchildren to be sceptical about the Holocaust and she wants to run a similar campaign. "This is what we need in this country and this is what I want to do next," she says. "I am determined to get the truth out there."

PRETTY DANGEROUS

Peter Wilson is The Australian's European correspondent. His previous story for the magazine was "The family guy" (December 13-14, 2008), about director Ron Howard.

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The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

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Joshua Hammer is the author of "A Season in Bethlehem: Unholy War in a Sacred Place."

Body

THE FEDERAL AGENT, a black-haired, middle-aged Virginian, stared at me for a while before asking, "Have you ever considered becoming an informant for the F.B.I.?"

We were in a large conference room on the second floor of the old U.S. Mission in Berlin. He sat at the end of a long, blond-wood conference table, scribbling on a legal pad and sipping coffee from a plastic foam cup. To his left was his partner, a taciturn man in his early 30s. Windows partly concealed by blue drapes looked out over Clayallee, a wide boulevard running through the Western part of the city.

"No," I said. "I haven't."

"We can make it worth your while," said the second man.

"You'd be serving your country," added the Virginian.

"No, thanks," I said.

The F.B.I.'s offer came in October of last year, at the end of a three-hour conversation -- a private debrief -- in the nearly deserted building that had been a center of intrigue in cold war Berlin. (Most U.S. Foreign Service staff members had moved across town to the newly opened embassy near the Brandenburg Gate.) Now the building was the location for another intrigue, involving the murder of a U.S. citizen in Bethlehem and a boastful confession that one of his killers made to me in 2002, when I was Newsweek's Jerusalem bureau chief. That man was Jihad Jaara, a former Bethlehem commander of the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, the armed group linked to the political party Fatah. Jaara called himself a freedom fighter battling the enemies of the Palestinian people. Israel considered him a prolific killer, responsible for the murders of Israeli settlers, soldiers and accused Palestinian collaborators.

Under ordinary circumstances, Jaara would have been a prime target for assassination or arrest by the Israel Defense Forces. But Jaara has been living in exile for seven years, guarded by police, in a secret location on the outskirts of Dublin, protected by a multilateral agreement made to end the 39-day siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in the spring of 2002. For several years, U.S. investigators pursued legal avenues to get Jaara, gathering evidence against him around the world. They first approached me in 2005, and now they were reaching out again.

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

THE WINTER OF 2002 was an anarchic time in the West Bank and Gaza. Nearly a year and a half earlier, in September 2000, Ariel Sharon, then the leader of Israel's right-wing Likud Party, made a provocative visit to the Al Aksa mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, in Jerusalem. Palestinians responded by throwing rocks and firebombs at Israeli troops across the occupied territories: It was the beginning of the second intifada. The Israel Defense Forces fought back, killing dozens and igniting a full-scale armed uprising. That winter, the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades began carrying out sniper attacks on Israeli settlers and soldiers, and by spring Hamas and Islamic Jihad were dispatching suicide bombers across the then-unprotected Green Line marking the border between Israel and the West Bank. Israel retaliated with assassinations and incursions into Palestinian-controlled territory.

Jihad Jaara was an officer in the Palestinian Authority's Preventive Security Service at the time the uprising broke out. In October 2000, while watching Israeli troops at a checkpoint outside Jericho fire on a crowd of rock-throwing teenagers, he later told me, he turned his rifle on the soldiers, killing one. Pursued by Israel, Jaara became a fugitive, going first to Ramallah, then settling in Bethlehem. Jaara joined the local Al Aksa cell, which consisted of several hundred armed men who spent their days extorting money from Christian shopkeepers and their nights shooting at Israeli soldiers and settlers. Soon Ibrahim Abayat, the Al Aksa commander in Bethlehem, made Jaara one of his lieutenants.

Meanwhile, Avi Boaz, a 71-year-old New York-born emigre to Israel who had never given up his American citizenship, was living a complicated life in the same city. Boaz came to Israel in 1961, but his Zionist ardor faded and, while befriending a family of Palestinian Christians in the village of Beit Jala, adjacent to Bethlehem, he learned Arabic and began designing architectural projects in the West Bank. Boaz commuted to Palestinian-controlled territory while living with his wife and daughter in the Jewish settlement of Maale Adumin. As the violence worsened in 2001 and Israeli settlers became targets, he shrugged off the warnings of friends and family members that he was risking his life; he insisted that his American citizenship, familiarity with Arabic and many Palestinian friends would protect him. On Jan. 15, 2002, Boaz was stopped at a checkpoint inside Palestinian-controlled territory near Bethlehem. The gunmen climbed into Boaz's car, drove him around the city, then took him to a deserted soccer field. There, as he sat behind the wheel of his car, Boaz was killed. The Palestinian police -- who conducted only a cursory investigation and made no arrests -- counted 19 bullet holes in the windshield.

Weeks after Boaz's murder, I arranged to meet Ibrahim Abayat and a dozen other gunmen from the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades at a restaurant in Manger Square, beside the Church of the Nativity. Bodyguards carrying two-way radios and M-16 rifles took up positions by the door. Then Abayat -- trim, glowering, with several days' growth of beard -- swept into the room. He was accompanied by a lieutenant, Rami Kamel, a stocky, brooding figure who lost an arm in a grenade explosion several months earlier. The sound of Israeli combat helicopters flying over the Judean Desert filtered through the restaurant. Abayat, chain-smoking Marlboros, leapt up at one point in the course of the meal to run outside and scan the skies. He admitted that he and his men shot dead a female settler in her car on a settler bypass road two days earlier. "None of Sharon's operations can deter us," Abayat boasted. "If we die, we are martyrs, and if we succeed, it is another nail in the coffin of the Israeli occupation." Then he picked up his gun and motioned to Kamel and his bodyguards, and they all rushed out of the restaurant together.

On March 29, 2002, Sharon, now prime minister, launched Operation Defensive Shield, sending thousands of Israeli troops and hundreds of armored vehicles into West Bank towns to arrest and kill Palestinian militants. Jaara was accidentally shot in the leg by one of his own men. He was bleeding heavily when his comrades carried him into the Church of the Nativity. Abayat, Jaara, Kamel and about 200 others took refuge inside the 1,700-year-old basilica's walls, living off macaroni and cans of meat and tuna stockpiled by priests. A number of them were shot by Israeli snipers. After the 39-day siege, U.S. officials, including the station chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, were able to broker a deal to end the stalemate. Israel agreed to remove its forces from Bethlehem; in return, the European Union accepted 13 of the most-wanted militants. The E.U. granted the men temporary refugee status under national and international laws and left vague the exact terms of their exile and return. Abayat was flown to Spain. Jaara and Kamel were dispatched to Ireland.

Not long after, I began to research a book about the church siege and the events leading up to it. Members of the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, Israeli intelligence officers and Palestinian officials all suggested that Jihad Jaara, rather than his superior Ibrahim Abayat, organized the Boaz murder, one of the acts that galvanized Israeli public opinion.

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

In July, my Arabic interpreter and I traveled to the hills of central Spain, where we interviewed Abayat, then living with two other militants in a government hunting lodge built for Gen. Francisco Franco. He denied any involvement in Boaz's killing and hinted that Jaara was involved. Two months later, Jihad Jaara agreed to meet me in Dublin.

The lobby of the Royal Dublin Hotel was crowded with tour groups of elderly Americans on a gray, chilly Sunday afternoon in October 2002. It was nearly a half-hour after the appointed time when the glass doors opened and Jaara walked into the room, with Rami Kamel behind him. Square-jawed, with a gap between his lower front teeth, a shock of oily black hair and hollow eyes, Jaara clasped my hand. Kamel looked very different from the menacing fighter I encountered at the Bethlehem restaurant; he was wearing a rugby shirt and tight, pressed jeans, and his stump was fitted with a state-of-the-art bionic arm, paid for, he said, while wriggling his fleshlike fingers, with European Union funds. Jaara led the way into a dim lounge with red carpets and vinyl booths, and the four of us sat at a center table. An older Irish couple sipped tea at the table beside us, glancing over in curiosity. Jaara apologized for their tardiness; they weren't supposed to meet journalists, he explained, and it had taken them a while to shake off their police guards.

Jaara lighted a Marlboro; his hands trembled slightly. I tried to put him at ease. I told him about my visit with Abayat, describing the conditions of his house arrest in the hunting lodge. Jaara listened intently, asking for more detail. We talked about the Church of the Nativity siege, and he grew relaxed, even voluble, stabbing the air with his cigarette. I didn't have a tape recorder -- my interpreter had warned that it would make the men nervous -- so I was scribbling in a notebook. Kamel joined in, correcting wrong impressions, facts and chronology. Then, 45 minutes into the discussion, I brought up the murder of Avi Boaz. Jaara nodded when I mentioned his name.

You knew him? I asked. He nodded again.

Do you know why he was killed?

Jaara paused. He took a drag on his Marlboro.

"Avi was killed because he was an Israeli," he said. "He worked for Israeli intelligence. He enlisted many people to be collaborators. He was encouraging the Israeli settlements."

But there was a more immediate reason, he added. Raed Karmi, the head of the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades in the town of Tulkarem, was assassinated by Israel the day before Boaz's murder. "I did this in revenge for Raed Karmi's death," Jaara said.

Jaara said the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades had set up a checkpoint on the road that Boaz used to commute to work in Bethlehem. There, an Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades gunman named Riad Al-Amur seized Boaz and took him in Boaz's own car to a rendezvous point not far from the Church of the Nativity. Three other militants climbed into Boaz's vehicle: Jaara and Ibrahim Abayat and his cousin, Ismail Abayat. They headed toward Beit Sahour, a village at the edge of the Judean Hills. But Ibrahim Abayat was against the idea of harming Boaz. "He said, 'Do not shoot him,' " Jaara said. "[I] said, 'Get out of the car, this is not your business.' We let him out."

With Ismail Abayat at the wheel, Boaz in the front passenger seat and Al-Amur and Jaara in back, the car moved south along a canyon filled with olive trees. The village of Beit Sahour lay just ahead of them. "Avi Boaz was scared, talking in English," Jaara recounted. "I talked to him in Hebrew. 'Don't get scared.' We were all in Avi's car. Avi confessed that he had purchased lands from Palestinians, that he owned a house in Har Homa, that he'd invested in Har Homa." Har Homa was a West Bank settlement then under construction. Jaara said he told Boaz that the settlement's growth was "hurting" the Palestinian people.

Back in Bethlehem, Ibrahim Abayat was on his cellphone, trying to persuade Jaara and the others not to harm Boaz. Jaara told me: "He kept calling us: 'Do not do anything to him. I repeat this!' " The men passed unhindered through a Palestinian police checkpoint and descended a steep dirt road that led to a soccer field. "Riad and I went ahead to the playing field. Ismail also got out of the car and started walking. Avi got behind the wheel." After Boaz started to drive, Jaara said, Riad Al-Amur "raised his rifle" and killed the elderly American with a fusillade fired through the windshield. "Riad did the killing," he said.

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

Jaara paused and lighted another Marlboro. I exchanged a glance with my interpreter. Recklessness, nationalistic pride, the belief that he couldn't be touched in Ireland, the fact that he hadn't pulled the trigger -- whatever the motivation, Jaara had made an admission that, though we didn't know it at the time, would come back to haunt him.

IN THE SUMMER of 2005, a "Dateline NBC" producer, Adam Ciralsky, phoned me. He was working with the investigative reporter Lisa Myers on a piece about Jaara. Would I be willing to talk about my interview? The segment was shown that fall. It described Jaara as a "legendary Palestinian terrorist" who had led a "double life" as a security-force officer and militant. Myers reported that Jaara was still stirring up trouble overseas. In 2005, he used a fake passport to visit Ibrahim Abayat in Spain and, two weeks later, was caught by the Guardia Civil and deported back to Ireland. Myers cited Israeli intelligence sources who claimed Jaara was working with Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia militant group, to funnel money to Palestinian militants. In an interview Myers conducted with Jaara, she asked him whether he had committed the murder of the "American architect" Avi Boaz:

Jaara: "That's not true, absolutely no."

Myers: "You've never killed an American?"

Jaara: "No. My conflict between me and the Israel."

But Western intelligence and law-enforcement sources told Myers that Jaara masterminded the killing. And my own contribution to the "Dateline NBC" report -- a five-second sound bite -- cast further doubt on Jaara's denial: "[Jaara] told me in no uncertain terms that he had organized the kidnapping and the murder of Avi Boaz." The segment ended with Myers's reading aloud a U.S. Department of Justice statement that it "will not be satisfied until all of those responsible for the murder of Boaz are brought to justice."

The Justice Department decided I might be of use toward that end, and on a Tuesday morning in 2005, in the Charles Hotel off Harvard Square, I met two assistant U.S. attorneys and an F.B.I. agent. One, a sandy-haired Midwesterner in his mid-30s, carried a copy of my book, "A Season in Bethlehem," with the section about the Boaz murder underlined in red ink. He was part of a small unit inside the Justice Department that investigated killings of American citizens abroad. He had begun looking at the Boaz case and, after my book was brought to his attention, he reached out to me.

"Mr. Hammer," he asked, "would you be willing to come to Washington and tell your story to a grand jury?"

He would put me on the witness stand for about one hour, he said, and would not ask me to say anything beyond what I had written in my book. He told me the government was contacting other witnesses as well. If all went according to plan, the grand jury would return an indictment of Jaara and the Irish government would be pressured into turning him over to the United States to stand trial.

According to a representative for the European Union, any of the Palestinian exiles charged with a crime could be extradited from an E.U. state as long as the state in which the exile resided approved the request. Since the acceptance of the Palestinians was an E.U. "common action," Ireland, in the Jaara instance, would be expected to consult with the other E.U. states; but the ultimate decision would be Ireland's. Other E.U. legal experts said the request could be turned down if the crime in question were deemed political in nature.

The Justice Department lawyer warned me that my involvement might not end with the grand-jury hearing. I could be called back to testify against Jaara at his murder trial. He told me that, while I was not legally barred from discussing or writing about my testimony, he hoped I would respect the sensitivity of the investigation. He would not compel me to testify but, should I decide to do so voluntarily, he would provide me with the excuse of a federal subpoena. "Take your time and think about this," he said.

My employers at Newsweek offered little guidance, saying that the testimony was connected to my book, not my magazine reporting. My publisher, Simon & Schuster, raised no objections. I reassured myself that I wasn't betraying a source and that everything I would testify about had appeared in print. Moreover, I felt little sympathy for a figure who helped organize the execution of an unarmed man in his 70s. (By contrast, my Palestinian interpreter

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

refused to cooperate after prosecutors approached him. When I asked him about his decision, he cited the potential dangers and the political context of the crime: "He wasn't Daniel Pearl. He was an Israeli settler, and the U.S. government is trying to turn him into a big American patriot.") But the proposal continued to nag at me. Should journalists take part in the prosecution of a source or subject? Wasn't there a degree of entrapment in eliciting a confession for the sake of an article or book, then turning around and using that information in court? Did it not constitute an act of betrayal?

After the Balkan conflict, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia asked several reporters to testify against Bosnian Serb military commanders who were indicted for war crimes. The Washington Post fought the request; its former correspondent, Jonathan Randal, argued that reporters should not be called upon to play the role of an "auxiliary of justice." Randal, who conducted a damning interview with a Bosnian Serb leader, published in The Post in February 1993, about the extremists' ethnic-cleansing strategy, later told me: "It's difficult enough getting armed groups or radical groups to talk to us. If they thought we were going to turn around and testify, they would refuse to talk -- or they would kill us." But several other journalists agreed to appear, including Peter Maass, who is a contributing writer for The Times Magazine, and the British correspondent Ed Vulliamy, who later wrote an essay in The Observer calling such testimony by correspondents a moral obligation. "The court needs reporters to stand by their stories on oath," Vulliamy wrote in the British paper. "Why should journalists of all people -- whose information will be of such value -- perch loftily above the due process of law?"

After a week of deliberation, I sent an e-mail message to the U.S. attorney in Washington, telling him that I was willing to take the witness stand. Later that fall he contacted me in South Africa, where I was then working: the grand-jury hearing had been scheduled. Could I get on a plane to Washington in 10 days?

AN F.B.I. AGENT met me in the lobby of a small hotel, near Washington's Chinatown, where the government put me up. Dazed with jet lag after a 32-hour trip from South Africa, I followed him into a black town car for the short ride to the federal courthouse. I still had doubts about testifying, but in truth, those misgivings went along with mounting excitement: I was thrilled to be part of an international investigation of a murder.

The two young prosecutors were waiting on the asphalt plaza in front of the courthouse. We spent the previous day at the Department of Justice, reviewing my notes, rehearsing. One lawyer explained that he wanted to create a "narrative" that would "draw in the grand jury" and convey the full impact of Jihad Jaara's crime. Now, as we entered the building, he warned, "It's going to be a mob scene in there." Judith Miller of The Times was scheduled to appear that morning before a grand jury in the adjacent courtroom. After spending 85 days in jail on contempt charges for refusing to reveal the White House source who leaked the identity of the C.I.A. covert operative Valerie Plame, Miller had capitulated and agreed to testify.

The elevator door opened on the third floor -- and my escorts and I faced a throng of journalists waiting behind a rope barrier for Miller's arrival. I rushed through the corridor, avoiding eye contact, shielded by my escorts, and took a seat on a bench inside a waiting room. Fifteen minutes later, a bailiff appeared at the door.

An F.B.I. agent escorted me down the hall and into the courtroom adjacent to Miller's. The grand jurors sat in four rows. I sat at a wooden table in the front of the room. For 90 minutes, I was led by the government's lawyer through the events of the intifada, ending with the encounter with Jaara in the lounge at the Royal Dublin Hotel. At the end of the hearing, the lawyer thanked me and turned me back over to my F.B.I. escort. We shook hands, and I got on a plane back to South Africa. And that, I hoped, would be the end of it.

But it wasn't. The case went fallow for a while. Then a new team began interviewing new witnesses and reinterviewing old ones. The re-emergence of the Jaara case after a three-year silence rekindled my interest. I was not surprised to discover that he remained a troublesome figure in exile. In August of last year, he gave a plaintive interview to a Dublin journalist, lashing out at the Irish government for refusing to provide him with a job and for not getting him back to the West Bank as quickly as possible. (Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority president, has made the return of the Palestinian exiles a priority in talks with the Israeli government.) "P.L.O. Militant: Let Me Go Back Home; Plea of Siege Gunman Exiled in Dublin After Church Stand-Off," read The Sunday Mirror's headline. Jaara, who was now 37, said he was lonely, living in limbo, unable to see his family (including his

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

youngest son, born the day he was dispatched to Ireland) and bored. Along with the boredom came moments of terror: The Irish Evening Herald reported in 2005 that the Irish police intercepted a Mossad team that was trying to kill Jaara. Last summer, reports surfaced on Middle Eastern Web sites that shots were fired on him in a Dublin street and that Jaara's car was forced off the road and into a ditch, leaving him slightly injured. The Israeli government, the Irish police and the Palestinian Authority all called these reports baseless. A senior Israeli general during the second intifada told me it was unlikely that Israel was hunting Jaara, "but if he's worried, let him be worried." As for the Irish, a government spokesman told me, "It's fair to say he's 'of interest' to us," adding that the Garda, the Irish police, "keeps a close eye on him. He's somebody who's been active in the past."

Despite all these difficulties, the Bethlehem exile resettlement has been cited by some E.U. leaders as a precedent for resettling the 60 or so Guantanamo detainees that the Obama administration is hoping to turn over to Europe. Ireland is among the few countries that has said it would grant asylum to some of the Guantanamo prisoners.

LAST MONTH I flew to Dublin: I wanted to find out if Jaara knew the F.B.I. was after him, if he had any regrets about the Avi Boaz murder, if he really thought Israel tried to kill him and if he thought Ireland -- one of the European countries considered most sympathetic to the Palestinian cause -- would protect him in the event of a U.S. indictment. Jaara had already said through Hikmat Ajuri, the Palestinian Authority's representative in Ireland, that he didn't want to talk to me. "He feels he has been burned by the press," Ajuri said. Two days after arriving in Dublin, I got an address from an Irish source, and within an hour I was riding north from Dublin along the coast in a commuter train. The sky was gray, and the wind was picking up. Drops of cold drizzle trickled down the windows.

After I got off the train, I walked along the coastal road from the station. On the right was an expanse of mud and kelp, extending for half a mile toward the Irish Sea. Brick row houses, each with an identical red-tile roof, brick chimney and postage-stamp lawn, lined the road and extended inland for what looked like a mile. It did seem to be a good place to hide.

A gray BMW was parked in the driveway of the house I was seeking. I approached, peered through thin white curtains into an empty living room and rang the bell. Jaara, in a gray sweatsuit, appeared in the doorway. He looked at me quizzically. I knew who he was instantly -- the square jaw, the gap between the lower teeth, the thick black hair, the haggard features. He didn't recognize me, though, from our meeting years before.

"Jihad Jaara?" I said. He had an expectant, half smile. "I'm from The New York Times. Would it be possible to ask you a few questions?"

"Who told you I was here?" he demanded. Then he shouted: "Who told you?"

"I tracked you down through some friends in Dublin," I said. "I -- "

Jaara wasn't listening. "Who brought you here? Was it the C.I.A.? Did the C.I.A. bring you here?" He began pacing about the hallway, agitated, making a half turn, then reaching for the telephone. "I'm going to call the police," he said.

"Jihad, I've got nothing to do with the C.I.A. I just want to -- "

"Ken," he said, shouting into his phone. "There is a journalist here. I want to know how he got this address. Did the C.I.A. give it to him? You know that my life is in danger. They have already tried to kill me. Find out who brought him here!"

Jaara handed me the phone. "I advise you to leave," the voice on the other end said. "Do not engage this person in conversation. Just walk out the door, and do not come back."

I handed the phone back to Jaara. "Can I just ask you a couple of questions before I go?" I asked. He glowered. I turned and walked away down the street in heavy rain.

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

Minutes later the BMW screeched to a stop in front of me. The passenger door opened. At the wheel was Jaara. "Get in," he said. He stared at me, his arm extended against the door. I hesitated. "O.K.," I said, climbing inside.

Jaara stared straight ahead. "You should not have come to my door. And now you must tell me, or tell the police, who gave you my address. You will hand over the name."

"Jihad, I'm not at liberty to do that."

We drove back to Jaara's house; he stepped out and opened the door. I hesitated. "You're not going to hurt me?" I asked.

"I am a freedom fighter, not a killer," he said. "I have never killed anyone. Go inside."

We stepped into the blandly furnished living room. James Belushi's cop-meets-German-shepherd movie, "K-9," was playing on the flat-screen TV. A Palestinian flag hung from a wall. Moments later a Palestinian physician, who also served as a leader of the Palestinian community in Dublin, walked through the front door. Jaara rushed to him, pointed to me and began talking agitatedly in Arabic. Then he swept back across the room, lighted another cigarette and flopped into an easy chair. "Do you know that a Mossad hit team was intercepted by the Irish special branch, on their way to kill Jihad?" the physician asked. "You have to understand that this man is terrified."

Jaara stood up and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "Everything is easy for you journalists, isn't it?" he said. "But I am the one whose life is in danger. The Mossad tried to kill me. Israel wants me dead."

"Please," the Palestinian physician said. "Give us the name of the person who gave you this address. Jihad is terrified because his security has been so easily breached."

"I'm really sorry," I said, standing up. "I can't do that."

"You must help us," Jihad said, angry, moving toward me. "They want to kill me."

"Give us the name," the physician said. "It could be a matter of life and death."

I looked at Jaara, sweating, sucking on a Marlboro, eyes wide with fear. I supposed he spent most of his exile holed up like this, watching bad movies and smoking Marlboros, waiting for the day when Mossad or the C.I.A. burst through the door. "Will you give me the name?" Jaara said, one more time. I again said no. Then two uniformed officers from the Garda arrived and, after a quick interrogation, they ordered me to leave. Jaara was trembling; the Palestinian physician placed two hands on his shoulders to steady him. He was still shaking when I slipped out the door and walked as fast as I could toward the train station.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Graphic

PHOTOS: Avi Boaz, an American emigre to Israel, was murdered in his car near Bethlehem in 2002. (PHOTOGRAPH FROM ZOOM,77/ASSOCIATED PRESS)(PG. MM46-47)

THE EXILE: Jihad Jaara, who was accidentally wounded by one of his own men, received temporary asylum in Ireland after the siege at a church in Bethlehem in 2002. (PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP MARK/ASSOCIATED PRESS) (PG. MM51)

The Palestinian Terrorist And Me

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Notes on a scandal; As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea, it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David Samuels investigates how 'supernotes' are funding crime - and a dictatorship

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Body

In October of 1997, a white-haired 63-year old Irishman named Sean Garland paid a visit to Moscow in the company of an acquaintance subsequently identified only by the initials "JM". Garland was a self-proclaimed Marxist who dressed like a professor and served as head of a far-left faction called the Irish Workers Party that had never elected a single one of its members to any mainstream political body. Garland's first visit to Moscow was followed by three return trips in the first half of 1998, made in the company of known criminals from Dublin and Birmingham.

Garland's pilgrimage to Moscow made little ideological sense, since Boris Yeltsin had turned the former Soviet Union from a communist state into heaven on earth for gangsters of all nationalities - and the company that Garland kept made observers wonder about the true purpose of his visits. In addition to his career in leftist fringe politics, Garland was a lifelong terrorist who had personally engaged in deadly attacks on British soldiers and police in Northern Ireland since the 1950s, and whose exploits were said to have inspired Tom Clancy's novel Patriot Games. As the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) entered into fitful negotiations with Protestant groups in the 1990s, Garland served as chief of staff for "the Official IRA" or OIRA, which rejected the idea of a peace deal in favour of the continuation of bombings, bank robberies and other politically-motivated crimes.

Garland's odd itinerary in Moscow, which included several visits to the North Korean embassy, held the key to a mystery that had baffled British criminal investigators and the US Secret Service since the early 1990s, when counterfeit US \$100 bills of exceptional quality had flooded Dublin. The fakes were so good as to be undetectable by the advanced bill-checking machines used by the Federal Reserve and other central banks, and local businesses and banks in Dublin stopped accepting \$100 bills as legal tender. An Irish counterfeit dealer named Hugh Todd was arrested in 1994 with a large bundle of fakes, and more arrests followed as the bills continued to circulate throughout Europe and the Middle East in the most sustained, deliberate destructive attack on the US currency on record. The source of the near-perfect fakes, which soon became known as the "supernote", remained a mystery.

The existence of the supernote came to the notice of Western governments just after the fall of the Berlin Wall in December 1989, when a money handler at Central Bank of the Philippines became suspicious of a banknote that

Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

passed all the usual tests but still felt odd. The note, a \$100 bill supposedly printed in the year 1988, made its way to Yoshihide Matsumura, a Japanese currency expert whose machines for detecting fake bills are among the most advanced in the business. The bill was an astoundingly accurate fake, Matsumura decided, the best that he had ever seen - yet it did not show any of the characteristics of the advanced fakes that he had encountered from Japan and Russia.

Like the real \$100 bills, the fake was printed on paper that was made of three-quarters cotton and one-quarter linen fibres, which is manufactured for the US government using specialised machinery by Crane & Co, the stationary company. The images are then stamped on the paper using an intaglio press - a piece of specialised printing machinery so heavy and expensive that only governments normally own them. The fake made its way to the headquarters of the Secret Service in Washington, D C, where it was compared to the agency's master file of 20,000 examples of forged US currency. The bill was assigned the identifying numeric C-14342, the letter "C" indicating that it was a circular, or the first in what was expected to be a series of high-quality forgeries from a single source.

Bills from the same series turned up a year later in Lebanon's Bekka Valley, leading to suspicion that the supernote was being printed in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which needed foreign currency to fund an estimated \$100 million a year in donations to Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations - who, as it happened, were being trained in bomb-making in Lebanon by Sean Garland. Intelligence analysts noted that Iran had taken delivery of two intaglio printing presses shortly before the fall of the Shah, who had sent a team of 20 master engravers to be trained by the Federal Bureau of Engraving in the US.

Since the beginning of its investigations, the Secret Service has routinely declined to comment on the origins and distinguishing characteristics of the "supernote", for fear of aiding the forgers and a variety of other reasons - including the fact that the supernote represents a gigantic, ongoing law enforcement failure fuelled by the agency's early and continuing refusal to acknowledge the nature, scope and source of the threat. The Secret Service discourages currency experts from discussing identifying flaws in the supernote and admonishes those who speak to the press. Still, it is known that the first widely-distributed supernote carried the date "1988" and was distinguished by at least three flaws, one of which may have been deliberately introduced by the forgers so that they could demonstrate the difference between real money and their own fakes.

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One internationally-known currency expert was willing to talk to me about the flaws in the original supernote for publication, in exchange for a promise of anonymity. "The lamp-post base on the back, above the "H" of "HALL" to the right of centre, has a very weak, almost nonexistent, left outline," the expert explained, referring to the back of the old US \$100 bill. "On the supernote the left side of the lamp-post base is clearly defined."

On the face of the 1988 supernote, the heavy horizontal line that intersects the portrait oval just above the decorative ribbon that bears the name "Franklin" does not reach the oval, as it does on a real \$100 bill. Instead, the line dives down parallel with the oval and intersects the Franklin ribbon on both sides.

While it is difficult for currency collectors to acquire a supernote, he adds, the bills are available from foreign currency dealers who often sell them at a 150 per cent mark-up so they can't be accused of passing bad notes. Experienced currency dealers are quick to spot fakes, the expert says. Money handlers often refuse to handle certain series of \$100 bills because of the high percentages of bad notes, with \$100 bills from the years 1996 and 1999 attracting a high degree of scrutiny. "Any one series of supernotes stays in production only a few months or a year or so before the counterfeiters have to change to keep up," the currency expert told me.

According to a recent study by two economists with access to Secret Service data, at least one in every 10,000 US banknotes in circulation is a fake. One reason that the Secret Service showed so little initial interest in the supernote is that they were found overseas, where two-thirds of the \$800bn in US currency circulates.

Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

"It's a spit in the ocean compared to what's being printed," the Secret Service liaison at the American Embassy in London, John Sullivan, told a newspaper in 1993 in response to an inquiry about counterfeit \$100 bills and other fakes, whose numbers had more than quadrupled between 1990 and 1992 - from \$29.9m to \$137.7m. By 1994, the Secret Service still had only six agents on permanent detail overseas to deal with what had become an epidemic that worried bankers and criminals alike. In December of 1993, for example, gunmen stormed a classroom in the Russian city of Rostov and demanded a ransom of \$10m in \$100 bills - along with a sophisticated machine to weed out the fakes.

Where circumstantial evidence about the source of the supernote had originally pointed towards the Shah's intaglio presses and US-trained engravers now under the control of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Secret Service was eventually forced to start looking elsewhere. In 1994, executives of a North Korean trading company carrying diplomatic passports were arrested for depositing \$250,000 in supernotes in a bank in Macao. Similar incidents involving a weird assortment of diplomats, terrorists and criminals with ties to North Korea followed. In January 1996, a middle-aged Japanese man approached a money changer in the beach resort of Pattaya, Thailand and gave him 90 crisp US \$100 bills in exchange for 225,000 baht. The bills were fake, and were soon traced to Yoshimi Tan-aka - a Japanese Red Army terrorist who had disappeared inside North Korea in 1970. Tanaka fled to Cambodia and took refuge in the North Korean embassy in Phnom Penh. He was later apprehended at the Vietnamese border in an embassy Mercedes after trying to bribe a border guard with \$10,000 in \$100 bills, which the guard wisely refused - they were probably counterfeit.

The revamped \$100 bill, unveiled in 1996, featured a new engraving by the artist Tom Hipschen, who gave Franklin an enigmatic look that recalled the half-smile on the face of the Mona Lisa, and drew attention to the portrait. Microprinted in Franklin's lapel were the words "United States of America", a phrase that was also microprinted inside one of the numbers on the bill, which were printed in colour-shifting OVI ink. Concentric lines in the oval surrounding the portrait were designed to create interference when scanned by a laser. Red and blue fibres were embedded in the paper, along with other safety features designed to protect the banknote from forgers. Tiny security threads that repeated the denomination of each bill were embedded in the paper to prevent counterfeiters from washing off the ink and turning dollar bills into hundreds - a favourite trick of Columbian counterfeiters. Within two years, all of these features would be successfully copied in the "big head" incarnation of the supernote, which turned up in London first and was called C-21555 by the Secret Service.

By the late 1990s, nearly all available evidence pointed to North Korea as the source of the supernote: Sean Garland's trips to Moscow were made for the purpose of picking up a new supernote that precisely replicated the safety features of the redesigned US currency. By the time Garland was arrested on 7 October 2005, in a hotel in Belfast, Northern Ireland, it was estimated that he and his associates had passed \$28m in redesigned supernotes produced inside North Korea. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Garland's network, while sizeable, distributed only a tiny fraction of the supernotes still in circulation. At least \$45m in North Korean supernotes have been detected in circulation, out of an estimated production of bills with a face value of \$45-\$75m per year.

According to people who regularly handled the bills, the North Korean fakes are so good and are updated with such regularity that the best way to tell that they are fakes is their superior quality. "The joke was, they were better than the Bureau of Federal Engraving produces," says David Asher, a former Treasury department official who was in charge of leading the fight against the criminal activities of the North Korean state. Asher mentions the high quality of the paper and the precision of the printing process, including the sharp relief of the clock hands on the tower on the back of the bill, as among the few reliable giveaways that a bill with Ben Franklin's face on it was printed in North Korea. According to Asher, the biggest victims of the supernote are the Chinese, who have found that between 2-4 per cent of the \$100 bills circulating in some regions of the country are fake - a de facto tax on Chinese money changers by North Korean forgers.

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Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

Trying to trace the supernotes to their source is a difficult task, owing to the fact that North Korea is a highly-militarised totalitarian country ruled by the dictator Kim Jong-Il. Recent reports from North Korea analysts suggest that Kim was recently treated for pancreatic cancer: the Korean leader looked thin and grey in footage of his recent meeting with former US President Bill Clinton, who arrived in Pyongyang on 4 August to pick up two American journalists who were incarcerated in a North Korean labour camp for crossing the border earlier this year. In June, Kim announced his intention to hand over to his 26-year-old son, Kim Jong-Un - the third Kim to assume the central role in the political cult. Recent interviews by researchers, including this author, with South Korean intelligence officials and North Korean defectors, have resulted in what appears to be a more-or-less accurate picture of the mechanics of the century's greatest forgery operation - one of the officially-sanctioned large-scale criminal activities that have earned North Korea the nickname "the Sopranos state".

The printing of supernotes is overseen by an organisation called Office 39, which runs state-sponsored criminal activities and is housed in a plain, barracks-like building on Changgwant Street in Pyongyang (the proceeds of these operations are managed by Office 38, which is located in the same building). Estimates are that illegal exports from North Korea, including counterfeit money, methamphetamine, fake pharmaceuticals and weapons amount to \$500m per year - a sum that equals or exceeds the value of the country's legitimate exports.

The supernote has a place of honour in North Korea's criminal economy. The main printing plant is housed at 62 Printing House, an address that suggests that it is located in Pyongyang city; the building is actually located in Pyongsung. According to a North Korean defector who worked for the central committee of the Communist Party, the workers who produce the supernote get superior food rations that include 600 grams of rice a day as well as "family food". The presses used to produce the supernote come from a company called De la rue Giori in Switzerland, with additional equipment from Japan, paper from Hong Kong and ink from France. Because their identity cards list them as citizens of Pyongyang, they are allowed to travel to the capital.

A South Korean analyst told me that there are two other plants inside North Korea where fake currency is produced - the Song Shin printing factory, which is under the control of the North Korean army reconnoitering corps, and a second plant using Austrian printing machinery that is under the control of the Communist Party Central Committee. While the counterfeiting operations exist to make money, the analyst explained, they are also motivated by a healthy dose of anti-Americanism as well as by North Korea's state philosophy of *juche*, or self-reliance. "*Juche* means that North Korea can and should produce for itself anything that the rest of the world can produce," the analyst explained. "If other nations have missiles, then North Korea should have missiles. If America produces dollars, which are the world's reserve currency, North Korea must produce its own dollars." While Office 39 personnel who help distribute supernotes were asked to leave the North Korean embassy in Beijing two years ago, the South Korean analyst says, they are still active in Germany, in Zagreb, Croatia and the Middle East.

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Official North Korean publications firmly reject the suggestion that their country is involved in producing supernotes. In an article published in 2006 by the North Korean weekly *Tongil Sinbo*, a government spokesman insisted: "Even while noisily babbling about 'counterfeit currencies', the United States has not produced any evidence to back up what it says."

A remarkable undercover operation run by the FBI from 2003 to 2005 had provided more than enough evidence of the depth and scale of North Korea's involvement in the supernote scam, as well as providing a frightening hint of the uses to which North Korea's smuggling networks might be put. On 2 October 2, 2004, a Panamanian freighter, the *Ever Unique*, arrived in Newark, New Jersey, from Yantai, China, with boxes of toys, which hid a cargo of \$300,000 in supernotes. Two months later, the initial shipment was followed by \$3m in supernotes that arrived in Newark, and another \$700,000 that arrived in the port of Long Beach, California.

All three shipments were part of one of the most mind-blowing FBI undercover operations in recent history, which would escalate from contraband cigarettes to supernotes, to requests for automatic weapons, mortars, and surface-to-air missiles, and result in the arrest of 87 people in the United States. The sting began with the successful

Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

infiltration of a 400lb agent named Jack Garcia into the Gambino crime family in New York under the name Jack Falcone. Two FBI agents named Lou Calvarese and Tom Zyckowski, were working an unrelated case whose goal was to expose Chinese smuggling networks that might be able to move weapons into the United States.

The three agents became involved with an elderly and proper-seeming Chinese-American couple named Bill and Mary Liu, who claimed to be able to obtain anything they wanted from connections in China. Posing as an overweight Mafioso, Garcia claimed to be involved in the drug business with Columbians who wanted weapons in exchange for cocaine. "We told the Lius we had a dirty customs official at the docks who'd let that container go in," Garcia told me. "We would then remove the container and bring it to a neutral location."

The Lius' main interest was not weapons but counterfeit cigarettes, which turned out to be such a stunningly-lucrative business that Garcia and his fellow agents soon despaired of convincing the Lius to move anything more risky. In the course of their involvement with the sting, the Lius wound up importing approximately 250 million packs of counterfeit cigarettes to the US. Through the Lius, the agents met Keith Tang, a Vietnamese-born Chinese who lived in California. Tang, an avid golfer rarely seen without his trademark Tiger Woods golfing cap, also wanted Garcia's supposed connections at the Port of Newark to import phoney cigarettes, but claimed to be able to provide weapons as well. After a trip to Asia, he returned with an OK on the weapons as well as samples that the agents hadn't asked for - three phoney \$100 bills.

"We were told they were manufactured in North Korea," Garcia remembers. "I actually looked at it with Louie Calvarese. I had seen a lot of counterfeit because I worked a lot of dope in my career. This stuff was great." Calvarese, who recently retired from the FBI, was equally impressed. "When they left, I took out my bills and compared, I couldn't tell the difference," he remembers. "I said, 'Jack took a look. Can you tell the difference?' He said no." The agents passed the bills to the FBI lab and the Secret Service, which confirmed that they were supernotes. Tang then invited the agents to Phuket, Thailand, to meet his supernote contact, who also dealt in heroin and weapons. They would stay at the Le Meridien resort and enjoy the beaches and food, as well as the company of local women.

Garcia, whose weight made it hard for him to fly in a commercial aircraft, declined the invitation, but Calvarese went, along with a female agent who posed as his girlfriend. In Phuket, he met Jyimin "Jimmy" Horng, a Chinese from Macao who had supposedly competed for China in judo in the Olympics and now worked for the North Korean government selling supernotes and weapons. "He had connections to very high officials in the North Korean government," Calvarese remembered.

When Horng quoted a price of \$500 a piece for AK47 rifles, Calvarese objected that he had purchased the same guns in Russia for \$100. Horng went off and called a contact in North Korea, and then returned with some bad news. "Listen it has to be \$500," Calvarese remembers Horng saying. "If I do it on my own through my contacts, the price could be lower but if we get caught my family is going to die, and my family's family is going to die." Horng offered Calvarese \$5m in supernotes, and sent him a half-inch thick catalogue translated from Korean that offered artillery shells, rocket launchers and other forms of advanced weaponry. Calvarese and Garcia met with Horng and Tang again in Atlantic City, and ordered \$1m in supernotes at a price of 30 cents on the dollar. Horng threw in another \$2m on consignment as well as some counterfeit Viagra.

The agents had landed in the middle of a global bazaar presided over by a weird dictator in which seemingly-limitless quantities of weapons, drugs, and fake currency were being made available to well-connected criminals by a foreign government that itself seemed to function like a mafia family. Frightened by the terror bombings in London in 2005, the US government got cold feet and ordered the arrest of everyone involved in the cigarette-smuggling business and other scams before the AK47s and rocket-launchers were imported into the States. Tang and Horng were invited to attend Calvarese's fake mafia-style wedding in Atlantic City, with Jack Garcia ostensibly acting as best man. "They gave us Rolex watches," Calvarese remembers with chuckle. "I said, 'is this counterfeit?' 'Oh no, we wouldn't do that to you.' They were real. They paid a lot of money for those watches." Eighty-seven people went to jail, but the production of the supernote continues. In March, 2006, a supernote stash was seized by Hong Kong

Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

police from a Chinese-American man coming from Macao. Later that year, supernotes were reportedly discovered in the take at several Las Vegas casinos and turned over to the Secret Service.

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Winning the fight against counterfeiting seems even less likely, as long as governments retain the power to turn paper and safety features worth pennies into certificates of value worth thousands of times what they cost to produce. "You watch that beautiful, free-line elegant engraving coming up at you gradually with this red safe light around. Your heart starts to beat," explained the printer Mike Landress, who counterfeited American currency in the 1960s and then wrote an autobiography called *I Made It Myself*. Landress compared the experience of having a life-sized image of US currency in his possession to having an orgasm. Cheap digital technology has made the kind of thrill that Landress experienced available not only to governments and large criminal organisations, but to anyone who can afford a digital scanner and an inkjet printer. A counterfeiter named Wesley Weber crippled Canada's \$100 bill by using techniques he found on websites, commercially-available paper, and four Hewlett Packard Deskjet 1220C printers. In 2005, a man named Yakub Yusupov and his two sons Eduard and Pinchas were arrested in New York City and charged with selling \$9.5m worth of near-perfect \$100 bills from a video store on Parsons Boulevard in Queens.

For economic and psychological reasons, the counterfeit business is likely to continue as long as human beings use currency, and counterfeit \$100 bills will be easy to find. I recently visited a detective named Jim Capaldo in his modest office in the NYPD's Organised Crime Control Bureau, which contains a government-issue file cabinet, bare linoleum floors and an award for exemplary service. Capaldo's raincoat hung on a bare wire hangar near his desk. In the evidence bag in front of him was a phoney \$100 bill, seized as part of an investigation into Mexican gangs who had engaged in three shootings on Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, a hotspot for obtaining forged documents. One subject of the investigation had also sold counterfeit money to undercover cops on five separate occasions. "I'm sure he had other customers. How many, I have no idea," Capaldo says. "It seems clear he didn't produce the money himself."

The fake in the evidence bag was dated 1999. When we compared it with a real \$100 bill from 2003, a number of differences became apparent. In the fake, Franklin's eyes looked fuzzier, as if he had been up late and felt sad - an effect that was most likely the result of a digital printing process. On the other hand, each one of the known security features that was present in the real note - the two watermarks of Franklin's head, the red and blue fibres, and the security strip with the number "100" embedded in the paper - was also present in the fake.

The question of why North Korea continues to produce the supernote has a simple answer: because they can. "Crime is a very lucrative business," says David Asher. "If you are a nation and you can deal drugs and print someone else's currency, you can make a lot of money." Asher quit the Bush administration over the decision to downplay North Korean counterfeiting and other illicit economic activities in the hopes of sealing an ever-elusive agreement on the disposal of North Korea's nuclear reactors and stocks of weapons-grade plutonium.

While policymakers in the State Department and elsewhere have portrayed the fuss over the supernote as a distraction from the real business of cutting a deal on North Korean nuclear weapons, Asher regards the two issues as inextricably linked. "The idea was, 'Oh my God, if we stop them, they might not want to negotiate.'" Asher states. "It's a false premise."

The failure of Bush's second-term diplomacy offensive makes it all the more unlikely that Obama's campaign promises about the wonders of engagement will result in real-world success. While Bush's late-blooming interest in diplomacy may have seemed churlishly overdue, it also carried a credible threat of force. Bush's failure to achieve diplomatic progress with Iran or North Korea means that the Obama administration will be forced to come up with even bigger carrots - assuming that the North Koreans are interested in making a deal. However, Bill Clinton's success this month in bringing home the two US journalists suggests that Pyongyang has not shut down completely. Nonetheless, some see Obama's failure to respond decisively to North Korea's provocative 4th of July missile tests as raising the likely price of any deal even further.

Notes on a scandal As the US edges towards engagement with North Korea , it will be forced to address Pyongyang's booming trade in fake American currency. David....

The fact that the North Korean state has grown quite comfortable doing business through criminal middlemen around the world in a wide variety of contraband merchandise suggests that the supernote and the threat of nuclear proliferation may be linked in even more frightening ways. North Korea has already transferred nuclear technology to Iran and Syria. During a visit to the Yongbyon nuclear facility in North Korea, the former head of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Siegfried Hecker, was allowed to hold a sealed glass jar containing a 200g casting of alloyed plutonium metal produced by North Korean scientists. Six hockey pucks of plutonium approximately 6.5cms in diameter and 2cm thick, Hecker noted in a subsequent report about his visit, would be enough to assemble a simple nuclear bomb. Hecker estimated the likelihood of detecting six hockey pucks of plutonium alloy properly coated in plastic and lead, carried in a briefcase from North Korea to Iran, as virtually zero.

Given North Korea's years of experience in the transportation and distribution of illicit goods through criminal networks, it would seem easy enough to find willing and experienced volunteers to carry a nuclear briefcase. FBI agent Lou Calvarese concurs. "Its pretty scary," he says, summarising his conclusions about the connections between North Korea's black economy and the threat of nuclear proliferation. "I think everything is held together by a Band-Aid."

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EYES ON THE WORLD; The past 10 years in photographs

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Section: SPECTRUM;FEATURES; Pg. 21,48

Length: 4774 words

Body

THE DECADE POLITICS

It was a truly momentous decade - captured in images on these pages by some of the world's foremost photographers. Dictators fell, terrorists brought death and destruction. In return we bombed and sent troops, but always seemed short of a long-term solution. While we debated global warming, storms wreaked havoc in Asia. And all the while, our most loved, and loathed, celebrities partied on regardless

ON THE COVER:

The body of 2nd Lieutenant James Cathey, killed in an explosion in Iraq in August 2005, arrives at Reno airport in Nevada. Marines drape a flag over his casket as the plane's passengers look on

FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Below: President George "Dubya" Bush, flanked by his vice-president, Dick Cheney (left), and Donald Rumsfeld, his defence secretary, outside his ranch in Texas in 2004. Four years later Bush is back in Texas permanently, while Cheney and Rumsfeld are writing their memoirs. Below right: Bush's successor, Barack Obama, and his family are showered with confetti following his acceptance speech in November 2008

TIMELINE

EVENTS OF THE DECADE

Some of the top stories from 2000 to today

MAY 11, 2000

India welcomes its billionth citizen, making it the second country whose population has reached 10 figures (China's now exceeds 1.3 billion). The baby girl, Astha (left) - Hindi for faith - is mobbed by journalists after her birth in New Delhi

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

MAY 24, 2000

In accordance with a promise made by Ehud Barak, the Israeli prime minister, the country's forces withdraw from southern Lebanon, ending 22 years of occupation. Hezbollah, the Shi'ite Muslim group, holds victory celebrations

JUNE 26, 2000

The Human Genome Project announces that it has assembled a 'working draft' of the sequence of the human genome - the genetic blueprint for a human being. Bill Clinton and Tony Blair say it marks a new era of medical discovery

AUGUST 12, 2000

A torpedo explodes aboard the Russian submarine the Kursk, causing it to sink during a military exercise in the Barents Sea. All 118 crew members (some pictured left) die after the Russian government refuses foreign offers of help

NOVEMBER 7, 2000

Hillary Clinton is elected to the US Senate. The only first lady to hold elective office in US history, she is also the first female senator to represent New York state. She later resigns her seat to become Obama's secretary of state in January 2009

DECEMBER 13, 2000

George W Bush (left) is finally declared the 43rd president of the United States following a legal battle with Al Gore over vote-recounting in Florida. Bush says he is 'thankful that we are able to resolve our electoral differences in a peaceful way'

DECEMBER 18, 2000

The singer-songwriter Kirsty MacColl, 41, is killed in a boating accident in Mexico. While swimming with her two sons, she is hit by a speedboat owned by a Mexican supermarket millionaire. The boat hand convicted of the killing is later fined around £60

JANUARY 26, 2001

A huge earthquake strikes Gujarat in India and parts of Pakistan, killing tens of thousands of people and injuring many more (left). The quake coincides with Republic Day, a national holiday when many people take to the streets to celebrate

JUNE 1, 2001

Nepal's King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya are shot dead in Kathmandu, along with seven other members of the royal family. The assassin is their son, Crown Prince Dipendra, whose killing spree begins after a family row. He later shoots himself

DECEMBER 2, 2001

With losses running into billions, Enron files for bankruptcy. The Texasbased business, one of the world's largest electricityand-gas companies, subsequently becomes the focus of a criminal investigation and a byword for crooked accounting

JANUARY 1, 2002

Millions of Europeans in 12 countries begin spending their new currency, the euro (left). The name 'ecu' had been briefly considered, but was rejected because it sounded too much like Kuh - the German word for cow

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

OCTOBER 12, 2002

In Indonesia's deadliest terrorist attack, three bombs explode in Bali, killing more than 200 people, most of them foreign holidaymakers (a memorial, left). Members of the Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah are later sentenced for the attack

FEBRUARY 1, 2003

On re-entering the Earth's atmosphere, the space shuttle Columbia suddenly disintegrates, killing all seven crew members aboard (six of them are pictured right). It is the first accident during re-entry in more than 40 years of US spaceflight

MARCH 20, 2003

The US launches Operation Iraqi Freedom, its war against Iraq, with the aim of removing Saddam Hussein. Thousands of bombs and missiles hit Baghdad, and the ground invasion begins with troops crossing into southern Iraq from Kuwait

MAY 1, 2003

President Bush, speaking on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, makes the famously premature announcement that 'major combat operations in Iraq have ended'. He does this in front of a 'Mission Accomplished' banner

AUGUST 14, 2003

It is feared that Al-Qaeda has struck again, but mercifully it is only a power cut - albeit on an enormous scale. Vast tracts of the United States, including New York City (left) and parts of Canada, are plunged into darkness

OCTOBER 7, 2003

Ozzy Osbourne falls off a quad bike at his home in Buckinghamshire, breaking his collarbone, eight ribs and a vertebra in his neck. Later, the rock legend tells a reporter, 'I've finally grown up. The bloody thing nearly killed me. I am lucky to be here today'

FEBRUARY 4, 2004

The social-networking site Facebook (left) is founded by Mark Zuckerberg and a group of fellow students at Harvard. Initially limited to college students, it soon expands to include everybody else, and now boasts more than 350m active users worldwide

FEBRUARY 10, 2004

French MPs vote resoundingly in favour of a law banning Muslim head coverings (right) and other overtly religious symbols from being worn in French state schools. The ban is hugely contentious and seen as an attack on Muslims

FEBRUARY 29, 2004

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King wins all 11 Academy Awards for which it is nominated. The final instalment in the Peter Jackson trilogy, it is the first fantasy film to scoop the best-picture Oscar. The trilogy cost almost \$300m to make

MARCH 11, 2004

Bombs on trains in Madrid (right) kill 191. Al-Qaeda claims responsibility after Spain's centre-right government blames Basque separatists. Spaniards later vote in the Socialist Workers' party, which says it will withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

NOVEMBER 22, 2004

Thousands of Ukrainians take to the streets in the Orange Revolution, showing support for the opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko, who claims to have been poisoned by his opponents. He goes on to become president

FEBRUARY 15, 2005

The video-sharing website YouTube is launched by three former PayPal employees. The site began in humble surroundings above a pizzeria and Japanese restaurant in San Mateo, California. It was bought by Google in 2006 for \$1.65 billion

APRIL 19, 2005

In Rome, just over two weeks after the death of Pope John Paul II, the German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (left), 78, is elected as pope, taking the name Benedict XVI. He is the oldest pope to be elected since Clement XII in 1730

JULY 8, 2005

At a summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, the leaders of the G8 industrial nations pledge to increase aid to developing countries by \$50 billion a year by 2010 and to cancel the debts of the poorest nations. But they fail to set firm targets for reducing CO2 emissions

SEPTEMBER 26, 2005

Lynndie England, the American soldier who was photographed holding a naked Iraqi inmate on a lead in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad (left), is found guilty of 'maltreating detainees' and sentenced to three years in prison

OCTOBER 8, 2005

Around 79,000 people in Pakistan-administered Kashmir are killed by an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6. It also hits Indian Kashmir, killing a further 1,400 people. Tens of thousands of people are injured and over 3m left homeless

NOVEMBER 27, 2005

Surgeons in France perform the world's first partial face transplant. Isabelle Dinoire (left), 38, severely disfigured after being attacked by her labrador, is given a graft consisting of the nose, lips and chin of a brain-dead female donor

JANUARY 25, 2006

Supporters of Hamas (right) celebrate winning a large majority in the first Palestinian parliamentary election to take place in a decade, unseating the more secular and moderate Fatah. The hardline Islamic group wins 76 seats out of 132

MARCH 11, 2006

The former Serbian and Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic, branded the 'Butcher of the Balkans', is found dead in his cell at the detention centre for the UN war crimes tribunal in the Hague. He had died of a heart attack

MAY 27, 2006

A 6.3-magnitude earthquake about 15 miles from the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta kills more than 5,000 and leaves hundreds of thousands homeless. The Asian Development Bank pledges £32m in aid and loans to help those affected

JULY 28, 2006

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

Mel Gibson (left) is charged with drink-driving after being stopped in Malibu. The actor asks the policemen if they are Jewish, and remarks that 'Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world'. Gibson later apologises to the Jewish community

AUGUST 23, 2006

A teenager held prisoner in an Austrian cellar for eight years manages to escape from her captor. Natascha Kampusch (right) vanished on her way to school in 1998. Her abductor, Wolfgang Priklopil, jumps under a train soon after her escape

AUGUST 24, 2006

Pluto, formerly regarded as the ninth planet in the solar system, is relegated to 'dwarf planet' status by the International Astronomical Union. The decision is based on the fact that its orbital path overlaps with asteroids and the planet Neptune

DECEMBER 30, 2006

Saddam Hussein, having been found guilty of crimes against humanity after a 12-month trial, is hanged at a compound in the Baghdad suburb of Khadimiya. The former Iraqi president was convicted of the murder of 148 Shi'ite Iraqis

JANUARY 1, 2007

Ban Ki-moon (left, being sworn in) replaces Kofi Annan as secretary general of the United Nations. The South Korean was not initially regarded as a strong contender, but became the favourite by travelling to each country in the UN Security Council

MARCH 16, 2007

Russia mourns after a huge underground explosion kills more than 100 workers in the Ulyanovskaya mine complex in southwestern Siberia. It is thought to have been caused by the spontaneous combustion of methane or coal dust

APRIL 3, 2007

During high-velocity trials on an extension to the French railway network, a TGV train smashes the world speed record for a train on conventional rails, exceeding 357mph near the city of Reims. Time for champagne - plenty of it is produced locally

APRIL 16, 2007

In the worst civilian shooting spree America has ever seen, a mentally unstable 23-year-old murders 32 people at Virginia Tech. The South Korean-born student Cho Seung-hui (left) ends the massacre by turning the gun on himself

JULY 7, 2007

Live Earth concerts to raise international awareness of climate change take place around the world, in locations including London, Sydney, Rome and Antarctica. Performers include Madonna, Kasabian (right), Bon Jovi and Alicia Keys

APRIL 4, 2008

Beyoncé Knowles and Shawn Carter, aka Jay-Z, (right) get married at the rapper's lavish New York penthouse apartment. The 'low-key' celebrations, for guests including Gwyneth Paltrow, involve a marquee decorated with 60,000 flown-in orchids

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

AUGUST 1, 2008

Violence begins to flare in the breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia. Russia sends troops to support South Ossetia and moves to support another rebel region, Abkhazia. The troops eventually withdraw after a Frenchbrokered peace deal

AUGUST 24, 2008

The 2008 Olympic Games end in Beijing (right). Although America's haul of 110 medals is the largest, China has won more gold medals, with 51. The US swimmer Michael Phelps takes home eight gold medals, beating Mark Spitz's 36-year record

SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

The US government steps in to prevent the collapse of the mortgage giants Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae - otherwise known as the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation and the Federal National Mortgage Association

SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

Deep below the Franco-Swiss border, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the world's biggest particle accelerator, goes into action. It is hoped that it will detect the Higgs boson particle, a holy grail of physics. But a magnetic fault shuts it down

SEPTEMBER 15, 2008

The US sees the largest bankruptcy in its history, as the investment bank Lehman Brothers collapses. Saddled with a mountain of bad debt, its chairman and CEO, Richard Fuld (right) has been refused help by the US government

NOVEMBER 4, 2008

The US elects its first African-American president. 'If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible... tonight is your answer,' says Barack Obama in his victory speech the following day

DECEMBER 14, 2008

At a Baghdad news conference during his farewell visit to Iraq, President Bush (left) becomes the target for a pair of shoes thrown by the television journalist Muntadar al-Zaidi, who is jailed - and becomes a hero to many Iraqis

JANUARY 14, 2009

In a 22-minute audio recording posted on Islamic websites, a man purported to be Osama Bin Laden threatens President Bush's successor with a renewed jihad. He also suggests that the financial crisis will erode America's influence around the world

JANUARY 15, 2009

After its engines become disabled, a US plane flying from New York to Charlotte, North Carolina, is successfully ditched in the Hudson river (left) by its 57-year-old pilot, Chesley B Sullenberger III, saving the lives of all 155 people on board

FEBRUARY 11, 2009

Morgan Tsvangirai is sworn in as prime minister of Zimbabwe by his longstanding nemesis, President Robert Mugabe, creating a 'unity government'. 'It is not a perfect arrangement,' admits Tsvangirai, 'but it is still a workable one'

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

MARCH 19, 2009

Josef Fritzl (right) is jailed for life in Austria, after the 73-year-old is found guilty of incarcerating and repeatedly raping his daughter Elisabeth over 24 years in the basement of the family home, and of killing one of the seven children she bore him

JUNE 25, 2009

Millions of fans mourn after Michael Jackson dies of a heart attack at the age of 50. The singer's body is found to contain a cocktail of prescription drugs. His 11-year-old daughter, Paris (right), pays tribute to him at a star-studded memorial service in July

JUNE 29, 2009

Bernard Madoff is sentenced to 150 years in prison after perpetrating the biggest swindle in American financial history. The financier had robbed thousands of investors to the tune of £40 billion, using a fraudulent investment operation

JUNE 30, 2009

A national holiday in Iraq (right) marks the muchtalked-about withdrawal of US troops from Iraqi cities. 'We feel confident in the Iraqi security forces continuing the process of taking over,' says General David Petraeus, the US forces commander

SEPTEMBER 26, 2009

The 76-year-old film director Roman Polanski is arrested in Zurich after travelling to collect an award. The United States is demanding his extradition, as he fled the country in 1978 after admitting to having sex with an underage girl

NOVEMBER 19, 2009

The Belgian prime minister, 62-year-old Herman van Rompuy, is elected as the first permanent president of the European Council. Van Rompuy has been dubbed the 'Belgian Waffler', but he did outflank Tony Blair for the job

NOVEMBER 27, 2009

A minor car crash is the inauspicious start to the unravelling of the life of Tiger Woods, who later admits to a string of infidelities. To appease his incandescent wife, Elin Nordegren, Woods announces he will temporarily give up golf

DECEMBER 1, 2009

President Obama announces a deployment of 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan over the next six months, but says all troops will begin to return home in 18 months (July 2011). Nine days later, Obama accepts the Nobel peace prize (right)

DECEMBER 13, 2009

An attacker strikes Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in the face with a metal replica of Milan's cathedral, fracturing his nose and two teeth. The assault takes place at a political rally in the city as he is signing autographs

THE DECADE WAR

FORCES TO BE RECKONED WITH

War in Iraq dominated the headlines, and at the end of the decade we're still arguing over whether we were right to send in troops. Top: US soldiers take up defensive positions against the Taliban in Afghanistan's Kunar province in

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

May 2009 - one in his "I love NY" boxer shorts. Right: a prisoner in an outdoor solitary confinement cell at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, Iraq. His garb is redolent of the infamous Abu Ghraib "torture" images. Above: Saddam Hussein undergoes a medical examination in Baghdad shortly after his arrest in 2003. He would be hanged on December 30, 2006

EYEWITNESS

DR MOWAFFAK ALRUBAIE, IRAQ NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER, ON SADDAM'S EXECUTION

"Saddam was a few inches away. He radiated the same arrogance and disdain he had shown toward the people who refused to bow to his tyranny. I asked him if he felt remorse, if he wanted to pray to God to forgive him. He said, pointing to the gallows, 'This is for men, doctor: do not be frightened.' I wanted to remind him that I was not the one about to be executed. He expressed no sign of apology. Then the trap door was opened, Saddam dropped and with an audible crack his neck snapped. It was the final symbol of Iraqi emancipation. We could breathe freely"

THE DECADE RUSSIA

RUSSIAN ROULETTE Far right: Vladimir Putin, the Russian prime minister, inadvertently becomes a macho gay icon in 2009. Right: a hostage slumps against a bus window in 2002 after Russian special forces storm a Moscow theatre in which Chechens are holding 850 people. The Russians pump an unidentified gas into the building to poison the gunmen; over 100 hostages die as a result. Above: a man holds a dead relative after a Russian plane bombs the town of Gori, near Georgia's breakaway province of South Ossetia in 2008

EYEWITNESS

LARISA SIDAKOVA, SURVIVOR, ON THE BESLAN SCHOOL SIEGE IN NORTH OSSETIA, 2004

'I held my daughter Aida in the first minutes of turmoil inside the gym. I thought, we were together, all would be fine. I was unaware that the terror was only beginning. We're still waiting for positive change in our lives. Aida lost an eye, but she is doing well. She likes to do the same things as any other 12-year-old. After the attack I began to look at Beslan with different eyes. We have been torn apart into those who lost and those who survived'

THE DECADE MIGRATION

GROUNDED

Men, women and children from poorer countries continued to leave their homes for the dream of a better life in Europe. Here a tourist comforts one of the 46 African migrants washed up onto a Tenerife beach when their boat runs aground in 2006. Thousands of would-be immigrants, most from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa, were intercepted off the Canary Islands that summer. The unluckiest drowned in the treacherous waters of the Atlantic

EYEWITNESS

NELSON PIQUET JR, FORMULA ONE CHEAT

"I cannot believe I agreed to carry out the order to crash my car, but when it was put to me I felt I wasn't in a position to refuse. I had been living with the knowledge of what had happened for a year before everyone else found out, so when it all came to light a few months ago, it was a weight off my shoulders. I'm glad that the truth is now known. I have had criticism, but I have also had a huge amount of support. I would love to have another opportunity in Formula One. There will be no driver as determined as me to prove myself. My actions over the next decade will define me to a greater extent than the last"

THE DECADE SPORT

THE GLORY DETAILS

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

Usain Bolt wins the 200-metres gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Far left: the Brazilian racing driver Nelson Piquet Jr walks away from the car he has crashed deliberately in September 2008. Below left: France's Zinedine Zidane is sent off at the 2006 World Cup final for head-butting Marco Materazzi in the chest

THE DECADE MIDDLE EAST

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Lebanese friends drive through a devastated part of Beirut in 2006. Top right: Jewish settlers clash with Israeli troops as they clear a West Bank settlement in 2006. Bottom right: student Neda Agha-Soltan lies dying after being shot during protests in Tehran, Iran, in 2009. Her death is broadcast on YouTube

EYEWITNESS

HALEH ESFANDIARI, ACADEMIC, ON IRAN

"I was in prison for 105 days. What kept me going was a strict regimen. I would get up at six, shower and change, then pace up and down the stairs writing two books in my head: a story for my grandchildren and a biography of my grandmother. I read the Koran cover to cover twice. I saw it as an education. The last decade has been a struggle for Iran, between the advocates of democracy and the hardliners who don't have a problem with crushing it in brutal ways. There has to be a change in the coming decade. There will be demands from a younger generation who want access to western education, employment, a better economy. I'm confident we will see new attempts by Iranians to redirect the country"

THE DECADE WILDLIFE

DEATH IN THE CONGO Anti-poaching rangers transport a dead mountain gorilla in Virunga National Park, Congo, in July 2007. Henry Chiriza, of the charity Gorilla Organization, says over a dozen gorillas were killed in the park that year. 'The authorities investigated and some rangers and a former conservation director were arrested. Rangers risk their lives every day to protect the gorillas, for \$30 a month. Corruption runs deep. But we are optimistic'

THE DECADE TERROR

IMAGES OF CONFLICT

Left: the unrepentant Bali bomber Abdul Aziz chats with his daughter during a prison visit in October 2007; he will be executed by firing squad. Far left, below: the terrorist Ajmal Qasab saunters through Mumbai's railway station. Below left: Benazir Bhutto speaks in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, in December 2007. Soon after, she is assassinated. Right: crowds in Zaragoza in March 2004 protest against the Madrid bombings

EYEWITNESS

SHERRY REHMAN, BENAZIR BHUTTO'S SPOKESPERSON, ON PAKISTAN

"Benazir Bhutto was the bravest person I've had the privilege of knowing. She knew that she might face death when she rushed back to Pakistan from seeing her children in Dubai after General Musharraf imposed a state of emergency on November 3, 2007. But she wanted people to know she was with them at that dark hour. After her bus was blown up [on October 18, 2007], she was advised to stay indoors. But she fiercely rejected that as cowardice. She had weighed up her life on the scales of history. She talked as if she had a premonition almost, and had come to terms with giving up her life for the sake of her vision. We would talk late into the night about how we would fight terrorism, because she was obsessed with saving Pakistan from this evil"

THE DECADE SPACE

THE X FACTOR

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Views from the Hubble Space Telescope (yellow), the Spitzer Space Telescope (red) and the Chandra X-ray Observatory (blue and violet) combine to produce an unprecedented image of our galaxy's core, using infrared and x-ray light to see through the dust. The bright-blue blob below is an emission from a double star system possibly containing a black hole

EYEWITNESS

COLIN PILLINGER, THE MAN BEHIND THE BEAGLE 2, ON ITS MISSION TO MARS

'Beagle 2 was not a failure, though we never received a signal after it landed on Mars. The team that built its instruments were funded by the Wellcome Trust on the understanding that we would use our skills for medical research. We've now reached the point where we'll soon be able to diagnose TB in one day. Next year, we'll ship out instruments to Africa and save countless lives'

THE DECADE NATURE

ELEMENTAL FURY

Mother Nature proved to be a harsh parent. Above: a rescuer arranges school bags, found in the debris of a primary school. Bereaved parents claim them following an earthquake that killed at least 70,000 in China's Sichuan province in May 2008. Right: a woman mourns a drowned loved one in Tamil Nadu, India, in December 2004. The Boxing Day tsunami, the worst in history, killed 230,000 people in 11 countries, left thousands more orphaned and inflicted lasting damage to the marine environment

EYEWITNESS

CHRISTOPHER COLERIDGE COLE, WHO WAS WITH HIS FAMILY IN KHAO LAK, THAILAND, ON THE TSUNAMI

"We'd just left our villa when we saw the wave. There was no time to feel anything - we just turned and ran. The current carried me, my two sons and daughter into a swamp. It was like being in a big washing machine. We grabbed tops of trees to save ourselves. It was 36 hours before we discovered my wife was safe. It puts everything into perspective"

THE DECADE CELEBRITIES

KISSING AND SELLING

Top left: Janet Jackson "accidentally" exposes her breast onstage with Justin Timberlake in February 2004. Left: Britney just has to kiss Madonna - or was it vice versa? - at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards in August 2003. Above: Jack Nicholson, looking a tad lardy, entertains female companions on his friend Tony Rizzo's yacht, in the Med in July 2007. Top right: a shaven-headed Britney tries to smash up a car outside ex-boyfriend Kevin Federline's house in LA in February 2007. Right: an overexcited Tom Cruise jumps for joy, professing his love for Katie Holmes, on Oprah's sofa in May 2005. Far right: the artist Daniel Edwards's sculpture Brangelina Forever is unveiled in December 2009

EYEWITNESS

JAY LENO, TALK-SHOW HOST, ON ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

"I've never seen a politician keep a real secret. Usually it's 'I'll give my opinion on that...' when you know well what the answer is. So we are talking at the top of his segment [in August 2003] and he is doing the 'Maria joke'. Arnold always comes with a couple of jokes about his wife, Maria, running the house. He's always funny. People love him. 'Okay, now the big question: are you running for governor of California?' And he says: 'Yes, I am.' I was stunned. I saw his people go 'What?' It wasn't fake. They had nothing in place press-wise, so it was a complete surprise. It worked out well for him"

EYES ON THE WORLD The past 10 years in photographs

THE DECADE AFRICA

ON THE ATTACK

Above: Joseph Duo, a Liberian militia commander loyal to the government, is exultant after firing a rocket-propelled grenade at rebel forces at a strategic bridge in Monrovia in July 2003. Right: Masai warriors with bows and arrows fight members of the Kalenjin tribe in western Kenya in March 2008. The battles begin at dawn and are waged from a distance. The tribes have clashed over land disputes following botched local elections in December 2007. Below: in readiness for an attack, a Somali pirate, Abdul Hassan, 39, carries a rocketpropelled grenade near a small boat with some of his crew on board, in October 2008. He is nicknamed The One Who Never Sleeps. His pirate group, the Central Regional Coast Guard, comprises 350 men and a squadron of 100 speedboats. In 2008, they attacked 39 ships, and made \$10m

THE DECADE KATRINA

FIRES OF HELL

Buildings ablaze in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans, September 2006. Wind speeds had reached 200km/h. The levee system catastrophically failed, leaving 80% of the city under water. The flood waters lingered for weeks, with some people refusing to leave their homes. More than 1,800 people died in the hurricane and the subsequent floods

EYEWITNESS

KATHY ZEITOUN, HOUSEWIFE, ON HURRICANE KATRINA

'I left New Orleans with my children before Katrina destroyed our home, but my husband stayed to look after his business. After the hurricane we heard he'd been arrested on terrorism charges. He was trying to help our neighbours, delivering food in his canoe, when he was stopped by the military. His first name is Abdulrahman.

He was born in Syria. That was enough for them to throw him in jail. The charges were eventually dropped. You can't allow yourself to focus on the negative. This is where we built our lives together, and we are going to stay put'

THE DECADE WATER

THE BEAR FACTS

This was the decade in which the polar bear became the symbol of the threat of global warming. We saw the bears clinging to tiny ice floes, and heard that they were drowning from exhaustion. Meanwhile, the climatechange debate still rages - denialists insist there is no such thing as man-made global warming. Above: chinstrap penguins gather on a blue iceberg near Candlemas Island, Antarctica, in January 2006. Left: a polar bear dives underwater in the Arctic Ocean in January 2003. Below: viewed through a magnifier in 2008, seawater teems with life. The planktonic soup includes bug-like copepods, long arrow worms and a larval crab the size of a rice grain

Graphic

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